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MEDIA POWER & INFORMATION CONTROL:

A STUDY OF POLICE ORGANIZATIONS & MEDIA RELATIONS

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ABSTRACT

"Media Power" represents the extent to which individuals or groups influence the content of media messages relevant to their interests. As mass media are the primary image builders in contemporary society, an ability to shape the contents of media has become central to impression management and public relations. This research documents the extent to which police influence the image of law enforcement – "police performances" – through police media relations offices and public information officers (PIOs).

A questionnaire was distributed to municipal police departments nationwide to obtain general information regarding the nature and frequency of police interaction, about the policies dictating police-media relations, and about police perceptions of their department's image within the news. A total of 255 surveys were distributed, yielding a response rate of 76% (194). Information garnered from survey data was used to identify four police departments that served as case studies for an understanding of the political and administrative context within which police-media relations occur. Each department selected differed from the others with regard to its media strategies, public information personnel, staff training in public relations, and perceived quality of its department's media image. Approximately 100 hours of observation was conducted across all sites.

Research findings suggest that the quality of a department's media image has little to do with the municipality crime rate and more to do with how departments manage crime news and information. Specifically, departments that do not streamline public information through one official spokesperson only but encourage communication with reporters at all ranks report a more favorable media image. Police training in television

appearance skills is similarly significantly associated with a more favorable department image. Finally, the dynamics of police-media relations shift during times of police-involved accidents or scandal. Those departments more familiar with media formats and the news-making process are more adept at making potentially damaging news story quickly disappear.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

All participant quotes contained in this research have been documented in a manner that best represents the ideas expressed by the speakers. Nevertheless, statements do not always appear as direct transcriptions. Many views were expressed when verbatim documentation was not possible. Such comments will be denoted as "author notes," while transcribed statements will be indicated as "author interviews." Information provided through open-ended questionnaire items will be denoted as "survey responses." Further, repetitious words and stutters have been omitted from recorded statements for reading clarity and fluidity. Throughout, every attempt has been made to accurately reflect the meaning, language, and tone of the participants in this study.

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There is no intrinsic reason . . . why the constructions of reality by public relations specialists should be thought of as any different from those in any group in the business of telling stories.

- Robert Jackall (1995:366)

CHAPTER 1

MEDIA POWER & THE POWER OF MEDIA

> [We've] seen the demise of two other chiefs because of media. When they shut out the press, the media starts this campaign to discredit not only this department, but it's leaders . . . It's not us against them . . .We have to work with the media to the best of our ability without getting eaten up. We've seen the end result of what they're capable of doing. If they want to go into attack mode, they will. The last Chief was out the door because of that.
>
> *-Former Morganville PIO*
> (Author interview)

Introduction

In an era when guns, drugs and gangs occupy city streets, media may very well prove to be law enforcement's most formidable foe. This is because the media are a source of political and social power. As providers of news and information, their messages influence the attitudes, opinions, beliefs, and voting patterns of the public. For this reason, government officials and special interest groups attempt to influence the content of media for the purpose of shaping public opinion. "Media power" represents the extent to which interested groups command control of media messages relevant to their particular interests (Altheide, 1985). This research documents the extent to which police agencies wield media power through police media-relations offices and public information officers. Its central thesis asserts that police who conform to the dramaturgical demands of contemporary media formats will maintain a more favorable media image.

In their daily scrutiny of public officials, the media are a powerful force for police accountability, and they are often critical of police practices (Skolnick and McCoy,

1984). Traditionally, police have adopted a reactive approach to dealing with media (Kasinsky, 1994). As gatekeepers in the crime news-making process, they often respond to unfavorable media coverage by cutting off knowledge available to reporters or by defending their actions when questioned (Ericson, Baranek and Chan, 1989). This strategy, however, has proven ineffective in maintaining a positive public image of police agencies.

Due to the emergence of new media technology throughout the twentieth century, and following intense media coverage of police-citizen disputes during the 1960s, police have begun to adopt a proactive approach to media publicity by taking numerous steps to construct an image that is favorable to the public. Specifically, police are now beginning to maintain media-relations offices staffed by public information officers trained in media communication and journalism whose primary responsibility is to engage the news media to advance the goals of the police organization. Unfortunately, little is known about the processes by which police officials actively pursue media coverage through public information officers, or about the effectiveness of this newly adopted strategy.

One objective of this research is to provide an account of the mechanisms by which police officials actively construct a positive image of law enforcement via news media. Building upon Goffman's (1959; 1974) metaphor of the theatrical performance of social life and Manning's (1977) conceptualization of the dramaturgy of police work, this study provides an account of how police agencies exercise the art of impression management through media services. Previous research examining the news-making process (Epstein, 1973; Gans, 1979; Fishman, 1980; Chibnall, 1981; Ericson, Baranek and Chan, 1989; Chermak, 1994) has focused on the role of the reporter and news

organization in the construction of social issues. The present research focuses on the role of police in shaping the public image of crime and its control. It describes how they engage news media services to maintain a favorable organizational image, to serve as the primary definers of the crime "problem", and to use news reports to further their crime prevention goals.

An assessment of police "media power" entails the review of police-media relations from a number of approaches. To begin, one must have general information about the nature and frequency of routine police-media interaction, about the demands reporters place on law enforcement for information, and about the ability and willingness of agencies to comply with the requests of news organizations. To obtain such information, a survey was distributed to municipal police departments nationwide. The survey identified a number of characteristics about police-media interaction, including: (a) the prevalence of police-media relations offices (b) the media strategies of various police departments and their role in the police organization (c) the characteristics of police public information officers, such as background experience in journalism, public relations, or communication studies (d) the policies regarding police-reporter interaction and the dissemination of information (e) the extent to which line officers and high ranking police officials receive training in handling media inquiries, and (f) actions taken by public information officers to offset negative coverage of police practices.

Secondly, an assessment of police media power requires an understanding of the context within which police-media relations occur. To achieve this, results from the survey were used to identify four police departments that served as case studies for ethnographic observation of police media relations offices and their personnel. The goal

was to transcend the inherent limitations of survey research by supplementing quantitative data with an understanding of the political climate, work patterns, administrative position and organizational role within which police public information officers operate. Each of the departments selected differed from each other – and others included in the survey – on an array of variables, including: their media strategies, public information personnel, staff training in public relations, and their reported quality of police-media relations. Approximately 100 hours of observation were conducted across all sites for the purpose of documenting the daily processes that encompass the working dynamic between police and media organizations. Finally, a review of department standard operating procedures, newspaper coverage of selected agencies, participation in a police public information training program, and in-depth interviews with both police public information officers and crime "beat" reporters aided in the evaluation process.

The remainder of this chapter discusses social and political life in an era dominated by media formats. Chapter 2 illustrates the relationship between the police as street performers and actors as stage performers. It argues that the nature of police work requires law enforcement to conform to the dramaturgical demands placed upon them by new image-producing technologies. Chapter 3 reviews the ways in which stories about police have traditionally been constructed by the news media, detailing the news-making process during both "routine" events and times of accidents or police scandal. It also presents a discussion of recent events that have sparked a change in the way police deal with news media. A description of the research questions, design, and case sites comprise Chapter 4, establishing the criteria for the analysis of media power that follows throughout. Chapter 5 provides an account of police performance during routine news

events. It discusses police-media interaction during non-crisis situations, evaluates the effectiveness of departmental policies that dictate communication with media during routine events, and details the role of the public information officer in daily impression management. Chapter 6 provides a discussion of the ways police may use media to their organizational advantage. To illustrate the relative strengths of various techniques, the chapter draws heavily from case study notes, observations and interview transcripts garnered from the four research sites. Chapter 7 evaluates impression management during the occurrence of non-routine news events, such as accidents and police scandals. At such times, impression management takes on an entirely new importance as vocal critics meet police performances. Finally, Chapter 8 provides of summary of the present findings on police media power, pointing to areas for future research. At the same time, it cautions against the misuse of media for distortion, deception, and purposive misrepresentation. While a number of agency-specific social, political and budgetary factors influence the nature, shape and ultimate success of police administration, the aim of the present study is to add media relations and the police/crime news-making process to the factors that influence the success of contemporary policing by identifying the processes by which police agencies use the media "as part of the policing apparatus" (Ericson et al., 1989).

Why Media?

Historically, power has rested among those with the ability to master the art of communication and control the flow of information. In the pre-literate, oral societies of early Greece, citizens having political power were those proficient in the verbal communication of poetry. Poetry was not merely expressive but a political necessity

whose devices of meter and parallelism allowed leaders to more easily recall the history of Greek politics (Havelock, 1963). In scribal societies, the skills of literacy were limited to a selected few, and scribes were thus treated as royalty (Innis, 1951). The Medieval Church was able to maintain its authority due to the limited number of people who could read the scripture and offer alternate interpretations of the gospel. Today, the mass society of electronic and broadcast technology is one marked by a small "power elite" who controls the flow of information and public opinion through access to and control of media (Mills, 1956).

The interrelationship of communication media and authority suggests that a loss of information control by those in power threatens their authority and legitimacy within the social order (Meyrowitz, 1986). The printing press, the first truly mass medium, afforded an opportunity for revolutionary ideas that countered the teachings of Christianity to be widely disseminated, ultimately bringing about the Protestant Reformation (Eisenstein, 1983). Cultural critic Lewis Mumford (1934), while highlighting the advantages of "instantaneous personal communication over long distances" afforded by radio, also warned of the possibilities for evil and of threat to political unity should access to this medium fall into the wrong hands. Even the advent of television has altered the social hierarchy of authority with its shift away from literacy and back to orality. The oral and visual nature of television inhibits the ability of parents and leaders to hide sex and violence from children (Postman, 1994).

Authority, then, rests on information management (Meyrowitz, 1986). Those seeking social power, or those wishing to maintain their legitimacy within the social order, must make a conscious attempt to shape the nature and content of information

relevant to their social standing. Loss of information control threatens the traditional social hierarchy, and it is the mass media that transmits a preponderance of political and social information. As primary authority figures within the community, police are regularly featured in the news headlines of mass media. Yet changes in media technology threaten the legitimacy of the police image as new information about police performance becomes increasingly public and, therefore, difficult to manage. Therefore, "it is the instant consequences of electrically moved information that makes necessary a deliberate artistic aim in the placing and management of news" (McLuhan, 1964:203).

Impression Management

The legitimacy of any individual or group is largely dependent upon the ability of the social actor to maintain a favorable public image. Even the police, who occupy a position marked by necessity and authority, must never become complacent in their privileged status, as history suggests that even the most solidified public figures are precariously situated on the plains of public opinion. For this reason, individuals and organizations alike strive to consciously present themselves publicly in a manner that conforms to their personal or administrative goals. Erving Goffman (1959) has described all social interaction as a composite of theatrical performances, staged by individuals and organizations for the purpose of impression management. These performances refer to behavior taking place in the presence of particular audiences. Social actors wishing to convey an image or "scripted impression" express qualities that contribute to the legitimacy of their social standing. Thus:

> When an individual plays a part he implicitly requests his observers to take seriously the impression that is fostered before them. They are asked to believe that the character

> they see actually possesses the attributes he appears to possess, that the task he performs will have the consequences that are implicitly claimed for it, and that, in general, matters are what they appear to be (p.17).

According to Goffman, a region is any place that is bounded by barriers of perception. Like theatrical actors, social actors stage different performances in different regions. A front region represents an area allowing for public view; therefore, social performances are staged in front regions. Performances in front regions represent conscious efforts on the part of social actors to project the appearance of legitimacy and respectability. In the presence of a public audience, performers accentuate certain behaviors and expressions while suppressing those that might undermine their credibility.

A back region, conversely, is a place where public performances may be knowingly contradicted. It is "backstage", away from the view of a judging audience, where actors are free to behave in a manner contrary to their public performances. A back region represents a place where the performer can reliably expect that no member of the audience will intrude. It is here, also, that individuals and groups rehearse their public performances and openly construct their impressions.

Because back regions represent places where performers can relax and drop their fronts, it becomes imperative that non-performance behaviors remain secluded from public view for proper impression management. Problems may arise when back region or non-scripted behavior occurs in the presence of an unintended audience or when "outsiders" unexpectedly enter a back region. When individuals witness a show that was not meant for them, they may become disillusioned with the performer or performers, and all social legitimacy may be lost.

The mass media, and especially the electronic media, penetrate backstage regions of social settings (Surette, 1998), potentially threatening the legitimacy of many social actors and their staged performances. They permeate the aural and visual boundaries that traditionally conceal back region behavior. Media may be conceptualized as Goffman's outsiders who witness performances not meant for public view. The intrusiveness and pervasiveness of the mass media, then, make the art of impression management difficult to achieve. It is now exceedingly difficult for a social actor to deny making an offensive statement or behaving inappropriately, since the behavior may be photographed, recorded, and distributed for public view. Increasingly, social actors must partake in repairing a damaged public image. It is only recently that the phrase "no comment" became a common response to public inquiries (Boorstin, 1961). Due to the intrusiveness of mass media, it has become a modern necessity for social actors to conform to media formats and restructure their behavior to meet the demands of a media-driven society.

Media Formats

Media formats are rules and procedures for presenting information in the era of mass media (Altheide, 1985). In the twentieth century, media formats have become central to virtually all areas of political and social life, and the dominant formats in a media-driven society are those of advertising and promotion. As early as 1922, Walter Lippmann wrote about a revolution that was taking place in the creation of political and social consent through the means of modern communication. According to Lippmann, the news media are filled with symbols placed there by a leader wishing to organize his following. The public is constantly exposed to suggestion. "It reads not the news, but

the news with an aura of suggestion about it" (pp. 150-155). More recently, Wernick (1991) has argued that the rise of mass media in late capitalist societies has produced a culture dominated by advertising and promotion. Promotion extends beyond the packaging and advertising of material commodities and is applicable to institutions and personas as well.

Successful promotion of political or social agendas requires special knowledge of media formats. Such expertise usually rests with the public relations counsel or public information officer - individuals trained in the art of communication and mass media formats. Edward L. Bernays (1923) was among the first scholars to write extensively on the public relations specialist. His seminal work, Crystallizing Public Opinion, introduced the concept of public relations to businesses and political organizations. It defined its scope and outlined its principles as practiced by specialists trained in dealing with the public and communications media. As defined by Bernays, a public relations specialist:

> Directs and supervises the activities of his clients wherever they impinge upon the daily life of the public. He interprets the client to the public, which he is enabled to do in part because he interprets the public to the client. His advice is given on all occasions on which his client appears before the public, whether it be in concrete form or as an idea. His advice is given not only on actions which take place, but also on the use of mediums which bring these actions to the public it is desired to reach, no matter whether these mediums be the printed, the spoken or the visualized word – that is, advertising, lectures, the stage, the pulpit, the newspaper, the photograph, the wireless, the mail or any other form of thought communication (p.14).

According to Bernays, one of the most significant social and political changes that has occurred in the present century has been the increase in attention paid to public opinion,

no doubt a result of the rise of the press and other communication media. This increase has occurred not only by individuals or organizations dependent upon public support, "but also by men and organizations which until very recently stood aloof from the general public and were able to say, 'The public be damned'" (p. 34).

A primary responsibility of the public relations counsel is to create events that will generate media attention and create a favorable image among the judging public. According to historian Daniel J. Boorstin (1961), the staging of events has become the business of America in the last half century due to the proliferation of the mass media. News making has replaced newsgathering, as a larger proportion of news has come to consist of what he calls "pseudo-events." A pseudo-event is an event or occurrence that is planned primarily for the purpose of being reported or reproduced through the mass media. It is intended to serve as a mechanism of self-promotion, image enhancement, and shaper of public opinion. The press conference, the staged interview, and the press release are all variations of these promotional events. According to Boorstin, the most successful politicians in recent years have been those most adept at using the media to create pseudo-events for the purpose of self-promotion.

Media formats often resemble what Goffman (1974) refers to as "frames". They are the principles that govern the presentation of events. Individuals or groups seeking successful public relations through the staging of events must be versed in media formats and frame their behaviors in accordance with the demands of the media, for access to news organizations is often essential to public relations and impression management. Clearly, an understanding of news and news formats "must be an integral part of the equipment of the public relations counsel" (Bernays, 1923:183).

All news organizations operate under certain constraints and formats that impact the issues and events they choose to cover (Gans, 1979). Different mediums operate under different formats. Thus, unlike newspapers that have more space to more fully address an issue, television requires brevity. And while newspapers may rely upon the spoken word, television is dependent upon the visual. Yet there exist certain constants across news formats that largely determine the amount of coverage and publicity. These include the "newsworthiness" or novelty of the event, the amount of "action" included in the story, time considerations (i.e., will the story make it to press or broadcast by a deadline), and predictability (planned events are easier to report) (Epstein, 1973; Gans, 1979).

Public relations, then, are predicated upon an understanding of media formats, and many corporations and government agencies are adapting their organizations to conform to these media formats as it becomes increasingly apparent that impression management requires mass media. Governments that communicate with their various publics only infrequently or indirectly through the news media soon discover how crucial relations with the press are to their administrative goals (Garnett, 1992). To date, an array of government agencies publish "how to" manuals providing guidance on dealing effectively with media organizations.

Recognizing that "the enormous appetites of the media actually translate into good news and opportunities" (National League of Cities, 1993), local government agencies are beginning to seek out media coverage through the use of specialists trained in the art of media formats. The belief is that a proactive, open and promotional approach to dealing with the media will be viewed favorably among the public and places the

government agency in a position to construct a favorable image of the administrative agency. Many organizations and agencies are recruiting employees having a background in journalism, marketing, or public relations. Some are even housing fully staffed media-relations offices. The police represent such agencies.

Importance of This Research

Police constructions of the news as a means of impression management represents an area largely unexamined in criminological and journalism studies. Most discussions of the crime news-making process describe police as passive agents in creation of crime narratives. Specifically, the police are often defined as news "gatekeepers" who simply decide which daily events to pass on to reporters and which events or details to withhold. Yet gatekeeping may involve elements of news shaping, display, repetition, and timing. Gatekeepers may decide to not only release information but also provide its interpretive framework, thereby usurping the role of the reporter as storyteller (Shoemaker, 1991). Given that live media broadcasts have made it increasingly difficult for public figures to filter the release of information, the role of the gatekeeper today has come to resemble that of a public relations or marketing specialist, who works toward providing the best possible interpretation of already public information.

This research examines the role of the police as news filters, as storytellers, and as public relations specialists. In doing so, it builds upon previous studies of the crime news-making process in several ways. First, it examines news construction from the vantage of the police, stepping away from the role of the reporter while placing the police as active participants at the forefront of the crime news-making process. It therefore recognizes the multifaceted role of the police news gatekeeper who not only releases

news information, but who also responds to police-related news stories stemming from critical, non-official sources. Secondly, this research investigates the political, social, and administrative constraints that influence the release and shaping of events into a framework that will ultimately prove beneficial to the police organization. It therefore examines the necessity for police to construct the news for purposes of impression management. Thirdly, this study identifies the different types of policing events that may require different forms of gatekeeping responses. For example, routine events such as police responses to standard criminal events may allow police to adopt a rather passive role in the news-process, while police accidents or scandal necessitate a more constructivist approach to media relations. Using interviews with police chiefs, their PIOs, and local beat reporters while relying upon actual news case studies, this research seeks to uncover the situational aspects of police involvement in news production. Finally, this study is one of organizational change and adaptation in a rapidly evolving technological climate. It attempts to illustrate how changes in media communication redefine the role of contemporary police and their interaction with news reporters. As police have become more proactive in their strategic approach to policing the public, so too have they become proactive in the manner with which they construct the police image in the public mind.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the power of media over social and political life. It argued that communication and authority go hand in hand. With mass media now the primary means by which political leaders communicate with their constituency, familiarity with media formats is necessary for the maintenance of social legitimacy. Clearly, the

dominant format that transcends all types of mass media is that of promotion, where communicators must constantly sell both themselves and their ideas to a judging public. This chapter also introduced the concepts of performance "regions," or areas where public leaders may temporarily abandon their promotional personas and be at ease. The chapter concluded with a warning that as media technology continues to develop, performance regions are becoming increasingly permeable, where the entire world is figuratively a stage where performances must be played out to convince audiences of political legitimacy. As the police represent among the most visible of public officials, their actions are continuously found within the images that comprise mass media. As such, police must recognize that even their back-stage performances are occasionally subject to front-stage view.

CHAPTER 2

POLICE & PERFORMANCE

> We live in a media world! Everything and everyone is fair game for the roving video camera; there's a profit in it! Whether it's a professional news station shooting some dramatic footage in order to win the ratings race or a home movie enthusiast selling his/her tape to the highest bidder, video pays! All one needs is a television to see how popular unstaged 'video happenings' have become, and the evening news is only one of many venues for them. Today, shows like *World's Wildest Police Chases* proliferate the airways.
>
> As Police Officers, we must realize that the nature of our work makes us a natural and very attractive subject for reality-based television programs (news and otherwise). Therefore, it is more important than ever to maintain a professional demeanor. We simply do not have the luxury of letting our guard down. We owe it to ourselves, our fellow officers, our department and our families, not to become a negative story. There are cameras everywhere! Let them catch us doing the job the way we were trained.
>
> *-Roll call training instruction,*
> *Urbandale Police Department*
> (Internal document #009)

Police work often resembles that of a stage performer convincing audiences that appearances are real. Using jargon such as the "blue curtain" of policing, "staged" operations, and police "performance", many texts and articles emphasize this on the job dramaturgy. Perhaps the most developed articulation of the theater of policing is that of Manning (1977), who discusses police work as a dramatic performance, staged to create the appearance of control. Based upon Goffman's (1959) notion of impression management, Manning describes police work in terms of symbols, themes, dramas, and appearances. Police seize upon particular aspects of their activities to dramatize their effectiveness. Officers represent actors playing agents of social control. They use props,

such as published crime statistics, for the purpose of a dramatic presentation of their performance outcome.

While Manning's (1977) description of the performance nature of policing is among the most direct, other scholars have alluded to the theatrical aspects of patrolling the streets. The policeman has been described as a "Rorschach in uniform" whose "occupational accouterments – shield, nightstick, gun and summons book – clothe him in a mantle of symbolism that stimulates fantasy and projection" (Niederhoffer, 1967:1). Van Maanen (1974:104) refers to the lack of affect displayed by many officers as "a mask to fend off the perceived curse of doing society's dirty work." He describes patrolmen in terms of Goffman's (1959) "performance teams," working together to create an impression of law and order. Loader (1997) argues that police primarily wield symbolic, rather than coercive, power. Similar to Manning's description of the dramatic power of the police funeral, he argues that police use other rituals and symbols for instrumental purposes.

Clearly, the appearance of control represents a fundamental component of successful police work. To maintain the public performance and, therefore, legitimacy, police must constantly be aware of their behavior in varying social regions.

> [T]hey must segment their audiences so that certain presentations are available only to some segments of the society; they must control the information available on their actions in order to be effective (both in crime control and in the maintenance of public credibility) . . . they must decrease the amount of information available to their public that indicates the dirty, the boring, the ineffectual, the illegal or potentially immoral; and they must through the management of appearances create the sense of commitment to and enforcement of rules and tenets on which there is only an "as if" public agreement (Manning, 1977:18).

To uphold the appearance of control, then, police organizations traditionally operate under a veil of secrecy. They deny outsiders access to their backstage regions for the purpose of impression management. Unfortunately, the prominence of the mass media in recent years, the focus of the news media on the behaviors of public officials, and the ability of electronic media to publicize non-performance behavior, are making the appearance of control exceedingly difficult for police to maintain.

Backstage behavior comprises a bulk of news items found within mass media, and of the varied functions of the news media, perhaps none has greater importance then the role of a free press in reporting on the backstage behaviors of public officials. The constitutional right to a free press allows the media to serve as a fourth branch of government by reporting on the actions of elected and appointed officials and holding their actions accountable to the public. By monitoring the government, the media keep in check the actions of government officials and ensure that the power structure between government and the public remains in balance. Given the functions of a free press, it is the responsibility of the news media to safeguard personal liberties by reporting on government wrongdoing and holding them accountable. As a result, this too often ensures that much of media reporting regarding public officials concerns backstage behavior of government misfeasance, malfeasance, or inefficiency. To address this negative image, police often restructure their public behavior to meet the demands of media technology.

Media and Reflexivity

One of the defining features of modern society is the extent to which media technology allows for the reflexive monitoring of public behavior, ultimately altering the

patterns of social life (Giddens, 1990). Reflexivity represents a process wherein social actors alter their public behavior according to the information they receive about their conduct. Often, the re-shaping of behavior is anticipatory and based upon presumptive responses to personal action. Each day, individuals and organizations script future actions according to the evaluations they receive or are likely to receive regarding their past actions. For public figures, these evaluations frequently stem from media coverage of their daily actions and spark changes in their overall performance. Media, therefore, serve as a social force that not only shapes public opinion, but also personal and collective behavior.

As public figures, the ability of media to portray police functions contributes to police reflexivity (Manning, 1997). Images of police work serve as commentary on their performance, from the visually dramatic to the vicariously mundane. Of course, reporters, camera crews, and newsroom editors play a significant role in the production of the police image. Operating under their "fourth estate" mandate, members of the news media often bring back-stage behaviors to the forefront. At times, they may project their interpretations of police work onto the public, or they may (inadvertently) suggest that non-routine performances constitute the rehearsed norm. Recognizing this, police often respond to their media image by reforming their strategies to address the issues portrayed. They may regroup backstage, applying changes to their scripted responses; all of this in an effort to regain control of their character. In essence, police today understand that who they are – at least in the public eye – is in part a product of media imagery (Perlmutter, 2000). As a result, they take steps to maintain this popular image through the reflexive shaping of their public behavior. One police sergeant I met during my

attendance at an international police media-training conference described the process of reflexivity brought about by new media technology as follows:

> The VCR/Camcorder is affecting how we do our job. Our city has a big festival every year, similar to Mardi gras or New Years Eve in Times Square. Last year, I was working the event with some other officers when a man began causing trouble. He eventually became aggressive and resistant. Sometimes the only way to restrain a guy is to use physical force, which we began to do. Then, I noticed people in the gathering crowd filming the incident with their camcorders, and I immediately signaled 'cameras' to the other officers, imagining how it would appear on the local news. Because the public doesn't understand police procedures, we ended up using less force and ultimately put ourselves in danger (Author notes).

Mass media, therefore, have brought a new dimension to contemporary policing; a dimension that concerns itself with imagery as much as reality. Given that media create the standard of reality upon which all public performances are compared (Perlmutter, 2000), much social action is conducted with an acute awareness of "how things might look." Serving as public figures and media icons, police must actively work to uphold not only the law, but also their image. They must anticipate the impact of new media technology on police performance, and they must restage their operations to fit the whims of their audience. And a review of the social history of policing and the evolution of police administration reveals an increasing sensitivity among police to the influence of media on their legitimacy and authority. Perhaps a commentary on the reflexive power of new image producing technology, the development and proliferation of new media preceded each stage in the evolution of policing performance.

Police & The Press: Performer Meets Critic

Early American police departments were marked by corruption as they became connected with the political machines of American politics (Reiss, Jr., 1992). The prevailing police strategy at the time called for close and personal ties to the community and a decentralized organizational structure. While this allowed police to become integrated into neighborhoods, the lack of organizational control over officers resulting from decentralization contributed to police inefficiency, disorganization and political corruption (Kelling and Moore, 1988). The latter half of the nineteenth century found big city police departments ruled principally by political machines and special interests, where police corruption and involvement in vice became unfortunate realities (Reppetto, 1978).

During this same time, a new breed of journalism – described by Walter Lippmann (1914 [1968:14]) as one possessing "a distinct prejudice in favor of those who make . . . accusations" – became nationally prominent. While journalism had always influenced American politics, advances in printing technology at the turn of the century made it possible for reform journalists to communicate with a larger audience. New printing techniques and cheaper distribution attracted readers previously unable to afford elite publications (Shapiro, 1968). As such, this new "muckraking" journalism catered to the masses by exposing the improprieties of the politically, socially and economically powerful. For police, it also marked an end to the heyday of the detective dime novel (1860-1910) that inaccurately portrayed American law enforcement as law abiding and just public figures. In fact, some American dime novels focusing on heroic or clever

detectives were actually reprints and translations of European classics and were not grounded in American tradition (Inciardi and Dee, 1987).

Among the chief themes of this new muckraking journalism was the dishonesty of politicians, the greed of big businessmen, the bribing of public officials, and the exploitation of wage-earning employees. Subsequently, not a few publications highlighted the malfeasance of local law enforcement that was so widespread at the time. In 1907, *Cosmopolitan* accused the New York Police Department of "standing publicly as partner in and sponsor for the most widespread and destructive form of vice known to that city," noting that public awareness of police graft "fully explains the disgust of those who declare municipal government in the United States to be a failure" (1907 [1971:331]). In 1909, *McClure's Magazine* noted that "the purchase of the police in Chicago . . . is freely and frankly for sale to the interests of dissipation" (1907 [1964:400]). In total, the mid nineteenth century through the 1930s saw number of reformers called for change in the organization and structure of policing, and newspapers provided extensive coverage of the reformers' demands, calling for investigations into incompetence and corruption of city police.

Keystone Comedies: No Laughing Matter

The emergence of popular cinema during the early years of big city policing became an equally veritable threat to the legitimacy of the police. Upon its introduction into society at the turn of the century, few law enforcement officials would consider the motion picture to be public enemy no. 1. Yet, from 1912 – 1920, the Keystone Film Company would come to represent a public nuisance that police officers simply could not ignore. Owned and operated by actor/writer/director Mack Sennett, the Keystone Film

Company traded in exaggeration, pandemonium, and outright indignity. Many of the Keystone films dealt with "the pretensions of a society that was bent on elevating itself", utilizing slapstick and the burlesque as central comedic techniques (Lahue and Brewer, 1972:44). And among the most popular targets for comedic ridicule was law enforcement.

One of the first standards to emerge from the new production company featured two incompetent detectives whose investigations only created more trouble, as in the films *$500 Reward* (1911) and *At it Again* (1912). By far the most popular of the Keystone comedies featured a band of bumbling police officers whose cinematic *raison d'etre* was public mockery. *The Bangville Police* (1913) finds the Keystone Kops responding to a burglary call by foot after their dilapidated patrol car explodes. The next year, *In the Clutches of a Gang* (1914) had the Kops mistakenly arresting the mayor on kidnapping charges, only to have the crime solved without the aid of the police force. In short, among the first images seen by moviegoers at the beginning of the century were those of law enforcement at work, yet these images failed to portray city police in even a remotely favorable light.

Police Reform: Performance Restaged

Clearly, mass media were among the key social forces that put police reform on the national agenda. Newspapers provided extensive coverage of reformer demands regarding police administration, and they called for investigations examining incompetence and corruption of city police. Portrayals of police in entertainment media damaged the image of urban police and contributed to the impetus for widespread

change. Richard Sylvester, who was responsible for transforming the National Chiefs of Police Union into the International Association of Chiefs of Police, complained that:

> In moving pictures the police are sometimes made to appear ridiculous, and in view of the large number of young people, children, who attend these moving picture shows, it gives them an improper idea of the policeman (Quoted in Walker, 1977:58).

At a 1914 meeting of the International Association of Chiefs of Police, officials criticized media portrayals of law enforcement, as many police chiefs faced daily public criticism from jokes, newspaper cartoons, and motion pictures such as the *Keystone Cops*. According to Fogelson (1977:65):

> The mass media, particularly the movies, often portrayed policemen at best as well-meaning imbeciles, incapable of carrying out the simplest order, and at worst as out and out grafters, ready to fleece everybody in sight.

In short, the development of new media technology at the turn of the century exposed police corruption and inefficiency, causing a growing number of reformers to call for change in the organization and structure of policing. The culmination of these efforts resulted in the formation of the National Commission of Law Observance and Enforcement, which published recommendations for a new model of policing in its (1931) Wickersham Commission Reports on the police. The new model was to be a bureaucratic, hierarchical structure of policing based upon the principles of professionalism (Walker, 1977). Among the top advocates for police professionalism were August Vollmer – the author of the report on police – and his protégé Orlando W. Wilson. As police chief in Wichita, Kansas, Wilson hired both more qualified and higher educated officers while upgrading standard training procedures. Further, he incorporated new technology into the everyday practice of police work. By 1939, Wilson had

achieved national prominence and became professor in police administration at the University of California at Berkeley (Johnson, 1981). Recognizing the need for tight organizational control and a public image suggesting strict adherence to the law, Wilson called for a new model in police administration. Impressed by the successes of J. Edgar Hoover in reforming the image of the Bureau of Investigation, he began a strategy of reform following a path similar to that of the FBI (Kelling and Moore, 1988).

Hoover & the Bureau: Media Power in Practice

When J. Edgar Hoover became Director of the Bureau of Investigation in 1924, the legitimacy and integrity of federal law enforcement were held in question, and the public image of the Bureau was less than favorable. In the preceding years, the Bureau had been involved in numerous raids on alien "radicals" and members of the Communist Labor Party using blank warrants, denying the right to counsel, and engaging in other illegal practices. While previous efforts to seize and deport alien radicals boosted the popularity of federal law enforcement, the Red Scare had died down following the First World War, and continued raids by the Bureau were perceived as an abuse of federal power.

During the Harding Administration, federal law enforcement became a symbol for political corruption. The Bureau had become an agency of presidential cronies. Agents were appointed based on political merit instead of professional ability. Then, in 1922, Attorney General William J. Burns ordered Bureau agents to burglarize the offices of politicians who were critical of the Harding Administration. News accounts at the time referred to the Bureau as a "goon squad" whose special agents "were some with criminal records" (Theoharis and Cox, 1988). At the same time, newspapers were filled with

stories about official corruption surrounding the Teapot Dome scandal. Both former Attorney General Daugherty and Burns, who was serving as Bureau Director at the time that the alleged corruption occurred, were implicated in the scandal. Finally, both Daugherty and Burns faced accusations of violating prohibition laws under the Volstead Act. The image of the Bureau was in dire need of reform.

Theoharis and Cox (1988) provide a detailed description of the successes brought about by Hoover in improving the image of the Bureau of Investigation and restoring legitimacy to the agency. At the time of Hoover's appointment as Director of the Bureau, public opinion was largely against the existence of federal law enforcement. Conservatives felt that the federal government should not be involved in police work, and liberals felt the Bureau to be a threat to civil liberties. Hoover recognized that he needed to change the public image of the Bureau, and upon appointment as Director, incorporated a series of guidelines into his employee manual of instructions. First and foremost, Bureau employees were to present themselves with an air of professionalism by giving "due regard to their personal appearance and presentability." Agents were to abstain from consuming alcohol, both on and off duty. Agents were forbidden to accept any rewards or gratuities, and all employees were to report indiscretions by fellow agents directly to Hoover himself.

Of the changes initiated by Hoover, perhaps none achieved greater success than Hoover's ability to control the image of the Bureau in both the news and entertainment media. According to William C. Sullivan (1979:80), former Assistant in Charge of Domestic Intelligence, "the FBI's main thrust was not investigations but public relations" as Hoover made every attempt to use the media to the Bureau's advantage. His employee

manual contained a detailed protocol of the Bureau's media strategy. Employees were forbidden to provide to the press any Bureau information or to disclose any information obtained in his official capacity to an individual not authorized by the Bureau. He issued a directive that no news story emanating from the bureau was to be released except over the director's signature. Finally, all speeches by agents were to be edited by the director. These policies ensured that Hoover alone would determine what Bureau information would be released.

Hoover also engaged in the selective disclosure of information to reporters who had previously presented the Bureau in a favorable light, placing them on "the list of persons to receive various releases and documents issued by the Bureau" (Theoharis and Cox, 1988). He later hired one these reporters, trained in media formats, to serve as a Bureau publicist (Powers, 1983). Hoover withheld information regarding the declining membership of the Communist Party during the era of McCarthyism because the prevailing anti-Communist fears contributed to public support for federal law enforcement (Poveda, 1982). Finally, Hoover's declaration of "Public Enemy No. 1" represents a pseudo-event timed and released to the news media just prior to the offender's imminent apprehension, thus creating the appearance of expediency in successful law enforcement (Clarens, 1997).

At the same time that Hoover exercised tight control over the news media, he recognized the public's near obsessive fascination with crime and violence as entertainment. His goal was to "attract audiences initially through fantasy, and then retain them with scientific language and the dissemination of facts" (Potter, 1998:126). The Bureau's Crime Records Division supplied information to pulp literature, detective

magazines, comic strips, and radio shows. Critical of Hollywood for glorifying crime, Hoover petitioned Hollywood to abstain from glamorizing such gangsters as John Dillinger. Eventually, the Hays Commission, which regulated the content of motion pictures, would issue the following guideline:

> No motion picture on the life or exploits of John Dillinger will be produced, distributed or exhibited. . . This decision is based on the belief that the production, distribution or exhibition of such a picture could be detrimental to the best public interest. (Quoted in Clarens, 1997:121)

Following the success of Warner Brother's (1935) pro-Bureau film *G-Men*, Hoover began issuing new regulations regarding the appearance of Bureau agents that were based upon the image of the G-Man as depicted by the film's star, James Cagney (Theoharis and Cox, 1988). Finally, upon the 1948 reissue of this successful film, Hoover authorized the use of the Department of Justice seal along side the Warner Brother's logo (Clarens, 1997). Clearly, Hoover mastered the art of impression management and, by responding to the demands of media formats, was able to create and maintain a favorable image of the Bureau.

Professionalism, Protest, Prime Time

Administratively, Wilson and other police reformers at the state level restructured the organization of local law enforcement upon the Bureau's administrative model of professionalism and centralized command of officers. They also identified crime control as their primary mandate. All of this, of course, was in sharp contrast to the popular image of police as "daffy", "ridiculous", "corrupt", and primarily "nominal" crime fighters (Lahue and Brewer, 1972). Among the strategies pitched to the public during the reform era of policing were police performance based upon limited discretion, preventive

patrol, and strict enforcement of the law. According to Kelling and Moore (1988), no better characterization of this model can be found than television's Sergeant Joe Friday, whose "just the facts" mantra exemplified the impersonal adherence to law enforcement and an emotional detachment from social crises that was prevalent at the time. Finally, like Hoover, the reformers set out to sell their brand of policing to the public through mass media.

To an extent, this new image of the contemporary crime fighter resonated among the public. Crime shows became a dominant and popular genre of prime time radio and television during the 1950s, with police officers figuring prominently as starring characters (Dominick, 1978, Surette, 1998). These new police 'performers' represented heroic figures whose dramatic actions, methodological detective work, and dependence upon violence proved extremely effective in solving crime. The reformers failed, however, to properly promote local law enforcement and therefore could not parallel the successes in public relations achieved by Hoover and the FBI. According to Kelling and Moore (1988), the approach of the reform movement was more like selling than marketing or promotion:

> Marketing refers to the process of carefully identifying consumer needs and then developing goods and services that meet those needs. Selling refers to having a stock of products or goods on hand irrespective of need and selling them. The reform strategy had as its starting point a set of police tactics (services) that police promulgated . . . for the purpose of establishing internal control. (Kelling & Moore, 1988:110).

By the 1960s, the strategies adopted by the reform movement contributed to the already growing social conflict within the nation's urban communities. It became apparent that police had different arrest policies according to race, and arrests of civil and

political protestors were viewed as the use of police to serve the interests of the powerful members of society (Quinney, 1970). Finally, an emphasis on policing technology, such as preventive patrol and calls for service, created a physical barrier between law enforcement officers and the communities they served.

The rise in media technology during the 1960s, especially television, coupled with domestic civil unrest, did much to undermine the image of police. Previously symbols of order and control, the public were now exposed to unrehearsed performances of law enforcement that resembled the antithesis of control. Images of police officers using their batons against the public "did not make good press to say the least" (Geller, Goldstein, Nimocks, & Rodriguez, 1994:7). The National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence (1969) argued that the presence of media during civil disorder may have caused police to "play to the television audience", thereby exacerbating public tensions and the appearance of official impropriety. The report went on to note that prior to the disorder in Watts, Detroit and Newark, "police were trained to act as individual groups of two and three. This training was clearly inadequate to deal with the massive disturbance which required a well disciplined force acting in unison" (p. 104). Yet it was these very disturbances that threatened the legitimacy of police by bringing images of ill-trained officers right into the living rooms of so many Americans.

To be sure, news media were aware of hundreds of freedom protests occurring during the 1960s that did not involve violent encounters between police and the public. The visual bias of the new television format, however, meant that news editors would not dispatch camera crews unless violence was already in progress (Epstein, 1973). Therefore, the ability of new media technology to expose the backstage behaviors of

police live and in action proved to once again undermine the appearance of police professionalism. It became clear that any strategy of police reform required command of the police image, much in the way that Hoover commanded control over the image of the Bureau in film, print and radio during his tenure as Director. Police input into the news-making process was to become a starting point and an area of central importance during the transition between the reform and community-policing eras (Ziembo-Vogl, 1998).

The Police Strike Back

By the mid-to-late 1980s, police departments across the country began to discover that they must welcome media coverage as a means of repairing the police image. For one, police began to enter the arena of entertainment media, serving as consultants on law enforcement dramas or – more frequently – allowing camera crews to accompany officers during a patrol ride-along. The recorded footage of these police patrols then become part of television programming known as "reality" television. Not only popular among the public (Cavender and Fishman, 1998), these programs are also popular among officers themselves who feel that such programs help the public understand and identify with police (Hallett and Powell, 1995). At the same time, as an incentive for their cooperation, the police are given full editorial control of any video footage taken of their department and are therefore in a position to present the most favorable of representations of their department to the public.

Police have also taken steps to use this same reality-based media technology to create their own video footage of police performance for use on local news broadcasts. For example, many departments now have mounted video recorders within the interior of their patrol cars for the purpose of documenting dramatic or even questionable police-

citizen encounters. While closed-circuit video is not part of "mass" media, it nevertheless represents a tool that may enhance or maintain the police image, since video footage of dangerous or controversial police-citizen disputes may be distributed to local media in an effort to sustain the credibility of their public performances (Sechrest, Liquori, and Perry, 1990). Other departments have secured their own weekly programs on local radio, a weekly "locked-in" time slot on the local television news, and have incorporated department computer web sites into their public relations strategies by constructing web sites to communicate directly with their demanding audience.

Of course, all of these public relations strategies place demands upon the police in terms of time and personnel. Therefore, police departments nationwide began to establish media relations units charged with the mandate of disseminating information to public while simultaneously exercising organizational impression management. Recognizing that maintaining or restoring public confidence is critical to effective policing, many police departments began incorporating media skills as part of their training protocol in an attempt to deal with "ambush" interviews, to properly handle difficult situations, and to successfully generate positive media coverage of department practices (Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, 1995).

Conclusion

This chapter presented an illustration of the occupational relationship between the police as street performers and actors as stage performers. Time and again, police have had to restructure their performance according to the requirements of an evolving media technology for the purpose of maintaining favorable reviews. Such restructuring of behavior based upon mediated images received represents a practice of media reflexivity,

where mass media today serve as an important source of information regarding public opinion surrounding the quality of police performances. Yet, while early police did not consider mass media a top priority among the many social voices to be addressed, police today recognize the potential for harm that may result from a failure to effectively deal with their media image. Indeed, media today are considered essential for building citizen support of law enforcement and for the successful implementation of effective policing strategies.

CHAPTER 3

POLICE & THE NEWS

> It's . . . a tenuous relationship . . . [T]here's been instances where you bang your head against the wall trying to get information, and other instances where they have been accommodating, and you're like, 'Wait a minute, this is a surprise!'
>
> *-Broadcast news reporter*
> *City of Morganville*
> (Author interview)

The News-making Process

On any given day, members of law enforcement are prominently featured in both the headlines of newspapers and in the flickering video clips of broadcast television.

As the most visible representatives of local government, their actions are of great interest to the media audience. Moreover, the multi-faceted aspect of police work coupled with the ever-popular drama of crime ensures extensive media coverage of police performance. As such, stories about crime and descriptions of police work constitute a majority of news items across local and national media formats (Graber, 1980).[1]

News organizations require journalists to provide accounts of community events on a routine basis (Tuchman, 1978). This requires a high level of dependence upon and cooperation with government officials, including the police, who comprise the bulk of news sources and provide the necessary news accounts (Gans, 1979). To ensure a constant supply of news items and authoritative sources, journalists maintain an index of

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[1] It is difficult to provide an approximate estimate of the extent of news coverage of police functions. In an extensive review of crime stories across local and national print/broadcast news, Graber (1980) found that crime and justice averaged 25% of all stories in newspapers, 20% of local television stories, and 13% of national television stories. In the Chicago *Tribune*, stories about individual crimes received nearly three times as much attention as the presidency, Congress, or the economy. While stories specifically about police activities represented only 10.3% of the total *Tribune* crime stories, Graber (pp. 47) indicates that the "typical" crime story contains routine stock elements, including "the work done by the police."

voices and viewpoints for both news and editorials that may be readily accessed at any given point in the news-making process. This journalistic dependence upon public officials works to the benefit of government agencies by routinely affording them privileged status in the marketplace of ideas, allowing them to frame news events according to their organizational needs (Bennett, 1990).

While the norms of news production typically favor powerful institutions and sustain their ideological hegemony, the dynamics of the news-making process shift during times of disruptive events, such as accidents or scandals. Molotch and Lester (1974) suggest that access to news agencies by government sources fluctuate during news coverage of non-routine events. Routine events are news items based upon the purposive accomplishments of social actors. They are marked by the fact that the people who undertake the happening are also those who promote them into events. In this sense, routine events resemble news items of what Goffman (1959) refers to as scripted dramaturgical performances. According to Molotch and Lester, the majority of stories appearing in the news constitutes routine or scripted events[2]. Accidents, however, differ from routine news events in that the underlying happening is unintentional, and those who bring it to public attention are different from those responsible for bringing about the event. Accidents rest upon miscalculations that lead to a breakdown in the customary order of public performances and more closely resemble news items of what Goffman (1959) refers to as back region or non-scripted behavior.

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[2] This does not imply that the bulk of news consists of routine or even typical occurrences. Surette (1998) asserts that "newsworthiness" is measured, in part, according to the "law of opposites" whereby the most infrequent occurrences are most likely to become news items. As it is used here, routine implies that official responses to events are scripted, planned, and therefore "routine." Thus, one would not refer to a news item about a terrorist attack as routine but rather news coverage of the "purposive accomplishments" of responding officials as routine.

During times of accident or scandal, those lacking habitual access to the news media are often brought to the forefront by reporters who abandon their index of routine, official sources and instead rely upon alternative voices:

> In their realization as events, accidents are far less contingent than are routine events on the event needs of the powerful. Given the inherent drama, sensation, and atypicality of accidents, it is difficult to deny their existence; and typically nonimportant groups can more easily hold sway in the temporal demarcation process [of news construction] (Molotch and Lester, 1974:109-110).

Thus, representatives from women's, civil rights, and youth groups become the key spokespersons in the media during times when business is not as usual.

> [T]he presence of 'unindexed' social voices in a given story simply may reflect the press's inability to apply the index norm. For example, when official opinion is in disarray for any of a variety of reasons, the journalistic process may be relatively more chaotic. With this chaos may come a decline in the familiar 'official' narrative structure, opening the way for anomalous news narratives told through disparate social voices (Bennett, 1990:107).

These voices challenge the official interpretative frame of the accidental event, often suggesting that atypical events are more indicative of the routine and commonplace. It is during times of accident and scandal when the loss of information control to alternative news sources poses a threat to the legitimacy and authority of public officials.

Police are routinely key participants in the news-making process and represent the primary sources for the production of crime news (Sherizen, 1978; Fishman, 1980; Chibnall, 1981; Barak, 1988; Ericson et al., 1987, 1989, 1991; Chermak, 1994). As a result, they maintain privileged status as the key definers of the crime problem (Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, Roberts, 1978). News organizations are dependent upon the police for a constant supply of crime information that comprises a large portion of news.

For this reason, news agencies often assign reporters to a "police beat" so they may obtain on-site information about the most recent crime incident. In turn, police organizations are dependent upon the news media to publicize crimes, request public cooperation with police investigations, and lobby for additional law enforcement resources. Frequent and direct access to news media often works to the advantage of police agencies who receive favorable media coverage, coverage that content analyses suggest is in sharp contrast to the less than favorable coverage of courts and corrections (Graber, 1980; Chermak, 1998).[3]

Police organizations, however, are not immune to accidents or scandal, and news reporters may turn to "unindexed" and non-official sources during allegations of police misconduct, else simply turn on them, rendering police organizations vulnerable to intensive public and media scrutiny. For example, Lawrence (1996) examined news coverage of police use of force in the *Los Angeles Times* between 1987 and 1992 to study the impact that two prominent media stories of police abuse of force had on reporter reliance upon police as official and indexed news sources. She found that both the occurrences of accidental events and conflict among officials regarding the interpretation of those events provided license to news organizations to devote more attention to non-official interpretations of the causes of police use of force. Alleged victims, their families and attorneys, witnesses to alleged acts of brutality, and community activist groups

[3] Although media evaluations of the criminal justice system are rare, Graber's (1980) content analysis of the *Chicago Tribune* suggests not only that police are evaluated more favorably in the press than the courts and correctional system, but that stories are more likely to indicate police performance as stable or improving than declining. More recently, Chermak (1998) reported results from a content analysis of more than 2,500 crime stories from both print and visual media. He concluded that most crime stories reflect positively on police performance by portraying them as crime-fighters and emphasizing the danger of police work.

became key media spokespersons during such accidental events, often providing challenging frames to official interpretations of police misconduct.

The police-media relationship, therefore, is one that is routinely amicable in nature but may sour at any given moment. Charged with the mandate of keeping watch on government officials, reporters often feel uneasy about their dependence upon police agencies, for they do not want to serve as uncritical publicists for police practices. Thus, reporters may temporarily abandon their dependence upon police during times of scandal, allowing other interested groups an opportunity to be critical of police authority. Recognizing this, police are often suspicious of the news media and maintain a level of mistrust in their daily interaction with reporters (Chibnall, 1981; Garner, 1984).

When faced with unfavorable media coverage, police agencies have traditionally adopted a reactive approach to dealing with news reporters by either withholding certain facts, cutting off access to particular reporters, or establishing a level of organizational secrecy (Ericson et al., 1989). In this manner, police have traditionally dealt with the media only informally and on an ad hoc basis, untrained and unprepared to deal with media coverage of backstage behavior. Ericson, Baranek and Chan (1989) summarize the sometimes-tense police-media relationship as a negotiation over the control of police news content.

Unfortunately, police often feel at a disadvantage in negotiations over the image of police in the media. For one, police often feel that the news media have a bias against them. (Reiner,1992). A survey of 200 police officers conducted by Niederhoffer (1967:227) revealed that 95% of police respondents felt that newspapers, "seem to enjoy giving an unfavorable slant to news concerning the police." In addition, police feel that

the news media have a misunderstanding of the role of law enforcement in society (Ziembo-Vogl, 1998), sensationalize violent crime incidents (Simmons, 1999), and fail to assess organizational and budgetary constraints when reporting on the police. Finally, in the words of Hubert Williams, former Chief of the Newark Police and now head of the Police Foundation, "the media's mistake is to look at *events*, not a *progression* of events" (quoted in Skolnick and McCoy, 1984:543).[4]

Police-media relations reached a turning point in the late 1960s when, for the first time, images of civil disturbances in Watts, Detroit, Washington, D.C. and Chicago were broadcast across the nation. Not only were police ill-equipped to handle protest on such a widespread scale, they were ill-prepared in coping with both media coverage of non-routine events as well as media coverage of unscripted police performances. With crime then the number one issue of concern among the public, President Johnson assembled a commission to investigate current criminal justice practices and provide recommendations for improvement.

In addressing the need for improved police-community relations, the Commission's (1967) Task Force Report: The Police encouraged police departments to establish an open dialogue with the press and other media, particularly through public information officers.

> Citizens who distrust the police will not easily be converted by information programs they consider to come from a tainted source. However, even for these groups, long-term education based upon honest and free dialogue between the police and the public can have an effect (p.159).

[4] Commentators have suggested that negative coverage of police organizations adversely effects police performance by reducing officer morale. Recently, a deputy police commissioner blamed the news media for an increase in the local murder rate, suggesting that negative coverage of police practices rendered the force less aggressive in their crime-fighting efforts (New York Times, 11/5/99 A1 B6).

Not long after, the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence (1969) criticized media coverage of recent urban riots as being sensational, but added that the inability of law enforcement to communicate effectively with reporters, especially in times of crisis, was a contributing factor.

> The press obtained much factual information about the scale of the disorders – property damage, personal injury, and deaths – from local officials, who often were inexperienced in dealing with civil disorders and not always able to sort out fact from rumor (p. 107).

The commission went on to recommend that law enforcement open channels of information to the news media.

> Regular news conferences must be held . . . if they are not, the press will follow the sensational reports and fan the rumors. Members of the press, as feasible, should be permitted to . . . share in [official] evaluations in order to provide the facts to the public quickly and authoritatively. Regular formal contacts with the press should be augmented by frequent background briefings for community leaders because rumors flourish at all levels (p. 113).

In 1973, the National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals report, Police advocated that police agencies promote an aggressive policy on of presenting public information rather than merely responding to media inquiries. To achieve this, police agencies should:

> Provide regular liaison between the agency and the media through an officer or unit, depending upon the size of the agency and the nature and frequency of local news media demands (p. 44).

By the mid-1980s, police departments across the country were reforming their organizational strategies. Recognizing the limitations of preventive patrol and reactive policing, police began to adopt a community-oriented approach based upon proactive

problem solving through police-citizen partnerships. To achieve this end, police departments were encouraged to establish a media relations unit staffed by individuals trained in media relationships, with each unit having a well-developed media relations policy (Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, 1995). To date, media are considered essential for effective policing and are referred to as one of the "big six" groups necessary for the successful implementation and maintenance of police-community partnerships (Trojanowicz and Bucqueroux, 1994).

Media Relations Units & Public Information Officers

A media relations unit is an office within the police organization that is responsible for handling communication with the news media. These offices are staffed by either civilian Public Information Officers (PIOs) having an educational background in journalism and public relations, or by sworn officers who may or may not have training in media communication. These offices are thought to establish formal relations with members of the news media so that law enforcement may better serve the community through education of police practices and efforts. Media relations offices also serve the interests of the police, who are in a better position to shape the content of police-crime news and exercise impression management.

One of the first police-press offices was established in 1919 in Scotland Yard where communications between the police and the press were made twice daily. Journalists had been placing bribes to police for information, and it was reasoned that establishing formal ties with reporters would curtail this practice. Of course, police officials also hoped that by providing the press with information, they could reduce opportunities for alternative interpretations of criminal events (Crandon, 1993). Through

the 1920s and 1930s, the English police were less forthcoming with crime information, and reporters relied upon leaks for crime news. Between the 1945 appointment of Sir Harold Scott as Commissioner and the late 1960s, police-media relations in Britain fluctuated from the "golden age" of crime reporting to the eulogizing of the police in the press (Reiner, 1992).

Then, in 1972 Sir Robert Mark was appointed Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police. Appointed at a time when the force was faced with scandal, Mark decided that his force should have a relationship with the press marked by an unprecedented level of openness. Under his new policy, the police were to openly provide information to the media unless restricted by judicial order, to protect individual privacy, or to ensure the security of the state. Police were to issue press cards for the purpose of identifying accredited journalists, and officers likely to deal with the media on a regular basis were recommended to receive training in media relations (Schlesinger and Tumber, 1994).

Mark's policy of openness with the media led to the establishment of formal police-media relations units, and his policies would serve as a model for police-media relations offices on an international scale. In the early 1980s, a series of reports on the reorganization of the Metropolitan Toronto Police called for the establishment of a public affairs department whose responsibility would include the development of improved relationships with the media. The department was charged with the task of providing information "consistent with the legitimate needs of the media" as well as the distribution of press releases and the development of police-media liaisons (Hickling-Johnston, 1982).

Until recently, few police agencies within the United States have had formal media relations units or public information officers dealing specifically with news media. As a result, little is known about the prevalence, responsibilities, training, and strategies of police-media relations offices and their PIOs in the United States. This dissertation documents the prevalence of media strategies of police organizations that have adopted a proactive approach to dealing with the news media. More specifically, it focuses on the role of the police media relations offices and public information officers in managing and shaping police/crime news.

Previous Research on PIOs

Traditional studies of the crime news-making process suggest that as news sources, the police are highly selective in production of the final news product and are capable of exercising tight control over the interpretation of crime-related news events. For example, Sherizen (1978:205) argues, "only the crimes that meet the criteria established by bureaucratically and occupationally determined factors *as well as* meet the monopoly official sources have over primary information are considered for selection as crime news." He suggests that crime news is police generated information, with law enforcement serving as the initial and primary crime news gatekeepers. Maintaining privileged status as the primary source for crime information, Hall et al. (1978) similarly suggest that the control police maintain over the content of crime news allows them to – in essence – lobby for wider power for the purpose of adequately responding to the very issues they have placed on the public agenda. Moreover, Chibnall (1981) contends that it is the police officer who is in a superior negotiating position with regard to the news selection process, because it is "the reporter's world which is drawn towards that of the

policeman rather than vice versa" (88). Finally, Ericson, Baranek and Chan (1989) posit that discourse of crime is essentially the prerogative of police. People wishing knowledge about crime and its control are, accordingly, dependent upon official sources to provide reporters with the necessary incident information.

While the police routinely maintain privileged status in the crime news-making process, they are by no means the only social group vying to define social problems through news media. With national headlines charging police with racism, excessive force, and officer misconduct, it is clear that the tight hold on news that police have occasionally slips. Unanticipated news items frequently come to the attention of beat reporters from sources operating outside of official channels. Many times, these news events describe law enforcement engaging performances never intended for public view. When this happens, police may be less forthcoming with incident information and reporters may be less willing to rely upon official interpretations. At such times, non-official voices appear as routine and critical news sources working to project their own definitions of social events. In short, previous research examining police-media relations focuses upon the dynamics of the news-making process during the occurrence of "routine" news events while neglecting the presence of critical voices during the appearance of un-staged police performances. Yet the news is not so much a terrain exclusive to official definitions as it is a battleground where interpretations compete. Police are certainly at an advantage, but they are by no means immune to sneak attacks by opposing groups.

One objective of the present research study is to document the means by which police struggle to maintain control over the interpretation of crime news events and

sustain a favorable media image. As a recent development in police administration and management, media relations offices and public information officers have emerged as a significant development in an attempt by law enforcement to police their public image during times of both routine and un-anticipated police practices. To date, however, research examining the role of PIOs and police media strategies is limited. Guffey (1992) surveyed 34 police departments from a national sample and interviewed 17 police chiefs for the purpose of eliciting proposals to improve police-media relations and, by extension, coverage of police practices. Results from his survey indicated that all police departments had an appointed media spokesperson for the department, although some worked only on a part-time or as needed. Among the suggested proposals for improved media relations are the designation of a public information officer in all departments, the adoption of a media education-training program for all officers, the development of a thorough media relations policy, and PIO training in conflict resolution techniques.

Surette and Richard (1995) surveyed PIOs in Florida on their functions within the police organization and their training in media. They found that half of the PIOs surveyed had prior experience working in the mass media, and all received in-service training upon appointment. Their primary responsibilities are to handle inquiries from the news media, to arrange media interviews with other agency personnel, to distribute press releases, and to conduct press conferences and serve as the department spokesperson. The authors found that much PIO time is spent handling non-media related tasks. Thus, while PIOs may be full-time employees, they deal with media often on a part-time basis. The authors conclude that much of the work of the PIOs surveyed is reactive in nature and does not entail prepackaging proactive news creation.

Mawby (1997) surveyed the 43 Home Office police forces in England and Wales as part of a research project investigating police public relations. He found that 78% of forces reported having a media strategy whose stated objective is the promotion of the reputation of the force through both public information and public relations. Sixty percent (60%) of the media relations offices were staffed with between one and five employees, with 93% providing in-force media training. Finally, Chermak and Weiss (1999) examined the efforts made by police departments in the United States to promote community policing in the news. They surveyed PIOs from 239 law enforcement agencies and found that 80% of the departments had at least one full-time official responsible for media relations. Each PIO had at least 50 hours of training in media relations. To promote the police, PIOs relied upon press releases and direct contacts with reporters. Their study also surveyed media managers about their receptiveness to PIO initiated stories of police innovations and found that reporters were able to provide coverage of police programs about 76% of the time.

While these studies provide a first look at police attempts to conform to media demands, each approach is limited in scope. For example, Surette and Richard (1995) administered their survey solely to PIOs working for Florida law enforcement while Mawby's (1997) study surveyed law enforcement exclusively in the United Kingdom, thus limiting the ability to generalize their findings to PIOs to the United States nationally. Guffey's (1992) study, although national in scale, was designed to elicit recommendations for improved media relations. It did not examine the various media strategies adopted by police departments or the responsibilities and training of police PIOs. Finally, Chermak & Weiss (1999) surveyed police PIOs on a national scale but

focused primarily on police attempts to promote community-policing initiatives. In addition, their method of data collection was limited to survey responses and did not include qualitative field data.

In sum, the establishment of formal police-media relations offices within the United States is a recent occurrence (Surette and Richard, 1995). As such, there is still much to learn about the responsibilities of police-media relations office, their public information officers, and the methods by which police promote their image through mass media. Research investigating the media strategies of police PIOs, their staff training protocol, and their overall effectiveness of PIOs remains limited. This study documents the strategies used by police organizations to create a favorable public image and advance their organizational goals in an era dominated by mediated police-citizen interaction.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the role of police in the crime news-making process. In doing so, it made an important distinction between routine news events and those involving unanticipated accidents and scandal. Routinely, police occupy a privileged position as primary news sources regarding crime information, and they occasionally use news coverage to their advantage, promoting new policing initiatives, requesting citizen assistance in crime prevention, or presenting their organizational ideologies to the public. The news-making process shifts, however, during the occurrence of accidents and scandals, which constitute non-staged performances that require journalists to abandon their dependence upon official sources for information. During these times, non-official voices that challenge police perspectives become part of the news-making process. The police-media relationship, therefore, is routinely amicable but may change at any given

time. To cope with unfavorable media coverage, and to more effectively promote the police image as new image-producing technology develops, police have begun to establish media relations offices staffed by trained public information officers. Today, media relations offices comprise an important component of modern policing.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH METHODS

> I need somebody . . . to walk through the police department and figure out [how to] sell it . . . So strategically, I'm kind of looking for somebody to hand me something that says 'here's what . . . to do.' Nobody's proven to me that [we] can't do anything different as opposed to doing something more.
>
> *-Urbandale Police Chief*
> (Author interview)

Questions & Hypotheses

Media Strategies

Ideally, organizations are goal oriented, as goals provide the framework around which decisions and activities are directed (Simon, 1976). In order to achieve organizational success, it is necessary for organizations to adopt a strategic model that will strive to guide administrative behavior. Among the strategic models that often prove necessary is one that addresses communication with and through the mass media. For police, media communication has become increasingly important as it represents a primary means by which law enforcement communicates with constituents. As police are increasingly featured in the headlines of the news media, organizational strategies targeting media communication should successfully guide communicative behavior during routine events and – perhaps more importantly – during scandals when non-performance behavior is brought to the forefront. Many successful businesses and corporations adopt various media strategies during times of routine business and times of market crises. In fact, many of these strategies are reproduced in business texts and made available for trade view (Gottschalk, 1993).

Little is known, however, about the media strategies of police organizations. How many police departments have written media strategies? What is the nature of police media strategies? What are the communication objectives, and how do management situations dictate the nature of police-media relations? Who, within the police organization, communicates with the media, and under what conditions? Are media strategies effective in improving police-media relations and in guiding administrative behavior during times of non-routine events? This research seeks to uncover the media strategies that most effectively allow police communicate with the news media during both times of routine events and accidents or scandal. In doing so, it tests the following hypothesis:

1. **The adoption of media strategies and PIOs by police departments represents an effective means of exercising impression management in terms of:**
   (a) Greater satisfaction with department image
   (b) Better preparation to communicate with news media
   (c) More proactive contacts with news media.

Media Training

The ability to deal effectively with media is related the amount of knowledge one has about the mass media and media formats. Therefore, a person or organization that anticipates receiving frequent media exposure should learn as much as possible about media communications (National League of Cities, 1993). In an address delivered to a conference of police officials, O.W. Wilson – then Superintendent of Chicago Police - expressed his concern regarding the inability of police officials to communicate effectively with the public through the mass media:

> [T]he police are not a scholarly group, skilled in presenting the police point of view. The literature in consequence is principally devoted to the case against the police; little has been written in their defense . . . Small wonder that those who read the papers . . . conclude that the police are evil (Wilson, 1963:176).

It stands to reason that training in media skills and formats is essential to effective police public relations, and police officials are beginning to advocate and initiate officer training in media skills (Garner, 1984, 1987; National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 1992; Vance, 1997). Many departments are even hiring civilians with educational and work experience in media to serve as department spokespersons (Surette & Richard, 1995). Yet little is known about the content of police training in media relations, or about the efficacy of hiring civilian media specialists. What is the nature of police training in media formats, and who within the police organization receives training in media relations? How important is media training to the success of media strategies and the performance of police PIOs? Are PIOs with educational and work experience in media more effective in proactively promoting their agency's agenda and image? This research tests a second hypothesis:

2. **There is a positive association between the amount of police training in media relations and the ability of a department to exercise impression management, as measured through:**

   (a) More proactive contacts with media

   (b) Greater success in having police story suggestions realized

   (c) Better media image.

Effectiveness

Recognizing the importance of impression management to their law enforcement objectives, police agencies have begun to adopt a more open and direct approach to media communication. This approach includes the formation of a written media policy, the implementation of in-service training in media skills for police officials, and the appointment of a PIO (often with a background in media relations) to both handle media inquiries and market the police organization. The goal of this new approach is to improve the working relationship between police and members of the news media, to better inform the public of police initiatives, to offset potentially damaging news items, and to shape a favorable media image of police.

Given the sometimes-volatile role of the news source stemming from the "fourth estate" mandate of the press, it is likely that under certain conditions, police PIOs and their media strategies will be of little utility in offsetting negative publicity or presenting the police organization in a manner favorable to the police administration. While news reporting typically reinforces the status quo by affording public officials routine access to media, journalists have autonomy to reinterpret or alter their source considerations at a given time, allowing alternative voices to enter the forum of public discourse (Molotch and Lester, 1974; Gans, 1979; Bennett, 1990; Lawrence, 1996). This is particularly likely to occur during times of elite conflict and official debate over the interpretation of accidents, or when officials themselves are implicated in scandal (Bennett, 1990; Lawrence, 1996). Thus, a reporter from the *Los Angeles Times* noted that police are critical of the news media because, in the view of police, "stories on police shootings

often quote eyewitnesses critical of the police more prominently than they quote the police version of what happened" (Shaw, 1987:152).

How effective are PIOs and their media strategies in improving police-media relations? Do police feel that reporters are receptive to law enforcement input into the police/crime news-making process? To what extent are police initiatives (i.e., press releases, interviews granted, invitations for ride-alongs, story suggestions) regarding the content of police/crime news realized through media coverage? Do police officials feel better equipped to deal with negative media coverage of accident or scandal situations given a formal media strategy and spokesperson? Have certain media strategies proven more successful than other strategies? The final hypothesis tested by this research states that:

3. **Police departments will face greater challenges in promoting their image during times of elite conflict, scandal, or official debate.**

That is, the effectiveness of police PIOs and media strategies will vary according to the prevailing political, organizational and situational climate.

Survey Data

Given the limited available information regarding police media relations offices and PIOs in the United States, this study administered a self report mail survey to municipal law enforcement agencies nationwide to obtain information regarding the nature and quality of police media relations. The survey was sent to departments serving areas with a population of 100,000 residents or greater, since these departments are more likely to have frequent contacts with the news media (Skolnick and McCoy, 1984;

Chermak and Weiss, 1999). A list of departments that comprised the sampling frame was be obtained from the 1999 National Directory of Law Enforcement Administrators, published by the National Public Safety and Information Bureau. This directory contains over 37,000 department profiles covering eighteen levels of jurisdiction (i.e., municipal, county, federal, corrections) and includes such information as municipality population, number of serving officers, and the name of the acting department chief.

The purpose of the survey was to gather information regarding the strategies employed by various police departments to promote and enhance their image through media and their perceived effectiveness, as reported by police officials. Survey items identified, among other factors: (1) the presence and nature of a formal department media strategy; (2) the prevalence of full-time police PIOs; (3) PIO background characteristics, including educational/vocational training in media, journalism or public relations; (4) specific goals of police media relations offices and PIOs; (5) the various methods by which these goals are achieved; and (6) the perceived quality of police-media interaction, the police image, and the public information office both before and after the adoption of the current media strategy.

At this point, a word should be said about the use of self-report surveys to evaluate departmental behavior. Traditionally, self-report surveys have been criticized for their inability to establish reliability and/or validity of findings, for their inability to adequately measure behavior among a target population (e.g., "true" delinquents rather than "school" delinquents), and skepticism about the willingness of respondents to report wrongdoing or unlawful behavior (see Hindelang, Hirschi and Weis, 1981). Fortunately for this study, the total population – municipal police departments – was known, leaving

primarily concerns about reliability and truthfulness. Undoubtedly, assessments of departmental performance may vary with the rank of the respondent completing the survey and the experiences that come with the respective roles. By chance, one department submitted two surveys, each completed by a different member of the department occupying a different rank (one a chief, one his PIO). A test of reliability between the two completed surveys on fourteen different evaluation-based items yielded an alpha index of .9423. Finally, regarding the truthfulness of survey responses, each respondent was informed of complete confidentiality regarding department and personnel names and ranks. As the purpose of the survey specified its intent to gather information for the improvement of police-media relations, respondents were encouraged to provide critical, yet truthful responses.

All surveys were addressed to the highest-ranking official within the department, asking him/her to respond to the survey personally or to have the survey completed by a member of the department who could accurately represent the views of the top police official. Each respondent was asked to provide a complete evaluation of department police-media relations and was assured complete confidentiality of all information provided. A pretest of the survey instrument was mailed to all municipal police departments serving areas having a population of 90,000 – 99,999 residents (N=31) and revealed questionnaire items requiring minor revision. The final survey was mailed in the spring of 2000 and yielded a response rate of 76% (194/255). Of the respondents, 48% were the department PIOs, 19% were chiefs themselves, 4% worked directly under the chief, and the remaining 29% was comprised of various ranks. A copy of the survey instrument is provided in the research appendices.

Data analysis

Univariate analyses will assess the prevalence of police media relations offices and PIOs, police media policies, and police media training among municipal law enforcement agencies nationwide. Bivariate analyses of the survey data determined the relationships between independent and dependent variables. Specifically, chi-square (X^2) coefficients assess the relationships between various survey items. As a result of little covariance among key independent variables, multivariate analysis proved unnecessary to control for the independent contributions of factors predicted to influence media power. For example, the crime rate was not found to be significantly associated with any other independent variable thought to influence impression management, such as the presence of a police PIO or whether police media training is offered to police staff.

Site Observations

Information garnered from the national survey was used to identify police departments to serve as ethnographic case studies. While the case study approach has been criticized for its lack of representativeness or generalizability, it proves useful for its explanatory power and ability to clarify previously reported events (GAO, 1990). As a complement to survey data, it contributes to a more comprehensive perspective on a given phenomenon by allowing the researcher to document social processes in the context of actual situations (Schatzman and Strauss, 1973). For this project, the goal of case study research was to document the various community events that – through their extensive coverage in the news – require police to incorporate various media strategies to their routine law enforcement practices. Specifically, do police have iterative or planned responses to various media events? If so, who within the department shapes these

responses? To what extent do city officials, such as mayors or city attorneys, determine the content of police-crime news? In what ways do social (i.e., media) events frame police behavior, influence the flow of information accessible to reporters, and result in information being withheld from the public through official "gate-keeping" channels? Finally, what are the daily patterns of police PIO work, and how do non-routine events impact the nature of their work or their work product?

To identify possible departments for case study research, responses to various survey items were used to comprise a scale assessing the strength of department "media power." The selection of case sites was purposive, favoring agencies reflecting strong variation in the extent to which they meet the demands of the media market. Specifically, three response criteria were used to assess department media power: (1) the perceived **quality of police-reporter interaction**; (2) the perceived **quality of public opinion** surrounding the department; and (3) the perceived **quality of the department's image** as projected in media coverage. Media power, therefore, may be summarized as follows:

MEDIA POWER = (police/media interaction) + (public opinion) + (image)

Ordinal responses to each of these assessments were assigned a numerical code (poor = 0, fair = 1, good = 2, excellent = 3). Departments with total scores of less than 6 were coded as "low media power" agencies, as at least one of their answers indicates responses of less than "good." All other departments were coded as "high media power" agencies. Table 4.1 presents an overview of "media power" variance among municipal police departments within the United States.

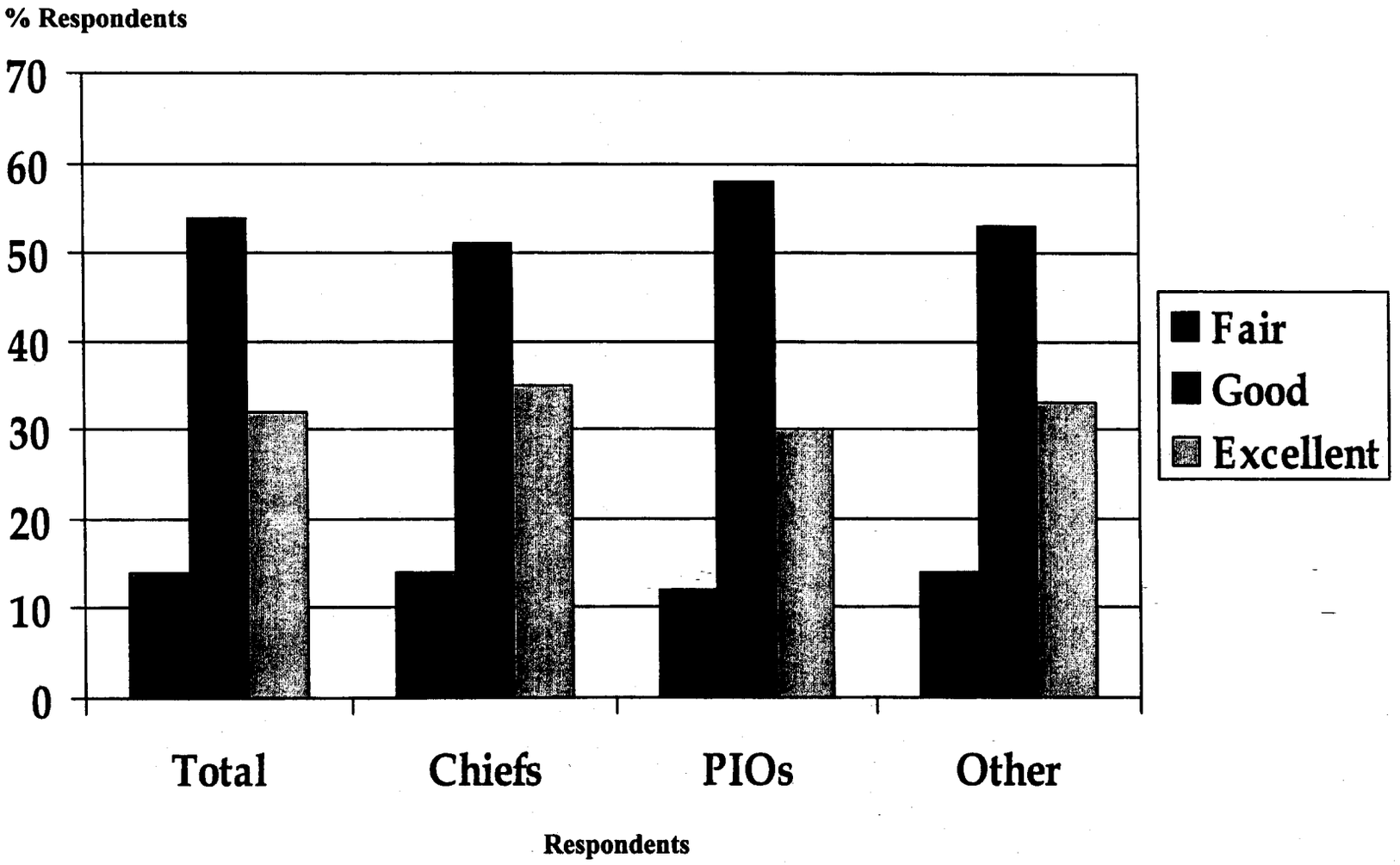
Table 4.1. " Media Power" Variance Among Municipal Police Departments

VARIABLE	FREQUENCY	PERCENT	CUMULATIVE PERCENT
Image			
Poor	-	-	-
Fair	24	13%	13%
Good	99	54%	67%
Excellent	59	32%	100%
Public Opinion			
Poor	-	-	-
Fair	15	8%	8%
Good	94	52%	60%
Excellent	73	40%	100%
Interaction			
Poor	-	-	-
Fair	7	4%	4%
Good	96	54%	58%
Excellent	76	42%	100%
Media Power			
Low	28	15%	15%
Medium	125	64%	79%
High	41	21%	100%

One of the concerns in conducting a self-report assessment of police performance is the potential for selection bias among police respondents. Specifically, the possibility existed that a chief pleased with media coverage is likely to hand the survey off to a PIO, where a chief dissatisfied might be more inclined to fill out the questionnaire his/herself. Figure 4.1 presents a comparison of perceptions of the police media image according to rank. It reveals an equal proportion of chiefs from fair, good, and excellent image departments serving as survey respondents. Because few departments evaluated their practices as less than successful, there was much confidence regarding the validity of low media power responses, since respondents had nothing to gain or lose by attempting to save face. A total of 28 agencies (15%) comprised the "low media power" departments. The low power sites selected for site visits were chosen – in part – as a response to their open-ended survey responses, which indicated concern over their inability to work effectively with the media and a request for study findings when finished.

Identifying "high media power" case sites, however, proved more of a challenge, as responses tended to cluster around the high-end of the scale. For example, 54% (N=99) of departments reported having a "good" media image, while another 32% (N=59) indicated having an "excellent" image. Responses to questions targeting public opinion and the quality of police-reporter interaction were similarly distributed in a skewed fashion. Moreover, a total of 41 departments (21%) received a maximum score of 9, while the remaining departments had scores ranging between 6-8. To narrow the list of possible "high media power" departments to select as case studies while increasing confidence in the validity of responses, additional items that appeared to substantiate department assessments (e.g., newspaper clippings favorable of department practices;

Figure 4.1. Police Perceptions of Their Department's Media Image, According to Respondent Rank



SOPs detailing media protocol; the breadth of open-ended responses designed to substantiate self-evaluations) were reviewed to provide a more focused sample of departments. For example, one of the "high media power" agencies selected for study affixed to the questionnaire a copy of their department media policy (numbering some 20 pages long). Such documents were considered as evidence of the strength of the department's self-assessment. Ultimately, the two departments that exhibited the most evidence of "high media power" garnered scores of 6 on the media power scale.

A total of four police agencies were selected to serve as case studies for site observations, with only one of the initially approached departments declining to participate.[5] All departments agreed in advance to four day site visits, allowing the author to observe PIO work patterns, police-media interaction both within the department and in the field, and allowing for the review internal training and work-related documents. Case study evaluations, therefore, entailed the review of multiple sources of information, including administrative documents and standard operating procedures, police press releases and the resulting news products, transcripts from interviews with police PIOs, chiefs, news editors and reporters, and personal field notes of various observations. All case site observations occurred during the Fall 2000. Approximately 100 hours of field observations was conducted across the four research sites and included interviews with PIOs, police chiefs, and local news editors, beat reporters, and media camera crew. Table 4.2 provides a summary of the four case department characteristics. Below is a detailed description of each case site.

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[5] This department was to serve as one of the "low media power" case sites. In the months prior to receiving my request, the department was involved in a high-profile political event that resulted in the appointment of a new chief, as well as a new PIO staff. The department, therefore, felt it best to forgo participation in case study research during their current circumstances.

Table 4.2. "Media Power" Case Study Department Characteristics

Department	City Population	Violent Crime*	PIO Staff	# Hours Training	Public Opinion	Media Relations	Media Image
Morganville	1,000,000+	291	4	16	Fair	Fair	Fair
Union Creek	500,000+	1202	2	N/A	Fair	Fair	Fair
Spring Lake	500,000+	1235	3	N/A	Good	Good	Good
Urbandale	400,000+	2192	6	40+	Good	Good	Good

*Number of violent crimes per 100,000 city residents. Uniform Crime Reports (1999).

Urbandale Police Department

Describing themselves as "one of the leading law enforcement agencies in the country," the Urbandale Police Department is also a leader in terms of media power. Located within a jurisdiction having a population of roughly a half-million residents, the department is nevertheless housed in one of the largest media markets nationwide. On average, its PIO staff (comprised of three full-time sworn officers and three civilian support staff) field media inquires from 27 different reporters representing as many as 24 media outlets. To meet the demands of this concentrated media market, the PIOs receive 40 hours per year of formal media training through external coursework. Here, they learn to rehearse media sound bites, parade charged suspects, and plan ahead for "the big one", a euphemism for the inevitable police scandal. Moreover, because the city is home to a large Hispanic constituency, the PIO staff is almost entirely bilingual, allowing them to provide daily sound bites and press releases in both English and Spanish to accommodate local Hispanic media. Finally, the PIO office maintains its own news library, containing department-related paper clippings and videotapes of local news broadcasts that are recorded by the 13 televisions and video recorders set up within their office. As part of their daily function, the PIOs review the new additions to their library, critiquing the quality of their performances by monitoring both the sound-bites given and the image(s) projected by their on-screen presence.

In terms of their media strategy, their approach to communicating with members of news media is two-fold. On one front, the PIO staff serves as media spokespersons for the department, providing reporters with information about crimes and other law enforcement related activities. Therefore, as explained to me by the senior-ranking PIO:

> We usually respond to scenes where media is present. It is to our advantage to get a first hand knowledge of the situation, so that we can report it accurately. That's why we are on-call 24/7. Naturally, there are times when it's not practical to respond; however, more times than not, we are there, especially if the scene is a major one. (Author interview)

To avoid the impression that they are mere talking heads, Urbandale PIOs do not themselves handle media appearances exclusively; instead, they may defer comment to the crime scene commander or responding officer while providing the rank and file with logistical assistance. Regardless of who within the department communicates, the goal is to provide media with assistance at each scene where reporters will likely be present.

On a second front, Urbandale PIOs engage in proactive and notably create public relations to "sell" the image of the department, its crime prevention initiatives, and to increase the "community" aura of Urbandale policing. During my stay at the department, one Urbandale PIO ("Daryl") made a "mystery guest-deejay" appearance on a popular morning radio show. Listeners were given an opportunity to call into the station and place a yes/no question in an attempt to guess the celebrity identity. Winners received two front-row concert tickets with limousine service to the show. When a caller quickly identified "Daryl" by name and occupation, I was told that this should come as no surprise, as his frequent media appearances allowed him to have been previously been voted "one of television's sexiest men" by a local news morning show (George Clooney was apparently the odds on favorite).

The Urbandale Police Department had been involved in a high profile news event that placed the department at the center of international media coverage, politically divided the city's leadership, and ultimately led in the resignation of the department's

chief. Interestingly, five months into the new chief's administration, the city issued its final report on the incident, concluding that "the [Urbandale] Police Department, which has been criticized by some for over-reacting, actually handled the . . . demonstrations with professionalism and restraint" (Newspaper #002209). While the report did criticize some aspects of police conduct, it also criticized members of the city leadership: "No elected city official should ever interfere, directly or indirectly, with police officers or their commanders at the scene of a disturbance" (report quoted in Newspaper #002209). This report – issued during my stay at the department – served as a final chapter on this politically charged event, providing Urbandale officers with a sense of closure.

Despite recent events, survey responses provided by the Urbandale PIO staff indicate a high level of confidence in their media performance. That is, they report favorable police-reporter interaction and, in general, a positive media image. To be sure, part of their positive image may be the result of a six-year decline in Part I Offenses within their jurisdiction and, more specifically, a 39% decline in reported homicides between 1997-1999 (U.S. Department of Justice, 2000). Nevertheless, their jurisdiction possesses the highest violent crime rate of the four case sites, providing the PIOs with many events to address through media. During the four-day period of my site visit, I accompanied the PIOs to several breaking crime scenes, including a hit-and-run (possible homicide scene) and a triple stabbing/attempted murder involving victims as young as five-years of age. I also watched as the PIO staff prepared and conducted two crime prevention press conferences and prepared official responses to two additional incidents that occurred during my stay: the discovery of a murder victim and failed suicide attempt by a juvenile. Later, when the driver of the hit-and-run vehicle was identified and

apprehended, I watched as the PIO staff consulted with the homicide unit, released a suspect mug shot, and notified local camera crews of the unofficially scheduled suspect walk-through from police headquarters to the county jail, as learned in training coursework.[6] Finally, I was able to monitor PIO behavior during downtime in between news cycles when officers prepared human interest or crime-stopper stories, followed up on previous press releases, or consulted with the Chief on upcoming public appearances.

Spring Lake Police Department

Also located in a city with a half million residents, the Spring Lake Police Department serves a media market that is about half that of Urbandale Police, with approximately 16 beat reporters employed by 9 different media organizations. As a result, their PIO staff is significantly smaller, consisting of one full-time lieutenant who works exclusively on fielding media inquiries and responding to crime-related events. Two additional officers are responsible for producing the department's "crime-stoppers" media campaign, which airs weekly on a local broadcast affiliate. Finally, one additional staff member drafts official departmental reports regarding police operations, budgets, and other administrative matters for release to both the mayor's office and/or local media.

Although the city's population is slightly larger than that of Urbandale, its violent crime rate is nearly 50% less. It has similarly experienced a sharp decline in Index offences and homicides – both down roughly 23% in the past three years. This does not

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[6] According to the PIO staff, a recent Court of Appeals decision criticized law enforcement for staging certain media events, such as the recommended parading of suspects in front of cameras. Apparently, a suspect successfully sued local law enforcement for unduly detaining him because camera crews had yet to arrive to document the suspect in handcuffs and being transported to the local jail. When news media finally arrived, a camera operator complained of not getting a "good-shot", causing law enforcement to subsequently conduct a second walk-through. The Circuit Court decision, within whose jurisdiction the UPD is situated, declared staged walk-throughs unduly burdensome on criminal suspects.

mean, however, that the PIO believes his office to be adequately staffed to address media coverage of crime within the city, for he alone is on-call 24 hours each day and is responsible for handling all requests for information himself. The Spring Lake Police Department also dispatches a PIO to handle all attention-grabbing crime scenes. While the PIO had much downtime during my four-day visit, we were called to the scene of a hostage standoff during the last evening of my stay that began at midnight and concluded at approximately 6am the following morning. By the end of my observations, the PIO had been working for nearly 36 straight hours, going home only to shave and change clothes for his next media appearance. Just hours after the hostage situation, the Spring Lake PIO was relieved to receive a call on his car-phone while in route to a local high school where shots were rumored to have been fired that the school's PIO would be handling the case.

In marked contrast to the high level of formal media training received by the Urbandale PIO staff, the Spring Lake does not provide its PIO staff with training in media communication, instead approaching media relations on more of an ad hoc basis. As an example, the Spring Lake Police had received much criticism within the local media just prior to my visit. The department had responded in riot gear to a rally consisting of some 300 protesters marching in support of organized labor. On the day of the event, the recently appointed chief suggested in a local paper that some of the protestors were dressed like anarchists and that, given this, the level of police response was both appropriate and displaying of "restraint" and that "I think our officers did a splendid job" (Newspaper #001005). Yet the department quickly changed its opinion after extensive and damaging media attention showed unarmed community protestors met

by police presence dressed for combat. Less than two months later in the department's own final report, the chief noted that "squad integrity was lost frequently throughout the day" as officers and sergeants failing to act as a planned unit. In addition, the department's report suggested that officers deployed so-called bean bag bullets 'inappropriately," and that problems with the public address communication system prevented protestors from hearing police orders (Official document #001010).

Despite this incident, the Spring Lake Police reports having "a very good relationship with the media overall" and satisfaction with both its media image and public opinion surrounding the quality of the department. This opinion perhaps stems in large part from the department's high degree of community policing initiatives. And it is their community policing initiatives that largely shape the scope of the department's proactive media initiatives. Known as a progressive department in the area of police-community partnerships, the department hosts a bi-weekly "Chief's Forum" task force with representatives from an array of local community groups in attendance. The meetings (one of which I attended) are not only broadcast on a local public access channel, they are also open to the public who are provided with an opportunity to address the chief directly. Finally, and in addition to the locked-in, weekly "crime-stoppers" segment broadcast on a local network, the PIO often appears on the local news interacting with various community organizations. While watching television in the hotel lobby the evening prior to beginning my observations, I noticed the department PIO on the evening news participating in a game of wheel-chair basketball to promote an awareness of the abilities of the disabled.

Morganville Police Department

Admittedly, media relations surrounding the Morganville Police Department "are not that good at this time." According to a lieutenant who heads the public information office, members of the local media frequently "beat us up about how bad we are," producing a media image that is tarnished and, they feel, somewhat undeserving. Despite having reported to receive 16 hours of media training per year, I learned through interviews with the PIO staff that none of their current employees underwent any formal training in media communication skills, and that external yearly training (totaling an average of 16 hours of instruction) had not been attended in several years. As such, the PIO staff indicated difficulty finding "qualified people who know how to deal with the press." Their survey responses suggest a media image somewhere between "poor" and "fair" while stating that they are taking steps to improve relations with reporters through a more open media policy.

Media relations are not a priority for the Morganville Police Department; as such, they admittedly have no media-related strategy or approach to improve or enhance their image. While they do produce a weekly crime prevention video, which airs on a local channel, they do not dispatch a PIO to handle every media-covered incident, though they do require that a PIO be on-call at all times. Moreover, proactive contacts to media with story suggestions, press releases and news tips are admittedly lacking. In fact, it was very difficult to observe police-media relations firsthand while in Morganville, as the PIO office decided not to dispatch spokespersons to the several crimes that occurred during my stay in the city. In addition, the department has recorded phone line, updated daily, which provides reporters with information about ongoing investigations. Thus, it was

difficult to observe any police-media encounters (even mediated via phone) because this recorded message service trumps any live interaction.

Approximately nine months prior to my visit, the Morganville police chief "abruptly retired" after serving for eighteen months. According to a newspaper account, "Controversy has plagued [the Chief's] tenure," which included allegations that the 1,400-member police force had been engaged in "excessive force, cronyism and unscrupulous recruiting" (Newspaper #000902). The public information office, therefore, had much to work toward with regard to impression management despite the 12% decrease in index crimes over the last three years and a 9% decrease in murder/manslaughter (U.S. Department of Justice, 2000). Yet the PIO staff was often reluctant to openly speak with reporters, whether the story was about official misconduct or a routine crime investigation. Instead, they operate in secrecy, complaining that the amount of information they provide to reporters "will never be enough. With more accessibility, they will just up the ante." Still, the newly appointed chief expressed his commitment to be more open with members of the news media. In fact, my visit coincided with a police-media forum where local reporters sat down with Morganville officials to express their concerns over the department's media policies. Approximately thirty-five reporters, assignment editors and camera operators were in attendance.

Union Creek Police Department

The city of Union Creek is one marked by a strong mayoral figure, who ultimately determines the approach with which the police staff approach media relations. City administration exercises tight control over public records requests, which greatly slows down the flow of information while the city's legal department reviews each

application. Therefore, neither the chief nor the PIO complained of inadequate staffing, the absence of media training, or overly aggressive reporters. Instead, the Chief – who completed the survey – complained of a poor working relationship with reporters, a poor media image, and therefore, a lack of public support for the department in general resulting from the policies and politics of the city administration.

The mayor is currently serving his third term that he won handily, while the previous election saw him run unopposed. He therefore has strong public support that provides him an opportunity for strong leadership and agenda setting. As a political appointee of a popular mayor, the Union Creek Police Chief has a difficult job. As one Union Creek newspaper reporter explained to me:

> The mayor has had six chiefs in eleven years . . . Chief tenure trends are getting shorter. It's shitty. The chief's in a tough spot. I think the mayor has publicly embarrassed the chief before. And there are all these rumors that he's going to resign or get fired. (Author interview)

As an example of what he called "political posturing," the reporter relayed the following experience of what he felt was the mayor's use of a police scandal for political gain.

> TV news had a case on tape, a big car chase. The guy gets out, the cop cuffs him, and it looks like the cop was beating this guy up. In the end, the cop was suspended but no criminal charges were filed. The prosecutor decided not to file criminal charges. [When I interviewed the chief the morning after the video aired], he said, 'Well, you know, I think there is racism, there is a problem with police brutality, and in this example you saw on the news last night, it's going to show that there is a problem.' And it struck me: it's 12 hours after the car chase video has aired, internal affairs hasn't even gotten a panel together to investigate, I would think that the mayor would say, 'Well, we're investigating it, and we're going to see if there is a problem and deal with it, if not . . .' Well, the mayor doesn't do that. The mayor says right away 'presumed

> guilty,' which I just thought was interesting. I wouldn't expect a mayor to do that. (Author interview)

The department employs one full-time PIO and one back-up spokesperson responsible for fielding media inquiries from the thirteen different news organizations within the city. Although new to the position, the Union Creek PIO was excited about her job, remarking about the tremendous responsibility she felt representing the 1,800 men and women who serve in the department. In turn, local reporters expressed respect for the Union Creek PIOs, recognizing the role that city politics play. One broadcast reporter indicated that "things have gotten better" since the current PIO took charge despite city politics:

> [She] is very reachable; she can be reached 24 hours a day. [The Union Creek] PIO is very good at getting back to you . . . I think that police-media relations have improved dramatically in the last few months. I think that was the case a time ago where nothing was released unless the mayor gave his approval, but I think that has dramatically improved. If you call the PIO and say, "hey, there was a double murder last night, what happened?' She will have the information for you in a timely fashion. When it comes to routine police cases and investigations, things have improved dramatically. When it comes to, we want to see someone's personnel files or we want to see files that the administration would have to give their stamp of approval, or freedom of information act requests take a while. (Author interview)

Despite the tight reign placed on the department and its public information officer, it is the Chief's firm belief that "virtually everything we do should be public record," and the department takes steps to be as open with reporters as possible despite city politics.

The timing of my visit to the Union Creek Police Department made it difficult for me to observe the Union Creek PIO at work. In fact, on the morning of my first day, the Union Creek PIO received notification (via her paging system) that a jury had returned a

verdict on a case involving a Union Creek officer shot and killed in the line of duty. While the city prosecutor's office was handling all public information responsibilities regarding this case, the police PIO was nevertheless at the courtroom for the unsealing of the verdict, both out of curiosity and to provide assistance to any police commenting on this (potentially) capital case. Therefore, my first day was spent in a courtroom, waiting for reporters to arrive while observing the Union Creek PIO, who was herself observing the prosecutor's office respond to the outcome of this highly publicized trial. When the verdict came back "guilty," this not only ensured a bifurcated case, but also that this story would dominate the news for the duration of my visit, providing the police PIO with somewhat of a temporary respite from her usual duties.

CHAPTER 5

ROUTINE EVENTS

> I was recently at a big policing convention a few months ago where many officers from small-town departments were in attendance. When the officers were sitting around talking about police-media relations, they were surprised to hear how we do business in our department. One of the officers actually said to me, "You mean you *actually* call media and tell them about crime in your city?"
>
> *-Public Information Officer*
> *Urbandale Police Department*
> (Author notes)

Although a common measure of police success, a city's crime rate does not necessarily make or break a police department's media image. Rather, stories about crime have become rather "routine" news events that more often focus upon victims and suspects than about justice system personnel (Graber, 1980). Moreover, the typical crime story often reflects positively upon police by portraying them as crime fighters actively pursuing a case or making an arrest (Chermak, 1998). Of course, perceptions of the police image do vary inversely with extremes in the crime rate, yet the covariance between these two factors does not rise to the level of statistical significance.

To be sure, table 5.1 presents a cross-tabulation of police municipality violent crime rates (in quintiles) and police assessments of their department's media image. As is evident, police perceptions (i.e., "fair" and "excellent") do co-vary with extreme crime rates (i.e., "low" and "high"), as departments in low crime communities are less likely to assess their image as fair than departments in higher crime municipalities. Similarly, departments in lower crime municipalities are more likely to report an "excellent" image

Table 5.1. Covariance of Police Municipality Violent Crime Rate & Quality of Department Media Image

Perceived Image	Violent Crime Rate Level in Quintiles				
	Low	→	Med.	→	High
Fair	3%	16%	19%	9%	17%
	(1)	(5)	(6)	(3)	(5)
Good	52%	41%	47%	69%	60%
	(16)	(13)	(15)	(22)	(18)
Excellent	45%	44%	34%	22%	23%
	(14)	(14)	(11)	(7)	(7)

X^2=11.318 *(Not* significant)

than are departments in higher crime municipalities. Nevertheless, chi-square analysis does not reveal a statistically significant relationship, and this holds true whether the crime rate is divided into quintiles or deciles.

This finding is not too surprising, given what content analyses have indicated as the inconsistency between crime statistics and crime within the news (Davis, 1951; Fishman, 1978; Hall et al., 1981). With little fluctuation among city papers and evening broadcasts regarding the proportion of crime stories reported each day, and high and low crime communities appear indistinguishable in the headlines of local news (Gerber and Gross, 1976; Dominick, 1978; Graber, 1980). Simply put, violence in the media represents a constant that – despite actual varying crime rates – homogenizes the police media image. As such, it fails to significantly influence the quality of the police media image. Moreover, while other predictors similarly co-vary as expected with extremes in the crime rate (i.e., media training is less likely to be offered in low crime municipalities and more likely offered in higher crime municipalities), the crime rate was not found to be significantly associated with any other independent variable thought to influence impression management, such as the presence of a police PIO (Table 5.2) or whether and/or what kind of media training is offered police staff (Table 5.3). Therefore, some other variable or variables must contribute to the quality of the police image. Perhaps it is not crime itself as much as the manner with crime is communicated.

Making Crime Routine

With criminal justice research describing much of everyday policing as leisurely, peaceful, and bureaucratic (Wilson, 1968; Reis Jr., 1971; Sykes and Brent, 1983; Walker, 1983; Goldstein, 1990; Skolnick, 1994), it is somewhat inappropriate to refer to the actual

Table 5.2. Covariance of Police Municipality Violent Crime Rate & Presence of Department PIO

PIO	Violent Crime Rate Level in Quintiles				
	Low	→	Med.	→	High
No	27% (4)	27% (4)	20% (3)	27% (4)	-
Yes	19% (27)	20% (28)	20% (29)	20% (28)	21% (30)

X^2=4.215 *(Not* significant); *5 cells have less than the expected counts

*Percentages represent rounded figures and may no total 100%

Table 5.3 . Covariance of Police Municipality Violent Crime Rate & Police Media Training Offered

Training	Violent Crime Rate Level in Quintiles				
	Low	→	Med.	→	High
No	27%	21%	23%	17%	13%
	(13)	(10)	(11)	(8)	(6)
Yes	16%	20%	19%	22%	23%
	(18)	(22)	(21)	(24)	(25)

X^2=4.430 *(Not* significant)

*Percentages represent rounded figures and may not total 100%

occurrence of criminal or tragic events as "routine." Yet for members of law enforcement, temporal frequency is not a defining feature of routine events. Rather, it is the anticipatory nature of criminal events that qualify them as routine. That is, routine events represent expected occurrences that elicit planned responses. Crimes, crashes, and natural disasters qualify as routine events within the law enforcement community because they initiate an array of rehearsed, staged and planned behaviors on the part of responding officials.

Similarly, members of the news media treat crimes and other "nonspecialized emergencies" as routine and anticipatory events (Tuchman, 1973:111). After all, it is the job of the news team to convert the rare or unusual occurrence into a daily feature new item. To do this, reporters are largely dependent upon police to make crime routine. They regularly contact police departments requesting any information that they may use as part of the news product. Table 5.4 presents a summary of the frequency of police-media interaction nationwide across mid-to-large sized departments suggesting that police-media interaction is highly frequent. Most departments (93%) communicate with the news media at least once a day regarding crime in the community, while many departments (62%) are in contact with media more than once a day. Moreover, as table 5.5 indicates, police field media requests from numerous crime reporters (mean=17) representing a range of news outlets (mean=10). For beat reporters, then, police-media interaction proves an occupational necessity, since law enforcement is responsible for providing media with the dramatic ingredients for much of their daily work product.[7]

[7] Much of the daily work product of news organizations involves the relaying of crime narratives. Content analyses of local and national news formats indicate that crime-related stories typically account for 25% of all newspaper articles and 20% of all local broadcast features (Dominick, 1978; Graber, 1980; Lotz, 191; Surette, 1998).

Table 5.4. Frequency of Police-Media Interaction (N=194)

Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Not at All	.5	100.0
Monthly	2.6	99.5
Weekly	4.1	96.9
Daily	30.6	92.8
More than Once a Day	62.2	62.2

Table 5.5. Number of Police Department Media Contacts In An Average Week

	Newspaper	Television	Radio	Total
Reporters				
Mean	5	8	3	16.6
S.D.	4.0	6.1	2.7	11.0
Outlets				
Mean	3.0	4.2	2.8	10.2
S.D.	2.4	2.1	2.3	5.3

Of course, police often benefit from the release of crime information, especially when they are able to provide reporters with news about successful performances. At other times, police request media assistance to promote crime prevention initiatives or ongoing investigations. Even during times of alleged inefficiency or misconduct, they may seek out media to present their perspective or news frame. As explained by one police official, "The media are going to find out anyway, so we may as well give them our information up front. That way, at least the information is coming from us" (Author notes, 9/30/00). For all of these reasons, police may decide to initiate contact with members of the media. The most common reason for police to call media is to provide crime incident information. Nearly half of all departments (49%) contact local media daily to provide reporters assistance with crime coverage (figure 5.1). Thirty percent (30%) of departments issue press releases on a daily basis to both facilitate and routinize the crime news-making process, while nearly 80% issue press releases at least once per week (figure 5.2). Finally, an equal percentage of departments (34%) hold monthly news conferences or regularly meet with news editors and media managers to provide input into crime news product, to contribute to media coverage of police practices, or to air concerns over coverage of recent breaking events (figures 5.3 and 5.4).

While police represent a primary journalistic source for crime-related information, reporters do not rely exclusively upon first-hand police accounts to learn about crime in the community. They may become aware of a crime through alternate or indirect channels, only later contacting the police for verification of events. For example, reporters frequently come across crime information through the frequent monitoring of police scanners. Local news desks rely heavily upon police scanners for information,

Figure 5.1. Department Frequency Providing Media with Assistance Regarding Crime Coverage (in Past 12 Months)

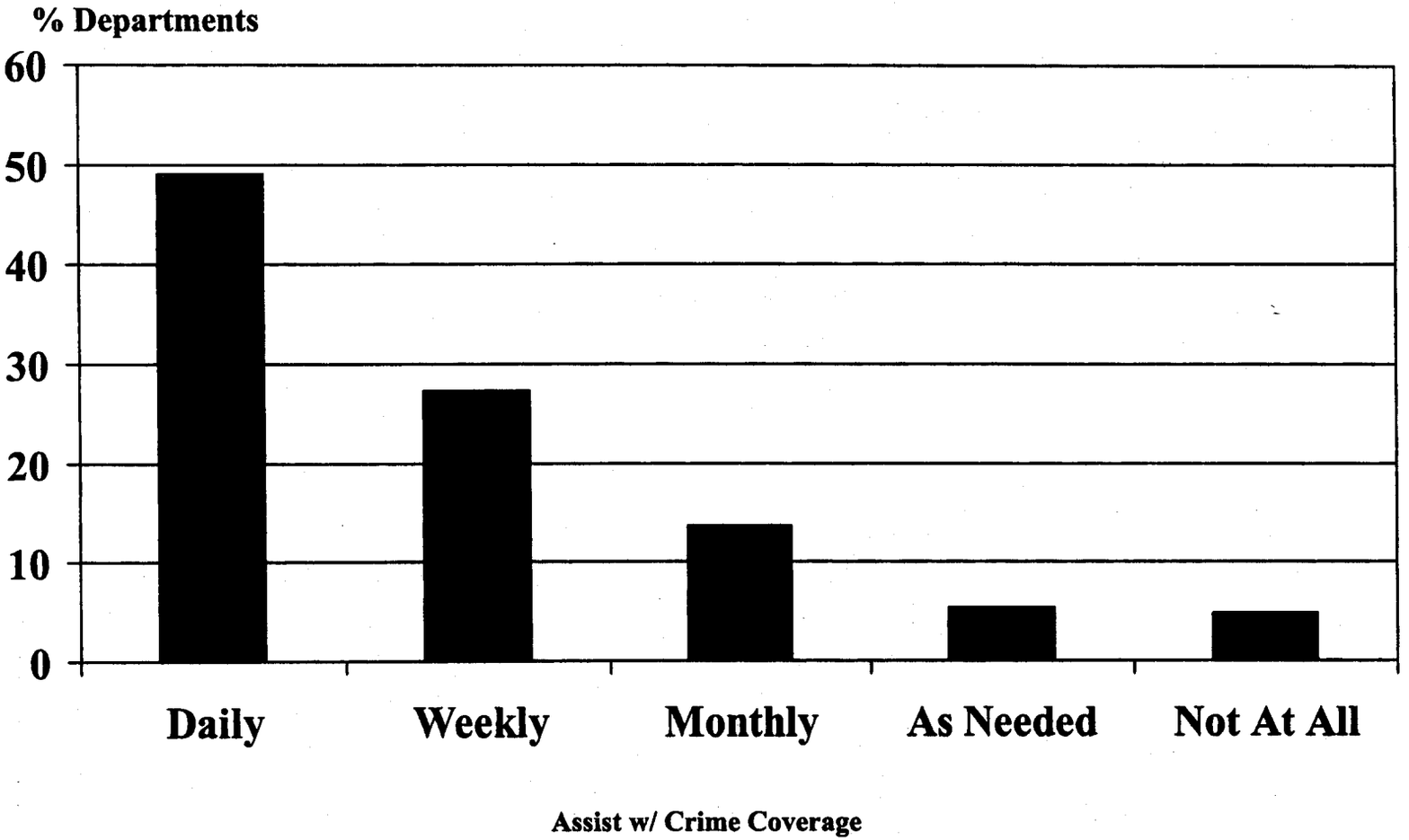


Figure 5.2. Department Frequency Issuing Press Releases (in Past 12 Months)

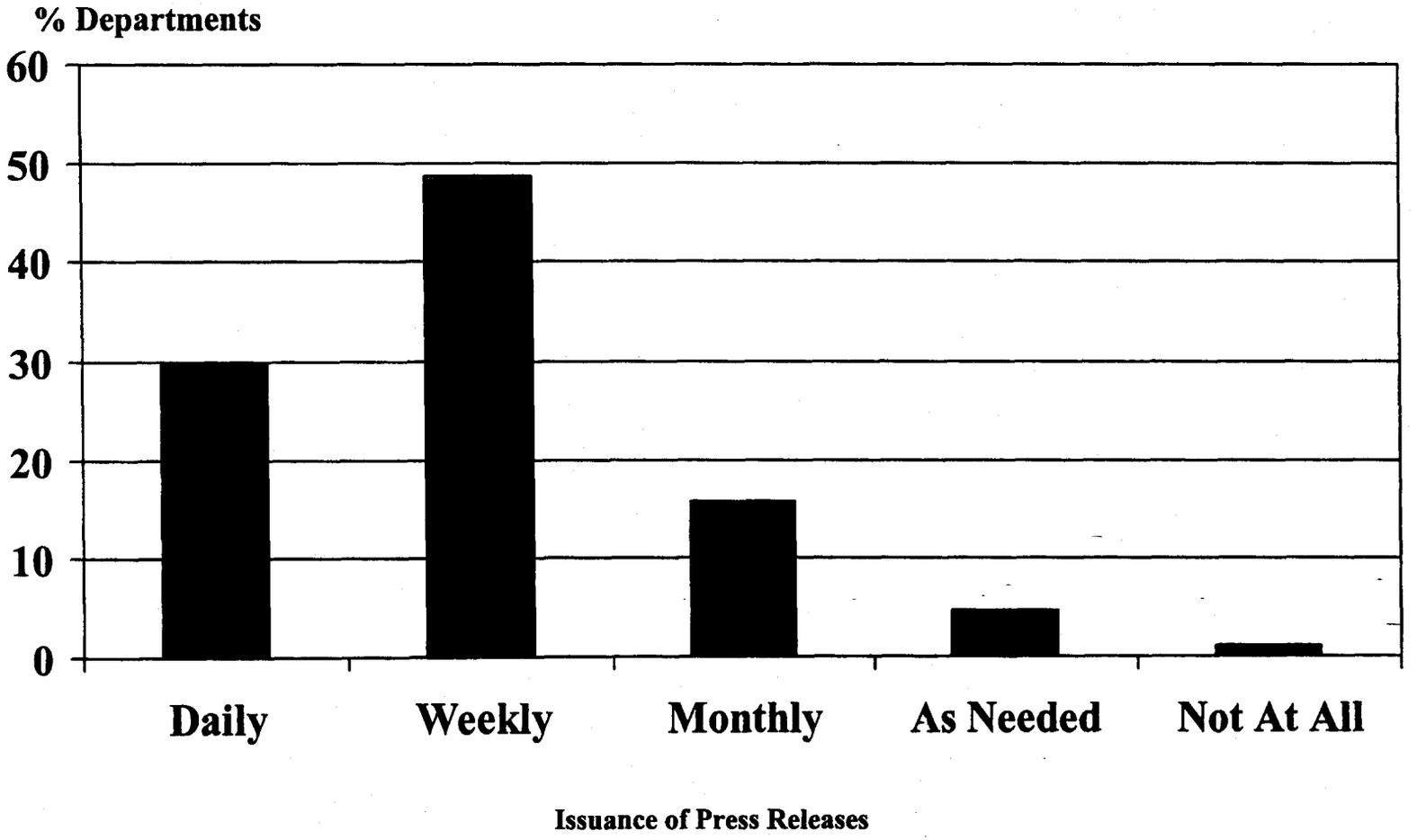


Figure 5.3. Department Frequency Scheduling a News Conference (in Past 12 Months)

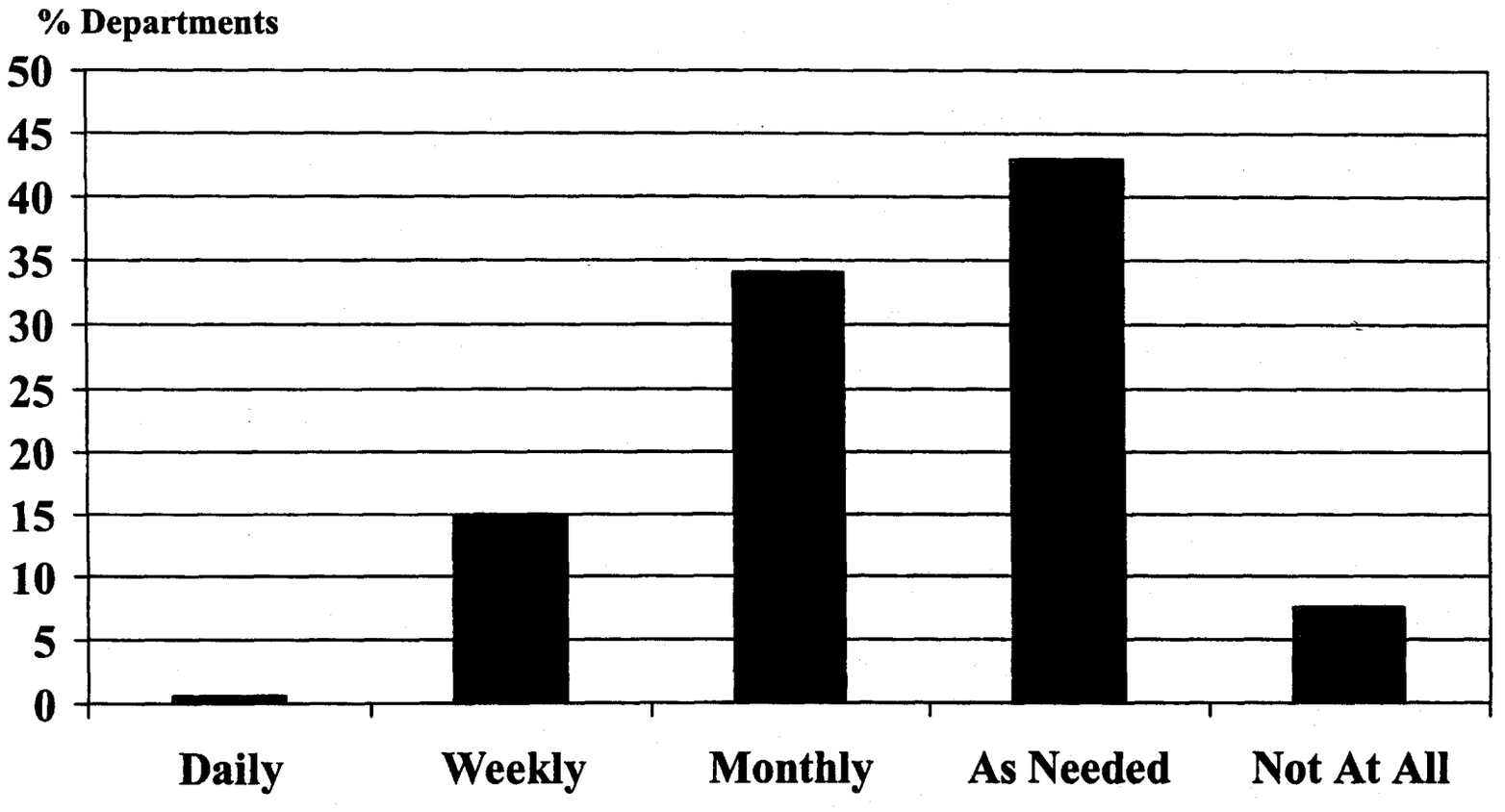
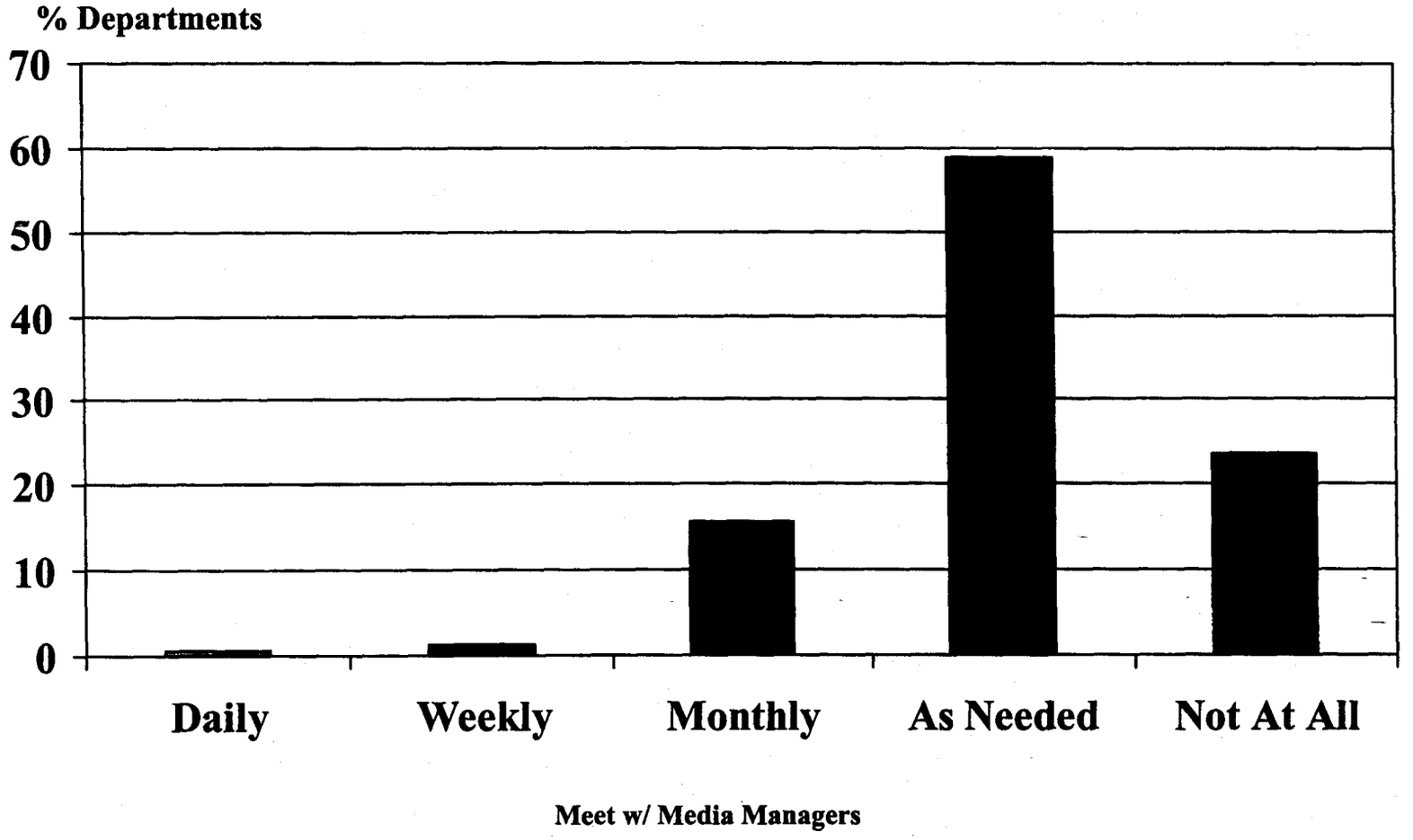


Figure 5.4. Department Frequency Organizing Meeting With Media Managers (in Past 12 Months)



particularly about "breaking" events. This allows an assignment editor to quickly dispatch a reporter and camera crew to capture the required visuals without the delay that may occur while waiting for official notification. Therefore, news bureaus afford scanners as much attention as the more reliable and trustworthy local news wires. One police officer described a recent mix-up caused by an assignment editor relying too heavily upon the wrong frequency on a police channel:

> The media constantly monitor police scanners. And once, they came across our training channel, a frequency we use when practicing and preparing for emergency operations. We were on the scanner talking about bombs, hostages and so forth, and the media began calling our office frantic, wanting to know what was going on! (Author notes)

On many occasions, reporters learn of incidents within the community before such events come to the attention of police, either from eyewitnesses or from non-official sources that choose to notify media instead of law enforcement. It is not uncommon for PIOs to learn of events from the media calling to verify eyewitness information or simply guaranteeing that police are aware of events. On one particular morning, an Urbandale PIO working two breaking events (a triple stabbing and the discovery of a murder victim) was tipped off by a reporter about yet a third incident. A twelve-year old boy tried to hang himself in his home with a dog leash because of trouble he was having at school. Ordinarily, police would not release information of this type to reporters, both because of the nature of the event and the age of the individual. But because the information did not originate from law enforcement, the PIO had no control over the gate-keeping process

and had little choice but to follow-up on the tip by releasing a timely verification of this sensitive event.[8]

This process of media disclosure ensures reporters that the police will reciprocate the favor through generous sound bites, visuals, and additional official details about the incident. It also suggests that the police as gatekeepers model describing the crime news-making process is only partially accurate (e.g., Surette, 1998). Whereas this model suggests a direct, one-way flow of crime information from the PIO to the crime reporter, police are frequently at the receiving end of the news-construction process, working feverishly to follow-up on tips provided by media for the purpose of releasing "official" information. Police by no means maintain exclusive control on the type of stories received by media. Rather, they merely provide official copy for reporters who may either use police information or work around it.

Nevertheless, police remain a primary source for crime news, and this demand for information has required many police agencies to incorporate public information as part of their law enforcement agenda. To accommodate beat reporters, police often resemble the reporters they serve. That is, they too must routinize infrequent and/or unpredictable events (i.e., crime, accidents, and natural disasters) by classifying them along dimensions of "newsworthiness" or "right to know" in light of their professional and organizational needs (Tuchman, 1974). Then, in an effort to standardize information, police issue press releases or devise other methods of communicating consistently with media. Note the steps taken by two smaller sized departments to routinize media inquiries:

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[8] As things turned out, reporters decided to drop the story about the murder victim from the items scheduled for the mid-day broadcast in favor of the attempted suicide, against the personal judgment of the PIO.

> We have a recorded [telephone] 'news line' with information on police cases, recorded throughout the day and night for reporters. Also a media alert pager system to notify media of major police and fire actions. (Survey response)

> We have a very good and much used [telephone] code-a-phone system that media uses several times a day. (Survey response)

In sum, police-media interaction is highly frequent, as police represent one among many potential crime news gatekeepers. They serve as official sources regarding crime information in the community, providing details regarding government responses to local events. Like reporters, they make the infrequent "routine" by providing the media with regular accounts of irregular events. Of course, police do not readily welcome their role as providers of community crime information, for they recognize the propensity for news to present rare occurrences as the norm, generating fear through sensationalism.

> Because we have a low crime rate, a violent crime is big news. Just by this fact, the tendency to sensationalize crime only comes natural. Not much one can do to deal with this situation. At least violent crime is not handled routinely like some more crime-ridden communities. (Survey response)

In fact, when survey respondents were asked about their biggest complaint regarding media coverage of their department, the most frequent response centered on media sensationalism of violence in the community (see table 5.6). Nevertheless, they recognize their role as the primary source for crime information, and they are becoming more adept at routinzing the dissemination of information. Police do not, however, always represent the initial filter in the crime news-making process; nor do they maintain a "monopoly" on crime information (Sherizen, 1978). Rather, they decide which details

Table 5.6. Distribution of Police Responses to the question: "What is your biggest complaint about media coverage of your department?"

COMPLAINT	PERCENT (N=193)
"Sensationalize violent crimes . . ."	35%
"Biased in cases of alleged misconduct"	16%
"Do not report on department successes"	13%
"Don't understand role of police . . ."	6%
"Interfere with ongoing investigations"	5%
"Other"	25%

*Most frequent "other" response focused upon "being quoted out of context."

to verify to media while negotiating internally regarding which "official" information should be withheld.

Police Policies for Working with Media

Media policies have become part of police standard operating procedures (SOPs), dictating the nature of media communication during both routine events and emergency situations. Specifically, these policies stipulate the type of information available for release, the parameters of media access during crime scene investigations, and when necessary, the chain of command to be followed regarding the release of information or statements to members of the news media. 92% (N=177) of sampled departments have a written media policy as part of their agency's standard operating procedure.[6] Yet as figure 5.5 indicates, the incorporation of media policies into police SOPs is a relatively recent occurrence. Few departments (4%) had formal guidelines regarding media communication prior to the (1973) publication of the National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals. Drafted in the aftermath of the televised urban unrest of the late 1960s and early 1970s, this federal report recommended that law enforcement agencies incorporate an aggressive media policy into their daily operations. Following its publication, police departments across the nation quickly adapted to the demands of media, devising guidelines to make media communication both necessary and routine. In less than ten years, the number of agencies incorporating media into their operating procedures increased three-fold; by the close of 1990, over 40% of all departments had adopted formal guidelines to communicate with (and through) media.

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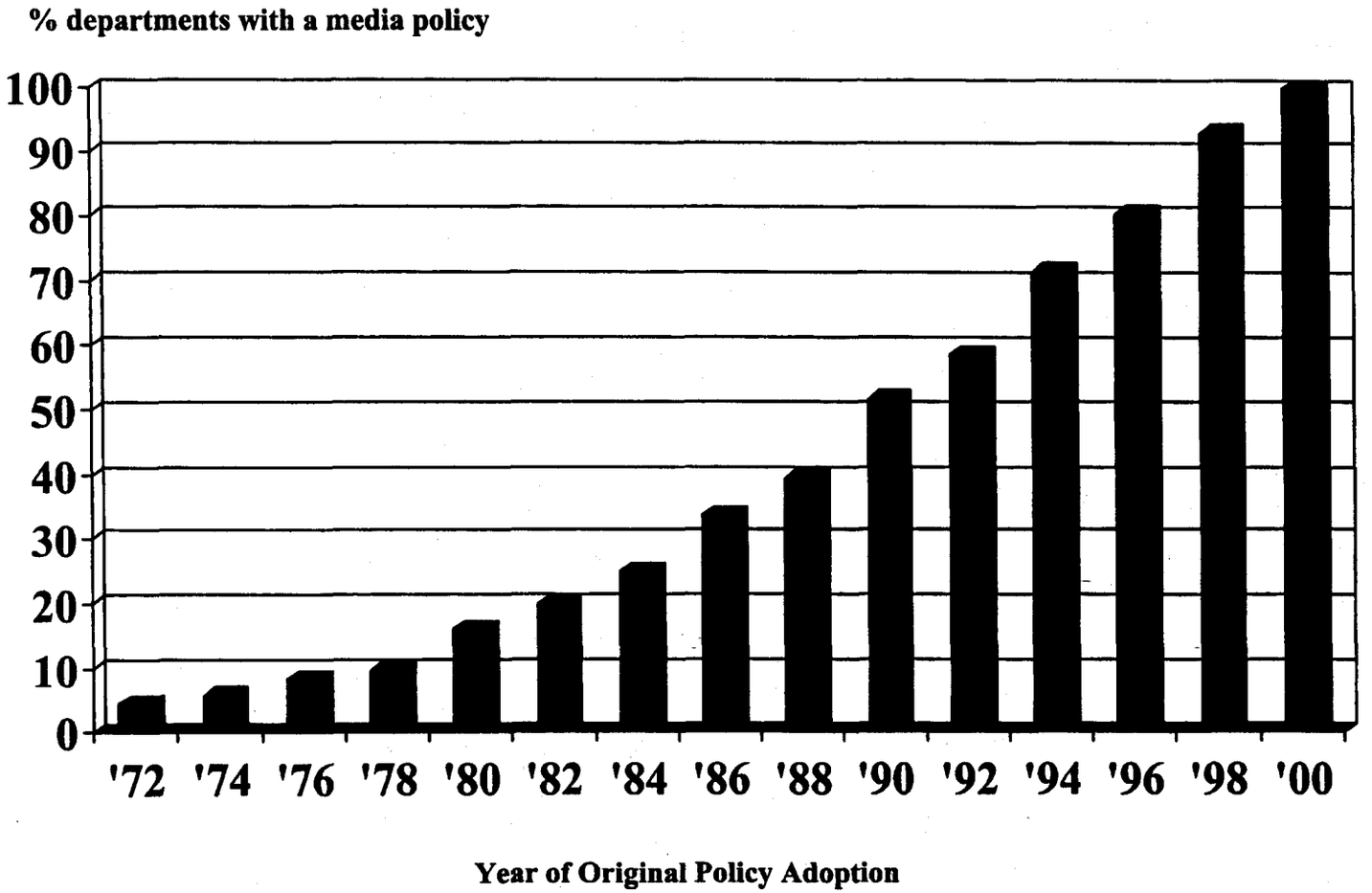
[6] Of the departments that have not incorporated a media policy into their SOPs, all but two serve cities with populations less than 500,000 residents.

Figure 5.5. Media Policy Adoption By Year in Cumulative Percentages



While only 25% of respondents identified a specific event prompting the formation of their department's policy, most of these (28%) adopted their current media policies to comply with national accreditation standards set forth by the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA). Established in 1979 with funding from the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA), and comprised of representatives from organizations such as the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) and the National Sheriffs' Association (NSA), this Commission drafted standards to improve the quality of law enforcement nationwide. Included in the Commissions' present standards are minimum requirements for local law enforcement regarding police-media policies and procedures. Among the other factors prompting the adoption of media policies, 26% of departments indicated a change in police personnel as the primary factor contributing to the policy formation, while 22% identified increased police-media interaction as the primary contributing factor. Finally, such factors as "state law," "the 1968 riots" and other "newsworthy events" complete the categories of factors leading to the establishment of more formal police-media relations.

Because an overwhelming majority of responding departments failed to identify a specific event that prompted the adoption of a standard media policy, one can only speculate into the causes that brought about a heightened sensitivity toward the news media among police officials. Recent high profile events, however, may have sparked an increased sensitivity to media among police officials whom otherwise felt immune to the threat of extensive media coverage. For example, the 1991 beating of motorist Rodney King – caught on tape and televised internationally – as well as the subsequent trial and aftermath that it produced, may have triggered the formation of media policies in at least

some departments slow to respond to the threat of changing technology. Nearly half of all media policies (51%) have been adopted in the years following the Rodney King incident. In addition, the much publicized 1999 shooting of Haitian immigrant Amadou Diallo in New York City – in which plain-clothed officers shot an unarmed man forty-one times and placed the NYPD within the national media spotlight – may have had a similar impact on police officials, though again, there was no specific mention of this incident in open ended responses. Whatever the actual causes, the past quarter century has experienced a growth in news media technology that has been accompanied by a realization among police that interfacing with media is both politically necessary and frequently desirable for community support and effective policing. Recognizing that their image is shaped by the news media and that any given official action may quickly become public and newsworthy, police have adopted policies to ensure that their performances are anticipated, rehearsed, and otherwise routine.

Routinizing Communication

As prominent figures in the news, police have become increasingly sensitive to the importance of media power, and their media policies represent significant administrative steps to incorporate media relations into the basic policing framework. Nevertheless, departments differ in the manner with which they routinize the release of information to the mass media. Many departments still possess a level of media distrust, and they restrict the flow of information, releasing only the most basic of investigative details. Others take steps to ensure the accuracy and consistency of official information by streamlining communication through one designated police figurehead. Finally, some departments encourage frequent media communication across all departmental ranks,

hoping that the open and proactive relationship with reporters will translate into favorable media coverage.

One of the ways in which a routine news event becomes an extraordinary headache for law enforcement is when department representatives are unavailable, unwilling, or unauthorized to provide reporters with the necessary incident information. Therefore, police departments take steps to routinize communication by appointing a PIO or other representative who fields all media requests for information, providing reporters with official statements and sound bites while handling news coverage of breaking and developing events. Not all departments, however, require this spokesperson to appear at all major crime scenes or to field all media inquires. Instead, they leave media communication to the discretion of the responding officer who may or may not feel comfortable with reporters.

This practice of discretionary communication is essentially anathema to routinization and can quickly become problematic, for not only does it leave the police vulnerable to alternate event interpretations from eyewitnesses, victims, and defendants, it also alienates reporters from the department and creates tension between the police and media. This proved to be the case during my stay at the Morganville Police Department – one of the "low media power" sites – where neither the on-call PIO nor the rank and file officer communicated with media at the scene of a late night homicide. Instead, the PIO relegated all media duties to the commanding officer that denied media access to the scene. The following morning, newsroom editors placed angry calls to the senior public information officer – audible over the office speakerphone – complaining that, "Once again, the [Morganville] Police Department is not cooperating with media!"

Other police departments routinize the release of crime information by limiting all such responsibilities exclusively to PIOs, a policy that likewise generates problems. Given that reporters and their camera crews arrive at an incident several minutes before the PIO, the absence of any authorized spokesperson at the scene created an "information gap" which, according to one broadcast reporter, becomes increasingly volatile as news deadlines approach. This was the case with the Union Creek Police, the other "low media power" department:

> A rank and file officer on the street is not allowed to talk to us at all. When you arrive at a car accident and ask a [Union Creek] patrolman for information, all you get is, "Call downtown, call downtown." And I think that's wrong . . .If he's on the scene, he should be able to say that car one crashed into car two. I don't see anything wrong with that. If it happens at 5:45pm that's a bad thing. Cause you have to go on the air in fifteen minutes. (Author interview)

As among the most visible of government officials, police maintain routine and direct access to news reporters, providing them with an opportunity to serve as the primary definers of social events. If, however, they decide to avoid media communication as specific issues develop, they allow for non-official voices to become the primary definers of social events (Molotch and Lester, 1974; Bennett, 1990; Lawrence, 1996). One print reporter working in Union Creek described to me the steps he takes to circumvent on-the-scene information gaps created by the Union Creek Police:

> You have your own sources, your own contacts. I mean, the kids who I grew up with are cops. You try and get information from them and ask, 'hey man, what's going on? What's going down?' Then you go to the PIO and tell her, 'This is what I heard.' That's how you do it. (Author interview)

Of course, these second-hand sources may provide reporters with inaccurate, contradictory, or potentially damaging information, making routine impression management all the more challenging for the department.

Frustration experienced by journalists at the scene of an incident, coupled with their attempts to complete a news story with non-official news sources, threatens to damage to a department's image. Results from the national survey indicate that only 28% of police departments authorize line officers to communicate with media. Given that these officers are typically those first to arrive at a crime or accident, their inability to provide media with information agitates reporters and relinquishes department control over the construction of events, at least until a higher-ranking official or PIO arrives on the scene. The outcome is one where police lose total control of their own image, and results from the national survey appear to bear this out.

While survey results did not reveal a significant association between line officer communication and the quality of police working relationships with reporters, results did reveal a significant association between a department's perceived media image and line officer communication ($\chi^2 = 7.494$, $p < .05$). As seen in table 5.7, those departments that authorize responding officers to speak with journalists are more likely to assess their media image as "excellent" (42% v. 29%) and less likely to assess their media image as merely "fair" (4% v. 18%). Moreover, table 5.8 shows that the quality of a department's self-reported media image tends to improve with each additional rank (i.e., persons other than the designated PIO) authorized to speak to reporters ($\chi^2 = 14.044$, $p < .05$). And given that the crime rate does not significantly contribute to the quality of the department image, all of this suggests that a policy encouraging openness with media at all ranks may

Table 5.7. Covariance of Police Self-reported Media Image and Line Officer Authorization to Communicate with Reporters

PERCEIVED IMAGE	LINE OFFICER AUTHORIZATION	
	No	**Yes**
Fair	17% (22)	4% (2)
Good	54% (68)	56% (30)
Excellent	29% (37)	40% (22)

X^2=6.894, p<.05

Table 5.8. Covariance of Self-reported Media Image and Number of Additional Ranks Authorized to Communicate with Reporters

PERCEIVED IMAGE	ADDITIONAL RANKS AUTHORIZED		
	One	**Two**	**Three**
Fair	23% (8)	12% (8)	3.8% (2)
Good	53% (18)	70% (23)	56.6% (30)
Excellent	24% (8)	18% (6)	39.6% (21)

X^2=14.044, p,.05

prove beneficial for the department's image and may help to ensure that routine news events remain as such.

Strategic Communication

Of course, while the quotidian is able to communicate at a basic level by relaying necessary information, *strategic* communication through media requires a higher degree of planning and awareness on the part of the communicator. It calls for one to move beyond the mechanics of language and toward an understanding of situations and contexts, audiences and their opinions, and media demands or formats. To be sure, a communicator may have any number of message objectives falling along a continuum from the most basic of goals to the most complex: a need to *inform the public*, a desire to *influence attitudes*, perhaps even a hope of *affecting behavior*. Those speakers most adept at achieving their personal or professional goals are those with an ability to integrate multiple communication objectives into their messages while delivering them through numerous forms of media (Garnett, 1992).

While the adoption of police media policies was in response to an increasing sensitivity toward the appearance of control, few department policies make even a passing reference to the police image, public relations, or impression management. Rather, the language of the typical policy reveals the basic, single objective approach regarding media communication – "inform the public". The policy, therefore, merely establishes guidelines regarding the release of case information, and it provides little guidance on how to communicate in a strategic manner that both provides information and also targets audience perceptions. Note the language in the following police department media policies:

> It is the policy of [this] department to cooperate fully and impartially with the public and authorize news media representatives in their efforts to gather factual, public information pertaining to activities of the police department, as long as these activities do not unduly interfere with department operations, infringe upon individual rights, or violate the law (#117).
>
> Only information which [sic] violates constitutional rights of the victim or the accused, interferes with an ongoing investigation or is legally privileged may be withheld from the public (#347-A).
>
> Members of [the Department] will assist the media with information, as long as the information does not compromise the investigation of a police incident; or detract from the ability to successfully prosecute a case in court; or violate an individual's legal right to privacy (see Section 706.05); or jeopardize the safety of any officer or citizen (#R01-11-00).

This single-objective approach to police-media interaction may be contrasted with less frequent, but nevertheless more *strategic*, approaches to media communication that not only address the importance of releasing timely and accurate information, but also display an overt recognition of the role media can have toward public opinion and impression management.

> Most citizens have little contact with law enforcement officers and their opinion of the police is often formed by the mass media's portrayal of our functions. The maintenance of good press relations is therefore a crucial element of public relations. Officers and employees must maintain good rapport with the media and deal with them in a courteous and impartial manner. It must be remembered that the media has a legitimate function in our society and the public trust of the police can be enhanced through proper dealings with the media (#1098-5).
>
> The mission . . . is (1) to coordinate the release of accurate and timely information to the news media and the public and (2) to promote the positive image of [the Department].

> The goals of [the Department] are to maintain public support . . . by keeping the avenues of communication among the department, news media and citizenry open. The objectives . . . are to utilize the media when attempting to stimulate public interest in departmental programs involving the community [and to] promote a feeling of teamwork between the police and media (#3800).
>
> [Officers shall] assume a pro-active approach in contacting the news media with information about the Department that might not otherwise come to their attention, but is newsworthy (#302.3).

A policy emphasizing cooperation with the press will ostensibly produce a level of trust and cooperation between police and the media that manifests as positive coverage of police practices. Because only a small number of departments (N=15) report not having a written media policy as part of their standard operating procedure, chi-square measures produced a model unstable for tests of statistical association.[9] Nevertheless, numerous survey questions asked those departments that do have written media policies to assess their helpfulness in achieving positive police-media relations, with responses given on a Likert-type scale ranging from "not helpful" to "very helpful". Table 5.9 presents a breakdown of the survey results. Police responses appear to indicate that a policy stipulating "the release of information" translates into favorable media coverage. For example, nearly half (49%) of all departments feel their policy proves "very helpful" in preparing them to speak with reporters. At the same time, 46% feel that their media policies prove very helpful in creating both a "positive relationship" with reporters and an "ability to present a favorable image" of the department. As explained by one police

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[9] Specifically, 33% of the cells had less than the expected counts. By convention, chi-square analysis requires no more than 20% of the expected cell frequencies to have counts less than expected counts (Babbie, Halley, and Zaino, 2000).

Table 5.9. Police Perceptions of Media Policy Helpfulness

Policy Helpfulness	Media Preparedness	Controlling News Leaks	Addressing Allegations of Misconduct	Presenting a Favorable Image	Creating Positive Relationship w/ Reporters	Promoting Policing Strategies
Not Helpful	.6% (1)	9.5% (16)	4.4% (7)	-	-	1.2% (2)
	1.1% (2)	20.1% (34)	8.1% (13)	3.4% (6)	4.6% (8)	2.3% (4)
Helpful	14.3% (25)	29.6% (50)	27.5% (44)	15.4% (27)	15.4% (27)	19.2% (33)
	34.9% (61)	25.4% (43)	33.1% (53)	34.3% (60)	34.3% (60)	40.7% (70)
Very Helpful	49.1% (86)	15.4% (26)	26.9% (43)	46.9% (80)	45.7% (80)	36.6% (63)

official, a policy that emphasizes cooperation with the media creates "an attitude of trust" that inevitably results in a favorable police image.

Nevertheless, information as the primary means of impression management may limit the ability of officials to influence their department's image at given times during the news-making process, particularly during times of crisis or scandal when the direct targeting of audience perceptions becomes necessary. Thus, while almost half of all police departments feel that their media policy proves very helpful in presenting a favorable image, only 27% of departments feel their policy proves "very helpful" in "addressing allegations of misconduct". Moreover, 13% of departments feel their policy proves *less than* helpful in dealing with publicized allegations of misconduct. At such times, news leaks become an important issue, for PIOs are reluctant to overwhelm reporters with potentially damaging information. Instead, police let information trickle out, a practice that prolongs the story, multiplies the damage, and increases the probability that journalists will turn to non-official, inside sources for additional information (Jones, 1993). Indeed, 30% of departments believe their media policies prove to be *less than* helpful in controlling news leaks, while 10% of this figure feels their policy is "not at all" helpful.

It appears, then, that during routine events when the police image is less at risk, the single objective approach to media communication maintains or even establishes a positive departmental image. Yet, when reporters must become police themselves and call into question the actions of law enforcement, policies that adopt this single objective approach do not always prove successful at effective impression management. In fact, the limitations of the "inform the public" approach to impression management are

recognized in the statements of many police personnel commenting on their department media policies. One police official responding to the national survey noted that his department's media policy "is a mislabeled policy, as it actually pertains to release of records, not media relations in general," while another indicated that the his department's policy "doesn't detail how to create a favorable image." Instead, survey respondents suggest that, "a favorable image comes from the department's professionalism as a whole." That is, "the media policy does not create a favorable image; the underlying philosophy, actions of employees, and the public information office staff create the image."

Public Information Officers

In an effort to improve police media relations, the public information officer (PIO) has emerged as a key figure in police administration. Today, 89% of municipal law enforcement agencies have an employee whose primary responsibility is to serve as a media public information officer. Employed predominantly as sworn officers (75%) and serving directly under the chief, PIOs represent the central source of information about department actions, and they act as spokespersons for the entire police force. Their objective is to facilitate the flow of information from the department to the media, avoiding information gaps that may cause reporters to depend upon less credible sources. Therefore, larger departments or departments in higher crime jurisdictions require their PIOs to be on-call around the clock, as crime is not likely to stop during the evening hours. Having a police representative readily available to provide official and consistent information prevents what one large city chief referred to as "rumors, lies or innuendos."

As the primary source of information on department operations, the PIO is responsible for all routine communication with members of the media. The PIO distributes daily crime incident information to reporters, prepares departmental press releases about agency events, responds to the scene of a police-related event where local media may gather, and arranges or provides assistance at police news conferences. To accommodate media inquiries for information on crime incidents, the PIO fields calls from beat reporters inquiring about any new events or developments on prior occurrences that may have transpired during the last news cycle. ("No blood and guts today, Gail. We've got a bunch of crime prevention press conferences, but no exciting stories. If I see any blood dripping through the vents, I'll call you"). Depending upon the size of the media market, PIOs may receive anywhere from 10-30 inquires each morning, and more should there be a breaking event or an event attracting media attention from other cities or jurisdictions.

When a crime or accident does occur, the PIO does not always represent the initial department gatekeeper. Instead, the on-duty dispatcher who is responsible for all field communication uses his/her discretion as to which calls may generate media attention. Following this initial screening, the dispatcher notifies the on-duty PIO via phone or pager regarding the nature of the incident. Once provided with this basic and initial information, the PIO will decide whether the event is newsworthy enough to warrant official notification of media. Of course, news desks monitor the same police frequencies as the dispatcher; therefore, assignment editors often come across police-related events without notification from the PIO. During my visit at the "high media power" Urbandale Police Department, their public information office received a call from

dispatch regarding a potential police-related media event. Minutes before, there was an accident with the department's mounted patrol unit. According to a police radio transmission, an officer's horse became dislodged from its horseshoe, causing it to stumble and fall. The horse landed upon the foot of a pedestrian, while the officer fell onto the street. Because the pedestrian suffered little more than a sore foot and was extremely understanding of the situation, the senior PIO decided that the story was not newsworthy to warrant notification of the press. Nevertheless, a local network affiliate overheard the story on the police scanner and decided to dispatch a film crew. Later, the newsroom called the PIO for information to complete the story, requesting filler information such as the name of the horse. To this, the media-savvy PIO responded, "Mr. Ed, of course!"

On routine days, the news occurs in cycles, and it is the responsibility of the PIO to meet the deadlines of the various news formats. The PIO spends the morning hours prioritizing calls, first responding to inquiries from broadcast reporters who require information for the rapidly approaching noon broadcast. The heaviest volume of calls occurs in the hour just before airtime, typically the 11A.M. hour in preparation for noontime broadcast. The late afternoon is similarly spent preparing reporters for the evening news broadcasts, again with an abundance of calls placed just prior to going live. During the mid-day hours, then, the PIO finds much quiet time, allowing for the preparation of more proactive image building through the development of police human-interest stories, news "pseudo-events" (i.e., press conferences), or preparations for formal media interviews with the Chief.

During my stay in Urbandale, the public information office scheduled a news conference to promote a gun safety lock program, and they used their downtime to work through the necessary logistics. The department had acquired 2000 gun safety locks for free distribution to gun owners. The purpose of the news conference was to specifically publicize the availability of the trigger locks while more generally play up the department's efforts toward crime prevention. After fielding the routine morning calls placed by reporters (and using the opportunity to plug the news conference), the senior PIO began briefing his staff about the staged event, working to ensure that all members of the press would get a gun-lock packet and that a table would be set up with an array of firearms and the gun locks as a visual. The senior PIO also provided assurance to the newly appointed and nervous Chief who was anxious about the conference operating smoothly. The PIO reassured him by indicating that all reporters received an advance copy of his statement should he stumble over words, and that the public information office was adequately prepared for the event.[10] Of course, there remains no guarantee that such highly planned staged events will make it onto the airwaves or in the press, as a separate joint news conference with a state attorney general was "bumped" from the headlines by a local violent crime.

In addition to providing reporters with information on breaking crimes and ongoing crime prevention campaigns, the PIO serves as liaison between the police organization and the public. S/he not only interprets the drama of police work to the public through media, but also emphasizes to fellow officers the importance of

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The press conference was carried out according to plan, with each news station carrying the event on the evening broadcast. Yet, an unexpected turn of events occurred approximately one month later when the national wires reported that "Gun Locks Given Away By Police May Not Work" (News staff and wire reports).

communication through – and cooperating with – the media. For example, in the days prior to my visit at Urbandale, officers in a neighboring department were involved in a high-speed pursuit caught on videotape by news helicopters above. As the chase came to a close, the choppers captured an aerial view of the police using what appeared to be excessive force against the suspect. When I arrived a few days after the incident, local media were still airing and discussing the videotaped pursuit. When I asked a PIO how he would respond to media coverage of suspected excessive force, his response revealed the important balance that must be struck between the needs of the public and those of the department:

> As a PIO, you have to understand both sides . . . [T]his is what is seen on television, and we understand how it looks. Once we can get this basic understanding across, then I think we can get into what it's like to be a cop . . . Let [the public] know about the dangers, the split second decisions that come with being a cop. The stresses, the humanness, the dangers of that particular situation, that we, too, are people. You try to help the audience feel what it's like to be in your shoes. Help them to imagine putting on the suit, strapping on the leather belt and the gun, what that feels like. Getting into that police car. What that feels like. Hearing that radio. What that feels like. And I'm not talking about watching television cops, movie cops. I'm talking about what it's really like. And it's our job to paint that picture. And we want to do our best, we owe it to our officers to do our best, to make sure that the people sitting at home watching television or reading the paper ...will stop and think for a second 'you know it is a complicated scenario here, it is. . .If we get them to do just that, get them to think that much then I think we've done our job, being fair to all parties. (Author interview)

To achieve a mutual understanding among the police, the media, and (through more balanced coverage) the public, many departments are relying upon their PIOs to establish police "media academies" where reporters can participate in special tactics police training

while camera crews obtain the necessary visuals. Several PIOs from various sized departments have described their attempts to increase media – and therefore public – appreciation for police work:

> Reporters in general understand very little about police work. As a result, media coverage is quite shallow. Our public information office is engaged in ongoing efforts to explain the How's and Whys of our department. We are setting up demonstrations for media in areas such as firearms. (Survey response)
>
> The PIO...encourages media personnel to 'ride along' with police staff. We have scheduled numerous ride alongs and will continue to do so to help educate both the media and officers working the streets. (Survey response)
>
> We have instituted a media academy. This is where we put on a one-day academy for media only. We teach them about different aspects of our department. (Survey response)

At the same time, newsroom editors and beat reporters are eager to share their on-the-job pressures with the police for the purpose of improving the police-media relationship, and they lobby PIOs to initiate a forum where they may have an internal voice. As a result, departments are beginning to allow media representatives to speak with new cadets at the police academy to provide them with an understanding of their needs and duties as the fourth branch of government. The "low media power" Morganville Police Department, eager to improve their relationship with local media, held a media forum with over 30 members of the local media and associated press in attendance. Among the issues discussed was the establishment of a symbiotic, police-media academy. During the meeting, the following negotiations occurred:

> Assistant Chief: "Some of the thoughts that the Chief had in mind were to have an opportunity to maybe bring in some of the command officers from the different areas that you can talk to, and they can talk to you, so that there's a little less of the 'I don't talk to media' attitude on our side, and a little more understanding on your side as to what their job priorities are when they're at a scene that you want to get information ... or when you call them at a district station about something they may or may not feel comfortable talking to you about."
>
> News Representative #1: "Maybe not just have cops come and talk to us about their jobs, but could you maybe bring us in and let us talk to them about our jobs?"
>
> Assistant Chief: "I think that's what he's envisioning, that give and take so that we don't have that impact out there of not knowing, 'Can we release this? I'm on the scene of a homicide. The end of a pursuit – what am I supposed to say or not say when you guys arrive?' Those kinds of issues. But not just that, also a better understanding, like you said, of what you do and what your needs are, and what a deadline means and why you're asking the questions that you're asking?"
>
> News Representative #2: "You guys should come and visit us, and see what it's like, too."
>
> Public Information Officer: "You're right. [We] should go there and sit in your chair for a half-a-day or a day.
>
> Assistant Chief: "I think that's a good idea. Some of the people who might most benefit from that are our newly promoted sergeants, to kind of get a feel for what you do out there. And they're still babies, so you could get a lot of information out of them!" (Author transcription)

The PIO, then, represents a liaison that works at both public information and public relations. Public information entails supplying the public with accurate and truthful information through media communication, while public relations requires PIOs to proactively promote department actions and build the department's image. Chi-square analysis did reveal a significant association between the presence of a police PIO and the

level of department proactive contacts with media (X^2=.6.781, p< .05). For example, as seen in table 5.10, when "proactive contacts" was measured in terms of the frequency with which departments (1) issued press releases, (2) held meetings with media managers, and (3) "initiated" contact with media for "any other reason," those departments employing a PIO were less likely to be "low" proactivity departments (18% v. 41%) and more likely to be "high" proactivity agencies (52% v. 41%). Nevertheless, proactive contact with media does not translate into a more favorable media image (see table 5.11). In fact, it appears that higher levels of proactivity actually represent a form of reactivity to a pre-existing "fair" media image. Moreover, the presence of police PIOs alone do not guarantee a more favorable media image or an improved working relationship with reporters. Tables 5.12 - 5.14 present chi-square analyses of the association between the presence of a police PIO and police perceptions of their (a) media image, (b) working relationships with reporters, and (c) level of public opinion surrounding the department. All of this suggests that while public information is a task that is often (though by no means always) straightforward, public relations requires finesse and an overt recognition of how the routine crime story may be used toward the benefit of law enforcement through positive media coverage. Such a task requires a keen understanding of media demands, formats, and deadlines, as well a level of comfort required to communicate with media on a regular basis. As a result, some departments recruit individuals with prior work experience (30%) or a college degree (27%) in media or public relations. More likely, departments require their employees to receive (78%) training in media communications skills and public relations for the purpose of impression management.

Table 5.10. Covariance Between the Presence of a Police PIO and the Level of Department Proactivity in Media Contacts

PROACTIVITY*	PIO	
	No	**Yes**
Low	41% (9)	18% (30)
Medium	18% (4)	31% (53)
High	41% (9)	52% (88)

X^2=6.781, p< .05 * Frequency issuing press releases, meet w/ media, initiate contact

Table 5.11. Covariance of Self-reported Media Image and Level of Department Proactive Contacts with Media

PERCEIVED IMAGE	LEVEL OF PROACTIVITY		
	Low	**Medium**	**High**
Fair	8% (3)	14% (8)	16% (15)
Good	51% (20)	60% (35)	50% (48)
Excellent	41% (16)	26% (15)	34% (32)

X^2=3.718 (*Not* significant)

Table 5.12. Covariance of the Presence of a Police PIO and Respondent Perceptions of Their Department's Media Image

IMAGE	PIO	
	No	**Yes**
Fair	14%	4%
Good	46%	54%
Excellent	40%	42%

X^2=4.363 (*Not* significant)

Table 5.13. Covariance Between the Presence of a Police PIO and Respondent Perceptions of Their Working Relationship with Reporters

WORKING RELATIONSHIP	PIO	
	No	**Yes**
Low	14% (3)	4% (6)
Medium	46% (10)	54% (90)
High	40% (9)	42% (70)

X^2=4.363, (*Not* significant)

Table 5.14. Covariance Between the Presence of a Police PIO and Respondent Perceptions of the Level Public Opinion Surrounding Their Department

PUBLIC OPINION	PIO	
	No	**Yes**
Low	5%	8%
	(1)	(13)
Medium	55%	52%
	(12)	(88)
High	40%	40%
	(9)	(68)

X^2=.288, (*Not* significant)

Police Media Training

In one of his first writings on the importance of understanding mass media, Marshall McLuhan (1951:v) alludes to Edgar Allan Poe's tale, "A Descent Into the Maelstrom." In this story, a sailor facing a tumultuous sea is able to save himself by studying the patterns of an otherwise dangerous whirlpool rather than futilely and instinctively attempting to avoid the current. As McLuhan explains, "it was...his rational detachment as a spectator of his own situation that gave him the thread which led him out of the Labyrinth." Like McLuhan, whose work represents his attempt to understand media, police have become sailors themselves, actively learning the patterns and practices of a demanding media market. Specifically, PIOs, their staff, as well as members of the broader police organization are receiving media skills instruction to learn the art of impression management. According to survey results, 69% (N=133) of municipal police departments provide some form of media skills instruction to their staff.

The goal of police media training is to provide officers with a better understanding of – and a greater respect for – mass media. At the same time, it attempts to show PIOs and their staff how they can "take charge of all types of contact with the media" while maximizing their effectiveness when communicating with and through media (Rosenthal, 1997:ii). To achieve this, media training seminars encourage PIOs to think as though they were the reporters they serve. This requires them to become familiar with the strategies and formulas used by reporters in the production of a news story as well as an awareness of media formats, patterns, deadlines, and perhaps most important, "the illusions of TV" (Jones, 1993:xi).

Of course, the amount, extent and content of media training vary greatly across different departments and personnel rank. Of those departments that incorporate media training into their department protocol (N=133), 40% provide line officers with training in media communications, with personnel training varying with rank. Thus, 60% of sergeants, 62% of commanders, and 71% of PIOs (typically lieutenants) receive some form of media training. Moreover, the variance in the number of training hours received is high, ranging from a minimum of 1 hour of training per to year to as much as 40 hours of training per year. This suggests that the percentages of police personnel trained listed over-represents the actual extent of in police-media training nationwide, as half of all police departments provide less than 5 hours of media training per year (mean=11 hours; mode=1 hour).

Table 5.15 details the content frequency of police media training provided, which covers instruction covering routine and non-routine media events, including instruction regarding interviews for print media, arranging press conferences, and controlling information leaks, coverage of officer misconduct, and other somewhat scandalous events. The most frequent forms of media instruction concern communication training for emergency situations – learning to routinize the *un*expected – and instruction on how to conduct a television interview. That the two forms of instruction are equally prevalent among training courses suggests that much of the TV interview training focuses upon "live" interviews during breaking events. This proved to be the case at a four-day media-training seminar that I attended during my field research. The seminar, sponsored by a large organization of police executives, provided many tips regarding media communication during emergency situations, with special attention paid to television

Table 5.15: Content Frequency of Police Media Training Provided

Writing a Press Release	Arranging a Press Conference	Negotiating Press Coverage	Conducting Print Interviews	Conducting Television Interviews	Managing Info. Leaks	Managing Coverage of Misconduct	Media Relations During an Emergency
53%	42%	42%	63%	84%	30%	35%	84%
(67)	(53)	(53)	(79)	(107)	(38)	(45)	(107)

appearances. One of the presenters was the PIO responsible for media communication following a high profile school shooting. Inundated with camera crews from local, national and cable news organizations, the PIO provided the following advice regarding television appearances:

> Try to set up the media command station in a location where the crime or disaster scene will not constantly become the backdrop. The public doesn't need to be reminded with visuals of the scene. I ended up learning this halfway through the day. After holding hourly press conferences in front of school, somebody pointed out to me that the school mascot was visible on the marquee behind me, just above my shoulder. Well, the school mascot is a 'patriot', and a cartoon image of a man armed with a musket and ready for battle just wasn't an appropriate backdrop. (Author notes)

In general, police perceive media skills training workshops to be helpful in providing assistance with everyday media relations. As seen in Table 5.16, police find training to be helpful in allowing them to present a more favorable image of their agency, in preparing them to communicate with media, in enabling them to promote policing strategies, and in establishing more positive relationships with reporters. In fact, less than 5% of respondents indicated that training proved *less than* helpful in these areas, while no respondent suggested training to be unhelpful in presenting a favorable image of the department. Police perceptions of training effectiveness shift, however, with regard to less anticipated (i.e., non-routine) media events. Thirteen percent (13%) of police respondents perceive training to be *less than* helpful in preparing them to handle media coverage of alleged misconduct, while almost half report training ineffective in helping departments to control news leaks. Moreover, as seen in table 5.17, police media training is significantly associated with department proactivity through such activities as initiating

Table 5.16. Police Perceptions of Media Training Helpfulness

Training Helpfulness	Media Preparedness	Controlling News Leaks	Addressing Allegations of Misconduct	Presenting a Favorable Image	Creating Positive Relationship w/ Reporters	Promoting Policing Strategies
Not Helpful	-	10.9% (13)	2.6% (3)	-	0.8% (1)	0.8% (1)
	1.6% (2)	24.4% (29)	6.8% (8)	-	1.5% (2)	3.1% (4)
Helpful	17.1% (22)	39.5% (47)	28.2% (33)	11.5% (15)	13.7% (18)	17.3% (22)
	45.0% (58)	16.0% (19)	41.9% (49)	48.5% (63)	45.0% (59)	47.2% (60)
Very Helpful	36.4% (47)	9.2% (11)	20.5% (24)	40.0% (52)	38.9% (51)	31.5% (40)

Table 5.17. Covariance Between Police Media Training and the Level of Department Proactivity in Media Contacts

PROACTIVITY*	MEDIA TRAINING	
	No	**Yes**
Low	31% (19)	15% (20)
Medium	28% (17)	31% (41)
High	41% (25)	54% (72)

X^2=6.968, p< .05 * Frequency issuing press releases, meet w/ media, initiate contact

contact with news reporters through news releases and meetings with media managers (X^2=6.968, p<.05).

Despite the rather favorable assessment of the various aspects of media training, many aspects of media training were unassociated with a favorable media image. Specifically, the amount of media training received, the extent of staff trained, and training in conducting print interviews and holding press conferences proved unrelated to a more positive department image. Only instruction in conducting television interviews was associated with the quality of a department's media image, according to survey results. Table 5.18, which presents a cross-tabulation of the association between television interview training and a department's media image, suggests a positive association between the two variables. PIOs that receive media skills training in conducting television interviews were therefore more likely to assess their department's media image as "excellent" (39% v. 10%) and less likely to rate their image as "fair" (8% v. 25%).

Several police officials, responding to the national survey, expressed concern that "not enough time is spent during training" on tips directly related to impression management, while one criticized training for not being "realistic" enough to adequately train officers for factors that may tarnish the police image. "Media training has served to educate Department personnel to the needs of the media (i.e., sound bites, visuals, timeliness, etc);" but when it comes to learning the much-needed skills of basic impression management, "much of the media training I've encountered doesn't touch upon this."

Table 5.18. Covariance of Police Television Training and Quality of Department Media Image

IMAGE	TELEVISION TRAINING	
	No	**Yes**
Fair	25%	8%
	(5)	(8)
Good	65%	53%
	(13)	(57)
Excellent	10%	39%
	(2)	(42)

$X^2=9.637$, $p<.05$

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the effectiveness of various administrative strategies on improving the police media image during times of routine news events. Routine events represent expected occurrences that elicit planned behavior responses. Despite their infrequency relative to property crimes, as well as their geographic variability, sensational violent crimes constitute routine events that police must address both in the news and on the streets. As police (arguably) have limited control over the latter, successful impression management requires a concerted effort at addressing the former. With actual crime is not significantly associated with the police image, it is not crime itself so much as much as the manner with crime is communicated that significantly influences the police image. Results from the national survey indicate that media policies encouraging officer communication with media improves the police image. Not only does a willingness to communicate suggest that routine events are as they appear, it also prevents reporters from seeking out alternate voices that may be less favorable of routine police performance. In fact, overall departmental openness appears more important that the presence of an official police spokesperson or PIO who is often last to arrive at a crime scene and therefore cannot comprehensively manage the news. The presence of PIOs is positively associated with the level of a department's proactive contacts with media, but press releases, police-initiated calls to media, and other staged events do not comprise the bulk of routine news making and therefore cannot overshadow street-level "live" performances. Finally, as such crime scene performances are more often captured live and on camera, it is not surprising that police training in conducting television interviews emerged as the only significant media-training variable. Of course, many of

the nuances of what contributes to the police media image cannot be captured with survey data alone. The next two chapters, therefore, take a more direct approach by focusing upon four case study police departments: two of which report satisfaction with their means of impression management, two of which complain of poor performance reviews.

CHAPTER 6

IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT

> The challenge becomes . . .finding the good story, finding the story that showcases the good work that the men and women of this department do, and [then] making that a story. There's no damage when there's no story about the department on the news, but there's also no benefit. You have to market yourself.
>
> - *Urbandale PIO*
> (Author interview)

Police image builders have a number of factors with which they must contend, such as budgetary and personnel constraints, fluctuating population characteristics, and movements within local political climate. Still, what places the media as central among these determinants is that it is primarily through media that the public learns about police handling of these and other crime-related variables. Police may use the media to tout new policing initiatives, to request citizen assistance in preventing community disorder, and to project the friendlier aspects of their job through human-interest stories. As impression management contains elements of public relations, marketing, and self-promotion, it requires departments to use their proactively to promote aspects of policing other than those that are crime-incident related that will enhance the department's image. Real examples of positive media coverage are plentiful: a father-son team working for the department; an arrangement between a community college and the police whereby auto body students restore retired vehicles for police use as custom vehicles; an off-duty officer saving a diner's life. The raw material is out there; it simply needs to be packaged, marketed, and delivered to reporters who can convert it into a news segment.

Of course, this requires that police communicate positive policing stories both internally – across ranks – and externally to news media. As one broadcast reporter told me:

> [One] thing that I find frustrating is, there are a lot of great people that work at the police department. A cop saw a kid walking to school with his toes sticking out of his shoes. His mom couldn't afford new shoes. He took the kid to the store, went and bought the kid a new pair of shoes cause he sees him everyday. There are so many untold stories out there, so many positive public relations stories for [police] to build up their image. And I think it's very frustrating because it's not all negative. I don't know why they don't promote this stuff, but I tell them over and over again, 'I wish you would.' And I think a lot of times, it's the guys and women out on the street who don't think they're doing anything out of the ordinary. So if they don't tell the PIO, the PIO doesn't know to pass it along. I know for a fact it goes on everyday. I'm sure it happens. (Author interview)

These views regarding the need for increased departmental proactivity of non-crime related stories were echoed by a big-city police chief, who was critical of his department's public information office for not actively seeking out positive policing stories:

> You know, we're buying six more of these radar trailers that you just park out there and it flashes your speed at you, plus we're starting a neighborhood radar program where . . . we'll send them a letter telling them to slow down. So, there's two different programs right out of traffic operations, two different things . . . Had [the Traffic Division] called up here and talked to the PIOs and said we want to [promote] this, then they would have jumped on it and set up [a press conference]. But . . . unless I hear about it, or they call the PIOs and say they want to do it, [it doesn't get done]. (Author interview)

Still, many PIOs maintain that news editors are unwilling to abandon their fourth estate mandate and give credit when credit is due. They complain that media are ratings and sales driven and have little interest in positive policing stories that do not contain

some form of drama. While reporters do not discount claims that "if it bleeds, it leads," they do suggest that there is always room for police input into the news-making process. According to one assignment editor, "It helps when departments prepare news releases, because we can work off of those and it makes our job easier." Especially on particularly slow news days, assignment desks cannot rely exclusively upon police scanners for leads and must call the PIO looking for information on local events to convert into a possible story. The task then becomes one for the public information staff, who must have an index of ideas to convert into possible news stories.

As the purpose of case study research was to overcome the barriers of limited interpretation inherent in survey responses, much information about successful (and unsuccessful) impression management stemmed from first-hand observations of PIOs at work and interviews with PIO staff, police chiefs, and crime beat reporters. While the intent of case study research was not to "prove" Goffman's (1959; 1974) theoretical model of social performances, the relevance of his writings to contemporary policing became quite clear as various department figureheads inevitably incorporated many aspects of dramaturgy into both their language and behaviors. Moreover, the topic of this inquiry – the manner with which police adapt to the performance demands of today's mediated environment – suggests that Goffman's model serves as an appropriate evaluative guide. As such, an analysis of departmental behavior will proceed using much of the terminology employed by Goffman is his discussions of the dramaturgy of everyday life. For policing, those departments in my research successful at impression management were those well versed in the three requisite skills that comprise the art of

routine impression management: dramaturgical loyalty, discipline, and circumspective framing.

Dramaturgical Loyalty

If the dramatic aspects of the theater are part of everyday public life, then impression management requires that each social actor adopt a stance of dramaturgical loyalty to the role s/he must perform. "Dramaturgical loyalty" requires actors to maintain character roles at designated times and display a commitment to those – cast and crew – responsible for maintaining public appearances (Goffman, 1959). For police, this requires recognition of media as part of everyday policing. As it is no longer possible for the public to perceive the police without the influence of some medium (Kidd-Hewitt and Osborne, 1995), officers must become committed the police-media framework. That is, they must recognize the performance nature of law enforcement and serve their public (the audience) through cooperation with reporters (the critics).

Dramaturgical loyalty and successful impression management are inextricably linked. This became readily apparent during case study research where the degree of dramaturgical loyalty varied with the department's media image. Each department employed full-time PIOs, had functioning public information offices, and had garnered numerous and firmly established contacts within the local media. Yet they differed with regard to their acceptance of and commitment to certain occupational obligations. Two departments in particular, equally staffed and equipped to handle media relations but reporting different degrees of media power, displayed clear distinctions in the extent of their dramaturgical loyalty: the Urbandale Police Department and the Morganville Police Department.

The Urbandale Police Department represents one of the "high media power" agencies selected for case study research. Its public information office consists of six full-time employees: three PIOs, one film industry liaison[11], one researcher/fact checker, and one administrative assistant. Each PIO is highly trained in media relations, receiving on average 40 hours of external media training instruction per year. The PIOs are then responsible for relaying their training skills to other high-ranking officials, and sometimes to new recruits:

> I [teach] a class to help the new recruits and new supervisors understand the similarities in the roles [of police and media] and to understand how certain negative actions will play. To understand why it's better to be open and honest and up-front. I don't think it's long enough. I get two hours with each group. But one of the things I'm trying to relay is it's not a good idea when you're at a scene, when you're besieged by media, it's not a good idea to say, you know, all right you guys stand back and we'll put you over here.' I'm trying to get rid of some of the negative or adversarial way of thinking. We're also still evolving in the training aspect, but we have done on and off training with the staff. (Author interview)

Not only were the Urbandale PIOs highly trained in media relations, they were also selected to serve as on-camera personalities for calculated, political reasons. "Barry," the department's senior ranking PIO, who in addition to his career in law enforcement has an extensive background in stage, explained the selection of the Urbandale staff to me:

> I took command of this office about six years ago. Before then, the attitude here was that media were the enemy, and should be kept at an arm's length. I wanted to change all that. Perhaps it's partly due to my training in theater, but when I revamped the PIO office, I wanted to select a cast

[11] The film industry liaison "is responsible for the issuance of film permits for all types of commercial photography, film, and video activities on . . . public property." The liaison also encourages the motion picture industry to use the city as a location site while ensuring "an accurate depiction of our department" in the movies.

> that would be trusted by the audience watching the news in their living room. I wanted my staff to appear realistic. When I met "Daryl," I found him to be both articulate and easy on the eyes. That he is also African-American I found to be an asset. I also appointed "Juan," who is an Hispanic-American. So, between the three of us, we had a cross section of the population. And I feel that the public has become familiar with our staff, they recognize us on the television, and they know to trust us. (Author interview)

Finally, the Urbandale researcher/fact checker was formerly a city PIO and has a degree in public relations. She was responsible for drafting department press releases and other forms of proactive communication. Staff members expressed fondness for their jobs, and the office perceived their media image and the quality of police-reporter interaction as favorable.

As an initial indication of the department's commitment to the media relations paradigm, the Urbandale public information office is located on the ground floor of their police headquarters, just adjacent to the building's lobby. The office is, therefore, completely accessible to reporters and members of the public who avoid having to overcome the hurdles of signing in, producing identification, and obtaining visitor badges. Not just a minor detail, the relevance of the office location became apparent during the first day of my visit when their computer scanner was discovered inoperable in the hours before the 11 o'clock news. Earlier, Urbandale police officers apprehended a suspect on a hit-and-run charge that left a five-year-old boy in critical condition. The arrest of the suspect was to become the evening headline, as visuals of school ground crash-scene lead the 5 o'clock news. With the scanner not functioning, the public information office had no way to collectively e-mail the suspect mug shot to local news desks. To ensure that media obtained their much-needed visual of this recent Urbandale

success, the PIO taped the mug shot to the inside of the office window, allowing for camera crews to enter the lobby at any time during the night to – in essence – photograph the photograph. This they did with much appreciation, with one cameraman explaining to me how this little thing makes such a big difference.

Not only does their office location reflect the department commitment to media, it also serves to foster the development of positive police/reporter (i.e., performer/critic) relations. Reporters frequently ate lunch in the public information office, either out of occupational convenience or in response to a previously scheduled request for a lunchtime interview. On one particular afternoon, a local radio reporter arrived early for a mid-day press conference to promote the department's renewed commitment to preventing domestic violence. Arriving at lunchtime, she came into the public information office, asked what they were having for lunch, and subsequently placed her order. She proceeded to eat lunch with the office staff, joking around and telling stories. Less than an hour later, she asked the chief to comment on a city report that was critical of the department's handling of a highly publicized political protest. When I questioned her about the inherent conflict between fraternizing with the cops while simultaneously scrutinizing them, she pointed to one of the benefits that results from the department's dramaturgical loyalty:

> I tell them up front when they're the story. And I told the PIO staff that I was going to ask [the Chief] about the report following the press conference. When the department is the story, I just say to them, 'all right guys, you fucked up. What can you tell me?' And they give me what they can. (Author notes)

Similar to Urbandale, the Morganville Police Department public information staff consists of three full-time PIOs, plus additional administrative staff available when

necessary. Each PIO is similarly on-call around the clock on a rotating schedule to accommodate the demands of news reporters. In terms of personnel, then, Morganville and Urbandale are relatively similar.[12] Yet unlike the Urbandale Police Department, the Morganville Police were classified as a low media power department. And like Urbandale, whose commitment to media relations was clearly visible, many of the causes of Morganville's poor image were clearly apparent.

Unlike Urbandale, the Morganville media relations office is located on the top floor of the headquarters high rise, some twelve floors above the public and just adjacent to the chief's office. Its inaccessibility was not merely impressionistic but literal, and it created numerous problems for reporters trying to obtain crime information. The newly appointed chief explained the situation as follows:

> Before the administration changed . . . there was very limited access [for reporters]. I guess everything was a challenge for the media to get any information from the police department. And I could kind of tell that because I met with many of the media police reporters . . . So . . . we tried to transition from that to the point where we opened the headquarters and building up a little bit so [reporters] could go to public counters, [so] they don't have to wait in the lobby. But we [had] a problem with reporters . . . [T]hey were wandering around sensitive areas, [causing us to again close the building]. So [reporters] developed these relationships with various officers on the streets . . . and I think that was kind of counter-productive, too, because media were reacting on rumor information, and it ate up a lot of administrative time trying to answer press questions on rumors. (Author interview)

[12] To my surprise, I was informed only during my visit that the current Morganville PIO staff had not yet received media skills training despite previous communication I had with the PIO office indicating otherwise. Apparently, it was a former Morganville PIO who received 16 hours of training per year. The failure of the Morganville Police Department to maintain a consistent level of officer training is in itself indicative of a lack of dramaturgical loyalty if not budgetary funds.

Moreover, unlike the Urbandale media relations staff that encouraged casual encounters between PIOs and reporters, at Morganville, no such interaction was witnessed. Instead, they consistently referred to reporters as "the enemy" and approached police-media interaction with an air of resentment. They admittedly found ways to limit the amount of information they provide to reporters, only to express puzzlement when further inquiries from reporters come in:

> I will release enough information to media to meet their immediate needs, and I say to myself, 'that'll hold them 'til tomorrow.' But when they call back the next day and ask if there is any new information and I tell them 'no,' they get mad. They constantly want information!" (Author notes)

And while the establishment of a police-media liaison serves as a symbol of a department's dramaturgical loyalty, Morganville PIOs repeatedly voiced their occupational allegiances:

> Sometimes I get confused who I work for. But I try to let my officers know that I work for them, not the media. And the media should make no mistake about the fact that I work for the police department first and foremost. I am an officer. (Author notes)

In fact, Morganville PIOs do not particularly like their jobs. The position is a rite of passage, a test of endurance that officers must undergo on the path to becoming lieutenant. As one former Morganville PIO told me:

> I didn't want [the] job . . . It's neat when friends say, 'Hey, I saw you on TV,' but I don't give a shit about that. I'm a cop. A street cop. We take round pegs from round holes and try to jam them in a square hole, and it doesn't work. And that [was] me. I know law enforcement. This [was] something totally opposite of my personality. I [felt] like a round peg in a square hole. Did I make an effort? Yeah, to some extent, but not as much as I probably could have. I wasn't excited about the job . . . And as a lieutenant, I've

> had six assignments in six years. Well, I'm not going to really learn my job when I'm not going to be here that long. So, it's more than media, it's department management. (Author interview)

Dramaturgical Discipline

Of course, impression management requires more than a commitment to the theatrical framework. Social actors must also be adept at convincing audiences of the authenticity of their performances. This requires a high degree of "dramaturgical discipline," or what Goffman (1959) refers to as a show of intellectual and emotional involvement in the role that is being staged. For Goffman, "the focus of dramaturgical discipline is to be found in the management of one's face and voice . . . and an appropriate affective response" (p. 217). It requires performers to identify with their audiences in order to ensure a reciprocal bond. As a result, a performer often must "suppress his spontaneous feelings in order to give the appearance of sticking to the affective line" (p. 217).

Unfortunately, dramaturgical discipline is at odds with traditional police training that describes police professionalism as uncompromisingly stalwart and affectively neutral. But as police departments have made the shift toward a more community-oriented approach, they may find the display of humanness advantageous in restructuring the police image. Daryl, a PIO working with the Urbandale Police Department, actively works to instill upon his audience the fact that he is one within the community.

> One of the things that's been very important in the past six years is try to move away from simply being a police officer; it's in our television persona, it's in the quotes that we give in the newspaper, it's in what we do in the radio, and it's in what we do in the community. We try to go away from just a police officer's persona. We try to let

> people know that Barry's a father, that he's got a dog at home, that outside of the uniform we're John Q. Citizen, we're just like the people we're trying to reach. But by the same token, we're highly trained law enforcement officers who have feelings, who are emotional, who, you know, have the same concerns as our neighbors. And I think that in developing relationships with the community, it becomes easier for the person who's been seeing me on television for six years to say, 'you know what, if Barry – the person in the community I've grown to trust – is explaining it in a fashion that I can understand, in plain speak and not cop talk, then at the very least I'm going to stop as a citizen and go, hmm, I sort of understand.' We get away from simply 'the facts' in . . . presenting a story and in the bites that we give. We go into, 'this is probably how I'd be feeling; these are the things I've gone through in similar experiences.' And that's why I think it's very important that we're law enforcement officers [serving] as PIOs rather than a person who has never worn the badge, donned the uniform, and gone out. I think that in showing both sides, showing that I am this person but this person also. I think that helps get [our] message across. (Author interview)

I was able to witness firsthand the touch of affect and emotional display involved impression management when I accompanied Barry to the scene of a triple stabbing. Apparently, a jealous boyfriend had stabbed his girlfriend in the presence of her youngest child (who was dependent upon a respirator). The eldest child was then stabbed in his side as he moved to protect his mother. Finally, the boyfriend proceeded to the bedroom where he stabbed the middle child, as she lay in her bed asleep. As if the events of the crime were not unique enough, the suspect was a deaf-mute, which slowed down the arrest, reading of the suspect's rights, and questioning of the accused, meaning the media would have to wait for many of the story details.

> We can't solve a crime, because we already have the suspect. But the family is very poor and has special needs. So we may as well use the media to help the family. Also, we can't release any specific details yet about the case.

> Investigation is still working and they are having a tough time getting the guy to cooperate, especially since he's a deaf-mute. So, we run a background on the guy and give that to the media to begin to paint a picture of the guy. Tell part of the story.

At the same time, Barry was quite cognizant of the need to present a usable sound bite that conveyed the seriousness of the case.[13]

> I start to think about what the drama is. What I try to convey to my staff is to get across the human element. Clearly, in this case, it is the nightmare the children must have felt watching their mother stabbed, then getting stabbed themselves. We all have nightmares and are relieved when we wake up. But what if we can't wake up? So this is what I go with.

Ultimately, Barry gave them the drama they wanted providing media with the following sound bite:

> [The crime scene] looked like a war zone. There was blood everywhere. Imagine the horror and pain that these children felt. Like a nightmare they can't wake up from. And one of the children was on a respirator. They [recently] moved here [from another state] to be closer to the hospital where the child is being treated.

By contrast, reporters working the Morganville public information office describe their PIOs as emotionally cold, steadfastly stoic, and uncooperative.[14]

> They really are the worst I've ever had to deal with. They could have a string of ten rapes and they don't want the media's help. They don't need it. They are as arrogant as they come . . . and they want to be able to operate in

---

[13] One element of the crime that generated a bit of humor (albeit in a dark sort of way) was the fact that because the suspect was deaf-mute, the couple communicated through writing. Therefore, the couple's entire exchange leading up the stabbing was documented on a legal pad found atop the kitchen counter. Whether the written exchange was akin to a confession or would legally be treated as testimony against the self, was not the topic of conversation. Rather, it was the fact that but for the tragic outcome, the legal pad presented a humorous and ironic twist.

[14] Despite the occurrence of at least two fatalities (one accidental, one criminal) during my visit in Morganville, I was unable to witness their PIOs working a crime scene because, operating under discretionary communication, the PIOs chose not to respond to the incident sites.

> secrecy . . . If your goal is to block all information, then you put in charge the biggest asshole you can find. (Author interview)

While there is a difference between emotional coldness and outright insensitivity, a failure to appear affectively moved by proximate events does not reflect positively upon responding officers or their department, for it fails to project what Goffman refers to as the "expressive *status quo*." The balance is a difficult one, as the elements of dramaturgical discipline (namely, emotional drama) can border on sensationalism. Thus, one Morganville PIO expressed to her frustration at being asked questions similar to "how long was the knife?" following a stabbing or "how long did it take to dig 'em out?" following the collapse of a building. Still, Morganville reporters suggested room for improvement on the part of the Police Department:

> I think they need to have someone in their PIO office who really understands the media . . . And, you know, part of being a PIO is giving good sound bites and giving us interviews we can use. And so you need someone who's very articulate and on the ball and can disseminate information quickly and release it and speak well. (Author interview)

These sentiments were shared by a former Morganville PIO, who clearly recognizes problems with Morganville media relations:

> You don't just take somebody and make them [sic] a PIO. The person has to want to be a PIO. You can give them training, but that doesn't necessarily make them a PIO. They have to be articulate. It has to be a balance, you have to have the tools to be able to do this job, and the bulk of cops on the job don't have the tools. You have to have the cohesiveness that gives you the ability to be in front of the camera. (Author interview)

Circumspective Framing

"Dramaturgical circumspection" represents the most challenging skill of impression management. Like an improvisational performance, it calls on the performer to operate without the safety net of a script even while staging a routine performance. Occasionally, actors may repeat well-received gestures or accentuate dramatic lines. They may also have to create new lines or movements should a prop be misplaced or a line forgotten. These same principles apply for the social actor, who must "adapt his performance to information conditions under which it must be staged" (Goffman, 1959:218). At times this may call for the exploitation of present opportunities or the exercise of prudence and restraint. At other times it requires actors to not only stage a performance, but to also provide its interpretative framework (Goffman, 1974).

A "frame" is a conceptualization that provides meaning to performances. Every public staging is subject to numerous interpretations regarding its cause, motive, and impact. Frames provide the context through which performances are viewed, interpreted and critiqued. An idea developed by Goffman as an addendum of sorts to his theatrical metaphor of social life, "framing" has become central to the constructionist paradigm. It asserts that those who operate outside of the setting attach meanings to situations. Stated differently, "a 'definition of the situation' is almost always to be found, but those who are in the situation ordinarily do not *create* this definition" (Goffman, 1974:1). Instead, outsiders use frames to simplify events by affixing meanings to situations that conform to previously established or understood realities.

As second-party storytellers, journalists provide interpretive frames to the events they report, transforming slices of life into broader, more meaningful news items.

Gamson and Modigliani (1989) argue that reporters apply a set of interpretive packages that contain a range of positions on various issues, with each frame presenting images and symbols for the purpose of generating a broader social metaphor. Jones (1993), a journalist for 30 years and now a media consultant to government officials, notes that news stories most typically revolve around one of the compelling "C's": catastrophe, crisis, conflict, crime, corruption and color (i.e., human interest). Since crime within the news has become routine, reporters must select crime stories containing an additional compelling "C", or else affix one to an otherwise mundane crime-related occurrence. Lule (2001) suggests that the news frames conform to one of many enduring cultural archetypes and that the news "story" is essentially that: a story that draws upon mythical staples in an attempt to interpret or make sense of the world. One reporter, who explained why the crime "beat" remains his favorite, explicitly stated this reporter-as-storyteller framework to me:

> What I look for are stories that are interesting at face value, but also [interesting] on a deeper level. What does this story say about who we are as a city? Who we are as people? As white people? As black people? Stories that can be used as metaphors for something bigger. Obviously, not all crime stories are that. Most of them aren't. Most of them [only involve] a stupid person or a bad person ... and that's all there is to it. But I do think you see more of those [metaphoric] stories in crime stories than, say, [a story about] a city council meeting. (Author interview)

For PIOs to successfully exercise impression management, they must possess an acute awareness of journalistic news framing. When officers complain about their actions or words being reported "out of context," they are expressing their frustration over having lost control of the news frame. They must recognize that news is not merely reported, but also interpreted. Absent any attempt by the PIO to provide the context of

crime information, the department risks losing control of both information and public opinion. The challenge for the PIO "becomes trying to take that negative thing and figuring out a way to put a positive spin on it so that...it's not focused upon negatively" (Author interview, 9/15/00). While still providing accurate, truthful and complete information, the PIO frames the event as part of a broader interpretive schema that adheres to the demands of media formats.

The Urbandale Police Department was adept at constructing positive interpretive frames of otherwise tragic news events, and they possessed a keen understanding of the requisite story ingredients: visuals, sound bites, drama, and theme. Even when a story was unlikely to reflect badly upon the department, they managed to present a crime story as one of human interest. As an example, a hit-and-run story became one of community heroism after a team of Urbandale PIOs deliberated at the crash scene and decided upon an interpretive news frame.[15] The event began when an afternoon call came in to the Urbandale public information office regarding a hit-and-run that left a young boy in critical condition. Before responding to the scene, the staff issued a press release containing the initial information (reported incident and location) and collectively e-mailed it to local news desks to ensure that media were notified.[16] . Upon arrival, the senior PIO quickly spoke with each officer on the scene to ensure accurate, complete and consistent information.

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[15] Goffman refers to such deliberation as "circumspection in staging the show." (p. 218).

[16] In all likelihood, media were aware of the incident before the Urbandale PIOs, as they monitor all radio communication between Urbandale Police and their dispatch bridge. In fact, when we arrived at the crash scene, members of the news media were already present and speaking with responding officers while awaiting an official sound bite from the Urbandale PIO.

Apparently, a driver was speeding toward a school zone when he encountered afternoon traffic at the end of the elementary school day. The driver became impatient with the gridlock and decided to circumvent the traffic by bypassing all cars on the right. This resulted in the car careening upon the school sidewalk, where it struck a mother standing with her two children, pinning the 5-year-old boy underneath the car. After speaking with officers at the scene, the Urbandale PIOs learned that ten witnesses had lifted up on the car so that the child could be pulled out from underneath. The driver subsequently ran from the scene. With two of the witnesses still nearby, the PIOs (literally) huddled and decided upon the story's frame: "local heroes save the day." While at the scene, the PIOs explained to me their decision-making process.

> There are several angles here. First, you simply have the hit and run with the possible resulting homicide. There is also a story about what can result while speeding in a school zone. This is a safety issue we can focus on. Third, there is a story about good Samaritans lifting a car to save a boy. . Clearly, this third angle has the drama the media want. But ultimately, we can get three positive stories out of this one event. Today, we'll focus on the heroism and how lucky the boy is that members of the community come together. Especially in this high crime community, they need a story like this. But tomorrow, we can focus on the fact that speeding in school zones will become a policing priority. Finally, if the boy does survive, and even if he doesn't, we will most certainly make the witnesses the local heroes of the month and gain additional positive media coverage when we give them their awards. I could push something else, some other angle, but decided on this one because I know the media, and media love heroes. And picking a story angle like this allows much media coverage of the heroes and encourages others to act accordingly. (Author notes)

When the stations went live and questioned police about the condition of the boy, the Morganville PIO responded by saying, "He's on his way to emergency now, but you

know, I think the real story here is about our local heroes," and he proceeded to direct cameras to the "heroes" by his side, who were more than willing to take credit for their actions. And reporters appreciate when PIOs serve as storytellers:

> Most departments only give you facts: time, place. But we already know that. We need something with drama. And the [Urbandale] Department knows this. So, if they can't give us specifics, at least they will provide some catchwords. If there is a homicide, but details need to be withheld, at least they will provide an angle, such as, "this is the most violent homicide of the kind I've seen since on the force" or "the crime scene was a mess." (Author notes)

The newspaper's metro-section headline featured the interpretive sound bites delivered at the scene: "Crowd of Heroes Lifts Car Off Boy."

HEROES LIFT CAR TO FREE BOY

Young pedestrians hit, injured

When a car swerved out of control after a collision and ran down a mother and two children Thursday . . . , a mob formed – a mob of heroes, a dozen or more young men who lifted a half-overturned car off 5-year-old _____ .

"They may have saved his life," police spokesman _____ said hopefully. (Newspaper #002209)

In contrast to the dramaturgical circumspection exhibited by the Urbandale public information office, the Spring Lake Police Department did not display the skills necessary to provide a positive interpretation of an otherwise tragic event. To be sure, unlike the events above that had already unfolded when the Urbandale PIOs arrived, the incident in Spring Lake was still developing as local media arrived. Given the timing of

the event and the unique factors of this otherwise routine (i.e., anticipated, planned and rehearsed) police response, the handling of media relations was rather impressive. Still, the example below illustrates how many PIOs overlook opportunities to "exploit" (Goffman's term) the good work displayed by officers for the purpose of routine impression management.

The event began with a late night call about shots fired at a residence with hostages held inside. Upon arriving at the scene, "Ted," the Spring Lake PIO, located the command center for details to relay to reporters and news bureaus. With only minimum details available, Ted resembled a reporter himself. With a pad and pencil in hand, he was eager to obtain any information to meet his own deadline of sorts: the arrival of the local media. As was standard protocol, a command center officer used a laptop computer to document an official incident timeline of police maneuvers. The following information, extracted from the on-site report, illustrates the quality of information available to Ted upon first arriving at the scene:

> 23:48 Call-up SWAT [regarding shots fired, possible hostage situation].
>
> 00:45 Grandfather shot granddaughter; four other children inside house, one possibly upstairs, one in basement. [Grandfather] suffers from dementia according to granddaughter. Also according to granddaughter, she was downstairs, heard gunshots, went upstairs and yelled to grandfather asking if he was okay. Grandfather replied that he was having a bad dream. Granddaughter knocked at door, and (?) shots were fired through the door, hitting granddaughter in the shoulder. The victim ran outside, boyfriend ends up across the street; granddaughter rescued outside the house.

Working off this timeline and additional information provided by responding officers, it was discovered that an elderly man suffering from dementia awoke confused from a

dream and began firing a gun in his bedroom. His granddaughter, who resides with him along with her four siblings, knocked on his bedroom door to question what was wrong. Confused, he shot through the door, striking her in the shoulder. Somehow, she managed to exit the house and call for help. When Ted and I arrived, the grandfather was still inside the house with the remaining grandchildren, and both the SWAT and hostage negotiation teams were on the scene. Fortunately for Ted, media would not arrive until just before their 5am broadcast, giving him time to clarify information. In fact, the only reporter on the scene was "Gordon," an independent journalist who monitors police scanners, responds to crime scenes, and sells sound bites and video footage to news organizations for a fee.[17] On this particular morning, Gordon was going to record a statement from the PIO on his own tape player and use a computer in the trunk of his car to send the digital sound file to a 24-hour local news radio station.[18]

By the time the television stations' camera did arrive just prior to 5am, many developments had occurred. Police had learned from the victim's boyfriend that the suspect had a .25 caliber pistol, a 22 rifle, and a 12 gauge shotgun located upstairs, while in the basement was a safe containing another 12 gauge shotgun, an additional 22 rifle, a 40 caliber handgun, and an AK-47. He was unable to confirm any history of mental instability, but stated that he had known the suspect for about six years and had seen him

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[17] As both Gordon and the PIO informed me, independent reporters are much appreciated in the local news community, because many times it is cheaper for stations to purchase visuals from him than to dispatch a reporter and camera crew.

[18] It was also fortunate for Ted that he had built a good working relationship with Gordon, as this becomes important during developing events. Ted's initial sound bite revealed sensitive information. The city's SWAT team was preparing a stealth entry into the house to rescue the remaining children. After providing Gordon with the latest information, Ted realized that if the radio decided to immediately air this statement, it could tip off the suspect. Therefore, at Ted's request, and because of their positive working relationship, Gordon erased the sound bite and recorded a new, benign statement.

intoxicated "about four or five times." The SWAT team subsequently decided to secretly enter the house and remove the children from the confused and heavily armed man, which they accomplished without incident.

These details allowed for dramatic affectation and emotional involvement – "the crucial test of one's ability as a performer" – when delivering sound bites about this obvious police success. Ted, however, did not display any of the qualities that make for good television. Instead, he used legalistic, tactical language (e.g., "Our SWAT team was able to extricate the children from the home") that contained neither the dramatic affectations nor the pithy sound bites necessary for impression management. Moreover, the statements provided did not frame the events as a success despite the fact that all "children" were "rescued" by "Spring Lake Police." Yet for Goffman, sometimes even the most effective means of impression management requires little more than "keeping close to the facts." And up until this point, the facts presented the Silver Lake police in a rather positive light.

Unfortunately, as reporters were to go live again at 5:30am., all opportunities for promoting police successes passed, as new developments quickly overshadowed earlier events. Apparently, the grandfather – either drunk or confused – could not communicate with the hostage negotiation team and either deliberately or accidentally set fire to his house while refusing to come out. Remote units went live as the fire department was called in, with flames providing camera crews with their necessary visuals. Before the 6am broadcast, the fire department would report the grandfather's body found in the south side of the home. By not framing this event as a successful *police* rescue, the story became one of a tragic event. Thus, unlike the Morganville interpretive frame wherein

heroism triumphs over tragedy, for residents of Spring Lake, disaster overshadows deliverance: "Standoff Ends: One Dead, One Wounded."

STANDOFF: 1 DEAD, 1 WOUNDED

Four children are rescued after a man, who later dies in a house fire, shoots his step-granddaughter

A 73-year-old man was found dead in his Northeast . . . home early today after the structure caught fire during a standoff with police.

The standoff began when the man shot his 26-year-old step-granddaughter in the arm. Police were called to the home . . . just before midnight and found [thegranddaughter] lying in the driveway with a gunshot wound to her left shoulder.

[She] apparently had been shot when she knocked on her step-grandfather's bedroom door and he fired shots through it, police said . . . (Newspaper # 001110)

For routine impression management, then, social actors must transcend the simple delivery of scripted lines vis-à-vis the mere communication of crime incident information. Instead, they must stage a performance, utilizing all of the talents of a veteran stage performer: drama, language, and expression. Moreover, they must not only deliver lines, but also interpret them by providing the meaning behind routine performances. This allows for the actor to serve as both performer and critic, and it is a skill that is recognizably absent from low media departments, as well as some departments more or less adept at routine media communication:

> [W]e can give out information on crime scenes all day long but it's a completely different world dealing proactively with the press. It's a different talent. So that's what I see missing is the public relations part of it . . . We don't get any credit out of handling crime or investigating complex cases. [PIOs] just say, 'here's the bad guy, they were arrested." It's not ...you can't make [media] appreciate the talent, the resources it takes to actually solve these major crimes. So I guess . . . what I'm saying as far as public relations goes, that's what I see as missing. (Author interview – Morganville Police Chief)

Performing Disorganization

There are periods in staged performances when one actor is able to benefit from the misstep of another. One character or a group of characters may even try to induce a foul-up on the part of another for the sole purpose of creating the appearance of actor dominance. Noting the "various functions of negative experience" in certain aspects of performances, Goffman (1974:382-383) suggests, "One should anticipate that intentional effort will be made to produce these states." Applying Goffman's theatrical analogy of the "organizational role of disorganization" to the public sector, it is often the case that one branch of government may prove to credit from the discrediting of another. Thus, politicians often campaign on a promise to improve a failing school system, to restore a sense of civility and decency to public office, and to radically improve upon a failing criminal justice system.

For better or worse, police are inextricably linked to this game of politics. As government agents possessing wide discretionary powers, it is essential that police remain accountable to the public they serve. At the same time, police are often lightning rods at the center of struggle for political or social control. Today, few community issues prove more contentious and divisive than the oversight of police performance, forcing

city leaders into a political quagmire where they align themselves either with the rank and file or against them. Perhaps best expressed by Fyfe et al. (1997:54), "if these officials stand too close, they may be tarred with scandal; if they stay at a distance, they may allow their police to become entities unto themselves." For police, then, the political process is a routine part of impression management, and even the most well trained police spokespersons face political obstacles in the communication's game.

The Union Creek Police Department serves as a unique example of how a well-equipped public information office can nevertheless suffer from "low media power" because of city politics. To begin, the agency was staffed with a PIO qualified to exercise effective impression management. Although new to the job, she was visibly excited about serving as spokesperson for the department she has loyally served. Without having received any external media training, she was quite comfortable with her position as the department's lone PIO despite the demands it placed on her physically and personally. And in her short time serving as PIO, she received a commendation from the city's left-wing weekly reader, listing her among their list of "Best of . . ." for the year 2000:

> **Best press flack**: Not be [sic] confused with 'best spinmeister,' [Union City] police spokesperson _____ just tells it straight. Honest and reasonable, willing and able. And she knows you're on deadline.

The problem, then, was rooted in city politics. With the city's government run by a strong mayor determined to maintain control of all government functions, the police public information office was regularly at the mercy of city officials. The chief, eager to explain

the damage caused to the police image by city politics, explained to me the mayor's communication policy:

> One of the cumbersome things we have in this bureaucracy is that when [we deal with] media inquiries, all sorts of relatively routine, simple requests for a crime report or something comparable to that [face a] review process . . [T]he city administration reviews, they want to be kept informed, not only of the questions being asked so they can develop a position, but the information that we're going to provide. So generally we tell the media that if they want some information, [they must] make a "public record's request," which really slows down the information flow – not for the media, but the information flow to the community. And because I'm part of an administrative process, it's important that I follow the guidelines that are established for me by the administrative head of this government, although I'm in opposition to the position that they take, I'm forced to comply. This is a city policy. The city has enacted a public policy request – that every request for information be documented in a written request. We compile the data and we send it to the assistant director of public safety who, along with some spokesperson for the city administration, reviews the request and determines what should be released and the manner in which it should be released. It seems like a very simple process, but the committee only meets once or twice a week and as a result the information to the media gets delayed. It's rather unfortunate, but it's a way for the city government to control not necessarily the flow of information, but to control and have some insight into what is being inquired. So if it's a controversial issue or a controversial topic, the city can develop a policy. Not a policy but perhaps a position, so everybody's informed of the question being asked . . . So that's the whole purpose of the delay. It really isn't an attempt to stop the flow of information but simply be aware of it, cognizant of the questions being asked, see if there's a problem, and see what position the city administration is going to go on this particular topic. [But] we get a lot of public records requests. Upward of 700 this year. So I think the media's perception of us is at best "fair," not because what we're doing is not honest or accurate, but just delayed. They all have deadlines. We're not keeping pace with them. (Author interview – Union Creek Police Chief)

"Tom," a print reporter from the city's major daily newspaper, expressed his frustration over the inability to obtain information beyond the routine incident report, this despite having a news bureau office within the police headquarters building:

> Any public records request above and beyond the basic police report [has to go through the Mayor's office], because the mayor has this, you know, you have to file a written records request, and then it's reviewed by the law department. It takes sometimes two weeks to get something. It's completely unacceptable. It's total fucking bullshit. . . . I have a good relationship with the PIO. She's a straight shooter and all that . . . I've never felt that we've been stonewalled, or that she'd deliberately tried to deceive us. That said, I think the system overall – that all media has to go through one person, having one filter, I don't think that's reporting. I don't think that's being a police reporter. I don't blame her for that. I don't blame the Chief for that. I think that comes directly from the mayor. And he has his reasons for that. I think the city has this siege mentality [that] we're somehow we're out to get them, at every shooting we go to we're looking for a case of police brutality (Author interview)

Recognizing that communication (i.e., the ability to speak in character) is both essential to establishing positive media relations and necessary to thwart media speculations of cover-ups, the department actively took steps to undermine the intent of the mayor's policy while maintaining an appearance of political loyalty. This action is one that Goffman (1959) refers to as "team collusion." It represents a means of maintaining routine performances while surreptitiously acting out of character, and it is most often carried out when a performer must deliver a line contrary to his inward feelings. The Union Creek Police routinely engage in team collusion. That is, they "intentionally stretch" what would commonly be considered a routine information request for the purpose of accommodating media and maintaining positive police-reporter

interaction. As the chief explained to me, "We try not to subvert the administration's will, but we recognize the fact that 99% of the time [media] requests are legitimate, the kind of things we would in fact be obligated to provide." Moreover, the department utilizes "a lot of 'off the record' conversations. I think we do three times as much background information off the record. We try to do it very subtly, and sometimes not too subtly" (Author interview – Union Creek Police Chief).

At any given time, any individual performer may overtly express discontent with various members of the performance team. That is, a performer may play to the audience for the purpose of securing some form of dramaturgical change. These temporary yet controlled character "realignments" are quite common in politics, with one team member critiquing the performance of another via the public. For example, the Union Creek mayor on several occasions was prone to using the police department as a pawn in his own political game to boost public respect for his own staging of events. According to "Lisa," a Union Creek broadcast reporter, the mayor began using the police as political scapegoats since the time he first ran for office:

> The police union's rank and file, and the mayor, have always been at loggerheads. This goes back years ago when the mayor was [running for office] for the first time. The police union did not endorse him. It's possible that he still holds a grudge. Instead of supporting his police department – the rank and file – I believe he supports the upper echelons. I mean, he picks the chief. But I think as far as the mayor and the rank and file police officers on the street, they've always been at loggerheads. (Author interview)

Tom, the Union Creek print reporter, provided the following example:

> Rank and file police officers despise the mayor. The Mayor, in turn, [despises them]. They think the pay is low, their equipment isn't updated, and that he raises police

> brutality issues. They feel they're not appreciated by the mayor. There was an incident with the Ku Klux Klan here. What happened was, the mayor came out and called a press conference and said that he had information that there were active cells of white supremacists operating in the police department. This was about a year ago. And when [he] was asked for proof of it, he said, 'well, there's an ongoing investigation.' Now, the question is, if you're doing an ongoing investigation, why would you call a press conference? [Unless], you're really not interested in the ongoing investigation as much as to embarrass the department. He calls the Feds, and the FBI comes out with a study that says there's no proof. Now, are there racists in the police department? Of course. There are racists in plain view all over the place, not just in the department. So, the police union was pissed about that. Then, the KKK says they're going to march in this city. The mayor, I think correctly, said 'Fine, you have a right to march. We despise you, but you have a right to march. And we're going to have the police provide you with security.' Well, the Police resented that. They said, 'Look, you called this press conference saying we're racists, and now you're making us provide security for the Klan! How's that going to look?' And that's the thing, the Chief is a political appointee, so in terms of responding to this via media, does he comment? Well, no. He's a political appointee. So, the chief and the district commanders stand up there at the press conference with a grim look on their faces and saying, 'you know, we're going to look into this, check it out.' And under their breath, they're saying, 'that dirty m.f.' And so then the rank and file are sitting there wondering why the chief and district commanders didn't stand up for us. So, they're in a tough spot. So, it's all political posturing. (Author interview)

When I had an opportunity to ask the chief to comment on the politics of policing, he offered the following comments, agreeing that "certainly the mayor's office, the elected city council, [and] the judicial candidates have all used the police division as a tool." Moreover, his comments hinted at the allegations made by the mayor regarding members of the police union:

> I think . . . the animosity between the administration and the police unions have risen to the level that it's – I won't use the word frightening – but it's unfair. I don't know how to be tactful, but at times it's very ugly. Finger pointing, accusations, unions were accusing the leadership of the city of not being responsive to safety issues. The mayor will respond by saying the union's nothing more than a bunch of thugs. (Author interview)

And of course, all of this political struggling is played out in headlines of daily papers and in the sound bites delivered on the evening news, leaving the public's allegiances divided and the police with neither broad based public support nor a favorable public image.

To overcome city politics, police may lower barriers between them and opposing teams to form team alignments of their own. Sometimes, Goffman suggests, teams working in "avowed opposition" discover that momentary realignments produce mutual benefits.[19] With regard to the police, they may have as much interest in discrediting a vociferous political figurehead as a city hall reporter looking for the definitive story on a political issue. During such times of character realignment, an established history of positive police-reporter interaction becomes crucial, as police may temporarily realign themselves with their other vocal critics, especially when each may have something to gain. In Union Creek, the reporters that I interviewed expressed deep frustration over the mayor's policies regarding public information. That the reporters I spoke with also felt the mayor's charges of racism were unfounded and that the police PIO was a "straight shooter," suggests that reporters might temporarily display their political allegiances with members of what is traditionally an opposing team. Tom, whose commitment to the

[19] "Team collusion" and "momentary realignments" constitute what Goffman (1959) refers to as "accommodative treatments." As they are most often applied during non-routine events, they will be explained in greater detail in the next chapter.

media's fourth estate mandate placed him at odds with the mayor's policy on written records requests, stated his belief that "quite frankly, [he's] been trying to fuck with us." Given his belief that the mayor's policy blocks any substantiation of his administration's political claims, the police may actually benefit from their attempts to establish positive police-media relations. In fact, Tom indicated that given a rare opportunity for a sit down interview with the mayor, he called him to task on his claims of the KKK operating within the Union Creek Police:

> I'm interviewing the mayor and we're talking about this rift between him and the police. Is it bad for the city? And he was talking about police brutality. And I said, 'well you know, you talked about this [internal] racism, but the FBI said your charges were bull.' (Author interview)

In sum, routine politics often makes for extraordinary alliances, with fraternization between "opposing specialists" becoming necessary for impression management. Thus, during both routine crime news-making process and routine political claims-making, police and reporters often find themselves in a position to provide assistance to each other, both politically and organizationally speaking. Yet, it is essential that these temporary allegiances do not become permanent fixtures, for sometimes political claims are grounded in substantiated facts.

Conclusion

While the previous chapter attempted to gauge impression management through the use of national survey data, this chapter focused upon police performances by witnessing police-media relations at four selected research sites. In doing so, it uncovered a number of factors undetectable through survey analysis and therefore provided a more comprehensive understanding of the police influence on the news-

making process. Similar to Goffman's (1959) concept of dramaturgical loyalty, the "high media power" departments observed in this study were those whose commitment of police-media relations extended beyond policy and into practice. The public information staff at the Urbandale Police Department displayed such a commitment, as did their senior ranking PIO whose theatrical background undoubtedly influenced his behavior and his reference to co-workers as his "cast" and the public his "audience." This operating philosophy was clearly in contrast to that of the Morganville Police Department, a "low media power" police department where serving as a PIO was temporary, unwelcome, and an impediment to so-called real law enforcement. At the same time, even high media power departments have differing levels of dramaturgical finesse, which may be a product of experience, training, or both. Many of skills exhibited by the Urbandale Police Department while in the field – such as finding the story "angle," or what Goffman (1974) refers to as "keying" a frame – were undoubtedly skills that were acquired through many years of experience and repeated media training. In fact, much of the language used by "Daryl" (such as "dumping", which is discussed in the next chapter) stems from external media training course manuals he provided me for review. Thus, the Urbandale Police Department was able to benefit from a "routine" hit-and-run while the less-trained Spring Lake Police Department failed to "exploit" a police success. Finally, case study research allowed for an examination of the political context within which PIOs operate. Based on interviews with Union Creek law enforcement and their media counterparts, much of the poor performance on the part of their PIO staff is the result of city politics and strong mayoral figure. The next chapter builds upon the case study research

described herein by focusing upon impression management during non-routine news events, such as police accidents and scandal.

CHAPTER 7

ACCIDENTS & SCANDALS

> From my experience, it's . . . been extremely difficult when a police officer has done wrong and we try to pursue the story. It's really tough, and they make things extremely hard for us . . . [B]ut these people deserve to be on film just as much as any other person. Some of the stuff that some of the guys have done are pretty serious . . . It's our job to show the public who the person is, and it's important because these are the people that are representing and supposed to protect us.
>
> *-Local Broadcast Cameraman, Morganville*
> (Author interview)

Accommodative Treatments

As performances are staged to suggest a certain reality, it is imperative that cast members remain in character. Appearances are crucial for impression management, as audiences are by their very nature both critical and demanding. Yet even veteran actors may on occasion miss their cues, forget their lines, speak out of turn, or fail to convey the requisite affectation. When this occurs, audience belief is no longer suspended, the reality of appearances is placed in jeopardy, and negative reviews are likely to follow unless cast members adopt an "accommodative treatment" (Goffman, 1959).

Accommodative treatments are techniques used by performers to overcome temporary performance glitches. When appearances are threatened by unscripted happenings, accommodative treatments re-establish the presence of order. Yet only the most adept actors are well versed in such dramaturgical accommodation. Typically, when on stage blunders occur, many actors tend to carry on with the show while simply ignoring the misstep; that is, they continue with the performance in the same manner as

before. Rarely, however, is this accomplished smoothly enough to preserve the overall illusion. A more effective means of overcoming a blunder requires actors to incorporate the unscripted action into the overall production. Although this produces momentary confusion and requires immediate restaging, it allows actors to perform dramaturgical workings on even non-scripted events, further displaying their theatrical (i.e., improvisational) talent, and thereby restoring control over all occurrences. Audiences, in turn, appreciate when missteps are subtly acknowledged, as they tend to experience embarrassment and discomfort when non-scripted behaviors are routinely overlooked or ignored. Impression management, therefore, requires quick responses to non-scripted events, and the most effective responses incorporate the unanticipated into the broader dramaturgical framework.

The permanent rehearsal that constitutes the work of law enforcement, coupled with their public visibility both on the streets and in the news, all but guarantees that police performances will contain occasional non-scripted behaviors. Sometimes, impromptu actions occur while the officer nevertheless remains in character. At other times, non-staged events risk convincing audiences of a lack of authenticity within the overall production. Such non-performance police behaviors are most visible during times of accidents or scandals. "Accidents" begin as purposive activities but result in un-envisioned happenings. They constitute miscalculations that lead to a breakdown in otherwise routine events (Molotch and Lester, 1974). And because they result in that which is clearly not routine, they become attractive commodities as featured news items, much to the dismay of those involved. "Scandals" involve out-of-character actions that become public events by those not involved. Like routine events, scandals may contain

purposive behavior carried out by cast members, but scandals clearly are not intended for public view. Both accidents and scandals threaten the legitimacy of police performances because their very occurrences are in direct conflict with the appearance of order, control, lawfulness and integrity. And unlike routine events, which are anticipatory in nature and trigger purposive and intentional responses, these non-routine events catch police performers off-guard and necessitate character restaging, dramaturgical re-scripting, and the employment of an accommodative treatment.

The very nature of contemporary police work renders the occurrence of accidents and scandals likely to occur. To begin, the police work environment has been described as one where the opportunities for out-of-character behavior are "more than ample" (Barker, 1994:48). Many legitimate police behaviors would raise suspicion if performed by civilians. Granted legal protection, police have an unparalleled opportunity to engaged in veiled misconduct (Kappeler, Sluder and Alpert, 1994). At the same time, police must be prepared to make split-second decisions whose outcomes may prove costly. Finally, concomitant with many police functions are numerous occupational stressors that – if not kept in check – may lead to abuse of authority or other non-scripted behaviors (Carter, 1994). Given the likelihood of such threats to the broader organizational performance, police administrators must possess the dramaturgical know-how to recover from discrepant appearances. Like the seasoned stage actor, those well versed in impression management will exploit the drama inherent in the discrepancy for organizational gain. Those less versed will tacitly expect audiences to collectively ignore what has clearly already been seen.

As *social* actors, police operate within a setting that, despite the similarities, differs in significant ways from the theater. As Goffman (1959:254) notes, "a character staged in a theater is not in some ways real, nor does it have the same kind of real consequences" that accompany real performances. For example, whereas stage actors may engage in team collusion to maintain the appearance of appearances, such a technique requires homogeneity of goals among participants. The officer faced with charges of misconduct may privately collude with fellow officers, but highly publicized scandals have a way of penetrating the police code of silence, making such collusion difficult. Moreover, he cannot silence the heckling public with whom he has no team loyalty. Nor can the department rely upon a temporary alignment with opposing specialists, for city leaders may wish to distance themselves, and sympathetic reporters may have little to gain by working to discredit the claims-makers. Therefore, to respond to the occurrence of unscripted happenings, police have little choice but to acknowledge the temporary glitch in the overall production. At the same time, they must – to the best of their ability – incorporate the glitch into their dramaturgical framework by thematically transforming the event into one less harmful to the department's interests.

Transformations

A primary framework is an original interpretation of a natural or social event. For Goffman (1959; 1974), it is possible for participants to transform primary frameworks into new, interpretive frames, thereby altering the definition of previously occurring events. While his list of techniques is both long and complex, perhaps the best means is to over-communicate some events while under-communicating others. To be sure, this does not involve either the telling of lies or the staging of false fronts; such

misrepresentations – when discovered – threaten the believability of all future performances. Instead, interpretive transformations are perhaps best thought of as "variations in focus" that provide re-analyses of taken-for-granted experiences.

Note the following example of a dramaturgical transformation successfully employed by the Urbandale public information office:

> We had a situation a few months back where a police officer went to a scene and failed to secure his car. He left the car running, left his keys in the car, and goes to take care of a fight situation. Well, he arrests someone, handcuffs him, puts him in the back seat of the squad car, again fails to secure that car, and leaves that person unattended. That person's girlfriend then gets into the drivers seat of the police car, drives away the police car, goes through an intersection, and hits an oncoming car, killing the driver.
>
> Well, you know, the story can be several things. The story could have very well been, 'its the police's fault, it was negligence on the police officer's part and that negligence caused this tragedy to happen.' And of course the lawsuits will follow. What we did was, we presented the story totally different. We presented the story as a 'stand by your man' story. That the girlfriend would go to any lengths to protect him. So basically what we took, we took that story and presented it in a way that still says, yeah, this happened and that happened and that happened. But the story, the angle, is the fact that she stood by her man, taking the focus off those other things or at least overshadowing the focus on those. We fed the story to [media] the way we wanted it presented. There's an old saying that "information given is information controlled." And basically we neatly packaged it and gift-wrapped it and we gave it to them that way . . . And because the sound bites that were given, the things that were said, the way it was presented was so overwhelming that it made [the media's] job so much easier. The sound bites were so good they were very television oriented. I don't remember what some of them were but they were things that reporters were eating up . . . you could see them as they were doing interviews saying, "Yes, that's a bite, that's a bite that's a bite." It came off just as we hoped, as soon as it happened it went away as quickly as it came.

> There was no fresh angle every day. The point was that it was delivered in a way that said, 'yeah, these things were all factors, but *this* is the real crime, and not only is it a crime, it's a story. It's a love story actually. So, you present it in a way that has all the elements. Yeah there was a crime; yeah there were collateral circumstances. But this is a love story, and it's a tragic love story. It makes for great television. (Author interview)

As accidents and scandals constitute "tragic" events, one means of transforming them into less harmful news accounts requires the over-communication of "rebirth and renewal" interpretive themes. According to mythological and literary theory (Lule, 2000), tragedies are by definition themes of purification and regeneration. Like the biblical anecdote of Noah's Ark, the Greek tragedy *Oedipus*, or Shakespeare's romantic *Romeo and Juliet*, tragedies require a terrible event to purify those on the wrong path and set future generations in the proper direction. The "tragedy", namely, is that for renewal, there must first occur a sacrificial loss. For PIOs to prove successful at impression management, they must identify aspects of rebirth and renewal in otherwise negative events, thereby achieving the necessary transformation. As Daryl, the Morganville PIO explained, "That's a large challenge, trying to find the angle of the story, especially when the story can reflect negatively."

> We had [another] situation where [one] of our police officers [was] arrested . . . [for] doing bad things. [He was] involved in the drug trade. Well, that is a story. That is one story. But the presentation was that *our* officers arrested [him]. Basically, we're so diligent; we're going after crime so relentlessly, that we'll even police ourselves. It's the same story with a different angle, and the fact that we presented the angle rather than them sniffing out the story, helped a whole lot in terms of which angle you're able to present. (Author interview)

Using this interpretive frame, an Urbandale newspaper made the following announcement:

> **[URBANDALE] OFFICER ARRESTED ON DRUG-TRAFFICKING CHARGE**
>
> [Urbandale] Police Department arrested one of its own over the weekend on drug charges, after finding five kilos of cocaine hidden in the bumper of a rented car parked outside his residence.
>
> Officer _____ was taken into custody shortly after midnight Saturday by [Urbandale] police, the Drug Enforcement Administration and other agencies . . . [Urbandale] police began an internal investigation last [year], after [the officer's] personal car was found . . . parked outside a known drug house. (Newspaper #002305)

This story, appearing in its entirety, begins with a theme of rebirth and renewal as Urbandale Police receive credit for cleaning shop. A similarly scandalous event was reported in a Union Creek newspaper, yet the police department did not provide reporters with the interpretive frame. As a result, the story begins not with a theme of resolution (via arrest) but rather corruption (i.e., "stole") and continues onto a back page. Moreover, by not proactively providing media with the story frame, the Union Creek police receive second billing in the officer's arrest.

> **POLICEMAN ARRESTED IN $12,000 STING**
>
> A [Union Creek] police officer stole $12,000 in a sting the FBI set up to see if he was taking money from drivers he pulled over, prosecutors said yesterday. Agents arrested patrol officer _____ at his . . . home late Wednesday afternoon after a year-long investigation by the FBI and the Police Department's Internal Affairs Unit. (Newspaper #000611).

While the article later indicates steps taken to purify the rank and file (" . . [The Chief] plans to have the department's Employee Assistance Unit speak with officers . . ."), such details are found in the concluding sentence of the news item. Yet thematic interpretation is largely dependent upon story sequence, with opening sentences providing moral identifiers that quickly establish an interpretive frame (Cerulo, 1998). Interpretive transformations, therefore, require explicit and repeated thematic communication. Participants must actively provide interpretive cues to primary frameworks in order to secure the necessary transformation. Whereas Daryl – the Urbandalle PIO – consciously provided the media with the cleansing interpretive frame, the Union Creek Police Chief confessed to having never thought about presenting such a frame.

Finally, themes of rebirth and renewal also make for effective news stories on proactive policing. Although an "accident" of a different sort in that it was initially unrelated to any oversight by police, the Urbandale public information office emphasized a recent community accident to highlight their efforts to cleanse the city of gun fatalities. The following proactive news release notifying news bureaus of an upcoming news conference contains all of the elements required to transform a previously occurring accident into a policing success: sacrifice, rebirth, renewal.

NEWS RELEASE
[Urbandale] Police Department

Subject: Joint News Conference
Date: _____

Little Samantha . . . was only 10-years-old when she stepped up onto a chair and reached for a loaded .25 caliber pistol that was hidden on the top shelf of her mother's closet. The gun discharged, wounding the child's right foot. Samantha's older brother telephoned [Urbandale] Fire-Rescue and the girl was transported to the hospital . . . Similar cases occur throughout the United States every year. In many instances, the young victim dies as a result of the injuries sustained. The state of _____ prohibits leaving a firearm in a place and manner that allows yound children acces to it, and since the law's inception, 21 cases have been prosecuted in [Urbandale] County. Even when the parent is punished, the child is still dead, and everyone loses. The hard thought is that these cases can all be avoided. With the hope of stopping this type of tragedy, [Urbandale] Police Chief _____, [neighboring jurisdiction] Police Chief _____ and the National Shooting Sports Foundation (N.S.S.F.) have joined forces in project "Homesafe." . . . Project Homesafe is a nationwide program sponsored by the N.S.S.F. . . . to promote safe firearm handling and storage practices . . . through . . . the distribution of free gun locking devices. As a result, citizens of [Urbandale] will be able to come to their police departments and get a project homesafe gun lock safety kit absolutely free of charge.

Story Containment

Of course, for police to exercise information control, they must maintain control over all relevant information. That is, they must eschew the practice of withholding negative information and instead ensure that reported information emanates from official channels. Unfortunately, many departments exercise tight control over all information, viewing administrative or managerial details as "internal affairs" not publicly relevant.

This practice typically proves counter-productive as police are by definition public officials, and information gaps are almost always filled with non-official news leaks. When this occurs, police must not only respond publicly to the initial news event, but also to new claims brought about by alternate voices. Rather than story containment, withholding information inevitably creates more damaging information. The Morganville Police Department witnessed this first-hand, as the following newspaper clipping illustrates:

FATAL RAID ON WRONG HOUSE?
. . . AFFIDAVIT FALSIFIED

Did ...police target the wrong house in a "no-knock" drug raid in which they shot a man to death? And if so, did they raid that house because of falsified information on a police affidavit? Those are among the questions being asked in the police and district attorney's investigation into last month's raid. [The suspect] was shot eight times by police officers when he reportedly refused to drop a pistol he was pointing at SWAT officers who had just broken in the front door of his home. [The suspect] died at the scene. Now, some officers, according to a Monday television report, are questioning whether some information in an affidavit supporting the search warrant was fabricated, questioning whether they entered the wrong house and killed [the suspect].

. . . The officer requesting the warrant . . . said he saw an informant [go to the house] where the informant said he or she bought a "rock" of crack. [But the television] report raised the question of whether [the officer] actually saw the informant enter the address . . .No drugs were found in the house, and an autopsy showed that [the suspect] had no drugs in his system.

"There is an internal-affairs case into the shooting . . ." [a] police spokeswoman said Monday. "We never comment on internal affairs and internal investigations." (Newspaper article, #610042).

What initially began as an "accident," quickly became a "scandal" due to the failure of the public information office to adequately address the original news event. Note the limited information provided media in the following news releases:

PRESS RELEASE
[Morganville] Police Department

For Immediate Release

Date: [Day of Event]___ **Phone:** _____
Contact: _____ **Fax:** _____

At approximately 1:50pm members of the [Morganville] Police Metro/Swat Bureau were executing an immediate entry search warrant for controlled substances at [address]. The officers, upon entry, encountered an armed suspect in a bedroom in the residence. Shots were fired and an unknown male was shot and pronounced dead at the scene. The homicide unit is currently conducting the investigation.

PRESS RELEASE
[Morganville] Police Department

For Immediate Release

Date: [One Day After Event] **Phone:**_____
Contact: _____ **Fax:**_____

The [Morganville] Police Department, at this time, is not releasing any additional information regarding the shooting at [address] on [the previous day]. To this date we have not obtained a positive identification on the deceased party at the address and therefore have not notified any next of kin. We are also conducting ballistic tests on weapons and are processing other items of evidence necessary to arrive at a sound investigation conclusion to this incident. We will notify you of any significant developments as soon as they become available.

PRESS RELEASE
[Morganville] Police Department

For Immediate Release

Date: Two Days After Event **Phone:** _____
Contact: _____ **Fax:** _____

While participating in drug enforcement District Two Neighborhood Police Officers prepared an Affidavit for a search warrant to be executed at _____ Street. The [Morganville] Police Department Metro Swat unit did the immediate entry at this location. Two people were found inside this house. One person identified as _____ produced a handgun and was told to drop the weapon by [Morganville] Police, however [he] did not respond. At one point [he] started to lower the weapon but then raised it up again in a threatening manner. At this point, officers fired their weapons hitting [him]. This is all the information I have at this point thank you.

While information was undoubtedly limited at the time these news releases were issued, for both the reporter and for the public, several obvious questions remain. Why did police raid *that* particular house? Did they have information that the owners were selling drugs out of the home? Were any drugs found at the scene? Will there be a non-forensic investigation into the shooting? When can the public expect to receive more information on this matter? Ultimately, information on this matter was released; however the information provided stemmed not from the public information office, but instead from non-official sources who leaked that (a) no drugs were found, (b) the raid occurred on the wrong house, and (c) that the incident may have been the result of officer perjury. Two days following the event, at least some of this information was known to the police that,

if released, would not hinder any investigation. But as explained to me by a Morganville PIO:

> Our Department is very secretive. But once someone has leaked to the media that the [Morganville] Police is investigating some particular internal matter, we're then trying to respond and react to that. But if the information is put out there that . . . there is an investigation into that particular matter, then it won't appear as a cover up. And that's how we damage ourselves.
>
> An officer was accused of perjury on a warrant. There's probably not a day that has gone by in the last year that that has not been an issue. When I give information in regards to it, in the public's mind, probably even in the media's mind, what am I giving out? Is this one sided? And that falls in line with why I think our [image] is bad. Because before, either the chief was non-accessible [or] we weren't releasing any information in regard to personnel matters. I didn't [even] know about [the perjury allegation] until the inquiries started coming in. I think the department may have [had] information . . . and they started an investigation. It turned out the media started probing, and someone leaked some information. Then it had to be looked into further and information had to be released. It may not have happened exactly like that, but that was the image that was being portrayed. (Author interview)

Sometimes, it is not so much the actions of the public information office that fails to contain a story as it is the policies of the police administration that dictate the release of information. This was also the case in Union Creek, the other low media power department where police appeared to flip-flop on an already racially charged criminal event. According to newspaper reports, a 3-year-old black child died from fatal injuries she received after being struck by a car driven by a 19-year-old white driver. The initial police report suggested that the driver showed no signs of being under the influence of drugs or alcohol, and that despite eyewitness accounts, the car did not exceed the posted

speed limit. Therefore, the Union Creek Police Department decided not to recommend criminal charges. As reported in the daily paper:

> This led to allegations of discrimination by relatives . . . who said that police did not pursue charges . . . because she is White and [the victim] was Black. If the [driver] had been Black, they said, she would have probably been arrested on the spot. (Newspaper #008389)

Nevertheless, the department publicly defended their handling of the incident.

> Police spokesperson _____ denies the allegations and says that the police department used standard police procedure. The police were at the scene . . . and the incident was handled the same way as any similar case would be, regardless of race, said [the spokesperson]. (Newspaper #000208)

Yet two weeks later, a newspaper headline announced:

> **POLICE CHARGE DRIVER IN DEATH OF 3-YEAR-OLD**
>
> . . . [Y]esterday, city prosecutors announced that they have charged her with vehicular homicide . . . According to a police report, [the driver] was within the speed limit . . . when [the child] ran int the street and into the path of the car. City officials would not disclose the determining factors that led them to file charges. (Newspaper #000208)

The same city policy that prohibited the Union Creek police from releasing information without mayoral oversight again proved to create the appearance of departmental impropriety. In this case, it appeared that police and city officials were ignoring the

police report to quickly silence racial unrest. According to the Union Creek Police Chief, this was not the case.

> To be quite honest, our facts were wrong. If I had my druthers, I'd be very honest and candid as to why the prosecutor charged. The fact is that our internal investigators *recommended* criminal charges, based on the evidence. I should have been able to say . . . 'After a thorough investigation, interviewing all of the witnesses, reviewing the statements of the motorist, after presenting the case to the prosecutor, our recommendation was that the prosecutor charge. But there was kind of a decision made by the law department and the prosecutor not to say anything. The mayor's press secretary made a statement, which really didn't say anything. I wouldn't have clearly articulated all of the evidence, but I think it would have helped to the let the public understand that there was more to this than a young child left wandering the street and being run down by a motorist, because there was some evidence to support some criminality on the part of the motorist. (Author interview – Union Creek Police Chief)

To contain a story, then, PIOs and their departments must be forthcoming with information, good or bad. By providing reporters with official information, police ensure the details provided are both accurate and consistent, and they are able to exert at least a minimum of influence on the news item's interpretive frame. Withholding information leads to journalistic speculation with reporters likely to seek out the inevitable news leak. To overcome this possibility, Daryl – the Urbandale PIO – engages in a practice he calls "dumping:"

> There are always leaks. There are always going to be people who find out. Things happen. Well, one of the things we do in those instances is, we present it. Dump everything we can. I like to call it the big dump theory. What you do with the big dump theory is, you dump the bad news. You dump it all. That way, they don't keep sniffing and finding a fresh angle everyday. That makes that story soon history. Bad things are going to happen and bad things are of course going to be distorted from time to

> time. There's no way around it. The best thing to do is be up front about it. Tackle it head on. Dump as much as you possibly can in the beginning, and then put it behind you. I was a homicide detective prior to this. And one of the things that would happen was, if I was about to go to someone's house, and I thought there were drugs in the house, I thought there were weapons in the house, I thought all of those things were proof of a particular crime, if I could get a consent to search, my mindset is going to be one thing. But if you force me into a situation where I have to get a warrant, of course I'm going to be as thorough in the search, but the mentality will be different. I'm going to suspect strongly that you have something to hide. But when you open up and let me in, I'm going to suspect strongly that there is nothing to hide. So we're dealing with perception. (Author interview)

Coordinated Staging

Finally, the level of coordinated staging inherent in public performances inevitably determines the success or failure of accomodative treatments. As few performances are truly one character displays, impression management requires both cooperation and coordination among multiple cast members, which Goffman refers to as "performance teams." While performance teams share the same goals in projecting specific appearances, they cannot, by themselves, adequately pull-off complete performances. They require instruction from directors, choreographers, producers and stage crew. Without proper direction, characters may upstage one another, speak out of turn, enter or exit scenes at inappropriate times, or perform entirely on the wrong script page. For law enforcement, proper direction from the department administrators is essential for the maintenance of police performances and for public perception.

Poor internal communication threatens police performances, as various team players are performing from different scripts. In Morganville – a department already

troubled by news scandal – the absence of any coordinated staging during non-routine news events exacerbated the damage to an already tarnished image. Many times, the department's public information office (serving as assistant directors directly under the chief) was last to hear about re-scripted performances.

> A lot of times we're not called and we're not notified, and we don't have [any] information that [a] person is giving [an] interview, and you're stuck with the question, 'Well, according to so-and-so, this is what has transpired.' Well, if you don't have the information, you can't verify. You don't know what the person said, and it allows for the pitting of the different personnel within the department [against each other] because you have one person saying one thing and another saying another. The information disseminated needs to be as precise as possible and accurate as possible at the same time, instead of one person giving this story and another giving another story, and then you have conflict. (Author interview)

The PIO went on to describe a situation where she failed to receive new staging instructions during a high-profile media scandal. As initial direction required the department spokespersons to be tight-lipped and secretive, the failure of the revised script to reach all cast members makes performances appear sloppy:

> A few months ago there was a big story about our property bureau. Evidence was missing: drugs, guns, money, property. It became a hot topic because we weren't releasing information. This was under the old chief. Eventually, I got a call [from a reporter] asking about a press conference that was scheduled in two hours, but I didn't even know about it. (Author interview)

At other times, the public information office will be given explicit instructions from a chief or commissioner to release "scandalous" information, only to be met with resistance from other team performers:

> One reporter requested information from Internal Affairs on the officers that [were being] investigated in our department, and Internal Affairs wouldn't give the information when I requested it. When I told them the chief authorized it, they still resisted. Finally, the chief called down and said, 'Release it!' (Author interview)

Even at the Urbandale Police Department, where dramaturgical loyalty was evidently high, PIO requests for information were occasionally met with some resistance. When I accompanied an Urbandale PIO to the homicide unit to retrieve a mug shot on the day's case, the detective was quite forthcoming (albeit humorously so) about his disdain for media relations, questioning the veracity of such axioms as "the public's right to know." When the PIO and I returned to the public information office, he turned to me and said, "Be sure to make a distinction in your paper between PIO-media relations and police-media relations."

> The PIOs get along great with reporters, and we recognize the importance of media relations. But it's an ongoing challenge to convince others in the department to accept the role of media in policing. You saw it upstairs in homicide. (Author notes)

Ultimately, it is the responsibility of a department's chief executive officer to "set the stage" in terms of media communication. As the performance director, s/he is "given the special duty of allocating the parts in the performance and the personal front that is employed in each part" (Goffman, 1959:99). At the same time, the chief-as-director allocates all performance "prerogatives," of which playing to the audience via media is always an essential part.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed media impression management during times of police accidents and scandal. Accidents begin as anticipated events but result in unanticipated consequences. Scandals represent purposive events not intended for public view that, nevertheless, occur in the presence of an audience. The occurrence of accidents and scandals require the staging of special performance techniques if police are to maintain public support of policing practices. What Goffman (1959) refers to as "accommodative treatments" are collectively known by police as techniques for damage control. This may involve providing a story angle or news frame that accentuates various details, pretending that the activity was anticipated, or simply "fessing-up" and beginning anew. Concepts such as "dumping" or "story containment" build upon findings of department openness, where information provided is information controlled. The Urbandale Police Department used such techniques to avoid extended coverage of accidents or scandal. Conversely, the Morganville and Spring Lake Police – whether by intent of administrative policy – withheld information that could have shortened the lifespan of bad press surrounding police practices. While news framing represented an effective means for the Urbandale Police to minimize the harm of police related accidents and scandals, framing in no way implies the deliberate misrepresentation of facts. The final chapter examines the importance of news media in ensuring a safe and just society by focusing upon the role of the reporter in providing police accountability.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

> The future sees law enforcement becoming more and more transparent. We are sharing more and more information. We have to do this. We have to wake up and smell the roses. You have to really build relations, formulate a plan, and provide other police with information on how to be prepared and deal with media.
>
> - *Chief's Address*
> *Int'l Conference on Police-Media Relations*

Police As Performers

The thesis of this research asserts that police who adopt dramaturgical discipline as part of contemporary law enforcement will maintain a more favorable media image. With mass media increasingly guiding public behavior, police must adopt routine work patterns that adhere to these media principles. Undoubtedly, *performance* is among the principles guiding behavior in our mass mediated society. The panoptic eye of the camera lens creates a climate that can only be described as promotional. Today, the primary sources for public information are the very forums for public relations, as it is the practice of mass media to sell both policies and products. As public figures that appear on and within these promotional media, police have little choice but to posture and perform.

> We can use drama to inform the public and still be accurate . . . And if . . . cops [don't like] this, then they had better go back to a time when TV didn't exist; like it or not, we live in a media/video/showbiz world. We can either understand that and work with it or live in a bubble. (Author interview)

Yet policing has always been predicated upon promotion and performance, and the literature on policing is filled with theatrical allusions. We talk about police

performance, *staged* operations, and the *drama* on the street. The *blue curtain* – already a dramaturgical referent – has become the *thin blue line*, while the imagined wall separating actors from audience is today the *blue wall* demarcating the police from the policed. Even the very nature of police work is described less as a job than a *role*, where the *permanent rehearsal* that constitutes police work require that officers *cast* themselves as obedient soldiers. This dramaturgical conceptualization of police work is really nothing new. What is new is the uniquely "mass" mediated nature of contemporary police performances. While police-citizen "encounters" have traditionally occurred through the dime novel, the penny press or muckraking "rag," never before has the police image been accessible to so many people on so many occasions. Because of this, and whether or not by their own design, police are indeed "sharing more and more information."

Even in a climate where promotion and public relations reign, police must – above all – serve the public interest. They must never knowingly without public information, and they must never misrepresent facts. They must not sacrifice accuracy for image, and they must know when to stage a show and when to halt a promotional campaign.

> [There are times when] It's very important not to get the two jobs mixed up. Public information entails supplying reporters with accurate and truthful information. Public relations implies putting a 'spin' on information or the news . . . How do you make something positive out of racial issues or situations when police have to provide protection to women trying to enter abortion clinics? (Author notes)

Moreover, even seemingly innocuous promotional campaigns may have widespread ramifications, as one sergeant at a police training seminar explained to me:

> I get calls from *COPS* all the time requesting permission to do a show on us, and each month, I send them the same letter telling them 'No.' I have to consider the view of the city manager and local government, about how the show will impact tourism. Our city is the largest tourist site in the state. And the public isn't aware that it takes *COPS* three weeks of ride-alongs to produce a half-hour show. Even though our chief has full and final editorial decision-making power, whatever footage doesn't end up on the cutting room floor is either going to be boring, at least according to the network. Even with major crimes edited out, the remaining footage won't reflect positively upon our city. I happen to watch *COPS* frequently, and [this convention site] is commonly featured on that show. I've never been here before and expected it to be much worse than it really is, based on what I've seen on TV. But this city is beautiful! (Author notes)

Regardless of the challenges, it is imperative that police maintain public support through the daily delivery of public information. As community leaders with enormous powers and legal protections, it is foolhardy for police to expect their organization not to be viewed with rigorous scrutiny. As the eyes of the public, media are any police performers' biggest critic. It is the police, therefore, who must bend to the will of the media, placing public relations at front and center stage.

> Things are happening in this department every single day, good things. Good police work is going on in this department every day. Every corporate office has a team that is trying to figure out how best to market that particular business. Well we're a business, and not only are we a business but we're the people's business, and the people need to see that we're not only out there doing our job but that we're kind, we're caring, and we're human beings doing the job. And that's very marketable. And that's what you have to do. I mean, that's the other challenge. You can be reactive, and every police department has to do that, but how many police departments, how many people work at being proactive? Therein is the separate challenge. You create the challenge. (Author interview)

Reporters as Police

If police have always been performers, likewise – reporters have themselves traditionally performed an important policing function. In fact, the policing of government by the mass media is inextricably linked to their very inception. According to Emery's (1962) interpretive history of journalism, with the birth of the printing press came a new form of democracy as the press made a record of official actions for all citizens to see. In the British colonies, mass produced dailies were essential to the formation of a revolutionist movement, and upon the ratification of the U.S. Constitution, a free press having the ability to police government actions was essential to the establishment (and maintenance) of a just society.[20] Even before the ratification of the U.S. Constitution, colonial businessmen recognized the money to be earned by appealing to the masses, and they began a publishing tradition predicated upon the establishment of a fourth branch of government. With contemporary newspapers still possessing names like *Tribune, Sentinel, Plain Dealer* and *Examiner*, the policing function of the American press still exists today.

Ironically, given that media have historically engaged in the policing of government, it is perhaps surprising that neither the police nor the media realize they essentially performing the same job: investigative work. Mozee (1987) notes that the police-media conflict stems – in part – not from their supposed differences, but rather from their occupational similarities. Both occupations investigate wrongdoing, often relying upon informants. Both require "facts" for their version of events to be taken as

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[20] According to Emery (1962), freedom of the press is fundamentally an American law despite its roots in British custom. Whereas Parliament is authorized to revoke that right, neither the President nor Congress can abridge this freedom without first amending the U.S. Constitution.

valid and truthful. Both work to routinize non-routine events and are first to appear at the scene of accidents or scandal. Both work for "bureaus" or organizations possessing certain legal-occupational protections. Finally, both police and news organizations ultimately serve the public interest. According to Mozee (1987:142), a veteran police officer with the Chicago Police Department, recognition of these occupational similarities might be a key to the resolution of conflict that occasionally typifies the police-media relationship. "It has been my experience that once a newsperson and a police officer [make] an attempt to understand the other's point of view, cooperation is usually the result."

Negative Reviews as Police Accountability

As every performer has its critic, police must be open to criticism and willing to take it, for it is through such commentary that staging may be modified "if the situation is to be saved" (Goffman, 1959: 234). When faced with poor police performance, "You're going to take the bumps and bruises." As Daryl – the Urbandale PIO explained, "Sometimes there is no way, no other way to present it." When such performances occur, police must quickly address the staging error and emerge anew. One PIO I met working for a federal law enforcement agency provided me with the following example:

> One time, one of my agent's informants was later killed. How can our agency turn that into something positive? The best that a PIO can do is to provide truthful information to the press quickly, and just be honest. (Author notes)

Police must not, however, hide behind the blue curtain in an effort to avoid negative reviews. As explained to me by one such cameraman-turned-critic:

> [The Morganville Police] smoked us basically, pretending to take [the officer] out this way and [instead] taking him

> out the back way. These people are getting special treatment because they're part of the fraternal order or something, and it's like brother looking after brother. But these people deserve to be on film just as much as any other person. Some of the stuff that some of the guys have done are pretty serious allegations. It's our job to show the public who the person is, and it's important because these are the people that are representing and supposed to protect us. (Author interview)

Another Morganville reporter supported this view by adding:

> They view us as the media, they don't view us as the link to the public. The public has a right to know what they're doing. They can't operate in secrecy and I don't think they understand that. And they think the big bad media is snooping in their business. The truth is, the public has a right to know. There's a real problem in [Morganville]. I thin they would describe their job as to block all information. To try and hide things from us. Put a wall between the department and the media. (Author interview)

Today, while various citizens and social groups debate the efficacy of various means of preventing police misconduct, mass media remain a central means for police accountability. With image-reflexivity now a dominant part of contemporary society, Reiner (1985:139) argues that "the existence of the media as apparently independent, impartial and ever-vigilant watchdogs" is actually "conducive" to the legitimacy of the police as an institution. Knowing that media are critical of police performance, officers are driven to behave in a media-friendly fashion. Flanagan and Vaughn (1995:122) note that media coverage of an individual case of police excessive force often serves as a catalyst for a more widespread examination of police brutality. They suggest that isolated coverage of even non-routine events "can provoke discussion of topics previously ignored by the media." Ericson (1995) concurs with this perspective, adding

that media coverage of police accidents/scandals may prove useful in helping officials discover problems within their ranks.

In short, all performers make mistakes. Those committed to improving performance eagerly listen to the critic's voice, for it both shapes (and often reflects) the dominant public opinion. Recognizing the reflexive nature of media performances, they monitor their appearances as guidance for change. Negative reviews are a powerful argument for the necessity of re-staging. In this regard, the function of the press as police cannot be understated. Beginning in the 1960s, newspaper accounts, such as David Burnham's articles featured in the *New York Times*, brought about the Knapp Commission investigation into corruption within the New York Police Department. More recently, mass media were essential to bringing to light the Rodney King video produced by a non-reporter critic. In fact, as argued in Chapter 2, many highly publicized police scandals have brought about important changes to police performance, including reform era and community policing, civilian review boards, increased minority representation, and national police accreditation (see also Skolnick and Fyfe, 1993). At the same time, as police-media relations inevitably improve, reporters must not abandon their vigilance for the sake of journalistic expediency. Skolnick and McCoy (1984:547) succinctly voice the growing concern that accompanies the development of sophisticated police impression management:

> Does the PIO's usefulness undermine the reporters' capacity to engage in objective and skeptical inquiry? Or at least, does the PIO's ready storehouse of facts about particular crimes subtly divert inquiry away from the processes and procedures of policing? . . . The more qualified the police media specialist, the less independence the reporter may exert. As reporters become dependent on

> the police department, they may lose the capacity to dig independently.

These concerns cannot be overstated. As the line between public information and public relations continues to blur, reporters must reaffirm their commitment to serving as the fourth branch of government.

At the same time, PIOs must recognize the distinction between propaganda and public relations, as their job consists of increasing public support, not skepticism. In 1937, a group of American intellectuals established the Institute for Propaganda Analysis in New York City and published a newsletter to educate the public about the dangers of propaganda. They identified seven recognizable characteristics that "easily" define what constitutes propaganda: the "name calling" device where labels are employed to create an immediate judgment ("Al Smith is a Catholic. He must never be president); the "glittering generalities" device where concepts (e.g., "truth" or "honor") provide the purpose for immediate judgment; the "transfer," whereby a propagandist lobbies the authority of another in support of something the public would otherwise reject; the "testimonial" and allusion to "plain folk" suggests that the seller is just like the rest of us; what distinguishes these devices as propaganda is the conscious attempt of non-plain folk to appear as common (e.g., money barons working on a factory line for the camera); the "bandwagon" where claims that "everybody's doing it" is presented as the seller's rationale; finally, there is "card-stacking" where the communicator resorts to "lies, censorship, and distortion" (Institute for Propaganda Analysis, 1937).

While wartime propaganda is (arguably) different from more contemporary conceptualizations of public relations, Jackall (1995:351) cautions the image-makers and public opinion shapers of contemporary society to be ever conscious of the fine line

distinguishing the two. He notes that even the pressures of non-wartime organizational operations "inevitably affects to some extent managers' own conceptions of their work and of themselves, [and] public goodwill," making morality and propriety central concerns of even the most innocuous means of self-promotion. He continues to warn the public that the mediated images that appear on the television screen do not displace substance or notions of truth so much as they merely "leave them in the dim periphery of the theater" (p. 389).

Summary of Findings

1. *Municipality crime rates alone do not determine a police department's media image.* While a number of agency-specific factors undoubtedly influence a police department's public image, survey data from nearly 200 municipal police departments nationwide failed to produce a significant association between the municipality crime rate and the quality of the police image as assessed by Chiefs or their PIOs. With crime in the media a geographic constant, there is little distinguishing high and low crime communities in the headlines of local news. "Media power," then, has less to do with what is in the news and more to do with how police manage the news.

2. *Departments having police media policies and public information officers are not more likely to report a favorable media image.* Survey data failed to support hypothesis 1(a), which predicted a positive relationship between police media strategies/public information officers and a favorable media image. Most respondents indicated that their department's media policy proved "helpful" or

"very helpful" in presenting a favorable image, yet the small variance regarding the presence/absence of policies among departments makes a definitive conclusion regarding the influence of media policies on the police image problematic. And while a test for association between the presence of a PIO and the quality of the department image was conducted, it failed to provide support for predicted findings. This does mean, however, that police media polices and PIOs do not contribute to impression management. In fact, police respondents overwhelmingly felt their department's media policy proved helpful in preparing them for media communication, while almost half (49%) felt their policy proved "very helpful," in support of hypothesis 1(b). Moreover, those departments employing a media PIO were more likely to be proactive in dealing with the news media – see hypothesis 1(c) – although proactivity was not significantly related to a more favorable department image. Therefore, assumptions that police media policies and PIOs alone can improve the police image appear overly simplistic, as impression management constitutes more than policies and persons, but also behaviors.

3. *Police media policies that encourage communication with reporters at all levels are positively associated with a favorable department image.* It is not so much the presence of a media policy but the content of the strategy within that contributes to effective impression management. One such strategy that emerged as significantly and positively associated with a favorable police image is best summarized as department "openness." Those departments that both authorized and encouraged its officers to communicate with news reporters were more likely

to assess the quality of their department's image as favorable. As it is officers and not their PIOs who are first to arrive at a crime scene, their reluctance or inability to communicate with reporters creates an information gap that may likely be filled with non-official information. A policy that emphasizes a constant flow of information creates the appearance of openness and honesty and ensures police control over a story frame.

4. *Police media training plays a small but significant role in impression management.* Although survey data suggests that police media training has a rather small influence on the success of impression management, case study observations of PIOs in action suggest a level of importance not directly captured by the questionnaire. Those departments that offer media training instruction to their staff were no more likely to report a favorable media image. Moreover, of those departments that do provide media training, only instruction in conducting television interviews emerged significantly associated with a more favorable police image. Finally, those departments that do offer media training are no more likely to engage in proactive contact with news media. While these survey findings do not lend support to hypotheses 2(a) and 2(c), quantitative data was less successful in capturing the importance of media training as qualitative data. Specifically, case study observations of the Urbandale PIO staff that receive on average 40 hours per year of media training revealed behavioral practices (such as "dumping" and concern over sound bites and visuals) quite similar to those discussed in various police-media training manuals. And their success at having various "staged" events realized as news items (e.g., the "gun safety lock news

conference" and the "local heroes" story angle) supports hypothesis 2(b) and suggests a greater importance of media training than was captured by survey data alone.

5. *Political and situational factors constrain police impression management.* Case study research of four police departments produced findings that clearly support research hypothesis 3. The most convincing evidence stems from interviews conducted in the city of Union Creek, where both the police chief and individual beat reporters independently identified a similar constraint to a more favorable police image. In this case, both city politics and city policies interfere with impression management as a strong mayor often aligned himself against the police or exercised tight control over "official" information. In other instances and in different departments, occurrences of police accidents or scandals alter the dynamics of impression management. While some circumstances allow for accommodation, others (e.g., " . . .when police have to provide protection to women trying to enter abortion clinics") clearly do not. Such interviews and observations revealed that there exists no formulaic approach to impression management.

Implications for Police Administration

1. *Police administrators should not rely solely upon a police public information officer to provide the public with information.* While police have traditionally maintained a stronghold over police-related information (Ericson, Baranek, and Chan, 1989), the adoption of the public information officer marked a turning point

in the manner with which police organizations communicate with the public they serve. With newly appointed "official" police spokespersons trained in the art of media communication, many departments have indeed opened up. At the same time, they have decided to streamline information through one police representative in an attempt to control the flow and content of public information. Results from this research, however, suggest that a media policy that encourages public communication among numerous ranks and, in particular, line officers, is significantly associated with a more favorable public image. Not only does variety in spokespersons stave off the appearance of a hired spin-doctor and suggest that the department is not hiding behind a talking head, it also constitutes an occupational practicality. Many times, the public information officer is last to arrive at the scene and may not be the responding officer closest to the source of information. When an incident occurs close to airtime, reporters and camera crew may be reluctant to await the arrival of an official spokesperson and may seek out alternate voices. In this regard, departmental attempts to streamline information and avoid leaks may actually contribute to the appearance of challenging voices within the news.

2. *Police administrators should adopt a media strategy in addition to a media policy.* A policy is that which defines or restricts specific behaviors for the purpose of organizational expediency. A strategy is that which establishes a plan, method, or series of maneuvers for obtaining a specific result. Many municipal police departments have incorporated media relations into their standard operating procedures, yet the language used is often restrictive and fails to specify an

organizational goal. While policies stipulating privacy rights and the release of victim information are certainly necessary, so too is a plan that establishes means of proactive communication with reporters for the purpose of impression management. Police administrators should adopt guidelines that not only specify communication restrictions but that also delineate acceptable proactive contact with reporters and other members of the news media.

3. *Police departments should provide public information staff with extensive and ongoing media training skills.* While the need for an extensive evaluation of police-media training programs will be discussed below, it is clear from survey results that media training in conducting television interviews is positively associated with perceptions of a more favorable departmental image. Additionally, all respondents to the national survey indicated that media training was *at least* helpful in allowing departments to present a favorable media image, while a majority found media training to be *more than* helpful. The Urbandale Police Department, receiving the most regular and extensive media training of the four case sites, also displayed the highest degree of finesse in dealing with reporters. As many departments receive only a minimum of media training on a non-routine basis, it is difficult to establish with certainty the contribution to a positive image that media training plays. What seems clear, however, is that as media communication increasingly becomes the norm, police officials must be adequately prepared to meet the needs of today's media demands and formats.

Implications for Media

1. *Members of the media must maintain their vigilance as a defender of civil liberties and a source of police accountability.* As government agencies become increasingly open with information and well versed at media communication and public relations, reporters must not become wholly dependent upon "official" voices as the only legitimate news sources. Unfortunately, the norms of the news-making process already favor the politically and socially powerful at the expense of less heard challenging voices. As officials take steps to make their organizational ideologies more publicly palatable, reporters must reaffirm their commitment to maintaining government accountability. One means with which this may be achieved calls for news agencies to increase the diversity of perspectives typically quoted in the news. According to crime reporter and professor of journalism David Krajicck (2000:196), "reporters and editors would do well to wean themselves from the police department agenda and spend more time examining strategies and holding the authorities responsible for those that fail." While expediency calls for reporters to quote from official news releases and police blotters, thoroughness calls for a balanced assessment of social events.

2. *Reporters must recognize the difference between public information and public relations.* Like PIOs themselves who must take caution not to let public relations taint the accuracy of public information, reporters have an ethical obligation to ensure the accuracy of information received. As the role of the police officer

becomes increasingly similar to that of the reporter, the reporter must – now more than ever – become increasingly similar to police by checking facts, substantiating evidence, and searching for collaborative testimony. This does not mean, however, that reporters should avoid proactive input into the news-making process on the part of the police. By all means not the exclusive crime news gatekeepers, police nevertheless have access to information often beneficial to the public. Responsible journalism simply requires that reporters take an active part in the construction of a news item and not merely allow police to construct proactive stories unchecked.

3. *News reporters must report on crime in a broader context.* When police officials were asked to indicate their biggest complaint about news media coverage of their department, the most frequent response provided (35%) was that crime stories sensationalize violence within the community. Another 13% criticized media for failing to report on departmental successes. Undoubtedly, an emphasis on the former distracts from the latter and contributes to the reluctance of many departments and individual officers to be forthcoming about crime scene information. While information about local crime incidents is both necessary and informative, Krajicek (2000:195) nevertheless argues that there exists ways for his profession to tell the truth "less poorly." Such additional incident-based items might include information about whether the victim and perpetrator knew one another, whether alcohol use was involved, and information on where weapons used to commit the crime were obtained. Moreover, "If [a] crime is part of a

pattern, share that information with readers or viewers. But if a crime is atypical, that too must be reported – and prominently."

4. *Crime reporters must learn the beat they are covering.* As police are quickly learning the norms governing mass media, there is similarly a movement for reporters to learn the norms that govern their sources. Beginning in the early 1990s and perhaps part of the victim's rights movement, journalism schools nationwide began hosting professional workshops and conferences to sensitize crime reporters to the traumatic impact of both violence and its news coverage on crime victims. For example, Michigan State University's journalism department now offers as part of their curricula coursework instruction on how to interview survivors of shootings, rapes and other forms of trauma. The School of Communications at the University of Washington has recently adopted a similar program, requiring all journalism students to receive training in conducting victim interviews. Cote and Simpson (2000) who spearheaded these programs provide additional suggestions for additional education and sensitivity on the part of beat reporters. For example, they note that:

> Hospitals, police and fire departments, and emergency agencies often hold disaster drills, testing each department and person to see how rapidly and productively each responds. Whereas news media sometimes report the drills, the scenario seldom directly incorporates journalists . . . [L]eaving them out of the planning may worsen the situation. News organizations might benefit from what has been learned in "critical incident" programs (p.57).

Clearly, it remains the responsibility of both police and reporters to familiarize themselves with the work patterns and responsibilities of the people and

organizations with which they interact daily to more comprehensively serve the public interest.

Implications for Further Research

1. *Additional observation-based analysis of police-media relations.* While attempts have been made overcome the limitations of self-report assessments of impression management through the review of standard operating procedures, newspaper clippings, site visits and interviews with reporters, clearly a more objective measure of impression management is needed to assess the relative contribution of a number of factors on the quality of the police media image. Ideally, such an assessment would include a measure of public opinion surrounding departments having differing media strategies, as well as a more systematic analysis of media coverage surrounding each department over an extended period.

2. *There is a need for an evaluation of the content and efficacy police-media training courses.* While an attempt was made to evaluate the contribution of police media-training to the overall quality of police-media relations, and while survey and case study results produced mixed findings regarding the importance of media training, a more comprehensive evaluation of various media training seminars is necessary to more accurately assess its relative importance to improving the police image.

3. *Future research into police-media relations should include more site visits.* While approximately 100 hours of site visit observations and numerous and extensive interviews was conducted across four case study departments, research

findings are limited in their generalizability to other departments nationwide. The departments included for case study research were all large agencies serving large metropolitan areas purposely selected to meet research criteria. Additional research is needed to more confidently extrapolate findings to a broader population.

Conclusion

However simplified in this research, the relationship between news events and impression management is inherently tautological. As an independent variable, it is apparent from the case study research that media power is causally linked to impression management, with departments more adept at media communication similarly more adept at preventing the "appearance" of police accidents or scandal. At the same time, it is undoubtedly true that the realization of accidents or scandal as news events often determines the ultimate success or failure of police impression management. In that sense, news events are both an independent *and* dependent variable, and impression management is both the cause *and* effect of daily news events. Perhaps the most significant finding from interviews with reporters, chiefs and PIOs is that with practice, police have within their power the ability to help determine the news rather than be determined by it.

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APPENDICES

NATIONAL SURVEY OF POLICE-MEDIA RELATIONS

RUTGERS UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE

The purpose of this survey is to collect information about your department's relationship with the media. Of particular interest are the policies that regulate how and when your department communicates with the news media, the efforts made by your department to promote policing objectives through media, and the nature of your department's relationship with the news media.

When answering questions about the news media, please think about newspapers, television, and radio in your **local area** only. Upon completion, please return the survey in the pre-addressed/stamped envelope provided. All information will be treated as confidential, and will be used only for research or statistical purposes, except with your permission. If you have any questions about completing the questionnaire, please contact:

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National Survey of Police Media Relations

1. Crime and its enforcement are popular topics in the news. On average, how frequently does your department communicate with the news media?

   ❑ Monthly ❑ Weekly ❑ Daily ❑ More than once a day ❑ Not at all

2. Please list how many different **news organizations** your department communicates with in an average week.

   ___ # Newspapers ___ # TV ___ # Radio ___ # Other (_____)

3. Please list how many different **reporters** your department communicates with in an average week.

   ___ # Newspapers ___ # TV ___ # Radio ___ # Other (_____)

4. On average, how often **do you or your staff** contact reporters for the following reasons?

	Monthly	Weekly	Daily	Not at All	Other (_____)
To issue a press release	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
To schedule a new conference	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
To provide assistance with crime coverage	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
To organize a meeting with managers of local media	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Other (Please specify)	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

_____

_____

5. Does your department have a written **media policy** or **media strategy**?

❑ Yes ❑ No (Go to Q6 on page 4) ❑ Don't know (Go to Q6 on page 4)

5a. In what year was this policy or strategy adopted? _____ (year)

5b. Did any specific event prompt the adoption of this media policy? (Please specify)

_____

_____

5c. Is there a key **objective, goal,** or **mission statement** in this written media policy? (Please specify)

_____
_____
_____
_____

5d. How helpful has your department's current **media policy** been in the following areas:

	Not Helpful				**Very Helpful**	**Don't Know**
i. Preparedness when communicating with media	1	2	3	4	5	-9
ii. Ability to control news leaks	1	2	3	4	5	-9
iii. Ability to address allegations of misconduct	1	2	3	4	5	-9
iv. Ability to present a favorable public image	1	2	3	4	5	-9
v. Ability to create a positive relationship with reporters	1	2	3	4	5	-9
vi. Ability to promote department policing strategies	1	2	3	4	5	-9

Box Continues on Next Page

5e. What has been the greatest success and difficulty regarding the ability your **media policy** to accomplish the following?

Create a **favorable image** of your department:

Success: _____

_____

Difficulty: _____

_____

Create a **positive working relationship** with the media:

Success: _____

_____

Difficulty: _____

_____

6. Who within your department has **routine** authorization to communicate with media?

- ❑ Line Officers
- ❑ Sergeants
- ❑ Commanders
- ❑ Chief
- ❑ Public Information Officer
- ❑ Other (Please specify _____)

7. Does your department have an employee whose **primary responsibility** is to serve as a media public information officer?

- ❑ Yes (go to 7a) ↓
- ❑ No (go to 7b) ↓
- ❑ Don't Know (go to Q8)

7a. How many members of your agency are assigned to public information duties?

_____ # Sworn

_____ #Unsworn

7b. Since your agency does not have a member specifically designated to serve as a public information officer, who **most often** performs these duties? (Please list the title of the person(s) who perform(s) this duty. _____

_____

_____

_____

8. Does the person **most responsible** for public information duties have any formal training in media communication skills?

❑ Yes (Check all that apply) ❑ No ❑ Don't Know

- ❑ Educational background (i.e., degree in journalism, public relations, etc.)
- ❑ Prior occupational background (i.e., working in media/public relations)
- ❑ In-service training
- ❑ Other (please specify)_____

9. Does your department provide **training** in media communications for your staff?

❑ Yes ❑ No (go to Q10 page 7) ❑ Don't Know (go to Q10 page 7)

↓

9a. Approximately how many hours of media training are offered per year? ____

9b. Who within the department receives media skills training?
(Check all that apply)

- ❑ Line Officers
- ❑ Public Information Officers
- ❑ Sergeants
- ❑ Chief
- ❑ Commanders
- ❑ Other (Please specify) _____

9c. Please indicate when media training is provided by your department.
(Check all that apply)

- ❑ Police academy training
- ❑ External course training
- ❑ In-service training
- ❑ Other (Please specify) _____

Box continues on next page

9d. Please indicate the **format** of media training provided by your department. (Check all that apply)

- ❑ Video presentation
- ❑ Distribution of reading material
- ❑ Guest lecturer
- ❑ In-service coursework
- ❑ Other (Please specify) _____

9e. Please indicate the **content** included in the media training provided by your department. (Check all that apply).

- ❑ Writing a press release
- ❑ Conducting television interviews
- ❑ Arranging a press conference
- ❑ Managing information leaks
- ❑ Negotiating media coverage
- ❑ Managing coverage of misconduct
- ❑ Conducting print interviews
- ❑ Media relations during emergencies
- ❑ Other (Please specify) _____

9f. How helpful has **media communication training** been in the following areas:

	Not Helpful				**Very Helpful**	**Don't Know**
i. Preparedness when communicating with media	1	2	3	4	5	-9
ii. Ability to control news leaks	1	2	3	4	5	-9
iii. Ability to address allegations of misconduct	1	2	3	4	5	-9
iv. Ability to present a favorable public image	1	2	3	4	5	-9
v. Ability to create a positive relationship with reporters	1	2	3	4	5	-9
vi. Ability to promote department policing strategies	1	2	3	4	5	-9

Box continues on next page

9g. What has been the greatest success and difficulty regarding the ability of **media training** to accomplish the following?

Creating a **favorable image** of your department:

Success: _____

_____

Difficulty: _____

_____

Creating a **positive working relationship** with the media:

Success: _____

_____

_____

Difficulty: _____

_____

10. How important is communication with the news media regarding the ability of your department to do the following:

	Not Important	Important	Very Important	Don't Know
Gain citizen assistance with investigations	❑	❑	❑	❑
Promote crime prevention education	❑	❑	❑	❑
Build police/community partnerships	❑	❑	❑	❑
Build a positive police image	❑	❑	❑	❑
Inform the public of police initiatives	❑	❑	❑	❑

11. Although news media are often critical of law enforcement, they sometimes print stories that reflect positively upon individual officers, department policy, or crime prevention efforts. **In the past month**, about how many stories have appeared in the media that reflected **positively** upon any aspect of your department?

___ # Newspapers ___ # TV ___ #Radio ___ # Other (_____)

Below, please briefly describe the subject and content of one of the more favorable stories:

_____

_____

_____

12. Please describe the most common situations when media coverage is:

Favorable: _____

_____

Unfavorable: _____

_____

13. On a typical day, how would you describe the quality of your department's **working relationship** with news reporters?

❑ Poor ❑ Fair ❑ Good ❑ Excellent

14. Even departments that have friendly and cooperative relations with media encounter disagreements regarding the coverage of police matters. **In the past month**, about how many news stories presented a biased or unfair description of your department or personnel?

___ # Newspapers ___ # TV ___ #Radio ___ # Other (_____)

15. In general, how would you describe the quality of your **department's image** within the news media?

❑ Poor ❑ Fair ❑ Good ❑ Excellent

16. In general, how would you describe **public opinion** regarding the quality of your department?

❑ Poor ❑ Fair ❑ Good ❑ Excellent

17. Of the following, what is your **biggest** complaint regarding media coverage of your department? (Please check **only one**)

❑ Media do not understand the role of police in the community.

❑ Media reports are biased against the police in cases of alleged misconduct.

❑ Media sensationalize violent crimes in the community.

❑ Media do not report on our department successes.

❑ Media interfere with ongoing investigations.

❑ Other (Please specify) _____

_____

_____

18. Please describe what steps, if any, your department is taking to address your complaint regarding media coverage of your department.

_____

_____

_____

_____

19. Please provide the following information about your agency.

Department Name: _____

Department Address: _____

_____

Telephone: _____

Sworn Officers: _____

Your Name: _____

Your Position: _____

How long have your served at this agency? _____

20. Please use the space below to write any additional comments you have about questions on this survey or about issues regarding police-media relations.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

End of survey. Thank you!

POLICE-MEDIA SURVEY CODEBOOK

Variable	Column	Code	Explanation
Card1	1-21	1	Card1 contains agency-specific information.
POPUL	22	#	Population of municipality
OFFICNUM	23	#	Number of sworn officers
Card2	24-25	1	Card2 contains agency-specific information
PROPCRIM	26	#	Property crime total w/out arson (1999)
VIOLENCE	27	#	Violent crime total (1999)
HOW_FREQ	28		Frequency of Dept. communication w/ media
		0	Not at all
		1	Monthly
		2	Weekly
		3	Daily
		4	More than Once a Day
NEWS_PAP	29	#	Total # of newspapers agency works w/
NEWS_TEL	30	#	Total # of television agency works w/
NEWS_RAD	31	#	Total # of radio agency works w/
NEWS_OTH	32	#	Total # of other agencies
SPEC_OTH	33		Specification of 'other'
		1	Free-lance
		2	Internet/web
		3	Magazines

REP_PAP	34	#	Total # of newspaper reporters works w/
REP_TEL	35	#	Total # of television reporters works w/
REP_RAD	36	#	Total # of radio reporters works w/
OTH_REP	37	#	Total # of other reporters
SPEC_REP	38		Specification of 'other'
		1	Free-lance
		2	Internet/web
		3	Magazines
PRESSREL	39		Frequency of press release issuance in past 12-months
		0	Not at all
		1	As needed
		2	Less than monthly
		3	Monthly
		4	Weekly
		5	Daily
NEWSCON	40		Frequency of news conferences held in past 12-months
		0	Not at all
		1	As needed
		2	Less than monthly
		3	Monthly
		4	Weekly
		5	Daily

ASSISTAN	41		Frequency of news assistance provided in past 12-months
		0	Not at all
		1	As needed
		2	Less than monthly
		3	Monthly
		4	Weekly
		5	Daily
MEETING	42		Frequency of meetings w/ Media mgrs. in past 12-months
		0	Not at all
		1	As needed
		2	Less than monthly
		3	Monthly
		4	Weekly
		5	Daily
OTHERCON	43		Frequency of other police-initiated Contact w/ media in past 12-months
		0	Not at all
		1	As needed
		2	Less than monthly
		3	Monthly
		4	Weekly
		5	Daily
DESC_CON	44-56		Describe Contact
POLICY	57		Does dept. have written media policy
		0	No
		1	Yes
YEAR	58		Year adopted

EVENT	59		Did any specific event prompt Policy adoption?
		0	No
		1	Yes
DESC_EVT	60		Describe event
GOAL	61		Does policy have key goal or Objective?
		0	No
		1	Yes
DESC_GL	62		Describe goal
HELP_PRE	63		Helpfulness of policy w/ media prep.
		1	Not helpful
		2	
		3	Helpful
		4	
		5	Very Helpful
HELP_LEA	64		Helpfulness of policy w/ news leaks
		1	Not helpful
		2	
		3	Helpful
		4	
		5	Very Helpful
HELP_ALL	65		Helpfulness of policy w/ allegations
		1	Not helpful
		2	
		3	Helpful
		4	
		5	Very helpful

HELP_IMG	66		Helpfulness of policy in presenting Favorable image
		1	Not helpful
		2	
		3	Helpful
		4	
		5	Very helpful
HELP_REL	67		Helpfulness of policy in creating Positive working relationship w/ rep.
		1	Not helpful
		2	
		3	Helpful
		4	
		5	Very helpful
HELP_STR	68		Helpfulness of policy in promoting Policing strategies
		1	Not helpful
		2	
		3	Helpful
		4	
		5	Very helpful
IMAGE_SUC	69		Greatest success of policy w/ image
IMAGE_DIFF	94		Greatest diff. of policy w/ image
RELATSUC	119		Greatest success of policy w/r/t Improving relationship w/ reporters
RELATDIF	144		Greatest diff. of policy w/r/t Improving relationship w/ reporters
AUT_LINE	169		Do line officers have routine auth. to Communicate w/ reporters
		0	No
		1	Yes

AUT_SER	170		Do sergeants have routine auth. to Communicate w/ reporters
		0	No
		1	Yes
AUT_COMM	171		Do commanders have routine auth. To communicate w/ reporters
		0	No
		1	Yes
AUT_CHIEF	172		Does chief have routine auth. to Communicate w/ reporters
		0	No
		1	Yes
AUTH_PIO	173		Does PIO Have routine auth. to Communicate w/ reporters
		0	No
		1	Yes
AUTH_OTH	174		Do any other people have routine Auth. to communicate w/ reporters
		0	No
		1	Yes
PIO	175		Does your dept. have PIO
		0	No
		1	Yes
SWORN	176	#	# Sworn
UNSWORN	177	#	#Unsworn
MOSTOFT	178		Since no PIO, who handles media
FORMALTR	179		Does person most resp. for PIO Duties have formal media training?
		0	No
		1	Yes

ED_TRAIN	180		Does person have educ. Background
		0	No
		1	Yes
OC_TRAIN	181		Does person have occ. Background
		0	No
		1	Yes
IN_TRAIN	182		Does person have in-service training
		0	No
		1	Yes
OT_TRAIN	183		Does person have other training
		0	No
		1	Yes
STAFF	184		Does dept. provide media training For staff
		0	No
		1	Yes
HOURS	185	#	Approx. # hours per year offered
LINE_TR	186		Do line officers receive training
		0	No
		1	Yes
SER_TR	187		Do sergeants receive training
		0	No
		1	Yes
COMM_TR	188		Do commanders receive training
		0	No
		1	Yes

PIO_TR	189		Do PIOs receive training
		0	No
		1	Yes
CHF_TR	190		Does chief receive training
		0	No
		1	Yes
OTHER_TR	191		Other people receive training
		0	No
		1	Yes
ACADEMY	192		Training offered at academy
		0	No
		1	Yes
INSERVE	193		Training offered in service
		0	No
		1	Yes
EXT_TR	194		Training offered externally
		0	No
		1	Yes
OTHERTIM	195		Training offered at other time
		0	No
		1	Yes
VIDEO	196		Video presentation w/ training
		0	No
		1	Yes
LECTURER	197		Lecturer w/ training
		0	No
		1	Yes

READING	198		Reading materials w/ training
		0	No
		1	Yes
COURSEW	199		Training in form of coursework
		0	No
		1	Yes
OTHERFOR	200		Other form of training
		0	No
		1	Yes
PRESSIN	201		Training in writing press releases
		0	No
		1	Yes
CONFERIN	202		Training in arranging press conf.
		0	No
		1	Yes
NEGOTIN	203		Training in negotiating news cov.
		0	No
		1	Yes
PRINTINT	204		Training in conducting print Interviews
		0	No
		1	Yes
TELEINT	205		Training in conducting tv interviews
		0	No
		1	Yes
MGINFO	206		Training in controlling news leaks
		0	No
		1	Yes

MGCOV	207		Training in managing coverage of Officer misconduct
		0	No
		1	Yes
EMERG	208		Training in media relations during Emergencies
		0	No
		1	Yes
OTHERIN	209		Other topics of training
		0	No
		1	Yes
HTPREP	210		Helpfulness of train. w/ media prep.
		1	Not helpful
		2	
		3	Helpful
		4	
		5	Very Helpful
HTLEAK	211		Helpfulness of train. w/ news leaks
		1	Not helpful
		2	
		3	Helpful
		4	
		5	Very Helpful
HTALLEG	212		Helpfulness of train w/ allegations
		1	Not helpful
		2	
		3	Helpful
		4	
		5	Very helpful

HTIMAGE	213		Helpfulness of train. in presenting Favorable image
		1	Not helpful
		2	
		3	Helpful
		4	
		5	Very helpful
HTREPORT	214		Helpfulness of train. in creating Positive working relationship w/ rep.
		1	Not helpful
		2	
		3	Helpful
		4	
		5	Very helpful
HTSTRAT	215		Helpfulness of train in promoting Policing strategies
		1	Not helpful
		2	
		3	Helpful
		4	
		5	Very helpful
TRIMSUC	216		Greatest success of train. w/ image
TRIMDIF	248		Greatest diff. of train. w/ image
TRRELSUC	280		Greatest success of train. w/r/t Improving relationship w/ reporters
TRRELDIF	312		Greatest diff. of train. w/r/t Improving relationship w/ reporters
CITIZEN	344		How important is media comm. W/r/t citizen assistance w/ invest.
		0	Not important
		1	Important
		2	Very Important

PREVENT	345		How important is media comm. W/r/t promoting crime prevention
		0	Not important
		1	Important
		2	Very important
COMMUN	346		How important is media comm. W/r/t building community Partnerships
		0	Not important
		1	Important
		2	Very important
POSIMAGE	347		How important is media comm. W/r/t building a positive image
		0	Not important
		1	Important
		2	Very important
INFORM	348		How important is media comm. W/r/t informing public of initiatives
		0	Not important
		1	Important
		2	Very important
POS_NEWS	349	#	# Positive newspaper stories in past Month
POS_TV	350	#	# Positive tv stories in past month
POS_RAD	351	#	# Positive radio stories in past month
POS_OTH	352	#	# Other positive stories in past month
OTH_TYPE	353		Source of story
		1	Free-lance
		2	Internet/web
		3	Magazines
DESCRIBE	354		Describe content of one such story

SIT_FAV	355		Please describe most common Situations when coverage is Favorable
SIT_UNFA	356		Please describe most common Situations when coverage is Unfavorable
RELATION	357		How would you describe quality Of your dept.'s working relationship W/ reporters
		0	Poor
		1	Fair
		2	Good
		3	Excellent
BIASPAP	358	#	# Biased newspaper stories in past Month
BIASTV	359	#	# Biased tv stories in past month
BIASRAD	360	#	# Biased radio stories in past month
BIASOTH	361	#	# Other biased stories in past month
DESCBIA	362		Source of story
		1	Free-lance
		2	Internet/web
		3	Magazines
IM_QUAL	363		How would you describe quality Of your dept.'s image in media
		0	Poor
		1	Fair
		2	Good
		3	Excellent

OPINION	364		How would you describe public Opinion reg. your dept.
		0	Poor
		1	Fair
		2	Good
		3	Excellent
ROLE	365		Biggest complaint that media Don't understand police role?
		0	No
		1	Yes
BIASED	366		Biggest complaint that media Are biased in allegations?
		0	No
		1	Yes
SENSATIO	367		Biggest complaint that media Sensationalize violent crimes?
		0	No
		1	Yes
SUCCESSE	368		Biggest complaint that media don't Report on police successes?
		0	No
		1	Yes
INTERFER	369		Biggest complaint that media Interfere w/ investigations?
		0	No
		1	Yes
COMPLAIN	370		Is anything else your complaint?
		0	No
		1	Yes
DESC_COM	371		Please describe your complaint

STEPS	372		What steps is your dept. taking To address biggest complaint?
Card3	401-406		Agency-specific information
RANK	407		Rank of respondent
		1	PIO
		2	Asst. to Chief
		3	Chief
		4	Other
LONG	408	#	How long at agency?
COMMENTS	409		Additional Comments