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EXPLORING THE FUNCTION OF THE MEDIA IN COMMUNITY POLICING

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Abstract

Identified by the late, Robert Trojanowicz, as one of the ‘Big Six’ necessary for successful implementation and maintenance of community policing initiatives, the exact function of the media in community policing remains largely unexplored and untested. While authors of case studies have sometimes examined the degree of favorability with which community officers were portrayed in various media, none have examined media function, per se. The task of this exploratory piece is two-fold. First, general and community policing literature are reviewed in order to identify how its champions have historically viewed the media’s role in the community policing movement. The function of the media, as viewed by police, is then contrasted with the journalistic perspective of media functions in the United States. Conflicts between these two perspectives are examined and discussed. Second, results from a content analysis of media contacts with the National Center for Community Policing are presented to enhance our understanding regarding the ‘field reality’ of contemporary media’s role in the community policing movement.

Introduction

As practitioners and academics move beyond debating such topics as community policing’s definition, the organizational strategies and cultural shifts necessary for successful community policing implementation, and sources of resistance to community policing and the mechanisms to overcome such resistance, attentions turn to the, heretofore, unexamined aspects of the community-oriented era. One under-explored aspect is the function of the media in the community policing movement. The purpose of this article is to examine the nature of media’s function, per se. Within an exploratory schema (Babbie & Maxfield, 1994), the article’s intent is to raise more questions than it answers and to further the dialog related to the nature, influences, and dynamics of media’s function in community policing.

Any discussion of the media is fraught with definition problems. To the uninformed, the words media and mass media conjure up stereotypical perceptions, many often negative in nature, that bring to mind visions of a massive ‘lump’ of vulturous entities. Distinctions and definitions are in order. Surette (1992) defines the mass media as any communication medium which reaches a large number of people, simultaneously, at little cost to the receiver. Further, one needs to distinguish between print and electronic forms of media. Print forms refer to newspapers, magazines, and books, while electronic media refer to forms such as television, radio, videos, and movies. Further still, one needs to distinguish between media that is news-oriented and media that is entertainment-oriented. As a result of this multi-tiered, media order, certain comments referring to a "sensationalistic media," for example, are nothing more than stereotypical statements rendered meaningless for lack of specificity. Which specific medium is the commentator referring to? Print or electronic? News or entertainment? Such lack of discrimination is referred to, by this writer, as media confusion. Further muddying the waters is the ever-growing, media trend of blending news with entertainment, which Surette terms “info-tainment” (p. 67). Analysis within the confines of this article pertain to news media, both print and electronic.

The format of this exploration begins with a general discussion of the police-media relationship and examines historical documentation pertaining to how police have viewed the role and function of the media in law enforcement. Along the way, the police view is contrasted with the journalistic perspective - or - media’s own view.
of its function. Discussion next turns to the media’s function as it has been expressed in community policing literature. A portion of this review focuses upon the National Center for Community Policing (NCCP) at Michigan State University which is examined in two ways: first, for its print media function as a disseminator of community policing literature and, second, as a source for other media anxious to obtain community policing information. This latter aspect of the NCCP is reviewed via an in-depth content analysis of media contact forms on file at the Center and with the express objective of verifying the “field validity” of media’s function in community policing. Identified in the conclusion of this article are the components of future research needed to complete the portrait of media’s true function in community policing.

Background

General Overview of Police and Media Relations


Because practitioners and academics accept police-media conflict as a given, this acceptance may be a catalyst generating increased divisiveness, although few empirical studies have been performed to actually measure the amount of conflict between these two entities.

Use of the term ‘media’ as an all-encompassing label serves to lump all medium forms together. What is the extent of police-press conflict? The extent of police-television conflict? Police-radio conflict? Is conflict the artifact of sensationalistic news coverage or of unrealistic police portrayals within entertainment media? Readers should be cautioned that the present discussion serves only to indicate that the actual amounts of conflict between police and various media are largely unknown.

Frank (1994) provides a detailed justification for conflict in the police-media working relationship, citing various factors from portrayal of crime news to misunderstandings of each other’s roles in society. Frank cites a small perceptual study of 25 police chiefs who indicated they viewed media relations as important, but this study ignored actual conflict measures. Others who discuss conflict cite this same study, such as Guffey (1992) who refers to another perceptual piece by Altschull (1975). Altschull’s work was limited in that it only examined officers,’ reporters,’ and citizens’ perceptions and beliefs.

A 1976 study commonly referred to as the “Chiefs Survey” (Hawthorne, 1977) examined police chiefs’ attitudes toward the press (a study which did distinguish between medium types) and indicated that 35% of police chiefs expressed “friendly” attitudes about relations with the press. Singletery and Stull (1980, p. 657) took Hawthorne’s work a step further, finding that 89.4% of chiefs perceived their relationships with newspaper personnel as friendly or very friendly.

Regardless of the extent of real or perceived conflict present in police-media relations, the factor of conflict is an issue that needs to be aired when discussing any type of police interaction with the media. Specific to the topic of the media’s function within community policing, the question becomes, to what extent do proponents expect media to willingly participate in community policing initiatives? While this question is developed further in a later section, attention is presently directed to how the government has historically viewed the role of media in law enforcement.

The Government’s View of Media and Police

In the 1967 report by the President’s Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice titled, The Challenge of Crime in a Free Society, the only references to media were made in relationship to the court system and the prevention of media abuses. Within its comments, the Commission recognized the constitutionally protected conflict between media and the criminal justice system (see also Miller & Hess, 1994; Surette, 1992). That the Commission couched media relations in terms of the court system followed rather naturally as a result of two recent U. S. Supreme Court cases of the times, Sheppard v. Maxwell (1966) and Estes v. Texas (1965). Both cases involved excessive media presence at the trial stage of the justice process. In its report, the Commission highlighted the sacredly held “watchdog” function of the media which is constitutionally protected:

Newspaper, television, and radio reporting are essential to the administration of justice. Reporting maintains the public knowledge, review, and support so necessary for the proper functioning of the courts. Critical inquiry and reports by the media...can prevent abuses and promote improvements in the administration of justice. The Commission recognizes that the guarantees of both a free press and fair trial must be scrupulously
preserved and that indeed each sustains the other in a most fundamental sense. (1967, p. 137)

More specific to law enforcement, the Commission recommended the institution of standards pertaining to "the kinds of information that may properly be released to news media about pending criminal cases by police officers, prosecutors, and defense counsel" (p. 138).

In its related Task Force Report, also in 1967, slight but prescient mention was made of media and police interaction. First, the Task Force Report called for "establishing communication with the inarticulate segments of the community and the need for police to be informed about what is bothering the residents of an area" (p. 34). "Information programs and long-term education of the public" were recommended via "honest and free dialog between police and the public" (p. 159). Next, and almost in passing, the Task Force identified that "...to the extent that the police department is genuinely working at improved community relations, dissemination of this information to the press and other media does have a positive effect on community relations" (p. 159). This afterthought, perhaps, closely reflects the present police view of media’s function in law enforcement, that of information dissemination—a function which has carried over into the community-oriented era, to be further discussed below.

In 1973, several reports by the National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals under the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968 further developed the government/police version of media function. These three reports were: Community Crime Prevention, A National Strategy to Reduce Crime, and Police.

In Community Crime Prevention, the Commission noted "A public that is well informed about the policies of government and the actions of officials has the knowledge it needs to decide whether to extend or withhold support for policies and officials" (p. 43). Mentioning that some news items, especially those appearing in "times of crisis," were "inadequate" and an "unreliable basis for making judgments about government policies and integrity of government officials," the Commission suggested increased use of the media for disseminating information. Specifically, recommended were: regular radio and television coverage of official meetings and hearings; cable television access; the appointment of a public media commission "to advise the government on most effective ways of presenting issues to the public through broadcasting"; and the formulation of drug education programming (p. 44).

Interesting to note at this point, is that media coverage is actively associated with generating support for government policies and actions. Surette (1992) also mentions this media effect (note: media effect, not media function) citing Bortner (1984) and Lichter (1988). According to Surette (1992, p. 103), "broader media-influenced perceptions combine with previous attitudes and experiences to influence the public agenda with regard to crime control, which in turn translates into increased support from both the public and policy maker for particular policies."

Within A National Strategy to Reduce Crime, the Commission affirmed its earlier active views by stating that "before community involvement in governmental processes can become a reality, community members must be able to obtain information on which government decisions and programs are based...one way to do this is via the media" (p. 49). Further, unlike the 1967 Challenge of Crime in a Free Society, in A National Strategy to Reduce Crime, the National Advisory Commission viewed the police-media relationship "in a democratic society as being characterized by complementary interests...the news media have a legitimate need for information about police activities and they offer an excellent channel for informing the public about the nature of police tasks and problems" (p. 75). Not only does this confirm the dissemination of information function of the media, this statement portends community policing’s view of media’s function.

The Commission’s report, Police, noted the important role of news media and the need for police agencies to be open in their relations with the media. Aside from responding to media inquiries for information, the Commission recommended the "promotion of aggressive policies of presenting public information" (p. 44). Among specific recommendations were: "the right of the press to obtain information for public dissemination; law enforcement’s responsibility for responding to and seeking the cooperation of media; the establishing of Public Information Officers (PIOs) within police agencies; and written policy related to police-media relations during unusual circumstances" (p. 44). As in A National Strategy to Reduce Crime, Police also defined the police-media relationship as complementary rather than conflicting, a relationship different than that characterized in some of the current literature (Mozee, 1987).

Four years later, Goldstein (1977), in Policing a Free Society, reiterated earlier views of the police-media relationship. Identifying the media as one external force impacting police, Goldstein wrote, "The media—radio, television, and the press—exert enormous influence over the form and quality of police service" (p. 316). Further, Goldstein described police dependency upon the media for generating public perceptions of police and...
the “importance and complexity of the police operations” (p. 317). Two important points are made by Goldstein: first, media must be aware of the importance and complexity of police operations, otherwise they hinder change; second, media do not realize how powerful an external force they are in their ability to promote change in police practices (p. 317). Whether media understand the complexity of police operations, most notably the complexities of community policing, is still open to debate.

Contrasting the Sociological Perspective

In contrast to the National Advisory Commission’s clear message linking the importance of media coverage with informing the public (who would then be better positioned to make decisions supporting officials and policies), many have examined the underlying sociological framework which forms a more passive foundation for media-generated support. Quinney (1970) referred to this as the social reality of crime and posited that we construct this reality via “the formulation and application of criminal definitions, the development of behavior patterns to criminal definitions, and the construction of criminal conceptions which are conceptions of crime constructed and diffused in the segments of society by various means of communication” (pp. 15-23). Media, as a primary form of mass communication wields pervasive and diffusive influence on individuals’ attitudes toward “conceptions of crime” and the criminal justice system as a whole. In that Quinney posits the construction of criminal conceptions as one formative element of social reality of crime, the mass media role is a powerful one.

Building further and analyzed in semiotic fashion, the work of Ericson, Baranek, and Chan (1991, 1989, 1987) examines the news media as a primary source of social control, thus, resulting in a functionalist perspective of news media effect. Such control results from knowledge and socially constructing reality through defining what constitutes morality (or ‘deviance’) in society. While the authors’ framework and discussion would seem to implicate the writings of Manning (1987) who discusses the pragmatic aspect of semiotics, they seem to advance views more in keeping with Merton’s thoughts on intended and latent (unintended) functions. More recently, Manning (1996) explored the intensifying relationship between media-generated images of “reality” and politics (including change, i.e., policy).

Whether the ability of media to promote police change occurs in an active fashion, as suggested by government reports and by Goldstein, or via a passive route proffered by the sociological perspectives of Quinney, Manning, and Ericson et al., the more encompassing question proposed in this exploration is the function of the media. Advancing toward the community policing movement, the next vantage point analyzes crime prevention/community relations in law enforcement.

Media and the Crime Prevention / Police-Community Relations Movement

The crime prevention movement “became important during the late 1960s” and was “used by police as a public relations tactic to improve their image in the community” (Roberg & Kuykendall, 1993, p. 74). Flowing from the recommendations of earlier government reports, police agencies also began to realize the value of the media’s influence in building and reshaping their faltering image. Over the next several years “crime prevention began to take on more of a community orientation as police departments began to institute such programs as blockwatch, which encouraged residents to become the eyes and ears of the police” (p. 74). Crime prevention was closely associated, and sometimes synonymous, with police-community relations efforts.

Gaines (1994) refers to police administrators, who in the late 1960s and with the aid of Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA) monies, launched the police-community relations movement which was designed to improve law enforcement-citizen relationships. “To improve their relations with the larger community, police agencies implemented programs ranging from store front operations to youth outdoor recreation programs” (p. 20). How actively these same administrators pursued media assistance during implementation and maintenance of these programs is largely unknown. However, Project PACE (Police and Community Enterprise) was one such program that recognized the value of media’s influence in impacting change.

Project PACE, in San Francisco, was implemented in 1969 and the media referred to PACE as a “pilot program in race relations” and as a “community police plan.”"8 PACE officials viewed “mass media changes” as one objective of their broader program designed to “...progressively and constructively induce and sustain socially desirable behavioral changes among police and citizens...the behavioral modifications expected include both verbal (i.e., attitude) and performance (i.e., action) dimensions” (Eisenbert, Fosen, & Glickman, 1971, p. 5). As such, media support, including newspaper, radio, and television formats, was actively pursued and utilized to benefit police efforts and to achieve the stated objectives of the program.

It is important to note that police-media relations took on heightened meaning during the transition era (the author’s terminology) between the Reform and Community-Oriented Eras as posited by Kelling and Moore (1988). This transition era, roughly during the 1960s and 1970s was marked by prevailing, unstable social conditions, racial unrest, federal steps to improve law enforcement,
unexpected research findings regarding police reform strategies, and the crime prevention/police-community relations movement. In *Four Decades of Policing in Chicago*, Nimocks highlights aspects of this era’s police-media relations: "...photographs taken during the disturbances that were circulated around the country and the world, of police officers grappling and fighting and using their batons to control demonstrators, did not make good press to say the least. We all know that this was a period of great unrest around the country, for a lot of different reasons, and it was a time when people began to distrust and challenge governmental authority of any kind” (Geller, Goldstein, Nimocks, & Rodriguez, 1994, p. 7).

In 1968 the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders and the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence were charged with examining the urban unrest of the 1960s. Carter and Radelet (1994) summarize the implications of the Commissions’ findings:

> The implication was clear: law enforcement must establish an open dialogue with the community, deliver comprehensive services, and reexamine the traditional police organizational structure and processes. The civil unrest of that era suggested that the process was not keeping pace with social change. Policing had to adopt an approach which empathized with the community, took advantage of emerging technologies, and balanced these with traditional responsibilities. (p.61)

At the threshold of community policing’s doorstep, attention is now focused on the express manner in which media’s function has been described, specified, and in some cases absent in community policing literature.

**Media’s Function as Described in the Community Policing Literature**

Following on the heels of evaluating Flint Michigan’s Foot Patrol Program, a case study in which newspaper articles were content analyzed for their extent of favorable and non-favorable reporting on police, Trojanowicz and Smyth (1984) acknowledged the influential power of the press and recognized it as a relevant social system whose cooperation must be solicited prior to implementing a foot patrol program:

> It is particularly important to think of the press as one of the systems which should be contacted. Good press relations can generate energy and momentum for the foot patrol program, while bad press relations can damage morale and lessen the possibility of cooperation within the community. (p. 6)

Later, when discussing the necessity of holding an initial city-wide meeting, Trojanowicz and Smyth refer to the need for educating the public about the “history of the foot patrol concept and how it might be modified to suit the unique needs of the community” (p. 8). While they did not openly charge the media with direct dissemination of this information, this function was couched in the authors’ stated view of media’s role at this stage: that of spreading the word about this initial meeting in order to promote citizen participation:

> Prepare a press release emphasizing important facts. Get political leaders, prominent business leaders, and other prominent citizens to come to the press conference. Contact radio stations, newspapers, television stations - especially television stations. See if a local newspaper will do a feature story on the (foot patrol) proposal. (p. 9)

Examination of Goldstein’s (1990) work on the simultaneously evolving problem-oriented policing indicates no mention of the media. However, Hill, Stephens, Stedman, and Murphey’s (1987) case-specific report on problem-solving policing in Newport News, Virginia does reference the media but in an indirect fashion. According to the authors’ problem analysis guide, media are mentioned as one source of institutional response to a crime incident. Institutional responses are “actions of public and private agencies and organizations as a consequence of the incident” (p. 61). Further, officers practicing problem-solving were to consider in their analysis of a crime incident, the effects of the mass media as a responding agency. Such effects included: “effects of news coverage on public, victims, and offenders, sensationalism, copycat incidents, and willingness to cooperate with justice agencies” (p. 61).

Several years later, the function, per se, of the mass media in community policing was unaddressed by Trojanowicz and Bucqueroux (1990) in their first community policing text. Instead, the authors referred to mass media’s (all formats) impact or role in the changing definition of “community”; the socialization effects of violence depictions in the media; and mass media’s role in reinforcing macho images of law enforcement officers. Also mentioned, was the evaluation of articles from “four area newspapers” during the Flint Neighborhood Foot Patrol Program.

In Trojanowicz and Bucqueroux’s second book (1994), media (electronic and print) were referred to as one of the “Big Six” necessary for successful implementation and maintenance of community policing initiatives. Along with reiterating, this time explicitly, their earlier views
Different pertaining to media’s function in publicizing the initial city-wide meeting, Trojanowicz and Bucqueroux now provided precise media functions:

...The department should try to develop a working relationship with the media, so that they can assist in efforts to educate the public about what community policing is and what it can mean for the community. If nothing else, local media should be asked to help announce public meetings. Beyond that, the goal should be to identify one or more journalists whose work seems both thoughtful and responsible, and then approach them about doing a story on this great new concept called community policing - perhaps indicating how so many of their peers have missed the boat in educating the public about what this approach can achieve. (p. 24)

The Bureau of Justice Assistance, in its report Neighborhood-Oriented Policing in Rural Communities, also mentions that “every opportunity should be taken to publicize NOP activities in the local news media. An initial press release and press conference would be appropriate” (1994, p. 54).

Reviewing community policing literature specific to the implementation phase highlights the need for providing information to the public. Grinc (1994) is one of several who presents the problem of lack of information available to the public. He cites a community leader who related that “few people in the city had any knowledge of community policing and argued that, even as a well-informed community activist, she was unsure of what the police meant by ‘partnership’ and what the community’s role was in community policing” (p. 455). Goldstein (1990), in his earlier referenced work, does mention the need for informing the community but, as Grinc (1994, p. 455) points out, Goldstein specifies that “little attention has been given to the type of information provided to the public or the most effective way of presenting the information.”

Trojanowicz provided a lengthy discussion of the media’s importance during the planning and implementation stages of community policing. In an unpublished hand-out (1992) used in community policing training sessions sponsored by the National Center for Community Policing, he references the conflict between police and media, cautioning police chiefs against viewing “the press as the enemy” and noting the necessity of involving all forms of media in “educating the public about the good things that the department is doing” (p. 10). Trojanowicz’s practical guidelines included the need for chiefs to “make a concerted outreach to the press to tell them of the importance of their role in making the effort work” (p. 11).

Trojanowicz is explicit in stating the role/function of the media in community policing efforts. However, the aspect of function/role is viewed and defined by a ‘media outsider.’ Recognizing the function that media played, especially at the implementation stage, Trojanowicz also seemed to realize that this function would need to be actively solicited. He provided advice about how to cultivate and properly “sell” the media without “manipulating” reporters: “Remember that reporters resent being manipulated, and they resist what they perceive as news management” (p. 11). While Trojanowicz stressed the education function of the media at the implementation stage, he also stressed the need for chiefs to first educate the media.

The function of the media at implementation has also been addressed in an internet monograph published by the Community Policing Consortium (1997). Again, the need for educating the media is highlighted: “Before implementing a community policing strategy, the agency should communicate the concept of community policing to its own personnel and to the community, including political and business leaders and the media” (p. 10). Media function, as stated in this monograph, takes on a marketing flavor:

The media must be included early in the implementation process to market successfully the idea of community policing. Media involvement ensures a wide dissemination of the community policing message and encourages the media to stay involved in future community policing efforts; the media also will be less apt to “derail” if there is a bump in the crime statistics or if some community policing policies are less effective than hoped. If the budget allows, media consultants can be useful. The agency’s internal media relations unit should thoroughly understand the chief executive’s vision of community policing and communicate it clearly in news releases and interviews. All who are marketing the concept must be careful not to claim more for community policing than it can deliver. (pp. 11-12)

Sparrow (1988), in contrast, ignores the role of the media at the implementation phase and focuses, instead, on the police agency’s value system and culture. Related to police culture and value system within a department, Dolan raises an interesting aspect of media and community policing, that of media-induced internal backlash. As Dolan states, “police officers and supervisors embracing community policing are seen by the community as heroes, and may become minor celebrities in their assigned neighborhoods” (1994, p. 29). This can result in divisiveness within the department.
In contrast with the assumed, increased media attention afforded community officers, are concerns over ethical issues due to reduction of social isolation that some believe will promote corruption (Nelligan & Taylor, 1994). Those who have raised concerns over lack of accountability and the potential for corrupt behavior by community policing officers, strangely, have overlooked the impact of increased media attention assumed to be sought by departments promoting community policing and the historically inherent “watchdog” function of the media (Gleason, 1990). Friedmann (1989), Nelligan and Taylor (1994), Bracey (1992), Trojanowicz (1991), and Trojanowicz and Carter (1988) are among those overlooking the media’s watchdog function. Rather, these authors focus upon increased accountability to community via police/community partnership. While this partnership may indeed result in a diminished problem with corrupt behavior among community officers, partnership and the function of the media related to officer accountability remain unexplored.

Friedmann (1992) looks at media involvement in community policing in yet a different light. He relates that televised media portrayals of police and police activities may actually hinder community policing initiative because they send the message that crime is “better left to the police professional” (p. 82). Bolger (1983), in contrast, suggests police should seek public support based upon those very same reasons. Metzler and Winton (1995) cite the problem of media-enhanced images of police officers as being problematic for officer selection within community policing settings due to media-reinforced, public perceptions of what a police officer is supposed to “look” like (1995).

Ross (1995) raises the issue of media propagation of community policing as a form of police public relations: “promotion of community policing depends, in part, on a series of factors related to the operation of mass media organizations. In general, media propagation and/or cooperation are important in the use of community policing as public relations. Of paramount importance is the role of the local media, especially the working relationship between police and crime/police reporters” (pp. 248-249). Ross also cites organizational constraints within media organizations that may “preclude in-depth coverage of particular issues” (i.e., community policing) (p. 249). Manning (1995, p. 375), who has examined, in-depth, the interplay of many of the above mentioned concerns proffers that “the police are losing their monopoly and are now competing with self-help groups, private security firms, and the media for dominance in social control.” Manning terms this interplay of media, police, and the resulting elevation of police and crime issues into “national issues” as “media reality of crime” (p. 376). Manning (1991, p. 41) also speaks of “the increasing dependence of the community upon the police for ordering social relations and the increasing use of the media to influence public concern.” For Stenson (1991, p. 21), what Manning refers to as media reality of crime and the increasing use of media to influence public concern, translates into the type of influence that drives agenda setting and policy making. Influencing policy makers in the government leads to “serious funding for research.”

**Identified Media Functions in Community Policing**

Inherent within the above excerpts and Trojanowicz’s writings, are several different types of identified media functions: publicizing the initial city-wide meeting; cooperating and communicating with other members of the Big Six; informing and educating the public about the concept of community policing; publicizing public forums meant to educate the community about community policing; the writing of feature stories pertaining to the department’s community policing efforts; and initially marketing and providing sustained support for community policing.

More currently, the Community Policing Consortium, in a recent edition of its Community Policing Exchange (1996), announced the availability of a “media fact sheet,” detailing the following media functions in community policing initiatives: “increasing public understanding about community policing; increasing public support for community policing; and building public confidence” (p. 7).

**A Journalistic Glimpse into Media Function**

Analyzed from a journalistic perspective, several of these specified functions fall within the purview of how media view their function. Speaking specifically of print media, Lovell (1993) devotes an entire text to the reporting of public affairs. However, the press views press releases in a somewhat different fashion than did Trojanowicz in his earlier works. Lovell, argues that “a press release is a story written by an organization to give its point of view of an event...most releases are not used verbatim because they are considered to be self-serving, but often they provide good ideas and background for stories” (1993, p. 15). In distinguishing feature stories from news, Lovell states feature stories are “stories oriented less to recording the news than to evoking reader interest in special persons, places, or things” (p. 15). Thus, publicizing public meetings and forums, and certain feature stories clearly fall within journalistic guidelines, while providing sustained support for community policing and overt cooperating and communicating with other organizations may fall outside accepted journalistic standards. Some support for community policing may be realized if media see a “good idea” within a press release or when reporting on public affairs. It is the media, however, not law enforcement which determines whether a topic will “evolve reader interest.”

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Some law enforcement agencies, especially those that have cultivated and nourished productive relationships with their local media, have managed to (without active solicitation) receive sustained support for community policing initiatives. This sustained support comes in the form of editorials, endorsements, and newspaper articles which often focus on community policing’s impact on crime and crime prevention, especially gang and drug-related crime, both of which are standard ‘newsworthy’ staples within the realm of the media. Further, and perhaps possessing great explanatory power for media coverage regarding community policing-related news stories is how well this type of coverage meshes with the current movement in media toward ‘civic journalism.’

At the center of the civic journalism or public journalism movement is the idea that the press should help communities improve. Within what Paul Keep (1996), Editor of the Bay City Times, terms “a movement” in journalism, we find the press acting as “catalysts for change” within their communities. Corrigan (1996) notes suggested attitudes and practices that journalists should follow, according to the precepts of civic journalism: (1) journalists should offer solutions to the community problems they write about in their stories; (2) journalists should see their jobs as that of initiators of public debate; (3) journalists should get directly involved in helping solve the problems of the communities in which they report in; (4) journalists should see themselves more as participants in the democratic process, rather than as watchdogs of democratic government; (5) journalists should write more about what affects ordinary citizens rather than about the major news events of the day; (6) journalists should rely more on intense local coverage than on news from national and international bureaus; (7) journalists should not view people as potential consumers of news, but as potential actors in the democratic process who can solve community problems; (8) journalists should poll citizens and use focus groups to select the type of topics the press should cover; (9) journalists should ‘preview’ their work with the subjects of their stories to make sure they are accurately portraying the community; and (10) public journalism is an improvement over traditional journalism because it tries to report good things about disadvantaged communities rather than concentrating on the negative incidents in those same neighborhoods.

It is with a great deal of clarity that one can recognize the similarities between the precepts of community policing and civic journalism. The potential for implementing, sustaining, and marketing community policing initiatives—media functions as put forth by law enforcement—may well be realized within the realm of accepted journalism standards (functions) steeped within the current movement of civic journalism.

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**Evaluating Media Involvement in Community Policing Efforts**

Research pertaining to the actual extent of media involvement in community policing remains scant. Evaluation of the Flint Foot Patrol Project appears to represent the most extensive example of research on media and community policing. Content analyses of four Flint newspapers were performed between the years of 1979 and 1981 (Trojanowicz, 1982). A total of 1,205 articles were analyzed and several dimensions were examined. Among the findings: “the press balanced their evaluations of the police when they made any assessment whatsoever; according to press accounts, foot patrol was not a prominent or visible part of the Flint area police activity and did not increase or decrease the visibility of the Flint Police Department; foot patrol resulted in an overall positive effect upon the image of police; and articles which mentioned foot patrol portrayed much higher (positive) image of police than articles with no mention of foot patrol (pp. 183-186).

One could speculate that this last finding contributes to the amount of CPO/non-CPO divisiveness within some police agencies, in spite of the fact that officers tend to overlook that media coverage of a department’s community policing initiative serves to reflect positively upon the department as a whole, not solely on the community policing officers or community policing unit.

Also emerging out of the Flint evaluation, was the fact that 11% of the citizenry learned of the Flint Foot Patrol Program from media coverage (Trojanowicz & Bucqueroux, 1990, p. 220). Another 67% had learned about the program via direct contact with a foot patrol officer. These findings, perhaps, reflect the earlier, police, expressed function of media serving as a source of information at the planning and implementation stages of community policing.

Second year evaluation results from the highly evaluated Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy (CAPS) echo the need for media coverage in terms of informing the citizenry:

...one concern pointed out in the second-year report was that surveyed residents reported being less aware of the community policing program than they had been when polled the previous year. Skogan said this could be because CAPS received so much newspaper and TV coverage in its first year. ‘Since that time, however, he said, there has been little, if any, media attention on the program which might better inform citizens about the policing changes taking effect.’ (Travis, 1995, p. 9)
Trojanowicz et al. (1994), found that police chiefs in 48% of the departments claiming to practice community policing, had “often” encouraged local media to do feature stories on their initiatives. Further, 40% of the departments reported that their chiefs “sometimes” encouraged local media to do feature articles (p. 103). What cannot be determined from these findings, is the actual amount of articles produced as a result of police encouragement.

When queried about whether CPOs were permitted to talk to the media, 35% of the departments responded “all the time,” 23% responded “most of the time,” and 31% responded “some of the time” (p. 104). Again, the actual amount of CPO/media interaction cannot be determined from the findings.

A second research study evolving from the national survey was a content analysis of community policing definitions and community policing officer job descriptions submitted by departments claiming to practice the community policing philosophy. Because the Trojanowicz Paradigm specifies the media as one of the “Big Five” necessary for a successful community policing initiative, descriptions were analyzed for evidence of required (or allowed) interaction between CPOs and the media. Very few departments (14%) listed contact with the media as a community policing job requirement. If mentioned, the requiring department was likely to be a small agency. One logical reason for this finding might be that large departments commonly have Public Information Officers through which media access information, or Public Relations Units which deal with media personnel (Ziembo-Vogl & Woods, 1996).

In spite of the fact that much of the community policing literature fails to directly mention media involvement, whether actively sought or passively realized, information on various community policing initiatives has been received over the years at the National Center for Community Policing and has arrived supplemented with examples of media coverage of the particular agency’s efforts. One such example was a report titled, Community Policing Lumberton Style, presented at the 1992 meeting of the International Association of Chiefs of Police. While no mention was made of media’s function in Lumberton’s community policing efforts, attached to Dolan’s (1992) report were several examples of positive media portrayals of the department’s community policing initiative. Such an occurrence was the norm rather than the exception. What this dynamic suggests is that the actual extent of media involvement in community policing may be far greater than realized. Also unknown is the extent to which a department solicits such involvement or whether it is ‘freely’ given under day-to-day journalism standards.

The National Center for Community Policing

Under the directorship of the late, Dr. Robert C. Trojanowicz, the National Center for Community Policing (NCCP), originally called the National Neighborhood Foot Patrol Center served two media-related purposes: it served as a print medium via its Green Book series and Footprints newsletters, and it served as a source of information for other media. The following excerpt from the NCCP’s funding agency, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation (1987), clarified the full function of the National Center as it existed during the time frame of this analysis:

To assess the effectiveness of Flint’s foot patrol, the Mott Foundation funded two evaluations of the program conducted by the School of Criminal Justice at Michigan State University. Work on those evaluations led MSU to seek Mott Foundation funding to establish the National Neighborhood Foot Patrol Center in 1982. Recognizing the demand for information about the community policing concept, the Foundation provided the initial, as well as on-going support for the center. Headed by Dr. Robert Trojanowicz, the center: served as a national clearinghouse for dissemination of information on foot patrol programs; provided technical assistance, including site visits, to communities interested in the community policing concept; hosts three major conferences focusing foot patrol each year, and has written and disseminated numerous articles, paper, pamphlets and books on community policing. (p. 1)

This excerpt reflects the first media-related function of the NCCP. In order to assess the nature of the second function, that of serving as a source of information for other media entities, a content analysis of media contacts with the Center was performed. That analysis is detailed in the following sections.

Method and Findings

To shed light upon the field reality of contemporary media involvement in community policing initiatives a content analysis was performed on media contacts or ‘requests for information” received by the National Center for Community Policing from April 1, 1989 to April 1, 1995. The research was performed with several objectives in mind: to determine what media entities utilized the NCCP; to determine the nature of media requests for community policing information; and to determine if a clear-cut media function could be identified from the data.
While the NCCP database contains over 7,000 entries and dates back to the inception of the Center, written records of requests for information, identified by the NCCP secretary as 'contact forms,' began to be recorded and filed in 1990. Between the years of 1983 and 1990, staff only monitored the number, rather than the nature, of contacts and reported those numbers to the funding agency, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation.

According to NCCP staff present during the years 1983 to 1995, only database entries listing specific, individual names resulted from true information requests. Listings containing generic titles, such as "Editor" or "Mayor" were downloaded by a staff person when the database was initially developed. As such, only those true information requests were analyzed.

The overall sample size (total number of information request forms) for all national and international contacts was 4,454. Domestic requests from 49 states, the Army Post Office (APO), and the District of Columbia (DC) numbered 4,180; international requests from 23 countries numbered 274. Table 1 shows the greatest number of domestic requests were received from California (n=428) and, as might be expected due to the location of the NCCP, from Michigan (n=389). Table 2 shows Canada (n=192), followed by Australia (n=27), dominated international requests for information.

### Table 1. Domestic Requests for Information Received by the National Center for Community Policing, 1989 - 1995.

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n=4,180

### Table 2. International Request for Information Received by the National Center for Community Policing, 1989 - 1995.

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n=274

### Media Requests for Information

Domestic media inquiries numbered 155, with contact forms on file for 81 of those inquiries. There were no media inquires among the international entries. When analyzing media information requests forms by year (note: 1989 & 1995 were partial years), the peak year for media requests to the NCCP was 1994 with 34% of all requests, perhaps reflecting the impact of President Clinton's Crime Control Act of 1994. The three years of 1992, 1993, and 1994 accounted for 78% of all media requests.

Media requests for information were also analyzed by medium. Analysis resulted in five categories of media: magazine requests (n=7; 9%), newspaper requests (n=48; 59%), radio requests (n=5; 6%), television requests (n=13; 16%), and a category termed 'other' (n=8; 10%). This category was a catch-all for requests from entities that did not fit the mainstream media formats, such as media consultants, a media-based Silent Witness program, and several private writers. The largest percentage of requests came from the newspaper medium. This is supportive of the literature, which indicate police agencies should and do contact the press for assistance with their community policing initiatives.

Media requests were last analyzed by the method of information transmittal that was requested of the NCCP staff member. Categories were: faxing information, overnight delivery - which included Federal Express and Airborne Express, a phone interview with Trojanowicz for the most immediate access to community policing information, mailing of information, and the combination of phone access to information with mail follow-up. Data were then collapsed into the two categories of "immediate (n=22) and non-immediate (n=26) information requests. This is not surprising considering that newspapers comprised the greatest number of cases. Further, the newspapers produce a mixture of story types, shorter daily news articles and longer, more detailed feature articles. Newspaper reporters have both short production deadlines, such as for daily stories and longer production deadlines, such as for once a week or once a month feature articles. Indeed, one newspaper reporter put his request in writing, stating that he was gathering background information for a story to appear six weeks hence.

The press or newspaper category of medium was the format comprising the greatest proportion of both immediate (n=22) and non-immediate (n=26) information requests. This is not surprising considering that newspapers comprised the greatest number of cases. Further, the newspapers produce a mixture of story types, shorter daily news articles and longer, more detailed feature articles. Newspaper reporters have both short production deadlines, such as for daily stories and longer production deadlines, such as for once a week or once a month feature articles. Indeed, one newspaper reporter put his request in writing, stating that he was gathering background information for a story to appear six weeks hence.

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When isolating the television format, all requests were immediate (n=13) in nature. In fact, NCCP staff were recurrently told (via comments noted on the contact forms): “I need a quick brief...just give me the ‘nuts & bolts’; “I’m doing a story for today’s (or in some case, tonight’s) show - please fax me some information.” One television reporter demanded, “I need this stuff, now.” The urgency of these comments reflects the shorter time constraints inherent within the television medium. Requests from magazines (n=3, immediate; n=4, non-immediate) and radio (n=3, immediate; n=2, non-immediate) were less frequent.

Conclusion

In light of the issues emerging from the literature review and content analysis of the NCCP database, the need for additional research falls under two categories which parallel the earlier discussion of active media involvement and passive media involvement.

Active media involvement suggests dynamics most closely identified with the operational (and operationalized) aspects of law enforcement and media interaction. It refers to the historically developed, ‘official’ government perspective reviewed earlier and to the type of information sought by our most recent federally-funded effort examining the media’s “role” in community policing. It is unknown if the term role equates to function as discussed within this article. As reflected in NIJ Awards Under the Crime Act: Fiscal Year 1996, active media involvement can be thought of as “the strategies police departments use to market their community policing efforts and their success rates” (1997, p. 6). Active media involvement can also be defined as ‘intended’ or openly solicited by law enforcement agencies. Research needs specific to active media involvement would include: (1) determining if media involvement serves the stated functions identified in community policing literature, such as informing and educating citizens; (2) determining how vigorous police departments have been in pursuing media coverage and cooperation in their community policing efforts; (3) determining why some police departments have been successful in cultivating media cooperation pertaining to community policing efforts and why others have failed; (4) determining the extent to which police departments use media formats such as newsletters and local cable access to promote community policing and the success of these media efforts; (5) determining the type of media cooperation (newspaper, television, cable, etc.) most effectively enhancing community policing efforts; (6) determining the extent to which media coverage contributes to divisiveness within police organization; and (7) determining the impact of various media at each phase of the community policing process: planning, implementation, and sustained support.

Passive media involvement suggests those latent outcomes which tend to be difficult to measure. These are the outcomes which more closely parallel the views and issues raised by Quinney, Manning, and Ericson et al., as opposed to the operational aspects referred to earlier. They include but are not limited to: (1) determining the impact that media involvement in community policing has on influencing citizen’s “conceptions of crime” (Quinney); (2) determining the actual extent of passive media involvement with community policing agencies; or stated differently, to what extent has media involvement sustained community policing and legitimized social control (Manning) unintentionally?; and (3) determining if, and to what extent, media attention serves to empower citizens and how this empowerment assists or hinders law enforcement. Does media involvement nourish the building of community and community consensus?

Underlying these ‘active’ and ‘passive’ research categories are several issues through which the topic must be assessed or filtered. Determining why media have been cooperative or non-cooperative will require an examination of the local social relationships existing between the two organizations—social relationships of trust, exchange, and conflict—which vary from department to department. Actual levels vs. perceived levels of social relationship dynamics will need to be considered if information is to be relevant.

In a similar fashion, the impact of organizational culture, both social and economic, will require consideration. Is the medium involved in civic journalism? Is its bottom line driven by economic concerns hinged to the number of readers, viewers, and listeners and advertising? Is the historical culture of the police agency cooperative or hostile with local media?

The current trend of decreasing crime and media’s understanding and portrayals of this issue may serve to either hinder or assist the community-oriented movement. Other service agencies have reported (anecdotally) that their local media look to attribute lower crime rates to the simplest factor, that of more officers on the streets or tougher sentencing requirements, without focusing similar on the innumerable other associated reasons such as local community initiatives and grass-roots efforts, police and community partnerships, education programs, and so forth. Is there validity to their claims?

Perhaps most important, is the issue of which agency (law enforcement or mass media) defines the term ‘function.’ Will research assume the function of the media in community policing efforts in terms of how criminal justice defines the word, or, will research be driven and defined within the historical, parameters of how the media world defines its proper functions? Analyzing media...
contacts with NCCP provides a new but limited illumination in terms of function. Media requested information about community policing for immediate and (in a few cases) long-range stories. This is in keeping with one of law enforcement's identified functions for media involvement. What remains unknown is what actual function the receipt of this information served in terms of the media's perspective. This is, truly where the need for clarity is greatest and where explanatorv power is maximum when, law enforcement assesses why media involvement did or did not live up to expectations.

1 Anonymous statement from a newspaper reporter (Zielmo-Vogl, 1996).
2 For a full discussion of this function see Gleason (1990).
3 Defined in the Task Force Report as minority members of society.
4 This statement has special community policing implications if viewed in light of Critical Social Theory. Refer to Trojanowicz and Bucquoy (1994).
5 Although not within the scope of the present examination, "visualizing deviance" and maintaining social control are latent rather than intended functions. What is absent from Ericson et al.'s examination is an understanding of the etiology of news media function from the perspective of the discipline actually performing the function.
6 We see the artifacts of both in current day, community policing initiatives.
7 Interestingly, a term used by Trojanowicz when discussing the roles of a community policing executive.
9 The "Big Five" consists of: the police, the community, the media, political leaders, and other social agencies (Trojanowicz et al., 1994).
10 When responding to the 1994 Community Policing: A Survey of Police Departments in the United States, law enforcement agencies often submitted copies of news and feature articles pertaining to their local initiatives. One agency submitted a video that had been produced in conjunction with a local television station.

Community Policing Consortium (March/April, 1996). Media facts sheets now available.


14 This statement supports the argument that community policing is not a permissive term.

15 Flint's Foot Patrol Program, rather, it focused on the extent of favorability of newspapers).

16 Media, police, community, elected civic officials, the business community, and other social agencies comprise the Big Six.

17 The Bay City (Michigan) Police Department is one such example.

18 Interestingly, a term used by Trojanowicz when discussing the roles of a Community Police Officer.


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6 We see the artifacts of both in current day, community policing initiatives.
7 Funded by the Ford Foundation.
8 This is one of the earliest references to the phrase "community policing."
9 This statement supports the argument that community policing is not a replacement for traditional policing, rather, community policing enhances and builds upon traditional practices.
10 This analysis, did not identify the function of the media as it related to Flint's Foot Patrol Program, rather, it focused on the extent of favorability toward police.
11 While journalism and non-journalism literature is replete with interchangeable uses of the terms press and media, Trojanowicz and Smyth's (1984) use of the term "press" suggests the newspaper medium. Later using the more inclusive term "mass media," the authors specify various formats (radio, television, newspapers).
12 Media, police, community, elected civic officials, the business community, and other social agencies comprise the Big Six.
13 The Bay City (Michigan) Police Department is one such example.
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