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Brief Note From The Chair

I will be leaving office as the Chair of the Police Section in March of this year. We have had two very successful annual meetings and expect to have a successful and productive meeting this year in Seattle. We have identified over 50 sessions that should be of special interest to those of us in the police section. I have all ready highlighted those sessions that I am particularly interested in. Note that the Police Section General Business Meeting is scheduled on Thursday, at 3:30 – 4:45 in the Aspen room. Please try to attend! I am looking forward to seeing some of our West Coast members, who have not been able to attend the meetings that have been in the Mid-West and East.

We have been unable to find what we believe is a current version of our Section Constitution and By-Laws. It may be that we will need to make the appropriate revisions of the copy that we do have, which could be more involved than the changes/revisions that were planned last year. We will than need to submit those changes to the general membership. If this has not been resolved by the Annual meeting, I will volunteer to undertake this endeavor and promise to complete it by the end of this year. If that ends up being the case, I will be contacting some of you for input and assistance in this endeavor.

At this point we have received nominations for at least one of our two Police Section Awards. We have not had a recipient for the "Outstanding Service Award" in several years. Please consider the selection of one of our members for this Award, if you feel that they are sufficiently deserving of it. As I discussed last year after the annual meeting, it would be nice to recognize some of these recipients while they are still alive, as both of the two previous O. W. Wilson Award recipients were Awarded posthumously. Both Jim Fyfe and Carl Klockars could certainly have been recognized before they passed away.

I would like to express my and the formal Police Section's appreciation to Lorie Rubenser and Jeff Rush, the Editors of the "Police Forum", for what I could only define as a very successful and productive year in its publication.

I would also like to express my and the formal Police Section's appreciation to Dennis Kenney. Editor and Robert Taylor, Deputy Editor, for their work in the publications of the "Police Quarterly". Thanks guys!

C. Allen Pierce

The Role of Citizen Surveys in Responsive Policing

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Introduction

With the advent of community policing, police agencies have sought to become more responsive to citizens' needs and to create a partnership with the community. A cornerstone of the philosophy is that the public and police jointly identify and address quality of life issues so that they can be rectified. Attendance at town hall-style meetings by police personnel, neighborhood crime watch programs, and other such initiatives have sought to create the community partnership necessary to solve and prevent crimes.

Police administrators currently review data such as reported crimes, clearance rates and citations issued in an attempt to decide where resources should be allocated. In the absence of a business-type environment in which losses and gains are more easily determined, administrators are in need of another tool that would assist in deploying personnel and programs to a particular geographic location or problem. Without the constant feedback of sales and production figures that are more readily found in the private sector, the police must actively solicit reviews and opinions of the public in order to provide themselves some information upon which they may make necessary adjustments to their operations.

One such tool may be the community survey, which solicits information from the community to judge the department's overall performance and to make suggestions as to how it can be improved, in addition as to what the citizens feel are the "problems" that need to be addressed. Through the use of citizen surveys, we believe, police administrators may be able to evaluate the effectiveness of current programs through citizens'subjective measures, and possibly reallocate resources to address concerns that had previously received little or no attention.

The purpose of this paper is to provide a literature review of citizen surveys and the results of their implementation thus far. Theoretical background and past practices will be examined across the spectrum of public administration's, as well as criminal justice's, experience with the subject. Through this two-discipline approach, a greater understanding of the tool will be gained which may possibly result in the construction of a grounded, proven and effective survey to be used for this author's organization.

A former Harrisburg, Pennsylvania city police officer was sentenced recently for repeatedly stealing and smoking crack cocaine from the department's evidence room. One issue in this case was the theft and consumption of an illicit substance; the overriding matter was what the possible repercussions would be for the local law enforcement community. According to Dauphin County District Attorney Edward M. Marsico, Jr., "the defendant crippled many drug prosecutions and cast a bad light on law enforcement as a whole" (Decker, 2005, web). With the increased publicity of a police officer's arrest, a concern is that local citizens will have the perception that all Harrisburg City officers are of, at the least, lower moral standards than the rest of society.

Bayley (1996, 42) reminds police administrators that the police are only as good as the public believes them to be. He indicates that in 1999, 79% of people had no contact with the police in the previous year; yet, it is likely that most people have firm beliefs as of how effective, good, professional, etc. their police department is.

If not from personal encounters with officers, where are these beliefs rooted? Bayley suggests several sources, from trusted friends and families to media accounts of the police.

Two of the principles of perception are size and repetition (Hellriegel & Slocum, 2004, 67-68). These characteristics help determine what will be noticed by an individual, and they are frequently manipulated by the media. For example, the website for the *Philadelphia Daily News* (2005) includes a section entitled "State Cop Scandals." This link guides the reader to over 60 stories ranging from minor misconduct to sexual assaults by Pennsylvania State Police (PSP) Troopers. All of these stories had originally appeared in the newspaper, some with large and damaging front-page headlines. In addition, editorials have been added to the public relations nightmare in Philadelphia, with the *Daily News* calling the PSP an "insulated, undisciplined, sex-obsessed good ol' boys bureaucracy" (No radar love, 2005, web).

With Philadelphians constantly reading stories of PSP malfeasance, in addition to name-calling by the editorial staff, what kinds of perceptions do citizens have about troopers? It is reasonable to assume that with the size of the front-page headlines and the frequency of the paper's demands for radical change in the organization, line officers are being affected. Citizens may possibly adopt a halo effect, where they will focus on one characteristic and be blinded by that single descriptor (Hellriegel & Slocum, 2004, 78). PSP Troopers may have unalterable assumptions made about them in the Philadelphia region from the paper's barrage of stories and editorials. Obviously, some effort needs to be put forth as far as personnel training and selection procedures to prevent further problems, but a larger issue is what serves as a barometer to the public's satisfaction with a particular organization.

A method is needed in which administrators can reach a true sense of the public's sentiments toward their organizations, instead of possibly biased stories and editorials. Stipak (1980) addressed the power of citizen surveys some time ago, claiming that they can create change, and that they can help managers become aware of the political climate in which they function (522).

In Goodsell's (2004) polemic on bureaucracy, he identifies citizen surveys as having an important role in a democracy. Of course, a crucial attribute of a government "of the people, by the people and for the people" is that it knows what the people want. Goodsell illustrated another important role of the citizen survey, that being the determination of what people truly believe about the performance of their government. He argues against the common misconception that the populace is dissatisfied with bureaucratic government. In his research, an interesting finding surfaces: people generally have a lower opinion of local government in general than they do of specific government services (25). This leads to his belief that recent experience with specific services creates a more favorable impression with citizens, rather than relying on sources such as media, the dangers of which are indicated above, and word of mouth. To these authors, the findings stress the need to be in contact with the citizens and, furthermore, to gauge their opinions to allocate resources to address public desires.

Brudney and England (1982) compare outputs (objective data, such as numbers) to feedback (subjective data, such as surveys from citizens). They call attention to some of the drawbacks to citizen surveys in the public administration culture. First, survey results do not match objective measures (i.e. how much garbage was collected, police patrol miles). This highlights the need for qualitative results. Imagine a citizen who has the garbage collected in a timely manner, but the workers always leave a few pieces of rubbish behind in the street. Certainly, the number of tons hauled away may indicate success, but the citizen is dissatisfied with the added inconvenience

imposed from the organization. Second, according to Brudney and England, the citizens lack sufficient knowledge of government to judge it; this type of elitism, of course, is a parallel to literacy tests in order to vote. Brudney and England then agree with Goodsell's (2004) view that such surveys are essential in a democracy. They state

"In a society committed to democratic norms, the views of the citizenry—no matter how (ill)-conceived—are significant in themselves (129)."

In a review of current methods of performance measurement, Holzer and Yang (2004) reviewed various programs in use throughout the country at the present time. While discussing citizen surveys, they found that the public is sometimes able to identify a core group of needs for each city service, such as response time and legal compliance of officers (23). Administrators may assume they understand what the public's main concerns are, but they are able to reach a more definite conclusion with the use of citizen surveys. The surveys may reinforce preconceived thoughts of administrators or possibly redirect the organization toward the true concerns of the citizenry.

In discussing the outputs of an organization, Brudney and England (1982) advise that the collector can simplify the data and choose what to report. An example of this would be measurement of customer complaints about employee courtesy at a water company. If a citizen complains to a manager about an employee's conduct, and the manager immediately addresses the issue and remedies the problem at hand, the citizen will leave satisfied although he/she was upset with the employee to a degree that he/she reported the situation to a manager. Since no "formal" measure was used, such as filing a written complaint, the number disappears if the manager does not document it. If organizations take such objective data into account for supervisory reviews, the manager may be cognizant of that and not document the confrontation.

Additionally, Brudney and England (1982) explain the dangers of managers becoming overly concerned with efficiency, the "maximization of output for a given level of input," and effectiveness, the "achievement of goals or objectives" (131). They pose that the dual goals of responsiveness and equity of service should be taken into account, as they are essentials of a democracy. A manner in which to gauge these goals is through actively reaching out to the consumers through the medium of citizen surveys. As Whitaker agreed, "it is necessary to allow the people being served to provide standards for evaluation" (1974, 760). Whitaker calls researchers to work through the imperfections found in citizen surveys to reach the key objectives of measuring responsiveness and equity.

Morgan (1979) calls attention to the lack of the free market controls over quality service in government, and the added focus it should place on listening to the citizenry, "In the absence of the market mechanism of price and competition, democratic governments would seem to be under special obligation to make their operations as sensitive to the public as possible (173)." "Customer" complaints and praise should be given strong weight, and public administrators will need to be proactive and actively engage citizens in performance reviews. Brudney and England (1982) suggest citizen surveys, public hearings and citizen advisory boards as means to reach the ends.

The Philadelphia Police Department has embraced the citizen advisory board concept with their Police District Advisory Council (PDAC). In this program, citizens speak directly to the commissioner and command staff about issues affecting their community(Philadelphia Police Department, n.d., web). The responsiveness of the department is seen in the public's ability to speak to the top official in a department of

approximately 6,900 officers through the PDAC program.

Wells, Horney and Maguire (2005) researched one component of Brudney and England's (1982) suggestions, that being citizen surveys. Seeking a deeper understanding of citizens' perceptions about the police, Wells, et al. (2005) examined the Lincoln, Nebraska Police Department (LPD), which already had a citizen survey program, and sought to gauge the impact such surveys have on an officer's behavior towards citizens (courtesy and professionalism) and the officer's performance, which was rated by a supervisor. The department had originally given officers a monthly review of citizen surveys for the individual officer. Of interest, is that the officers had to consent to be involved in the surveys, so the entire department did not participate. The survey was not to be used for personnel decisions, rather, as a "professional development tool" that was seen by no one other than the officer being rated (179). The Quality Service Audit was constructed by researchers from the University of Nebraska at Omaha, a representative of the Gallup Corporation, and LPD officers, including one union representative.

The study sought to report on officer encounters with citizens who had been cited, involved in a crash or who had been a victim of a crime. The results showed that there was no effect on the attitude of officers or on supervisor ratings for LPD officers who knew they were being rated by the citizen surveys. The study concludes that citizens who were cited had less favorable ratings of officers compared to those involved in crashes and who were crime victims (Wells, et al., 2005, 189). This seems to call attention the dual role of LPD officers as enforcers and helpers. Citizens may become, in a sense, victims of LPD officers when they are cited for traffic violations. Involvement in a crash or becoming a victim of a crime may be a traumatic experience, and it is possible that citizens found the officers to be the calming force in the situation. Also of importance, the study does not indicate whether the drivers involved in crashes were also in the group that was cited. Crashes frequently result in one party being cited, and having that information may have given further clarity to the results.

A change that the LPD administrators found was that officers had habitually informed crime victims that they would contact them in the future and then did not. The survey results called attention to this, as the citizens were disappointed when the officers did not follow through on the promise. There was a department-wide discussion about this issue, and it resulted in officers either following up more or not making the promise to call at all. Showing that an organization is engaging its citizens is crucial for positive relations.
"Citizen surveys are a valuable source of information about how citizens perceive the police…the mere act of surveying citizens can be viewed aspart of a larger effort to improve the relationships between the police and the communities (Wells, et al., 2005, 196)." The authors also note that conducting these surveys is a sign to the LPD officers that citizens' opinions are an integral part of the organization, and that the department values their perceptions.

The notion of creating a positive environment with citizens by asking about their perceptions through surveys is echoed by other authors. Glass (n.d., 5) concluded that, among its other uses, citizen surveys indirectly send a message to citizens that the government is interested in their opinions. Watson, Juster and Johnson (1991) reviewed the city of Auburn, Alabama, which has a citizen survey program in place. The article describes how the local news media heavily publicizes the news release of the survey's findings. The media announcements about the public's opinions would seem to be in keeping with Glass' statement, further showing to the public that its opinions are valued.

The original survey was first constructed by the Department of Political

Science at Auburn University. After its completion, it was reviewed by a community group for questions that might be interpreted as somewhat biased. Watson, et al. (1991) point out that this review by the citizens gives the survey added credibility in the eyes of the public. The survey's reception by the media and the public echoes the Wells, et al. (2005) study by illustrating the public response of showing that the government cares about citizens' opinions. An added benefit, according to Watson, et al. is that five out of nine city council members reported using results of the citizen survey to influence their budgeting priorities. Here the government's responsiveness, and how it affects the formal budgeting process, is seen. The effect that disconfirmation may have had if the council members ignored the survey results is not explored, but it is assumed that it would result in negative publicity for the members, in light of the positive media coverage the survey enjoyed.

In a comparison of objective, thought of as numerical values, and subjective measures, viewed as survey research, Brown and Coulter (1983) posed a system of variables that possibly lead to various satisfaction levels with police service delivery. The authors examined the subjective variables of satisfaction with police response time, treatment of people and perceptions of equity of protection—satisfaction with police protection in one's own neighborhood (52). It was found that the more a citizen is the victim of crime, the less satisfaction there is with response time and treatment; yet, the citizen still feels that protection is not better in other neighborhoods. Citizens who were not crime victims had a higher rating for the three subjective variables. The authors attribute this to the dichotomy of client versus consumer, with the latter being in need of police service due to negative experiences, while the former does not need to call for the service at all.

Brown and Coulter (1983) found that the best indicator of satisfaction is the citizen's involvement with local government; there is a positive correlation between the two. The study also contains a hypothesis that twenty years later evolves into "disconfirmation theory." The authors hypothesized that the higher a citizen's expectations of police service delivery, the lower they will become when the expectations are not met. In their closing comments, they seem puzzled about the finding and call for future research into the matter. "Perhaps one important reason why objective service conditions do not affect satisfaction levels is that citizens interpret objective service conditions through their subjective service expectations. Citizens may evaluate what they get in terms of what they expect. Future research should explore this possibility (57)."

In examining the private sector for customer satisfaction rating techniques, Van Ryzin (2004) discusses the expectancy disconfirmation model, which he claims has never before been utilized in citizen surveys. "The model views satisfaction judgments as determined—not just by product or service performance—but by a process in which consumers compare performance with their prior expectation (434)." With organizations such as the National Academy of Public Administration and the Government Accounting Standards Board calling for more focus on citizen surveys to measure government's performance, Van Ryzin believes there is a need for studying the surveys with this private sector theory. The private sector seems to be advanced in collecting pertinent information about its customers, as Walker (1994), states, "by monitoring sales trends and customers' buying habits, private sector managers receive almost continuous feedback" (47).

Van Ryzin (2004) utilized data from the 2001 Survey of Satisfaction with New York City Services (SSNYCS) for his study. The survey asks respondents whether their expectations for the quality of New York City services from a few years prior have been met or not. The study also asks participants to rate specific city services, such as fire service, streets, etc. Van Ryzin

then creates a solution to measure disconfirmation (438): QUALITY (of service) – EXPECT (expectation) = DISCONF (disconfirmation).The citizen's expectations from years ago will be subtracted from the perceived quality of service. This will gauge at what level, if at all, there was disconfirmation.

The finding is that what a citizen expects (EXPECT) and what they experience (QUALITY) becomes a significant determinant of the overall satisfaction judgment (Van Ryzin, 2004, 442). Van Ryzin recommends that administrators should raise citizen's expectations for the quality of city services. The author admits that performance is a significant variable in the overall process, but that the expectation level is as well. The implications of this theory for administrators are considerable. When municipal services are facing possible cutbacks of service, administrators should not warn citizens of difficult times to come, thus implying they should lower their expectations. Based on the theory, the author suggests that a positive expectation with negative performance will lead to more negative disconfirmation than lowered expectations and positive performance. A difficulty in the theory is that an administrator seems to be putting him/herself in a precarious position by publicly raising expectations for a service with the possibility that objective indicators will later show that the quality of service is declining.

Two important subissues arise in Van Ryzin's (2004) study: media coverage and use of demographics. He notes that media coverage may be a factor in a citizen's decision about satisfaction of a service. With the arrest of the Harrisburg officer noted earlier, it seems plausible that residents of the city may weigh such a heavily publicized case into their decision of how they feel about the Harrisburg Bureau of Police. Additionally, the SSNYCS only categorized respondents geographically, by each of the five boroughs. The study does not include demographics such as race, age and sex. Brown and Coulter (1983) had indicated that blacks had historically rated government services lower than did other groups, and that may have played a significant role in determining the results of the study. A resolution later adopted by the National Academy of Public Administration called for more focus on demographics: "1. c) develop procedures for establishing realistic performance evaluations that take into account the influence of client characteristics, local conditions, and other factors beyond the control of program staff (National Academy, 1991)."

Turning the focus again to police-related studies, the demographic of race is a crucial factor in citizen surveys. Engel and Calnon (2004) discuss two types of citizen surveys: information about interactions with police and those that create baselines for traffic stop data (107). The study focused on racial profiling and, thusly, information about a driver's age and race is a central variable in such a study to detect possible prejudice. Sims, Hooper and Peterson, (2002) also focused on the demographic of race, among other factors, to determine citizens' views of Harrisburg police officers. In their review of the citizen surveys, Sims, et al. found that blacks had a more positive view than did whites. This is in contrast to Stipak's (1980) assertion that minorities have a less favorable view of government services. Sims, et al. believe there may be a begrudging reliance of blacks on police, as they are the ones who are the most frequent consumers of these services.

This harkens back to the finding by Wells, et al. (2005) in the LPD, where those who were involved in crashes and were victims of crime gave higher ratings of officers than did those who were issued citations. The blacks in the Sims, et al. (2002) study may be viewing the Harrisburg officers in their "helper" role, which causes them to be seen more favorably. The main issue is that through the use of demographics, such as race, public administration can open new opportunities for understanding citizen surveys.

Another benefit of citizen surveys, according to Kelly and Swindell (2002) is that they provide another measure of job performance. As seen above, Sims, et al. (2002), Stipak (1980) and Wells, et al. (2005) seek further knowledge in underlying issues such as race. Kelly and Swindell (2002) suggest that objective performance measures may be closed off from realizing all sides of a given service. "Inputs, efficiencies, and outputs typically are collected and reported asadministrative performance measures, while citizens' evaluations are likely to be based on outcomes that are meaningful to them (613)." If, for example, a city looks at the number of miles that its streets department plows in neighborhoods during snowstorms, it may produce a large number that administrators find indicative of effective service, in that "a lot of work" is being done. A survey may elicit a more qualitative response and rate the streets department low for reasons such as not completely plowing the street or plowing citizens' vehicles under when the department did not give citizens adequate time or warning to move vehicles off of the street.

What Kelly and Swindell (2002) found in their review of 30 citizen surveys from various cities, is that the higher the objective measure, the lower the satisfaction with the service. For example, in areas with high violent and property crime, the citizens' satisfaction declined; this occurred even in areas with high clearance rates for arrests. In addition, the more money spent on road maintenance, the lower the satisfaction with the roads in the city studied. The authors believe that the more a citizen needs a police service, the more likely they are in a neighborhood where the police need to "do more." In areas where there is low crime, the police are called on for service less frequently; therefore, the police are being effective in that area by preventing crime altogether. The objective measure of arrests may be low, precisely because no arrests need to be made. This satisfaction with the police may be found in a subjective survey, because it is an effective method to measure crime that is not happening. Insofar as the roads, this author believes that the more spent on road repair, the more roads are closed and citizens must take lengthy and inconvenient detours. Again, satisfaction will likely be highest when the road repair service is not needed at all.

An issue that surfaces in Kelly and Swindell's (2002) review of the surveys is that there is a lack of uniformity in the survey methods (614). It therefore becomes more difficult for administrators to have an objective method to survey, for example, road maintenance scores across several jurisdictions. Wholey and Hatry (1992) discussed the feasibility of performance monitoring programs in public administration, and gave the recommendation to use preexisting data to lower costs of such studies (609). An example of this is at the federal level, in the form of the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR), which are crime statistics that are filed with the federal government by local and state police departments. The reporting system demands that local departments fit their reporting methods into the federal government's model, which creates the desired uniformity in reporting.

This lends itself to the option of accreditation, which is becoming a popular concept with police departments. Accreditation agencies, such as the Commission on the Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA) review a police department's policies and operations and mandates that they follow minimum, uniform policies created by the accreditation commission (CALEA, n.d., web). The benefits vary from lower insurance costs for departments to greater accountability of departmental practices. Most importantly, in terms of this paper, is that there is a minimum level of uniformity that could be used to create some commonality in citizen surveys in the field. CALEA (2004) requires that a citizen survey be conducted a minimum of every three years, and that it survey opinions on:

"overall agency performance; overall competence of agency employees; officers' attitudes and behavior toward citizens; community concern over safety within the agency's service area as a whole; andrecommendations and suggestions for improvements (45.2.4)."

While concerns of citizen survey structure and implementation certainly validate lengthy discussion, an area that has received less attention is how well public administrators are able to predict what the citizens truly want. Melkers and Thomas (1998) thought the issue to be important, as administrators are charged with accomplishing the public's goals. The authors begin by extolling the benefits of studying managers' prediction accuracy. As stated previously, using the surveys could show managers where they have possibly fallen out of touch with the public will, and increase interest in citizen surveys by adding some type of "shock value" when the actual and predicted results are compared (328).

Melkers and Thomas (1998) performed their study in Atlanta, Georgia and tested administrators from various departments of government, including police and water. The water department's administrators predicted citizens would be more satisfied with the drinking water than they were, and the authors attributed this to the administrators possibly relying on technical indicators of water taste which the public did not use to making their evaluations (333). Here the difference between objective and subjective performance measures, and the completely different scores they can yield, is seen.

Police administrators had predicted that citizens would feel safer downtown than they actually did; the authors claim that the administrators based their assumptions on objective measures of arrests, etc. (Melkers and Thomas, 1998, 331). Also, citizens felt that they were seven or eight percent more safe in their neighborhoods than the administrators had predicted. This suggests that administrators may have been misallocating resources to neighborhoods instead of downtown districts, or that they were not adequately publicizing their results through the media to the public. Finally, the authors address the role the news media has in creating fear in the public:
"Citizen perceptions, by contrast, may reflect media reporting of crime in cities, reporting which often helps to produce an excessive fear of crime in cities (333)." Again, the need for administrators to effectively communicate with the citizens presents itself. By creating a dialogue with citizens through surveys, and the results of those surveys compared to objective performance indicators, administrators can either redirect resources or offer proof to the public that their fears are unjustified.

Conclusions

The main focus of this paper was to be limited to citizen surveys and issues therein. A subcategory that quickly arose was the importance of an organization's relationship with the media. As illustrated by the examples of the PSP and their failure with the *Philadelphia Daily News*, and the success of Auburn, Alabama relationship with their local media, public relations should be a key concern for administrators. The research has indicated that the public may not have enough, if any, direct experience with an organization to form a grounded conclusion as to whether goals are being met. Instead, media accounts, sometimes in the form of negative editorials, may fill in the void. This points out the need for administrators to engage the surrounding environment and put forth positive information and expectations about the effectiveness of their agencies.

Goodsell (2004) noted that the public is more satisfied with specific governmental programs than with the general concept of government itself. The finding suggests that administrators may need to place more effort in not only communicating their program's value to the public, but in asking the public's opinion about specific programs. With shortcomings between objective and

subjective measures, citizen surveys may fill the gap of understanding that administrators may currently lack. In addition, this dialogue not only improves communication which might lead to implementation of more responsive programs, but it fosters the type of community partnership that the community policing concept demands.

The benefits and drawbacks to citizen surveys have been reviewed in this paper, and it is our opinion that the tool is more valuable than previously thought. In the sense that it may possibly produce new ideas from the public, create greater responsiveness and strengthen police-community bonds, the citizen survey seems to be part and parcel with the community policing concept. It seems that the basic areas addressed by the CALEA standards provide strong groundwork in addressing concerns common to all departments, in that it allows minor adjustments to be made for specific organizations, while focusing on major concepts. Including some level of uniformity is a major key, as mentioned in the brief discussion on accreditation, which will lead to the creation of more meaningful statistical analyses, whose implications will not be limited to one jurisdiction due to poor formatting.

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Be sure to look for the featured panels that are being set up by the Police Section.

Also, don't forget to come to the Police Section meeting for exciting section news, awards and officer voting. We want to turn out in force to show our appreciation for Allen as he steps down as chair and to show our support for Jim Golden as he assumes that position.

Media Coverage of the Cincinnati Riots and Implications for Law Enforcement Public Relations

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Public Relations for Law Enforcement: Implications of the Media Coverage of the Cincinnati Riots

On April 7, 2001, Cincinnati police officer Stephen Roach shot and killed area resident Timothy Thomas, an apparently unarmed man wanted on misdemeanor charges. This incident ignited a powder keg of violence and mayhem in the city, as angry citizens burst onto the streets in protest. When the smoke cleared a week later, Cincinnati residents were left to dig out from some of the worst rioting in the city's history. The present study is a case analysis of the media coverage of the events leading up to the Cincinnati riots. It examines how the media presented the Timothy Thomas shooting, and how police tactics in dealing with the incident could have contributed to the eventual riots. It also looks at the police statements after the riots to compare coverage before and after the devastating event. The paper concludes by offering some simple public relations strategies police can use to reduce the likelihood of similar events happening in the future.

A cursory inspection of local newspaper coverage in the three days before the riots reveals the progression of the ways in which the story was framed. On day one, the *Enquirer* focused primarily on the larger, potentially incendiary circumstances surrounding the shooting. One headline read, "Officer shoots, kills suspect: Man was unarmed, wanted on misdemeanor charges." The account of the incident was then immediately framed in light of past instances of police violence against Cincinnati residents, particularly African-Americans. Residents and citizens groups immediately responded to these accounts, expressing outrage about what happened in the story. The Cincinnati police, on the other hand, initially provided only basic and limited factual information about the incident (Vela, 2001), and took three days before getting an account of a formal press conference into the papers. This delay proved problematic, as angry citizens had already taken to the streets in protests and riots. At the press conference, details and specifics regarding police and witness accounts of the shooting provided by the police were kept under wraps, while the information disclosed dealt primarily with the security reasons associated with their unwillingness to release information.

This response appears to be in stark contrast to the response from area citizens, concerned parents, and civic leaders. On day two of the coverage, a story with the headline "Mom Asks: Why?" appeared. In this particular story, Timothy Thomas' mother and other residents demanded that

the police address their relationship with the African-American community. Unfortunately, the response to these demands came too late, and at great cost.

The stark and striking disparities across these headlines and stories raise the obvious concern of what effects they may have had on the local audiences that read them, especially in a time of heightened racial tension in the city of Cincinnati. Contrasting the images put forth by members of the community and representatives of the police department may answer some questions about public opinion and civic response to the shootings. Given this disparity, the present study seeks to present a theoretical background on media effects and public relations practices, identify relevant aspects of crisis communication, analyze statements made by the Cincinnati Police Department, and discuss the implications of these statements and future directions for research.

Media Coverage and Effects

News media coverage of high-profile events such as police shootings is guided in part by economic considerations. The *economic theory of news making* says the probability of an event becoming news is inversely related to the expense involved in discovering its existence and positively related to anticipated interest among audiences that advertisers are seeking to reach (McManus, 1988). To increase the profitability of their commodity (i.e., news), journalists and editors often employ specific strategies to maximize audience interest.

One such strategy is sensationalism—the more sensational an event seems, the greater the likelihood of its coverage (Jeffres, 1994). Police shootings have an inherent element of sensationalism, and they can be made even more so by how they are framed and presented. A *social frame,* for example, places an isolated incident (e.g., a police shooting) into a larger societal context (e.g., all recent police shootings). *Style of presentation* can also increase the impact of a media message on audiences. Specifically, (a) intensity of language (Walker & Meyer, 1980) and (b) sequencing of content (Yarborough & Gagne, 1987) have been found to relate positively to (a) perceived importance of information and (b) information recall. After Timothy Thomas was shot, one headline exclaimed "Cop Kills Black Suspect: Cincinnati police gave no explanation why an officer shot an unarmed 19-year-old in Over-the-Rhine" (Vela, 2001). This headline reflects all of the sensationalistic elements described above: it contains the emotionally charged phrase "cop kills black suspect" (language) and then proceeds to focus on the lack of police explanation and victim being unarmed, with no mention of the circumstances of the shooting (sequencing of content).This type of framing could potentially have a strong effect on viewers.

Priming theory (Jo & Berkowitz, 1994) offers one explanation for such effects and how they occur. According to priming theory, exposure to an event via the mass media activates related ideas, thoughts, and memories with a similar meaning for a short time afterward. These thoughts, in turn, can activate other semantically related ideas and action tendencies. For example, a person who reads a news story about an unjustified police shooting may recall their own negative experiences with the police, which can then "activate" a desire to lash out against the police or similar others. Several intervening variables may positively facilitate this relationship, including identification (e.g., with a same-race victim of police violence) and the reality of the depiction (i.e., news events lead to greater priming than fictional events).

There are several elements of the media coverage of the Timothy Thomas shooting that could have contributed to the riots. As mentioned, the first story about the shooting in one major source made it seem unjustified by focusing on the unarmed suspect and lack of police response. In addition, the lack of police response was framed against vocal and impassioned responses from pro-Thomas sources,

including the victim's mother (e.g., O'Neill, 2001). The above statements are all speculative, however, so the immediate goal of the current study is to empirically evaluate police responses before and after the riots, in light of public relations theory on how to appropriately respond to potential crisis situations and deal with the public in general.

General practices in public relations and crisis management

Over the course of the last fifty years, a sizable body of research has emerged in Management, Media Studies, and Communication literature examining ideal courses of action for organizations attempting to establish and maintain a particular image in the eyes of the public. These approaches have been extended beyond private companies to include organizations as diverse as non-profit groups, educational organizations, and various governmental agencies. Little attention has been paid, however, to the study of ideal public relations maneuvering in the context of law enforcement. In particular, image maintenance for law enforcement agencies during crisis situations and instances of public outcry has gone largely uninvestigated. The following review will examine some of the general principles and maxims of ideal public relations endeavors, both in everyday and crisis scenarios. This information is presented for juxtaposition against the tactics engaged in by the Cincinnati Police Department between April 8th and April 12th 2001, in order to identify lessons that can be learned from the Cincinnati riots and police response to the Timothy Thomas shooting.

PR Basics

Fundamentally, public relations is the concept of using the news media to create or maintain free publicity for an organization, and the utility of this free publicity to maintain image and relationships with the communities it serves (Alcalay & Taplin, 1989). One advantage to this approach is that it not only allows for the dissemination of large amounts of community relations content to diverse audiences, but that it is often considered to be more credible than paid advertising because it comes from an "objective" source. However, misquotes, edits, and reporter bias often skew the information presented in press conferences and press releases, thus making this process a risky one. It then becomes especially important for organizations such as law enforcement agencies to develop some sort of tangible public relations plan, tailored for both everyday and crisis scenarios, in order to ensure that the intended image and information is accurately and completely presented to the public in the most effective way.

Before deciding on an image or relational message that is intended to be conveyed to the general public, the agency in question must first determine the groups it is trying to appeal to (Kotler, 1972). These "multiple publics" are usually identified as groups that may have a direct impact on the agency in question, or in the case of law enforcement, may be the groups served by the agency and who may have differing opinions and viewpoints about the agency. This audience segmentation may also extend to include the differences in demographics, media use, socioeconomic status, attitudes, geographic dispersion, and distribution channel availability (Murphy, 1984). In other words, stakeholders must be identified, their attitudes and interests must be analyzed, and the best media outlet for reaching them must be assessed before any actual campaign work can be executed.

Once these procedures have been executed and a general assessment has been made of messages to convey and channels to use, the organization in question is faced with a second challenge: image building and maintenance. These challenges include making the issue newsworthy, positioning the stance taken by the agency, and accentuating the fundamental messages

necessary to building an image in the public eye (Alcalay & Taplin, 1989). This also includes the recognition that all information released through the mass media will set a particular agenda, and that the management of what will information will be kept and retained becomes and important one. It is important, however, to note that information may have to be divulged in order to satisfy the needs and interests of particular stakeholders, without compromising the image building endeavors of the agency. This compromise is often a challenging one, and presents one of the most difficult dilemmas faced by those in the public relations industry.

In crafting these messages and providing the information necessary to instill a particular image in the public consciousness, Center and Jackson (1995) offer a series of suggestions regarding the content of these messages. Of particular interest to law enforcement, they offer that appeals to audience self-interest are often the most effective; in other words, determining a message that will establish an image or organizational attitude in a way that benefits the audience (such as reducing uncertainty or dissuading fear). Furthermore, audiences respond more favorably to situations in which they understand the decision making processes at work, such as the legal channels relevant to a high profile investigation. The messages must also be explicitly stated (within the maximum extent allowable by the law), rather than vaguely alluding to processes and decision making methods. Center and Jackson also offer that the passing of time makes messages less salient in the minds of the public, so occasional reminders are necessary in order to maintain an image or position.

Additionally, when faced with a hostile audience, two key factors emerge. First is receptivity to both sides of an argument; audiences tend to be more willing to listen to messages that concede to or validate their concern, even if the agency is attempting to change their opinion. Further, in times of crisis people become especially sensitive to public leadership. It is thus essential that contact is established with opinion leaders in various communities and that the concerns and issues they publicly air are addressed directly. Community leaders can work for or against the establishment of an organizational image, so it is best to make every attempt possible to win over these individuals and frankly and openly address their concerns.

Crisis communication

Past definitions of a crisis have specified these events to be “a specific, unexpected, and non-routine event or series of events that create high levels of uncertainty and threaten or are perceived to threaten high priority goals including security of life and property of the general individual or community well being” (Seeger, Sellnow & Ulmer, 1998, p.233). Weick (1988) defines crises as “low probability/high consequence events that threaten the most fundamental of goals of the organization. Because of their low probability, these events defy interpretations and impose severe demands on sensemaking” (p. 305). Unexpected events such as the Timothy Thomas shooting may be especially volatile sources of stress, fear, and uncertainty of those who are affected by the crisis, either immediately or by association.

The very nature of crisis events leads to uncertainty responses in individuals associated with the crisis. High levels of uncertainty may create what Weick (1995) calls a “cosmology episode”: when individuals suddenly and deeply feel that their immediate surrounding and accompanying experiences are no longer rational, orderly systems. Weick (1993) claims that statements such as “I’ve never been here before, I have no idea where I am, and I have no idea who can help me,” illustrate the fundamental human response to extremely uncertain and potentially threatening events (pp. 634-635). In order for individuals to maintain the capacity to think and behave rationally under these circumstances, they seek certainty and

predictability. This drive for certainty and information is a major consequence of crisis (Berlyne, 1960). This drive is especially strong when outcomes involved with the uncertain events could be potentially rewarding or harmful (Heath & Gay, 1997), and in situations where the potential risk is largely or completely uncontrollable (Miller, 1987). In any case, the implication here is that immediate action must be taken under such circumstances in order to subvert any hostile responses from those seeking to restore order to their experiences.

A crisis usually starts with an easily recognized trigger event and ends with a resolution and perception of a return to a previous state of normalcy. The trigger event, in this case the shooting, indicates that the current surroundings are moving in an unknown direction which is incongruent with routine experiences. The condition of crisis continues until a resolution is reached. Understanding the development and lifespan of crises is necessary for the design and delivery of communication messages. Several models exist that explain the crisis life cycle, including Barry Turner's (1976) six stage model, and Pauchant and Mitroff (1992) five phase crisis management model. However, recent research suggests that a three stage model is more flexible for communication of crisis events (Coombs, 1999; Ray, 1999; Seeger, Sellnow & Ulmer, 2003). This approach involves characterizing the life cycle of crises as encompassing the pre-crises, crises and post-crises stages. This allows other more limited and more variable sub-stages to be addressed within the three broad stages (Coombs, 1999).

The crisis stage begins with the trigger event, followed by the recognition by stakeholders that the crisis has occurred. This stage is further characterized by three conditions. The first is the recognition of potential loss of a high-priority goal or item. Second, uncertainty and surprise emerge concerning the cause and consequences of the crisis. Third, decisional pressure is experienced as response time increases. Individuals' capacity to correctly process information and make rational decisions is often seriously reduced when compared to individuals operating in everyday situations. Decision theorists add that high stress situations may result in the isolation of important sources of information, and thus decision makers may cut themselves off from important information required to interpret the event (Gouran, 1982; Seeger, Sellnow, Ulmer, 2003). Other conditions associated with this stage include high levels of uncertainty, confusion, disorientation and shock, and increased levels of stress.

In general, when uncertainty represents danger, as is characteristic of crisis, individuals immediately engage in information seeking (Brashears, Neidig, Haas, Dobbs, Cardillo & Russell, 2000). They turn to a variety of sources, and will constantly update their information. Mass media outlets, such as news sources, can be expected to be the dominant source (Murch, 1971). This is likely because on the whole, the news media is (rightly or wrongly) thought to be an objective, valuable and timely source of information (Heath, Liao, & Douglas, 1995). The public's need for information makes it essential for communication during and about the crises to be specific, ordered and distributed through a channel which is accessible to those seeking information. Further, the nature of the threat of the crisis may be so overwhelming that members from varying publics involved perceive the circumstances as hopeless. This is evident in how the crisis event disrupts the routine activities of everyday life. Routines are inevitably disrupted in such a way that established routine interpretation frameworks are inoperative or ineffective.

Obtaining information facilitates two sets of remedial processes (Seeger, Sellnow & Ulmer, 2003). The first of these allows individuals to observe the way others behave in the crisis situation. This is known as the solidarity function of the media (Press et al., 2002), when the media serves as a bonding function between individuals and society through the reinforcement of social norms.

The press may also be used at this time to reduce the tension and anxiety that is characteristic of reactions to crises. Through hearing the interpretations of others that have experienced the events, even those with contradictory viewpoints, individuals are able to engage in sensemaking. Additional research suggests that formal leaders, in this case the police chief or public information officer, play a central role in helping others understand what to think and how to interpret the ongoing events (Seeger et al., 2002).

Second, the presentation of this information will facilitate specific remedial responses. The ability to take some action during a crisis brings about a sense of empowerment, thus creating at least the impression that the individual has some kind of control in the situation. This action, when taken by the individual, further contributes to his or her ability to engage in sensemaking. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention make the suggestion that anxiety can be limited in a crisis if useful information is provided concerning the nature and scope of the problem, followed by information about what the public ought and ought not to do (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2002).

Historically, the end outcome of crisis response has generally been more negative than positive. The current study suggests that this too was the case with the Cincinnati riots. The interests of some groups are always overlooked in reactions to a crisis, leaving many uninformed about the specifics of the event or planned responses from those in key positions. As Weick states "[t]o sort out a crisis as it unfolds often requires action which subsequently generates the raw material for sensemaking and affects the unfolding of the crisis itself" (p. 305). Part of the challenge is to provide messages that are specific enough to enable individual behavior, while at the same time being flexible enough to address chaotic and uncertain conditions. Regardless of a message's effectiveness in meeting these challenges, it must be disseminated quickly under crisis circumstances in order to at least provide the opportunity for individuals to engage in sensemaking. As we will see later, this was not the case with the Timothy Thomas shooting.

Additional considerations

In addition to appealing to public concern and opinion leaders, there are several other maxims of effective public relations work that pertain directly to crisis situations. Linke (1989) identifies four major types of crises, the first of which is the exploding crisis. Crisis scenarios such as the Timothy Thomas shooting and public unrest in Cincinnati fall under this category in which there is little doubt that something abnormal has happened that will impact the community directly. Second, immediate crises include those that happen quickly but for which the organization still has some time to prepare, such as an inaccurate press report, government hearing, or pending trial verdict. Third, building crises are those that can be anticipated, such as labor negotiations or responses to changes in policing tactics. Finally, continuing crises are those that are ongoing and show no signs of resolving any time soon. This distinction is an important one to draw, as it varies the amount of time and action that can be taken in response to a crisis situation.

Furthermore, certain principles of communicating with the media and the public become especially important in times of crisis. First and most importantly, some sort of crisis response plan must be in place to deal with such an event. Linke (1989) points out that this is almost an act of organized chaos, as crises tend to unfold spontaneously and no two are the same. Nevertheless, a basic plan of action must be in place to deal with the event and make the public aware of the organization's position on it. In instances in which the crisis may sway public opinion against the organization, face-saving messages must be implemented as soon as possible in accordance with this crisis plan. Typically, this plan will include a

basic set of policies and authorizations consistent to all possible crises. These may include policies regarding who may speak to the press, the organization and timeline for press conferences, and detailed accounts of the types and content of information that may be disclosed to reporters. It should also include a list of press contacts and civic leaders to whom messages can be delivered as soon as possible in order to address the crisis. Linke (1989) adds that having contacts and channels in place to move quickly is essential, as in the world of public relations perceptions are reality: if there is bad news the best thing to do is say it yourself, and as quickly as possible, in order to minimize potentially damaging rumors and innuendo. Of equal importance is to have some kind of standing rapport with these contacts; positive relationships should be established with key audiences *before* a crisis occurs in order to facilitate this process.

Fearn-Banks (2002) also adds a number of suggestions for the messages that must be promptly delivered to the press and to key stakeholders. The first, and one that is often unobserved by law enforcement spokespersons, is to avoid the statement "no comment" at all costs. A statement of no comment is almost universally interpreted by the press and the public as an admission of guilt or that information is being concealed. It is the suggestion of the current authors that in instances in which the law prohibits the disclosure of information (gag orders, juvenile cases, etc.), that these legal principles be explained in full to the press in order to avoid even the interpretation of a statement of no comment.

Additional suggestions are also forwarded concerning the content of crisis communication messages. The first is to avoid cover-ups to the extent possible, and admit mistakes when they occur (Fearn-Banks, 2002). Additionally, cases in which the agency may be at fault, it is important to remind the press that the situation is being worked on and that the well-being of all those involved is of the utmost concern to the agency. It is also recommended that the agency take a highly cooperative approach with the media, articulating exactly what is known about the crisis and that efforts are being taken to find out more. Finally, it is recommended that such statements be made by a high ranking officer or Public Information Officer who may already be recognizable and considered a credible source by the press and public.

In summation, there are several key components identified in Public Relations research as pertaining to responses to crisis situations. They are presented here as ideal types against which to compare the actions of the Cincinnati Police Department from 4/8/01 to 4/12/01, the days between the initial reporting of the Thomas shooting and the beginning of the riots. It is not the goal of the current case study to vilify the CPD; rather, our goal is to identify mistakes that were made in the handling of the case in hopes that law enforcement agencies can learn form this case and better prepare themselves for crises and potential unrest among the public they are entrusted to protect. To address this goal, an ad hoc content analysis was performed on media coverage in the two major Cincinnati newspapers during this timeframe, in order to shed some light on the public relations implications of statements made by the police. The following broad research question is offered to evaluate the public relations efforts taken by the Cincinnati police department in the days immediately following the Timothy Thomas shooting:

RQ_1: How timely and effective were the messages of the Cincinnati police department, as evidenced in local newspaper coverage, of providing the opportunity for sensemaking and defusing of potentially volatile public response?

Search Method and Sample

A search was performed on the websites of the two major Cincinnati newspapers (The Cincinnati Post and Cincinnati Enquirer). Two search terms

were used: “Timothy Thomas Shooting” and “Cincinnati Riots”. The searches were constrained between the date the shooting was reported (4/8/01) that the shooting occurred and the rioting began (4/12/01). These searches returned a total of 48 articles regarding the Timothy Thomas shooting and surrounding events.

Coding

Two graduate students served as coders on the current data set. An initial test of reliability was conducted on ten percent of the articles in the sample. Intercoder reliability was firmly established, as Scott’s Pi calculations revealed levels of reliability in excess of .90 for all included variables.

The coding scheme was kept to a simple quantification of message sources, general tone, and message content elements. Four sources of police statements were coded. These were police spokesman, police chief, unknown or other police source, and police union. The tone of each statement was coded as being calming, neutral, or inflammatory. In addition, each statement was coded as containing or not containing the following elements: no comment, no comment with a reason, acknowledgement of the community’s concerns, appeals to community leaders for calm, concession of mistakes or shortcomings on the part of the police, and condolences to the family of Timothy Thomas.

Results

Overall, 16 (33%) of the articles contained police statements. To facilitate analysis, the articles were grouped by the day that they were published. On 4/8/01 the initial report of the shooting was the only article that was published. This article contained a statement from an unidentified police representative that was neutral in tone and also contained a no comment response. Additionally, the article contained a statement from the police union that was inflammatory, acknowledged community interests and reassured due process.

On 4/9/01, no articles were published that contained police statements.

On 4/10/01, three articles were published that contained police statements. All three articles contained statements from the Chief of Police. All of these statements were neutral in tone and included responses of no comment with a reason. One statement expressed condolences to the Thomas family, and one acknowledged the concerns of the community. Two of the articles contained statements from an unidentified police source. Both of these were neutral. One contained a statement of no comment with a reason, and one expressed condolences for the Thomas family. One of the articles contained a statement from the police union. This statement was neutral.

On 4/11/01, five articles were published with police statements. Three of these contained statements from the chief. All of these statements were inflammatory. One contained a statement of no comment with a reason. One acknowledged community concerns, and one appealed to community leaders to maintain calm. Two articles contained statements from the police spokesperson. Both of these were neutral. Three of the articles contained statements from an unidentified police source. Two of these were neutral in tone, and one was inflammatory. One statement conceded a mistake on the part of the police, and one appealed to the community leaders to help maintain calm.

April twelfth was the morning after the riot. On this day, seven articles that contained police statements were published. Five of these contained statements from the chief of police. One of these was inflammatory, two were neutral, and two were calming in tone. One statement of no comment with a reason was reported. There were three appeals to community leaders to maintain calm, and two acknowledgments of community concerns. One statement from the police spokesperson was reported. This statement was neutral in tone and acknowledged community

concerns. Three statements were attributed to unidentified or other police sources. Two of these were neutral and one was calming in tone. One contained an appeal to community leaders to help maintain calm, and one acknowledged the concerns of the community.

Discussion

In evaluating the actions of the Cincinnati Police Department and their interactions with the news media in the days leading up to and immediately after the riots, this ad hoc analysis reveals great potential for improvement, in line with the general maxims of good crisis communication outlined in the opening pages. The first, and perhaps most obvious of these, is the control of information and spokespersons. Fearn-Banks (2002) suggests that the number of spokespersons for any organization in a crisis situation should ideally be kept to a minimum. While the majority of the police statements found in Cincinnati papers were from the Chief of Police himself, numerous additional statements were issued by both a designated police spokesperson and anonymous or unnamed sources inside the police department. The presentations of multiple voices associated with the CPD presented messages that may have been interpreted as mixed, and in fact were somewhat different in their content and tone. Taking efforts to limit statements to the press from one source, perhaps the Chief of Police himself in such high profile cases, may have led to greater consistency in the messages delivered to the public.

An additional concern is the use of statements of no comment, which are almost universally accepted b audiences as concessions of guilt. To the credit of the CPD, when statements of no comment were issued they were almost always accompanied by a reason as to why a comment could not be given. Given the legal ramifications of disclosing certain types of information during an investigation, it is perfectly understandable that this would be the case. It is the suggestion of the current authors that law enforcement agencies consider different phraseology in declining to comment on sensitive questions. Explicit statements of the legal incapacity to disclose particular facts and information may be a less problematic situation than the literal use of the phrase “no comment.”

Perhaps even more problematic in the police response to the Thomas shooting and events leading up to the riots is a general lack of statements considering the concerns of the community or the extension of condolences to the family of Timothy Thomas. It was two days before the CPD issued a statement expressing any kind of acknowledgement of public concern regarding the African-American community and tensions that had been growing between the CPD and this community for months. Finally, the police made almost no appeals at all to community leaders to maintain some sense of calm, and only did so on the eve of the riots, when it was perhaps too late. Given the powerful force that civic, cultural, and religious leaders can be in urban communities, this failure to appeal to them was a golden opportunity to reduce tensions that went totally overlooked. Likewise, the police only made one concession that some kind of mistake was made in the Thomas shooting, and only did so in the hours leading up to the riots.

The timing of these limited statements of understanding for the concerns of family and community members demonstrates a general violation of one of the most fundamental tenets of crisis communication: to be proactive and not reactive. This is to say that when the Timothy Thomas shooting took place, statements did not begin to emerge from the police department until after the shooting had become an issue on the public agenda, and not beforehand on the assumption that it would. In cases such as this, it is always wise to make the first statement, to tell the story before you allow someone else to do it for you (Center & Jackson, 1995). The failure to make swift and reasonable

statements before speculation and tension could escalate may have played a pivotal role in the extent of public outcry against the CPD. It is the suggestion of the current authors that law enforcement officials prepare and elicit statements immediately upon the discovery of any incident or accident which may constitute a crisis situation. While it may or may not turn out to be absolutely necessary, it is certainly better to be safe than sorry.

Finally, taken as a whole, the shortcomings in the public relations efforts undertaken by the CPD are indicative of one major problem with their organizational approach to crises: the apparent failure to have any kind of tangible crisis communication plan in place. Law enforcement agencies, like any other organization, should develop crisis communication plans that can be reverted to when potentially volatile situations arise. Such a plan should include the identification of one individual who will conduct press conferences and speak to reporters, a detailed list of what kinds of information can and cannot be disclosed, a list of civic and community leaders that must be contacted and won over, and a timetable ensuring that responses to the crisis are swift, immediate, and accurate. While no crisis can be entirely defused through these tactics, the presence of a tangible and rehearsed crisis communication plan for interacting with the media and the public can at least serve to minimize reputation damage and any potential negative outcomes to both the law enforcement agency and the community at large.

Directions for Future Research

The theory and research findings presented in this paper offer several plausible reasons for why police interaction with the media after the Timothy Thomas shooting could have been better executed given the crisis at hand, mostly due to questionable public relations practices. It is simply the goal of the current paper to identify some of these shortcomings, and further research is proposed to generate additional knowledge that can be used by law enforcement agencies in times of crisis. The first question that will be addressed in this body of research will be: *How does the coverage of police response differ from the coverage of responses of others during the days leading up to the rioting?* Follow-up analyses will compare the reactions of the Cincinnati Police Department to those of civic leaders and community representatives on both local and national levels, in order to get a sense of the images of the CPD being presented by groups outside the department.

Second, the shooting had several potentially sensational elements, which may have been compounded by the police failure to address the issue. The shooting took place after several similar incidents of police violence in the city, for example, and seemed unjustified since the victim was unarmed (Vela, 2001). These facts gave newsmakers plenty of material for framing the story as "sensational" (e.g., the incident was part of a "wave" of unjust violence against African-American citizens in the city). The sensational aspects of the story could have primed residents to act aggressively, especially those residents who perceived themselves to be similar to the victim. The second question, then, is: *What inflammatory and/or sensationalistic techniques were employed in presenting this story?* In order to address this question, coverage of the events in *The Cincinnati Enquirer* and other area media sources will be analyzed in greater depth and more objectively, mainly through quantitative content analysis and computer text analysis.

Conclusions

The Timothy Thomas shooting and the police response to public outcry is a useful case study for the examination and consideration of crisis communication tactics

among law enforcement agencies. While individuals and other organizations such as non-profit groups and major companies may suffer reputation damage or a loss in sales, the consequences of ineffective crisis management for law enforcement agencies are potentially much greater. As was the case in Cincinnati, when an opportunity to defuse tensions between the police and the public is not capitalized upon, the results can be disastrous. Once again, the goal of this study is not to point fingers at the CPD, but to identify things that could have been done more effectively in order to help law enforcement agencies better handle crisis situations in terms of their public relations efforts.

Primarily, law enforcement agencies would be well advised to develop some type of crisis communication plan that entails the timetable for the release of information, the individual that will release it, what kind of information can be disclosed, and the key publics that must be addressed along with their civic leaders. By having a plan such as this in place, Police departments can at least minimize the damage presented by crises that become known to the general public. Future research will also extend these guidelines to include ways to counteract sensationalistic reporting and address various statements made by members of affected communities, in an ongoing effort to maintain and improve relationships between law enforcement agencies and the public they are entrusted to protect.

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