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# A New Era of Policing: Uncovering Ways Officers Believe Community Relations can be Restored

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A NEW ERA OF POLICING: UNCOVERING WAYS OFFICERS BELIEVE COMMUNITY
RELATIONS CAN BE RESTORED

By

Bradi Kooyman

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By

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**Dedication**

  This paper is dedicated to all the law enforcement officers who continue to serve and protect their communities throughout these trying times our country has endured. It is also dedicated to my mother and father who have continuously motivated and supported me throughout every stage of my life. Without them, this paper would not exist.

**Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank Dr. Medel for her invaluable assistance and insights leading to the writing of this paper.  A sincere thanks also goes to Dr. Dong for his inciteful critiques and encouragement throughout the entire process of my research and writing.

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A NEW ERA OF POLICING: UNCOVERING WAYS OFFICERS BELIEVE COMMUNITY RELATIONS CAN BE RESTORED

Abstract

By Bradi K. Kooyman

University of the Pacific
2023

The present study qualitatively investigated law enforcement officers' opinions on creating more positive relationships with community members and how news media can play a role in deteriorating community attitudes and perceptions of law enforcement officers. A total of six participants were selected to participate in a forty-five-minute interview. Participants were asked questions regarding positive and negative factors in their relationship with their communities, local and national law enforcement portrayals in news media, reforms needed within law enforcement, beliefs toward community policing, and factors that lead to success in their relationships with citizens. This study discovered that building trust, implementing community policing with ample resources, focusing on the value of educating citizens, and implementing various police reforms could lead to building more positive relationships with community members. Concerning media portrayals, the study demonstrated that the most important factors are transparency with news media and the public, implementing multiple forms of social media to stay connected with the public, and news media companies reporting both positive and negative law enforcement stories could lead to creating a more positive public image for law enforcement officers and their agencies.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In an age of police and community relations turmoil (Stansfield, 2022), research geared towards restoring their relationship is vital for our future. This study focuses on the causes of the public's disdain towards law enforcement (Childs, 2018; Stansfield, 2022) as well as how the news media persuades the public's opinion of law enforcement negatively (Levan & Stevenson, 2019). By interviewing local law enforcement officers, this study aims to provide solutions to building positive relationships with community members and increasing positive portrayals of law enforcement in news media.

First, the statement of the problem, purpose, and significance of the study is discussed. Next, the literature review focuses on the historical background of law enforcement methods, followed by explaining the importance of communication accommodation theory (CAT) within law enforcement and civilian relationships, and last, it reviews law-enforcement-media portrayal's effects on the public's attitudes towards law enforcement. Next, the chosen methodology and research questions are presented, followed by the results and discussion of the findings.

**Statement of Problem**

Over the past three decades, violent crime in the United States has dropped from over 750 cases to under 400 cases (FBI, 2021). Despite almost halving violent crime rates, most media sources portray the opposite message on crime, and many citizens do not trust law enforcement officers (Gramlich, 2020; Stoltze, 2020). Chabot (2020) highlighted a gallop poll study in 2019 that revealed that 57% of Americans trust the police. The number was considerably low, implying that 43% of Americans did not trust the police. One of the many reasons the

relationship between law enforcement and the public continues to deteriorate is the ongoing feedback cycle of unfavorable law enforcement depictions (Wolfe & Nix, 2016). Most research on law enforcement and the public focus on exploring one side of the issue, the public's and the media's problems with law enforcement, instead of exploring law enforcement's struggles with the public and news media. Therefore, research in this area of concern is paramount, given the current social climate between the three groups and the dire need for solutions. Research into solutions from the viewpoints of law enforcement personnel and agencies might lead to new ideas for improving public and news media interactions.

## Purpose of Thesis

This study investigated law enforcement officers' beliefs towards building better relationships with their citizens and news media. In addition, this study also examined law enforcement officers' opinions on how the mainstream news media portrays them and how it can affect the citizens' perception of law enforcement. The belief is that news media plays a significant role in citizens' perceptions of law enforcement and that these media messages negatively influence their relationships (Ericson, Baranek, & Chan, 1991; Reiner, 2003; Schlesinger & Tumber, 1994). However, Sunshine & Tyler (2003) discovered that face-to-face interactions with law enforcement could significantly influence citizens' outlook on law enforcement in general. Therefore, this study examined which factors law enforcement officers believe are vital in crafting and developing their perceptions and relationships with the public and the media. With the findings from this study, the hope is that it will open new avenues of ideas and information that can be adapted and applied by law enforcement officers, the public, and news media, to improve their relationships and serve each other to the best of their abilities.

**Significance of the Study**

As social justice and reform increase in national popularity, so has news media stories regarding law enforcement officers and their performance. However, many media platforms that cover law enforcement stories and topics often only discuss the adverse outcomes of law enforcement officers' performance. While these types of news stories create more revenue for media platforms due to their high through-click rate (Scacco & Muddiman, 2016), they leave out the positive performances of law enforcement officers. This lopsided image of law enforcement is detrimental to law enforcement agencies across America and their relationships with the communities they serve and protect (Chemak, McGarrel, & Gruenewald, 2006; Choi, 2021; Dowler, 2002). With the constant cycle of negative law enforcement news stories at the fingertips of many Americans, it is arguably a significant factor that predicts citizen's attitudes towards law enforcement officers and agencies.

Aside from the high saturation of fear-inducing news stories about poor law enforcement performance, there is an even more significant concern. Crime rates have been dropping significantly, and according to Tseloni, Mailley, Farrell, and Tilley (2010), this phenomenon is happening not just in America but worldwide. Tseloni et al. (2010) found that "current analysis estimates that between 1995 and 2004, the mean international crime incidence reductions were: 77.1 percent in theft from cars, 60.3 percent in theft from persons, 26.0 percent in burglary, 20.6 percent in assault and 16.8 percent in car theft." Despite the evidence that crime rates continue to drop, the public and the media continue to view law enforcement in a negative light (Gauthier & Graziano, 2018; Graziano, 2019; Koerth & Thomson-DeVeaux, 2020; Miller, Davis, Henderson, Markovic, & Ortiz, 2003; Wozniak, Drakulich, & Calfano, 2021). Therefore, it is arguable that negative news media regarding law enforcement and crime is more popular among viewers.

Another reason this study could significantly impact research regarding law enforcement and the public is that it uses a qualitative research method. Questionnaires and open-response survey methods are the most common research methods regarding law enforcement and community relationship building (Eschholz et al., 2002; Hajek et al., 2008; Molloy & Giles, 2002; Reisig & Giacomazzi, 1998; Sunshine & Tyler, 2003). While these quantitative methods have been successful, law enforcement and community research are missing law enforcement officers' rich and vulnerable stories. In fact, "very little research addresses communicative dimensions of police-civilian encounters. The process is important to the extent that while it has been estimated that the vast amount of police training is devoted to physical compliance issues, 98% of actual law enforcement practice revolves around communicating with the public and its safety needs." (Giles et al., 2006). Therefore, more qualitative research is needed in the area of law enforcement and citizens relations in order to help find the various problems and solutions to creating healthier relationships between the two.

This study researched law enforcement officers from a high crime rate location. Their headquarters are based in Stockton, CA, which saw a 65% increase in criminal homicide in 2020 resulting in 56 homicides, and a 4% increase in forceable rape. While this increase appears small, it resulted in 189 cases of forcible rape in 2020 (Stockton Police Department, 2022). Stockton also received a 6 out of 100 crime index scale, with the score of 100 being the safest, and had a total of 13,934 reported crimes in 2021, averaging 43.43% crime rate per 1,000 residents (Neighborhood Scout, 2022). The department does not only oversee Stockton, but also includes the entire San Joaquin County. Established in 1849, there are now over 800 sworn and support staff apart of the department in San Joaquin County that oversee the cities: Acampo, Clements, Escalon, Farmington, French Camp, Holt, Lathrop, Linden, Lockeford, Lodi,

Manteca, Ripon, Stockton, Thornton, Tracy, Vernalis, Victor, and Woodbridge (San Joaquin

County, 2022; SJCSD Annual Report, 2021). The officers in this area are exposed to a

community that embodies diverse lifestyles, cultures, genders, and races. Within this county, the

populations race is 40.7% Hispanic, 33.5% White, 14.2% Asian, 7.4% Black, 3.4% Multi-Racial,

0.5% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and 0.5% American Indian/Alaska Native (California,

2022). This study adds a new perspective to law enforcement and community building by

discovering the perceptions of law enforcement officers and agents and offering suggestions for

improving those perceptions.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

**Law Enforcement and Communities Through the Ages**

Law enforcement and conflicting community relations are not a recent phenomenon. From 1840 to 1900, policing in the United States was in its first era of policing, known as the Political Era, and it was heavily influenced by politicians' agendas (Greene & Mastrofsky, 1991). Due to their biases and corruption, there was a need for massive reform, and inevitability caused the termination of the Political Era of policing (Greene & Mastrofsky, 1991). A new style of policing, the Reform Era, was brought forth and heavily influenced by Chief August Vollmer's ideas (Reppetto, 1978). Vollmer emphasized the causes behind the crimes. In turn, this required officers to utilize scientific methods in their cases, take intelligence tests and physical training, and increase the social distance between themselves and the communities they served (Reppetto, 1978). Despite his positive efforts, from the 1960s to 1970s, policing saw a massive increase in crime rates, and therefore, the Reform Era was not as effective as Vollmer had hoped. The 1980s marked a new era of policing known as the Community Era.

According to Goldstein (1987), "Toward Community-Oriented Policing: Potential, Basic Requirements, and Threshold Questions," the Community Era's initial goal of reducing crime rates were to control crime. While it was a commendable idea, it proved an unfeasible misstep. This heavy emphasis on enforcing the law left out one of the many substantial aspects of law enforcement officers' duties: the act of service to their communities and working with them. By placing immense focus on crime reduction, this study found that the officers forgot their effects on the quality of life in the communities they serve (Goldstein, 1987). After this discovery, the idea of community policing came into effect. According to Weitzer & Tuch (2005, p. 281),

"community policing involves residents and police officers working together to identify problems and solutions to crime, which should foster improved relations between two parties and, thus, reduce the incidence of police abuse of citizens." While older studies on community policing, primarily performed in Europe, received criticism for using questionable practices and failing to connect with lower-ranked citizens (Manning, 1984; Holdaway; 1984), some research in America has, over the last few decades, proved otherwise. For example, to build stronger relationships with their communities, law enforcement officers have devoted time and resources to educating citizens on avoiding being victims of crime and how to actively help law enforcement perform to the best of their abilities (Goldstein, 1987). This type of community policing helps law enforcement gather information and insights into the community's crime and gives the citizens a sense of purpose and pride over the safety of their community.

Law enforcement officers have many duties they are tasked with daily. The traffic stops, the peacekeeping, the paperwork, and even the high-stakes life-threatening situations all contribute to an overload of responsibility for one organization to do these tasks effectively and successfully. Community policing is particularly helpful in cities with high crime rates, where police time and resources may be scarcer. Healthy interactions between the police and citizens create a sense of neighborly fulfillment. They also allow for easier workflow (Brogden & Nijhar, 2013; MacDonald, 2002; Ndono, Muthama, & Muigua, 2019; Peak & Glensor, 1999) and create opportunities for them to make relationships. According to Goldstein (1987, p. 9), "the ability of members of the community to know their community police officer by name is considered a measure of success." The process can be done through community policing and by assigning officers to permanent patrol areas and can cause citizens in the area to have a greater familiarity with law enforcement. Wilson and Kelly (1982) found that when police officers

strongly identify with a place, they are more likely to become familiar with the residents, improving community policing. Therefore, community policing could be a critical asset to mending community and citizen relations with their local law enforcement officers and agencies.

Furthermore, Alpert & Dunham's (1988) research highlighted that the neighborhood environments help shape the relationship between law enforcement and the citizens. Therefore, if citizens in a specific community see the same police officers on patrol, they are more likely to cooperate with a familiar face and help improve their community by trusting and aiding the police officers. Thus, community input and involvement would be a significant step for law enforcement agencies success.

Essentially, this type of environment and relationship building could successfully allow both parties to be a part of community policing. According to Goldstein (1987):

> … community policing, if it is to realize its full potential, should not be viewed merely as a new project, method, or procedure that can be added, as an appendage of sorts, to an existing policy organization. It can better be described as a way of thinking about policing-as an operating philosophy that, to succeed, must eventually have a pervasive influence on the operations of the entire agency… (p. 11)

The belief is that community policing allows citizens to pinpoint their exact needs for a safer community while building positive relationships between law enforcement officers and the citizens they serve. However, the article," 'All it takes is one TV show to ruin it: a police perspective on police-media relations in the era of expanding prime time crime markets" by Laura Huey & Ryan Broll (2012) found that while officers believed their community's intentions are in the right place, their ideas often aren't feasible or productive. In the same article, one officer noted that citizens don't know the ins and outs of the operations they perform, so most of

their suggestions are not helpful for the department's success. This disconnect could be due to the CSI effect, which is when television crime shows strongly influence the public's perception of how law enforcement officers and their agencies work (Huey, 2010; Call, Cook, Reitzel & 2013). This effect is quite possible since television crime shows have remained incredibly popular over the past half-century (Rogers, 2008). This could mean that a majority of citizens' knowledge about law enforcement comes from unrealistic expectations set by television shows. Increased community involvement with law enforcement could prove an excellent solution.

Adding to this, research focused on the communities and citizens' voices, rather than the law enforcement officers' voices, often shows that the personal discussions between the citizens and police officers play a crucial role in creating stronger relationships. These personal encounters carry more weight than their vicarious counterparts in shows like CSI (ex. CSI effect) and news stories (Rosenbaum, Schuck, Costello, Hawkins, & Ring, 2005). However, it is essential to note that prior beliefs about law enforcement officers strongly predict positive and negative attitudes towards law enforcement officers and their agencies (Rosenbaum et al., 2005). This study implies that the negative personal and vicarious relationships citizens have with law enforcement need more than just positive interactions with community policing, but instead, this policing needs to be integrated for decades to absolve deeply held negative beliefs towards law enforcement.

Positive personal and vicarious relationships could allow police officers to serve their communities better. Law enforcement officers will not only be more informed of their community's needs and build trust, but they could also lead to a decades-long reform that instills positive attitudes towards law enforcement. With this research, community policing could be a key instrument in building relationships with law enforcement officers; however, many studies

on community policing come from one side of the relationship, the public. Therefore, more research conducted with law enforcement officials and agencies could provide a deeper understanding of the positives and negatives that community policing provides.

## Communication Accommodation Theory in Action

Communication accommodation theory (CAT) provides a broad theoretical overview of how we attempt to maintain and decrease social distance with other individuals. These accommodations also improve our communication with others (Gallois & Giles, 1998; Gallois, Ogay, & Giles, 2004). The accommodations are essential in law enforcement and civilian relations because most police work involves communicating with the public (Thompson, 1983). Therefore, with and without weaponry, extensive funding for physical training seems to be an ancient philosophy for policing and building communal trust with citizens. Giles et al. (2006) discovered that verbal communications were more potent at defining attitudes towards law enforcement than socio-demographic factors.

Through CAT, Giles et al. investigated whether law enforcement officers and civilians can learn and implement better ways to accommodate each other to create more positive and successful interactions. In turn, the research focused on communication and community building over old-school policing, like the Political and Reform Era, and determined if law enforcement agencies and officers will serve their communities in a better way. In deciding if civilians and officers can work together and form positive relationships, Bayley (1994) examined if using the Communication accommodation theory could lead to a higher success rate by preventing criminal activities. This research proposal investigated if focusing on communication and relationship building at the forefront of law enforcement officers' operations could foster environments that produce better results without weapons or aggressive actions.

Unlike the Reform Era of policing, CAT explores ways officers and civilians can decrease their social distance through positive verbal exchanges and physical appearances. Therefore, when citizens see a law enforcement officer on patrol, they might associate them with one they had a personal experience or vicarious experience with via news media, social media, or television shows. This is another reason why reducing social distance via physical appearances is essential because these are the first impressions citizens notice and evaluate. For example, Klockars (1985) notes that it is not just an officer's transparent display of weaponry. Still, it is also their uniform and badge that can incite a sense of worry and panic in citizens. From this, we can assume that their style, color of motor vehicles, and aesthetic appeal also play a crucial role in their physical appearances. Aside from their requirements to dress, carry certain weapons, and drive specific cars, many male and female officers subscribe to military-style haircuts (Giles, Zwang-Weissman, & Hajek, 2004), and these physical similarities between police officers and the military are seen in both the news and entertainment media. This aesthetic is a product of our current era of policing and the Homeland Security Era, which was established after the Community Era due to the terrorist attacks on 9/11. While the Community Era had many positives, the government wanted to shift its focus toward exposing threats and gathering intelligence to keep American citizens safe. With higher security from external threats due to modern-day technology, reforming the current policing era toward a diverse community-driven policing style may be feasible and fruitful, especially for current racial and political tensions.

The ability to reduce the social distance between law enforcement officers and citizens is a goal that positively impacts both police and citizens. According to the National Research Council (2004), citizens must provide cooperation and consent for a police force to perform to the best of its abilities. Therefore, people can witness how it might be vital for communities to

have positive relations with their local law enforcement agencies and how a change in verbal and nonverbal communication styles could lead to breakthroughs for police and public relations.

However, cooperation and consent from citizens might not be possible if the citizens in a given community hold profoundly negative views towards law enforcement officers, otherwise known as legal cynicism. Negative perceptions toward law enforcement can deplete their legitimacy with the communities they serve and create more friction between them (Graziano & Gauthier, 2018; Sunshine & Tyler, 2003; Tankebe, 2013). These adverse perceptions could eventually increase social distance and reduce the likelihood of either party working on communication accommodation techniques and behaviors. A study conducted with the youth in three Philadelphia neighborhoods found that many already had preconceived negative attitudes and perceptions towards law enforcement (Carr, Napolitano & Keating, 2007). For most of the participants in this study, Carr et al. found that they were less likely to view law enforcement officers as legitimate and capable of controlling crime (2007). However, despite their lack of trust in the police, the youths' overall top solution against crime in their communities was to increase the number of police officers and create tougher laws and stricter penalties (Carr et al., 2007). With this, it could be beneficial to recommend that law enforcement agencies implement more training focused on diverse communication tactics that could increase their chances of having successful personal encounters with the public. If not, citizens' opposing views may likely destroy their chances of cooperating to combat crime, which could backfire (Reisig & Giacomazzi, 1998). There are more concerns that the conversations and actions between law enforcement officers and citizens impact their relationship. Still, it is also the influence of the mainstream news media that affects their perceptions.

**Media Portrayals of Law Enforcement**

News stories regarding law enforcement often display a profoundly negative picture on most mainstream media platforms. Lawrence explains that the media focuses on reporting questionable law enforcement actions and behaviors (2000). This constant negative image of law enforcement can skew perceptions towards officers and their agencies. It is especially true with high-profile cases that spread nationally (e.g., George Floyd, Breonna Taylor). Kaminski & Jefferis (1998) found that news media coverage negatively influences citizens' perceptions and beliefs toward law enforcement. The use of excessive force, brutality, scandals, and various other forms of abuse towards the citizens adversely affected the public's trust in the police. Due to the nature of the current generation's exposure to multiple forms of news media and social media, and the increasing prevalence of negative law enforcement media, this massive saturation of adverse media reports about the police decreases citizens' trust in the police (Bučar-Ručman & Meško, 2006; Gauthier & Graziano, 2018; Hohl, 2011). However, the high saturation of law enforcement media could be beneficial if news media platforms discussed both positive and negative news stories regarding law enforcement in order to provide the public with a more balanced view.

Despite news and social media's recurring negative projection of law enforcement, there is a form of media that often displays law enforcement officers and agencies more positively. For example, police reality shows, like *COPS*, have increased viewers' approval of the police and their performance; however, this was only found for the White participants and not the Black participants (Eschholz, Blackwell, Gertz, & Chiricos, 2002). This racial divide is not exclusive to law enforcement entertainment. In fact, a study by Weitzer, Tuch, and Skogan found that the Blacks with less education perceived police misconduct as a problem; but Blacks with better

education did not (2008). Furthermore, another study performed in Washington found "that residents of a low-income Black neighborhood were between 4 and 7 times more likely than residents of a middle-class Black community to say that the police had stopped people on the street unjustifiably, verbally abused residents, or used excessive force against them" (Weitzer, Tuch, & Skogan, 2008, p. 420; Weitzer 1999;). These findings could indicate that better communication and education with lower income and educated communities could improve the racial divide between law enforcement and the public.

Weitzer, Tuch, and Skogan's study found that "community policing decreases the chances that citizens will view police misconduct as a problem in their neighborhood, and this was especially true for African Americans" (2008, p. 420). However, Weitzer, Tuch, and Skogan (2008) also note that community policing may not be sufficient to mend relations, primarily when the media often depicts a negative view of law enforcement (Kaminski & Jefferis, 1998; Bučar-Ručman & Meško, 2006; Gauthier & Graziano, 2018; Hohl, 2011). Despite most coverage of law enforcement news media depicting negative affairs, there are police reality shows and law enforcement entertainment that do encourage positive messages toward law enforcement officers and agencies. While some aggressive encounters may be present in police reality shows, they often portray the actions of the police officers as just and courageous, which can cause audiences to feel like they are equitably upholding the law (Eschholz et al., 2002). These optimistic projections could be essential for law enforcement officers' image in the public's eyes, but they could also come at an unforeseen cost. These positive perceptions of law enforcement entertainment could cause negative consequences by creating unrealistic expectations from law enforcement officers in everyday life, despite how favorable they can be in their communities.

Police reality shows are not the only type of favorable police media. In fact, according to Rogers, television police dramas are one of the three popular television programs, aside from soap operas and medical dramas, which have survived more than five decades of various societal norms and cultural changes (2008). We also see this relevance in today's television shows and documentaries. For example, in 2020, streaming platforms like Netflix and Hulu saw massive growth due to the nature of people's new environments that they were living within. During this time, the most popular shows had several that fell into the law enforcement category, like *Crime Scene: The Vanishing Cecil Hotel*, *Manhunt: Unabomber*, *Sinner*, *Mindhunter*, *Broadchurch*, *Making a Murderer*, and more (Paper Magazine, 2021; Writers, P. S. & T. V., 2021). With this many highly favorable television shows regarding law enforcement officers and/or crime with law enforcement involvement, the news media platforms display them in an unfavorable manner.

Even now, Netflix's infamous "Top Ten in the Nation" category contains movies and shows that involve law enforcement and murderers (Netflix top 10 - global, 2021). In particular, Netflix has many true crime-related documentaries, docu-series, and movies that have gained attention and increased ratings (Sayles, 2021; Sutton, 2021). These eighteen films and series, *Tiger King*, *Unsolved Mysteries*, *Jeffrey Epstein: Filthy Rich*, *Crime Scene: The Vanishing at the Cecil Hotel*, *Night Stalker*, *American Murder: The Family Next Door*, and many more, have cumulatively spent 232 days in Netflix's Top 10 and these first six films stayed in the top ten for over two to five weeks which is an awe-inspiring number given that Netflix is consistently adding new movies and series to its platform, as well as updating the Top Ten list daily (Sayles, 2021). From May 2019 to April 2021, Netflix's true crime genre has remained the leader among all other genres and almost doubled its lead in 2020-2021 (Sayles, 2021). It is evident that law

enforcement media can remain favorable and popular among Americans when displayed as a form of entertainment.

It is an interesting affair that the media and the public can criticize law enforcement officers performing their job, and simultaneously be a source of entertainment in media for some people. The dilemma is well summarized by Sean Delaney (2003) when he observes that:

> Pared to its bare bones, the police drama is the 'eternal struggle between good and evil.' It is also a crossword puzzle in the tradition of Agatha Christie, with the thrill of a journey on the wrong side of the track, but this 'conservative' genre has consistently explored social mores, widespread concerns, and contemporary folk devils (moral panic). At the same time, it reads a thin line between realism and a relentlessly upbeat representation of the police force and is prone to stereotyping and tokenism. It remains a world dominated by individualistic white men. However, despite this mass of contradictions, it is a versatile and flexible genre that can survive the loss of central characters and confront sensitive social issues. (p. 1)

Not only can this be frustrating for law enforcement agencies, but it can also damage the public's perception of the police. That is why it is crucial to understand the impact of the media regarding law enforcement, not only for the citizens but also for law enforcement officers and agencies. Uncovering how these messages affect law enforcement officers could provide insights into improving community relations and policing.

It is not just the public's perception of law enforcement that is affected by the varying media portrayals of law enforcement; it is the law enforcement officers themselves. Huey and Broll (2012) conducted interviews with several law enforcement officers in Canada. They discovered a common problem and complaint among the interviewees: "news stories are often

based on bits and pieces of 'evidence'; many officers felt that the media rarely presents the whole story" (Huey & Broll, 2012, p. 388). While interviewing a forensics investigator, one participant stated, "'I've been to scenes and known the facts of what's going on and gone home and the news is complete[ly] off. They're broadcasting this stuff to be real and true, and people believe it'" (Huey & Broll, 2012, p. 388). Other law enforcement officers complained that when they cooperate with the media, they often find out later that they have been misquoted or misrepresented to make the story more appealing to the public (Huey & Broll, 2012). These exaggerated or false reports are often adverse, creating a toxic environment for law enforcement officers to coexist with citizens. Another participant from this study, a homicide investigator, explained his frustrations with the news by stating, "I actually can't remember ever reading an article where they talked about how nice an investigator was or how professional they were or how dedicated they were" (Huey & Broll, 2012, p. 389). Another homicide investigator from a different organization agreed, "Just look at the newspaper. Either we're heroes and brilliant or we're complete idiots, and there's very little in between." (Huey & Broll, 2012, p. 389). This study sheds light on a problem that many do not know exists in its approach to media portrayals from the perspective of law enforcement. In doing so, Huey and Broll (2012) highlight how media portrayals of law enforcement can impact officers' careers, personal lives, and mental and physical health. The media's reflection on law enforcement has various outcomes that eventually affect public perception of law enforcement.

In conclusion, I have covered how law enforcement and their relationships with the communities they serve have been a constant roller coaster of positive breakthroughs followed by damaging pitfalls. From attempts to control crime to relying on community policing, law enforcement and the public have been trying to uncover the answers to solving their periodical

turmoil; however, there has been little research on improving law enforcement officers' current community relationships. One idea is to focus on improving communication channels with the implementation of CAT. This theory shows promise, but there is still little research on its success, especially from the law enforcement officer's perspective. Finally, I have discussed that media about law enforcement, both the positive and the negative, can be highly persuasive in molding peoples' beliefs toward law enforcement officers and agencies.

### Research Questions

The questions were 'what are the factors that law enforcement officers believe will aid in building positive relationships with the communities they serve,' and 'what factors do law enforcement officers believe will create a more positive public image in mainstream news media'? The interview questionnaire used to capture the insight into these questions is located in *Appendix B*.

Uncovering possible solutions these questions are fundamental due to the current cultural climate toward law enforcement officers and agencies (Gaines & Kappeler, 2014; Loader & Mulcahy, 2003; Weitzer & Tuch, 2006). It is crucial to research how to reduce negative feelings and actions towards law enforcement officers because it can lead to positive interactions, news coverage, and relationships and facilitate cultural angst (Haarr, 2001; Loader & Walker, 2001; Reisig & Giacomazzi, 1998). Another reason this study will have a profound impact is its uniqueness in conducting interviews with law enforcement officers. A tiny pool of research (Curran, 2018; Huey & Broll, 2012; Reynolds, Fitzgerald, & Hicks, 2018) involves the voices of law enforcement officers, and this study looks to add depth to this field. This study uncovered ideas and tactics that can help create more positive relationships with the public and the media by examining the stories and experiences of law enforcement officers.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The methodology chosen for this study was one-on-one interviews with law enforcement officers with varying ranks and specializations. Interviewing was selected because it created a safe and judgment-free environment for each interviewee. I conducted individual interviews because of the varying opinions and taboo tendencies the topic of law enforcement manifests among officers. The ability to obtain law enforcement officer's thoughts and feelings towards their communities and the media is extremely valuable and is often unattainable research.

This study had six interviewees, and it used a mixture of purposeful sampling and convenience sampling to find participants. I used purposeful sampling to target law enforcement officers with extensive knowledge and experience with their communities and the media. Convenience sampling was used due to my personal and professional relationships with law enforcement officers in San Joaquin County, and this is a key to obtaining rich insight into finding solutions for the problems at hand. This combination allowed for a higher degree of vulnerability during the interview and a higher degree of interview richness specific to this research study's goals. Most law enforcement research is not conducted with the level of openness and depth captured in this study. This is one of the most important aspects of this research study.

I recorded data via the Zoom professional version, which allowed recording and transcribing the audio portion of the interviews, and I also took written notes during the interview process. During the analysis phase, I reviewed the recordings, transcriptions, and notes collected for each interview multiple times and noted the significant findings and thematically coded them. Then I compared each interview's key findings and thematic codes

and examined them for similar articles and results to analyze the insights (Glaser, 1965; Fram, 2013). Upon completion of the interviews, I transcribed the in-person interviews into electronic format. Then, I analyzed each interview and coded them thematically by determining common keywords, phrases, and themes among interviewees. I chose open coding, and I developed my thematic coding method using Microsoft Word to organize the transcriptions and I used color coding (ex., highlighting, bold/italics, underlining, and font/style). Next, I coded for similar keywords, themes, and phrases and organized them together in a separate document.

*Interviewees*

The law enforcement officers that participated in the study work for a law enforcement department in San Joaquin County. The department's mission statement declares the following:

" (We are) dedicated to delivering quality service through the creation of partnerships with the people we serve. All members of this department will carry out their duties and responsibilities in such a manner as to afford dignity, respect, and compassion to every individual with whom they come in contact. With community partnerships as our foundation, we are driven by goals to enhance the quality of life, investigating problems as well as incidents, seeking solutions, and fostering a sense of security in communities and individuals. We nurture public trust by holding ourselves to the highest standards of performance and ethics."

Having worked for the department for a semester, it is evident they care deeply for the communities they serve and the people they work with. They have established 8 core values that embody their love and devotion to justice and their communities, which are: compassion, crime reduction, community, family, innovation, sacrifice, diversity, and service. This department has over 800 sworn and support officers, meaning they make up 0.6% of sheriff deputies in the

United States of America (Deputy Sheriff Demographics, 2022). While this percentage may seem small, it is normal for sheriff departments to cover large counties with a small number of officers. In fact, not only do they cover the entire San Joaquin County, but they also have 9 divisions that enable them to do so, and they are: patrol, investigations, metro narcotic task force, special services division, unified court services, custody division, professional standards division, civil division, and administration.

Despite their limited ranks, in 2021, they had 165,138 calls for service (e.g. self-initiated activity, follow-up, area checks, and technical services), 33,103 reports taken and on priority calls, 69% of the time they were able to arrive in under 10 minutes and 58% of the time it was under 5 minutes (SJCSD Annual Report, 2021). This is an impressive feat considering they cover the entire San Joaquin County. In this department, they are immensely community driven due to their elected nature and compassion for their communities. They connect not only face-to-face by hosting events at local schools (ex. Mounted Patrol Appreciation, educational seminars) and local businesses (ex. Coffee with a Cop, Trunk or Treat), but also on social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram; and they post daily and respond to citizens comments.

Adding to their devotion to their communities, they have a well-established a community car program that, in 2021, assisted in 191 abandoned vehicles, 483 arrests, 912 area checks, 639 traffic stops, 212 traffic citations, 70 parking citations, and 57 field interviews (SJCSD Annual Report, 2021). They also added a community revitalization unit in the middle of 2021, and this unit was able to assist with 7 homeless encampment clean-ups, 181 homeless encampment maintenance, and 267 illegal dumping investigations (SJCSD Annual Report, 2021). Outside of patrol-style community policing, they have a number of programs that increase community

involvement: Citizens Academy, Explorer Program, Neighborhood Watch, and S.T.A.R.S. Program. Citizens Academy was designed to give citizens the opportunity to gain knowledge of external and internal workings of the department and raise community awareness of their operations. The Explorer Program was created to allow people with a passion for law enforcement to become cadets and gain hands-on experience with the department and encourage positive youth relations. The Neighborhood Watch program was designed to enable citizens to aid in crime prevention and cooperation with the department's officers; as well as working together with fellow community members. Finally, the S.T.A.R.S. Program, or Sheriff's Team of Active Retired Seniors, is a volunteer program for citizens ages 50 and older that can provide aid to the department in a variety of ways.

The law enforcement officers of this department that participated in this study have an understanding of service and community-oriented policing, and their experience in the field of law enforcement, provided rich and invaluable knowledge regarding community relations. Therefore, the participants insights are notably meaningful and paramount, not only to this study, but to future research as well.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The researcher found these five major themes: media portrayals, community policing, relationship building, educating citizens, and police reform. Of the six participants, each had at least five years on patrol and the average time spent with their current law enforcement department was ten to fifteen years. Only one of the six participants started at a different law enforcement department and transferred after their patrol with a department in Tracy, CA. Of the six participants, one identified as female and the other five identified as male. Regarding race, four identified as White, one identified as Hispanic, and one identified as Pacific Islander.

Based on the views shared from the officers who participated in the study, this research identified four frequent factors that the officers believed would help build positive relationships with their community members: 1) focus on building trust with citizens; 2) establish community policing units with adequate resources; 3) instill education as a top priority; for both law enforcement officers and citizens; 4) a variety of police reforms are necessary in order to improve law enforcement and citizen relationships. These four factors all fall into four of the five thematic codes: community policing, relationship building, educating citizens, and police reform. According to the law enforcement officer's responses, for community policing to be possible, more resources are necessary. As for relationship building, the research points towards fostering trust with community members in order to improve relations. Furthermore, the law enforcement officers believe that education for citizens and law enforcement officers and their departments is a critical step towards improving their relations, as well as advocating for variety police reform within their state and county in order for them to provide better care for their communities.

The study revealed three frequent factors that all the officers believed would help improve law enforcement officers and their agencies public image in mainstream news media: law enforcement agencies providing transparency with local news media and the public / law enforcement agencies utilizing multiple social media platforms to create news content and connect with the public / news media companies reporting both positive and negative stories regarding law enforcement officers. These three factors are all apart of one thematic code: media portrayals. The insights provided by the law enforcement officers help us to understand how they believe media portrayals can be improved upon.

## Media Portrayals

The data analysis revealed that all the interviewees believed that their department's media portrayals were shown in a positive light. A detective from the Cold Case unit stated that, "I think locally the Sheriff's office is portrayed pretty well." Later, the same detective explained that this positive representation might be due to their department's transparency. Like the views of the Cold Case detective, a detective from the Child Abuse and Sexual Assault (CASA) unit stated, "I believe that we are very, very, very, very transparent. We try to release and provide information as fast as possible." Adding to this consistent theme of transparency, a captain from the Investigations Unit that has spent over twenty years with the department noted that it is not only the transparency helps their media portrayals, but also the accountability they hold over each and every one of their staff members. The captain discussed this in the following statement:

> "I think our PIOs (Public Information Officers), and the sheriff does a very good job of communicating with local media. And I think that that keeps us in a positive light, but I think it's our honesty and that we don't we don't run from things if somebody makes a mistake. We'll admit it. If one of our staff does wrong, we've held them accountable. And I think that transparency, that transparency goes along with the public… in the last several years we fired and some and prosecuted and fully investigated some deputies and

correctional staff.  And again, we don't turn a blind eye or sweep it under the road.  We fully investigated.”

A patrol officer in the Boating Safety unit also described their relationship with the local media as transparent.  As well as noting that their overall perception with the local media is positive in the following statement:

> “I think it's positive.  So, what I've noticed with this administration, against other prior administrations.  I worked for two different ones, is we actually put the information out there.  So, they're using social media, we'll say Facebook, you know, Instagram, they're using those outlets to reach more people…When citizens say, 'Hey, we saw all these, you know, emergency vehicles going over in this area, what's going on?' You know, public, they become interested.  Like what happened? And if you don't say anything, what happens? Rumors.  'What are they hiding?' They start making up their own story.  Next thing you know, it's this big, old thing.  That's nothing.  It's like, hey, let's be transparent.  Let's get the word out.  Hey, this is what's going on.  This what's happening.”

A theme of positivity and transparency was found among all interviewees when describing their department's media portrayals and representations on local news and social media accounts.  The interviewees were also asked about the representation of law enforcement in the media on a national level, and across all interviewees, they discussed how the representation is more negative than their local representation.  For example, a detective from the CASA unit described the current nationwide portrayal as battle between negative and positive police stories, and why which one may get more coverage than the other in the following statement:

> “Like right now there's not much in the news.  It comes in waves.  Like right now we're not necessarily the heroes anymore, but we're just kind of neutral at the moment because I don't think there's anything that's really hit thing… but they do see us more as we're the bad guys.  You know, and what's sad is there are shitty cops.  Everywhere you go, there're shitty cops and those shitty cops, you know, overpower the good things that, you know, most cops do.  Most cops are good people, but that's not what it comes down to.  It does come down to what sells…”

The CASA detective went on to describe her frustrations with how news media outlets report stories, especially with their language choice regarding different races.

"Instead of saying, you know, um, 'A cop kills a man' it's 'White cop kills black man.' Like why does it gotta be race? We're all humans. So that, that irritates me because it sells, and it's really sad."

Another detective from the Homicide Unit described the nationwide portrayals as very

negative and how the media portrayals are discouraging current and potential people from a

career in law enforcement in the following statement:

"I feel like it's very negative and I feel like qualified candidates that would normally apply and think about, 'Hmm. I might wanna do law enforcement, but I'm gonna do something else.' Cause there's a lot of people here that I currently work with, and it's been like nine years. We have somebody retiring today, you know, and they're just tired of how the current system is. And I think that person would've worked here probably till 55 if it wasn't so negative."

However, despite the detective's frustrations with the current media portrayals, he did

propose a solution of transparency, like many of the other detectives mentioned as well in the

following statement:

"And it's like the only way to undo that is to make, make sure people know exactly what our job is, why we do our job, why we're legitimately there doing it and that we do have a public good. You know, and if we get, and we stop feeding into this narrative, this false narrative of police killing all these people."

The detective continued with this idea by discussing his views on how many news media

outlets only choose statistical evidence that supports the narrative they want to push in the

following statement:

"And if you look at it, statistically, that is not the case. A lot of these offenders match up with FBI statistics of like, who's an offender, what their race is, what their age is, you know what, and we actually under arrest certain populations people based on what the crime reports say, and no one ever talks about that. No one ever talks about that."

Finally, the Homicide detective passionately described his own personal experiences in

minority communities because his frustrations with the news medias under representation of

positive law enforcement stories with minorities in the following statement:

"People talk about like, 'Oh, the police aren't wanted in minority communities.' That's a bunch of garbage. You know, cuz when grandma comes out and we're arresting a gang

banger, there's times she comes out and says, "Thank God you got rid of him.' You know people go like, 'About time!' You know, they'll make comments like that because he's been terrorizing all these people and no one else does anything and until there's one moment that we come there and have to handle it."

In summary, the participants all believed their own law enforcement department's local media portrayals were positive due to transparency with the public.  However, all the participants agreed that national media portrayals of law enforcement officers are more negative than their own local media coverage of their department.

### Community Policing

The data analysis revealed that all the interviewees believed that community policing is beneficial for both law enforcement departments and the communities they serve.  The captain from the Investigation's Unit described community policing as being very beneficial for fostering positive relationships with community members and the need for an increase in community policing resources in order for it to be done to the best of its ability in the following statement:

"I think community policing is great.  I think sometimes we don't have the time and/or resources to do it to the extent that I, I think would be very beneficial.  What I'm getting at is, I've gotten outta the car and played with a group of kids in the street.  I know some of these other guys around here have done that too.  Unfortunately, your time is limited, if you're trying to move from car to car, to car, or call to call, to call.  The more you can't get out outta that car and interact with the youth, interact with citizens.  Just talk to 'em. It doesn't have to be about crimes, be a person.  It fosters a very good relationship."

The captain continued this discussion by adding that making emotional investments and actively listening to community members helps strengthen the bond between them in the following statement:

"It's the little things and it's making the, it's making an emotional investment in the person, in the people in the community.  Get out of the car and talk, make that emotional connection.  And you start to learn people and you start to ask, 'How's your mom doing? How's your dad doing? How are the kids? Hey, I know Johnny was sick last week.

How's he feeling?' That's huge. Um, it's just unfortunate because again, based on manpower calls for service sometimes you don't get the time to do that."

While the captain agreed community policing can be a positive addition to law enforcement departments and the communities they serve, a detective from the Homicide Unit explained his own personal struggles he encountered when he was a community police deputy in the following statement:

"So mine was like, I'm going to make sure these tweakers stopped stealing other stuff because there's tons of mail fraud. You know, so they'd steal all this mail and then they would take that and start doing identity theft on people in that community. Like I would do search warrants, and I clamped it down to where these people would then do their crime somewhere else. *But* what they (the community) wanted was officer Joe friendly, you know, ask him about their dinner every night in their front yard. And I even had to go into this lady's backyard all the time and I talked to her about these community problems, cuz if I didn't, it would be political problems for the administration. So, there's just like, I have to deal with this political aspect, and if that makes people happy on a political aspect, the administration's happy, the community's happy, you know?"

Finally, a detective from the CASA unit expressed her positive views towards community involved, and how community involvement it crucial for community policing to work in the following statement:

"It's definitely good. I have no issues with that at all. Although sometimes the community puts a lot on the police officer. They think they should be able to solve things when you can't sometimes… the community definitely needs to be more involved…"

The detective went on to add that although community involvement is necessary for the success of a department's community policing unit, it can sometimes cause community members to attempt to take police work into their own hands. The detective explains this predicament in the following:

'…but then the community can also go overboard. I've seen that. They'll put up their own speed bumps on a road or they would put up their own it cones and make people, you know, go around the traffic, and then I actually had people that, you know, cuz there wasn't a lot of parking in the school, would have like, you know, events or whatever. So, they'd have to park on the main street and people would literally paint the sidewalk red trying to make them think that they were in a no parking zone and then start vandalizing

the cars, you know, trying to teach them a lesson for parking, you know, next to their driveway."

Finally, one detective suggested the idea of a community mediator to help ease possible citizen-police tension, as well as utilizing it for better organization and workflow between law enforcement agencies and communities, in the following statement:

> "If we had some citizen review board or something like that and included them with our debriefs. Explaining what was done and why we did it, and then maybe these citizen review boards, can discuss their thoughts and concerns with us and we can move forward from there."

In summary, all of the interviewees agreed that community policing is overall beneficial and a positive aspect of policing in order to help boost community relations. However, some officers did admit it can be difficult to do depending on the department's resources and the varying expectations some community members have towards law enforcement officers and their agencies.

## Relationship Building

The data analysis revealed that all the interviewees believed that establishing trust and respect are crucial components for both law enforcement departments and their communities to form more positive and successful relationships. For example, a detective from the Boating Unit discussed how deeply he cares about his fellow community members and the importance of treating them as if they were his own family member in the following statement:

> "Every person I come in contact with, this is my family member. That's how I look at it, a family member and you know, we get a horrible incident out here. Kids ran over. But that's what I look at. That's my family member… And you know, we get a lot of gore stuff out here, a lot of gory stuff… And sometimes you take it a little too personal. You know, but you're gonna deal with it separately. That's the job. I'm gonna deal with it separately, but that's what it comes down to is this is my loved one. How would I want that handled. I want everything, you know, dotted and Ts crossed and everything. That's what I want."

Similar to that of the Boating detective's strategy in relationship building, a detective

from the Cold Case unit explained his philosophy behind fostering relationships with both the

victims and the suspects, despite how severe the crime they may or may not have committed

might be, in the following statement:

> "I mean, at the end of the day, the way that I've treated most people is like, everybody's somebody's somebody. Like they could be, they could do the most horrendous thing. Which it's hard to not let your emotions dictate how you're gonna be with somebody. But like at the end of the day, like if somebody's charged with a sex crime or a child crime or whatever, that's somebody's somebody, there's everyone's somebody to somebody. And just taking that into account that their person at the end of the day, and you don't have to agree with what they did, but at the same time, I mean, people should be treated a certain way, no matter what."

The Cold Case detective continued to add to this statement by explaining the importance

of listening. Whether that be to a victim, suspect, witness, or any citizen's story, he explains in

the following just how important it is to treat everyone with respect, appreciation, and patience:

> "A huge complaint that I've heard from people is they don't feel like they're listened to at all. Like literally it could be somebody that is the craziest person in the world, but it like, literally if you just sat there, they could have no bearing on your investigation, it could be the most ridiculous thing you've heard of in your life. But if that person just felt like you sat there and heard what they had to say and say, "Okay, thank you. I appreciate that.' And give 'em a business card. "If you hear anything else, let me know." That that goes a *long* way."

Building on the importance of treating citizens like family members, somebody's

somebody, and showing respect for everyone, one of the captains at the department also shared

how he uses humbleness to ensure every citizen he meets is met with respect:

> "I think for me the biggest thing has been staying humble and that the badge and gun does not define you. It can, if it does, you probably need to take a good deep look at yourself, you know, we're all just people. You have to treat people with respect, always start off with respect until they change that. You know, if they take it different direction then obviously you have to gain control, but they're people… I'm just another person too… but always keep it in mind and staying humble that you're just another person."

One way a detective from the CASA Unit would work on relationship building and

discouraging criminal activity is by treating the suspect with hospitality:

> "I would offer them food. That was kind of my way, a lot of people I dealt with were homeless or, you know, transient or something along those lines… For instance, we get a call for someone hanging out at the hospital who was causing a disturbance. They weren't breaking any laws technically. They just wanted them out of there, so I'm like, 'Hey, how about if I take you to McDonald's and get you some food and I'll take you anywhere you wanna go.'"

A detective from the Homicide unit recounted a similar experience of providing

hospitality and treating suspects humanely regardless of their actions in the following:

> "And then they're like, man, 'I'm really thirsty. Can have a Coke?' I'm like, I'll buy you a Coke dude. Yeah. And then I handcuff, 'em give 'em a Coke. They'll drink it. And I'll book 'em in. And they're like, 'That was really cool, man.'… You went to a hospital and now you're going to jail, and that's a shitty day. Like why am I gonna make your day even worse?"

Building off this comment, the detective explained why he chooses to show empathy

towards citizens, regardless of the crimes they may or may not have committed by stating, "So it

just comes kind of down to honestly respecting the person as a person, not as whether they're like

a criminal or a victim in the situation."

The previous detective from the CASA unit also noted that the deputies at her law

enforcement establishment have to have excellent communication skills. She said, "We have

better communication skills because we're out there in the middle of nowhere." Due to the nature

of her sheriff's department, they do not have as many resources as most police departments do.

Therefore, they rely more on communications skills because their closest unit could be a half an

hour away. For example, the detective from the Homicide Unit shared a similar story in the

following:

> "With police officers you can have three or four people on the call. When you're a deputy, your closest unit is probably gonna be like 30 minutes, 20 minutes away. And that could be a CHP officer responding to that, so you *have to* be able to talk to people,

you know, and diffuse the situation for long enough.  You're relying on your communication tactics.  You know, and I feel like when you can gauge people quite quickly when you talk to 'em."

Adding to this statement, the Homicide detective explained the differences he has seen between police officer's and deputy sheriff's communication skills with the public and why these differences occur in the following statement:

"You don't have to be disrespectful.  I feel like a lot of times with police officers in cities, they're more likely to quickly escalate things because their backup is two to three minutes away, so they don't have to rely on the verbal aspect.  They're just used to just taking quick action.  So, when you're, you know, out in the middle of a property and your directions to your beat partner are like, 'Hey, I'm down a long dirt road.  You take a left past the blueberry patch and then take a right past the cherry, and we're in that back house.'"

Outside of having quality communication abilities to aid in relationship building with the communities they serve; other detectives explained the importance of placing their communities value at the forefront of their work.  A different detective from the CASA unit added to this by stating that careers in the field of law enforcement are not salary driven in his eyes.  In the following statement, he explains that his line of work is driven by wanting to help those in his community instead of a paycheck:

"You always want to show the, you know, the community that you care because you didn't sign up for this job.  I never signed up for this job for the money.  I signed up for this job because I wanted to make a difference in my community."

Later on in the interview, the detective added to this theme of valuing communities and discussed how important mutual trust is between both law enforcement officers and the communities they serve, as well as valuing trust outside of the job as well, in the following statement:

"You don't have trust, it goes *downhill*.  Trust goes with everything.  Trust goes with your community.  It goes with your job.  It goes with your life.  It goes with your family.  It all goes away if you don't have trust."

Adding to the idea of trust and valuing communities, another detective from the Homicide unit explained the importance of treating every citizen with respect regardless of their demographics in the following:

> "You have to show up in the community and you just have to make sure everybody gets treated with respect. I don't show disrespect to someone, until they show disrespect to me. You know, I treat everybody the same; from a rich person in a mansion versus a homeless person, you know? They, they made different choices, but why am I gonna treat them any differently?"

The Homicide detective continued with his discussion of respect towards all members of the community, while adding while he may pass judgement, he does not let it interfere with his job or how he treats members of his community, in the following statement:

> "I may have judgment on people. Everybody does. But I don't make it known and, and just no drama. Just keep a level head, *keep it*. Show people compassion and respect. Even if they don't deserve it. Killing with kindness is what my dad says."

Finally, the Cold Case unit detective also discussed the importance of building trust with the community he serves and the difficulties he has faced while trying to do so, by stating, "It's working to gain their trust towards you as an officer, but you're also trying to negate any past experiences that they may or may not have had with the Sheriff's office or law enforcement in general." He added to this statement by explaining his key tactic for combating situations like these, which is, "The golden rule is just treating people how you want to be treated."

In summary, all of the interviewees agreed that trust and respect are essential to the job and to fostering relationships with their community members. Many of them noted that they try their best to imagine each citizen as a family member, or someone special, even if they are a suspect for an egregious crime.

**Police Reform**

The data analysis revealed that all the interviewees believed that a certain degree of reform is needed in the field of law enforcement.  Some interviewees advocated for reform within law enforcement departments while others discussed creating opportunities for citizens to grow their understanding of law enforcement officer's work.

One of the captains at the department discussed the inevitability of change and his views towards understanding younger generations and how generational differences have been an issue in the field of law enforcement since the beginning of his career in the following:

> "Change is almost constant, constantly necessary.  And when I started this, I'm sure when I started in this career 20 years ago, I guarantee you that those that have been here 20 years before me looked at me and said, 'Okay, here's the new guy.  He doesn't have any work ethic or whatever.' And you know, you'll hear people talk about gen X and millennials and this, that, and the other things.  Well, they were raised a little bit different, but that doesn't make them bad.  In some instances it makes them more efficient.  And so for us, and for me and people of my age, we have to recognize that and then figure out what what's good and what's bad, and go from there… Everybody, you know, life boils down your perspective and you have to be able to doesn't mean you have to agree with, but you've gotta be able to see different perspectives to understand."

Later in the discussion, the captain breaks away from reform on an interpersonal level and explains how he believes reform regarding law making would be beneficial for law enforcement officers and community members in the following:

> "Reforms, there are things I'd like to see changed.  You know, certainly I'd like to see, some of the laws tightened up, some of the penalties tightened up because to, to create a deterrence, and hopefully minimize the crime."

As he states in the following, despite his agreement with the need for reform, he does admit that new problems could arise if new reform is implemented; yet even with the chance of new issues arising, he still believes reform is necessary:

> "But with every change comes a new problem, you know, I don't know the answer to what the solution is, but if you arrest and incarcerate everyone for petty offenses, then

you've gotta build more jails.  Or more prisons.  You know, that's just one example, but certainly there are some things that I'd like to see change tightened up a little bit."

Adding to the conversation of change and reform, the Homicide detective explained in detail, his views towards how to properly produce change that will benefit both law enforcement officers and the communities they serve in the following:

> "I think people need to well define what the deficiencies are for law enforcement.  They need say exact problems, what our problems are, and then we can figure out solutions.  So, if it's not well defined, then how do we ever fix the problem of policing? And then two, if they say that it's a deficiency, it should be on them to prove how it's a deficiency, why it is a problem.  And if we can identify that this is a true deficiency, what are some of the things we can do to make it better?"

The detective explains the importance of community involvement and communication on both sides to determine the best possible solution and course of action to take to combat a genuine problem that both the community and law enforcement officers and their agencies can agree on.  Building upon this, the detective added the following statement in which he discussed ways in which change can be effectively made by law enforcement officers, which will allow them to have adequate work-life balance:

> "If you train officers and in say, jujitsu, well, how many people are going to want to do that on their days off? Especially if they're working all the time.  You know what I mean? So, you have to give them the time and space to accomplish that goal.  So, if we want to change, you have to implement it in the time that they're at work.  Because a lot of times when they're at work, they're going be here because of lower staffing because you can't hire people.  They're already going be working overtime.  So, you have to make sure that they can do it at work and then go home and then have like a work life balance.  Cuz they're already home away from their kids, their wives, their husbands, you know what I mean?"

The Homicide detective also added that communication is an area that he believes could be taken more seriously and that departments could and should focus more training on communication skills because of their usefulness in defusing situations.  The detective explains this idea in the following:

"Communication is another deficiency where I feel like we don't have a lot of programs where we just have like serious classes where we talk about what are good models to talk to people… I think it's just understanding how to talk to people, and just giving options. And a lot of times you can just naturally deescalate things."

The Homicide detective added to his previous two views of reform, the community identifying deficiencies and improving communication skills, by also advocating the importance of creating educational material for citizens when they are interacting with law enforcement in the following:

"I feel like that if there were more like public service announcements of how to conduct yourself on a traffic stop. Even if you feel what the officer is doing is wrong. If you follow this model, no one is gonna get sent to the hospital. No one is gonna get shot. No one gonna die. If you just follow the model of, here's the police officer, he tells you to step out of the car, you don't ask him why, you don't give him an attitude. You just go, "Yes sir or yes ma'am," and get out of the car. You know? And then if there's a time and place, if he's giving you a citation, you know, or researching your car, you can ask them, sir, why are you searching my car? Why are you writing me this ticket? And that officer should explain to you why they're searching the car, why you're detained in handcuffs, and why you're being written a citation. They shouldn't just say shut up. I'm just doing my job."

Similar to the views of the Homicide Detective on the importance of creating educational material for citizens, the Cold Case detective stated:

"I feel like there needs to be like a training of society in general too, that, uh, that we all have a mutual understanding of roles of law enforcement officers and roles of people when you come in contact with each other."

As the theme of educating the public on the duties of law enforcement officers, as well as how to conduct positive interactions, continues throughout most of the interviews. The Cold Case detective added that he believes law enforcement officers should have an integrated citizen review board to help increase education and understanding of the police work that is being done in their communities in the following:

"Maybe including like if we had some citizen review board or something like that. Um, including them in our debriefs on like this, was done and this is why we did what we did and then maybe these citizen review boards, they come out with a statement or

something.  So, it's not coming from the law enforcement officer that everyone thinks, oh, they're just covering something up and they're just saying this to keep the community informed and educated."

Stepping away from the idea of educating citizens, a previous detective, the Boating

Unit's detective, later on in his interview explained the importance of reform needed for law

enforcement officers on a national level and creating a standard that could possibly increase the

successfulness of law enforcement departments and their officers in the following:

> "You know, the way I look at it, it comes again, it comes down to training, so yeah. We're talking other states.  Well then you start looking at what's the standard in California.  We have peace officer standards.  And that's through POST (Peace Officer Standards Training).  So, at other agencies it's like another job, or I'm sorry, in other states like another job it's, 'Hey, you got the bare bones and here you go, you got a gun, you got a car.' Well, what do you think happens? It comes down to judgment.  Right? If you don't have all that training, something goes bad.  What kicks in is natural instincts, and if you don't play these things in your head, those natural instincts could be bad.  As we see in the national outlet, that's when you have a guy that's like, 'Hey, I never dealt with something like this never been in this situation.  And that was my reaction.' It's like, well maybe if you had that training, if you had, you know, a better standard, that wouldn't happen."

Building upon the idea of creating a better standard and implementing more training on a

national level, both the detective from the CASA Unit agreed that a communication standard

needs to be set.  One of them stated, "Well, there's also training that helped me because I was a, a

negotiator, you know, hostile negotiator.  So, I did train with the FBI and that helped me to get

communication tactics and even empathy for when you are dealing with certain people." The

other detective from CASA added that, "Verbal judo should be taught more thoroughly in, you

know, maybe post or a training class." To clarify, verbal judo regarding law enforcement officer

is defined as "educating officers on interpersonal skills to diffuse potentially volatile

confrontations with members of the community." (San Miguel & Justice, 2008).

In summary, all the interviewees were in favor of a style of reform.  While some

discussed the value and importance of educating citizens, others discussed the importance of

working to reform law enforcement officer's training in order to create a successful outcome for

both law enforcement agencies and the communities they serve. There were few that discussed

creating a space for law enforcement officers and the communities to openly express their

opinions on situations in order to come to an agreement and decision in regard to making reform

and help increase transparency and understanding among citizens. One unanticipated topic that

was found in the interviews was education. The law enforcement officers shared their beliefs on

educating citizens and how it could be a critical factor for success and future success with

citizens. Therefore, I found it to be a significant factor that needed to be thematically coded for.

One of the detectives from the CASA unit discussed her solution for helping the citizens

they serve and protect understand the ins-and-outs of the job better. In the following, she

discusses ways in which community members can become more educated on what police work

entails:

> "It would be nice if they did ride-alongs. I think it would be a good one idea. Also, those
> virtual machines that we have, you know, where they can be put in a situation where
> they're wearing a fake gun, or they're put in a situation we've been in. We have 'em here.
> You know, where it's those scenarios where you don't have a minute to assess, you know,
> you don't have that minute to go like 'Hmm. Does that person have a gun?' You gotta,
> you know, you *have to* react. I think that would help them understand what we go
> through and how intense the job can be."

The captain of one of the departments explained in the following that education can

sometimes be more critical than enforcement of the laws:

> "You know, again, working in boats (Boating Unit), there's enforcement in education and
> you'll find that a lot of new boaters don't need enforcement, they need education. So, you
> know, it's about how you approach a situation and understanding where they're at within
> their, their level of knowledge. And understanding that not everything needs
> enforcement. You know, *many* times they just need education."

To continue with the importance of education over enforcement, the head detective from the Boating Unit passionately explained the importance of education, especially in his work environment, and how to deliver it properly in the following statement:

"It starts off with the first contact. So, when you come across somebody that maybe they've committed violation, I'm talking infractions. So, I don't come off as, 'Hey, you know, put that boat neutral!' It's that first contact. I'm calm. 'Hey sir. Put it in neutral. We're just gonna have chat, come alongside me.' You have a conversation, and that's *all* we're having, is a conversation. And then back to the education, I'd say something like, 'Hey, we don't do that, and this is why.' And you know, usually I have life experience to back up what I'm telling the boater, like, 'Hey, we investigated this incident where someone was seriously injured or killed,' or whatever, you know, circumstances are. And they actually sit there and listen. And after the conversation, they're like, 'Yeah. Wow. Okay. That's why we don't do this.' And I'm telling you, you get compliance, which is the number one thing. Number two is now that person's educated, they're telling other people. Even better! And it's just, it's a domino effect. So, education, it's a big thing."

The detective from the Boating Unit continued to add to this statement by explaining how he differentiates between having just an educational conversation versus choosing to educate and write a citation for a boater who is in violation of the laws in the following statement:

"So yeah, we push a lot of education, but we also get, you know, enforcement actions. Where, hey, okay, maybe the education isn't the best option, and I'll give you an example. A kid without a live jacket out here, that's a guaranteed a citation. And the reason being is you see the aftermath of what bad can happen. And you know, it really comes down to the parent, so I look at it as a child endangerment. You know, you got a six-year-old on the boat without a life jacket. I educate first. But every time after that education, it's okay, 'This is the reason why it's a law and why I have to issue a citation.' And you know, it's funny, a lot of times you get push back from the parents, but it's still very important to educate and give them a citation because they don't realize the number of scenes I've arrived to where it's a young kid that's passed on due to not having that life jacket or being watched over by their parents."

In summary, very few of the interviewees discussed education. When discussing education in law enforcement, they did agree that education can be more useful in certain situations, especially boating incident, as opposed to just giving out a citation.

**Summary**

In conclusion, the participants of this study all believed that their department had positive local media portrayals, a favorable opinion of community policing and its potential, and a positive attitude towards building relationships with citizens. Despite the participants agreeing that the local media portrayals of their department were positive, they also agreed, on a national level, that the media portrayals of law enforcement officers and their agencies is often very negative and could further the divide between Americans and law enforcement officers. However, the national media representation was not the only theme on which the participants shared a negative opinion. Many participants in this study disagreed with the recent police reforms and future reforms in the current discussion, especially in California. Despite not agreeing with most of the reforms or possible reforms, all the participants agreed that there is room for positive changes for law enforcement agencies and their officers. Whether that be a wider variety of training and techniques implemented in POST and during their careers, more frequency of training throughout their careers, creating an educational system for citizens to learn how to have successful interactions with law enforcement, or learning opportunities, like classes and example scenarios, for citizens to grow in their understanding of the field of law enforcement. While education in law enforcement was not a part of the interview questions, a few law enforcement officers discussed its high value and place in the world of policing.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Based on previous literature and my findings, there is plenty of room for improvement for society and law enforcement to make the positive impact that this country so desperately needs. In this section, I discuss my findings concerning the research questions and cover possible solutions to mend society's and law enforcement's relationship, all while examining the importance of the themes: media portrayals, community policing, relationship building (specifically trust), educating citizens, and police reform.

While much of the literature discusses the media's adverse reporting about law enforcement (Lawrence, 2000), my findings discovered quite the opposite. However, the small sample size of my study must take into consideration when comparing it's results to previous literature. Despite my limited sample size, it still is important to note that all my interviewees shared positive experiences with their local news media. When asked why, they all landed on the same answer: transparency. One detective explained that they are "very, very, very, very transparent" and "try to release and provide information as fast as possible." A captain added that their success at being transparent is primarily due to their Public Information Officers (PIOs). Roberts (2019) explains that PIOs are "responsible for creating and enabling communication between a government organization and both news media outlets and the general public." One of the ways the officers and PIOs in the department I interviewed can do this so successfully is due to their implementation of social media as a news source. Their PIOs are not only in charge of press releases, arranging interviews, and organizing speeches, but they also create content for their Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram pages. On all of their social media accounts, their stories range from community service projects, catching cold case murders, solving recent crimes, and

sharing what's happening with their department. They have their direct messages (DMs) and comments open to the public so that they can respond to people in their community. Therefore, this transparency and sharing of information could be a tool that other law enforcement agencies use to improve their media presence within their local news media.

Adding to this, this department and other departments could use social media to not only benefit their relationships and transparency with their communities but help educate them as well. By implementing educational segments on social media platforms, departments could be more likely have a more significant reach across their communities due to the tech-centric nature of many, and the ability for community members to share and repost content from their local departments. This could create a new avenue for virtual community policing where education is a key factor, like Goldstein stated (1987), in promoting positive relationships between officers and community members Goldstein. Furthermore, social media is a useful mechanism that can help spread information quickly to the masses, so it could prove to be a vital asset for improving law enforcement officers and their department's ability to educate citizens.

Aside from education and social media, some of the officers I interviewed did note that they are fortunate to have a positive presence in their local news media. Still, they are aware of the constant negative news stories about law enforcement officers and their agencies nationally. One officer explained the reasoning for negative news media by stating, "what's sad is there are shitty cops. Everywhere you go, there're shitty cops and those shitty cops, you know, overpower the good things that, you know, most cops do. Most cops are good people, but that's not what it comes down to. It does come down to what sells…" The detective points out a critical part of news media, which is that they tend to choose the stories that will generate the most profit for them.

The detective later described how the media often uses race as a weapon against law enforcement officers. The detective continues by stating, "why does it gotta be race? We're all humans. So that, that irritates me because it sells, and it's really sad!" With this finding and the previous, it is arguable that the media must be held accountable for the messages they share with our nation. While many argue for police reform, there should be reform within the press. Negative news stories, in general, generate more revenue and have a higher click-through-rate (Scacco & Muddiman, 2016), and these should not be a deciding factor for what news media platforms present to the public. Any career that serves the public should constantly be constructively criticized and willing to adapt and change for what is best for society. These constant negative news messages regarding law enforcement officers have had a detrimental effect on our nation's outlook on most law enforcement agencies and their officers, and much of the literature supports this as well (Bučar-Ručman & Meško, 2006; Gauthier & Graziano, 2018; Hohl, 2011; Huey & Broll, 2012; Kaminski & Jefferis, 1998; Lawrence, 2000). Therefore, it is important that the press is held accountable for their persuasive messages regarding law enforcement media, and all varieties of news stories, which are motivated by revenue, and not the nation's best interest, which should be the truth.

While negative news stories regarding law enforcement have had a significantly negative impact on citizen's views of law enforcement and the law enforcement officer's lives as well (Huey & Broll, 2012), the press should not stop reporting adverse incidents that occur between law enforcement officers and citizens. News media outlets should pursue both sides of citizens' encounters with law enforcement instead of showing a lopsided negative view of law enforcement (Kaminski & Jefferis, 1998; Huey & Broll, 2012; Lawrence, 2000). As well as law enforcement departments utilizing their PIOs and social media outlets to report their story and

findings as well. Restoring balance within news media journalism could aid in restoring citizens' attitudes and perceptions toward law enforcement officers. It could also allow for positive relationships and experiences with law enforcement officers.

The idea and implementation of community policing and its variants have brought positives and negatives for both citizens and law enforcement. According to my findings and many of the community policing literature, its positives outweigh its negatives. However, community policing is a dynamic process that requires constant attention and realignment from both sides. All my interviewees believe community policing has its place in law enforcement and recognize it as primarily positive. They realize it is positive because of the ability to create an emotional investment in their communities and develop genuine relationships with those community members; this is one of the main goals of community policing (Goldstein 1987; Weister & Tuch, 2005). Based on my findings and the literature, community policing can be a game changer for improving citizen and police relationships and reducing the number of crimes in those communities; as well as creating opportunities for educational moments, so that citizens are able to learn and grow from the situation (Weitzer, Tuch, & Skogan, 2008). Therefore, it would be important for agencies to discuss and create more community policing programs within their department to take a step toward improving their relationship with the communities they serve and help support educating citizens as a vital role in diminishing crime.

Alongside the addition and improvement of prior community policing units, implementing the key aspects from the Communication accommodation theory (CAT) would be a beneficial tactic for law enforcement officers and their agencies. CAT could allow them to create better relationships with community members and maintain those relationships to encourage generational trust (Gallois & Giles, 1998; Gallois, Ogay, & Giles, 2004). By

decreasing social distance between law enforcement officers and the communities they serve, their communication and cooperation could increase; in return, this could promote a higher success rate in deterring and/or preventing criminal activity (Bayley, 1994; Gallois & Giles, 1998). The combination of CAT and community policing could be a critical component to creating and ensuring the strength and longevity of a law enforcement agency's community policing unit.

Nevertheless, community policing requires three vital parts: resources, cooperation, and relationship building. All three critical aspects are necessary for the communities and the law enforcement officers. Law enforcement agencies need to have enough funding to ensure community officers and the tools they require to perform to the best of their abilities and their community's needs. These officers must be able to "get out of the car," as one of my interviewees said when describing the importance of positive community policing and face-to-face interactions with community members to make a lasting impact. If community officers are limited on time and resources, they will not be able to establish positive connections with the citizens in their community according to this study.

Another possible resource that might be beneficial is the establishment of a community board that acts as a liaison between the community member and their local law enforcement officers and agencies. One detective explained that it could be valuable to have a "citizen review board" that aids in mediating messages and debriefs between law enforcement and the community's members. This could be beneficial due to citizens' varying attitudes and behaviors towards law enforcement. Still, it would require the community to agree on voting for community members to be a part of the board and establishing meeting schedules with their local law enforcement agencies and community. Allowing community members to elect their board

members could create greater community involvement, as well as improve engagement with officers and deter criminal activity within the community.

The second key aspect of community policing is cooperation, especially from the citizens (NRC, 2004). One detective stated, "the community definitely needs to be more involved," when discussing the importance of community policing. In the same conversation, the detective explained their positive views toward community policing and how it is been beneficial in the communities the detective's department implemented. The lack of cooperation could be due to various factors. Still, based on my findings, negative media portrayals (Weitzer, Tuch, & Skogan, 2008) and lack of trust between law enforcement and citizens are the two significant factors in determining cooperation. Based on the literature, lack of confidence and negative attitudes towards law enforcement are often created from prior beliefs within a community (Carr et al., 2007; Rosenbaum et al., 2005). One way to improve cooperation would be to establish multiple community policing units in departments to ensure that each community increases its trust with its community officers through familiarity and exposure. The creation of multiple community policing units could allot officers more time and therefore, create educational moments in order for their community to grow and learn from the situation. Furthermore, utilizing CAT as foundation for community policing units could aid law enforcement officers in decreasing social distance in order to establish better relationships with community members and produce positive long-term results (Gallois & Giles, 1998; Gallois, Ogay, & Giles, 2004).

Finally, relationship building with an emphasis on building trust is crucial for establishing a thriving community policing unit within a law enforcement agency. Although building trust will take time due to possible negative preconceived attitudes and perceptions some community members may have (Carr et al., 2007). It is essential to redirect some law

enforcement funding, and it would be beneficial to allocate funding towards establishing more community policing units and creating classes that teach law enforcement officers the power of communication, decreasing social distance and maintaining relationships, and how communication methods can be used as tools for fostering positive relationships with community members; rather than having funding reallocated for advanced weaponry, or worse, the defunding of law enforcement agencies (Gallois & Giles, 1998; Gallois, Ogay, & Giles, 2004; Owens, Clark, & Glynn, 2020; Rushin & Michalski, 2020). Additionally, teaching verbal judo techniques, like one of the detectives from the CASA unit discussed, could prove beneficial since it was originally established for law enforcement officer use and to aid in community policing philosophy (San Miguel & Justice, 2008). Not only can it help deescalate situations verbally, but it also "teaches officers to be empathetic, conduct themselves in a professional manner, and gain compliance through verbal appeals" (Thompson & Jenkins, 2004). Furthermore, creation of a communication, interpersonal relationship, and humanity-oriented programs within law enforcement agencies could not only prove beneficial for community members and their relationships with their local agencies, but it could also help foster better relationships and communication between officers within the agencies.

Although community policing can be positive, it needs to be implemented in a way that allows both sides to be successful and boost community and law enforcement relations. If not, it can lead to hostile relations and outcomes. For example, some law enforcement officers I interviewed shared similar struggles with the officers in Huey and Broll's (2011) study regarding implementing community policing practices. For example, one of my interviewees stated that "the community can also go overboard… They'll put up their own speed bumps on a road or they would put up their own cones…" in Huey and Broll's (2011) study, an officer explained

that a community member's ideas might be a solution, but it is often not the best or the safest for the entire community. Adding to this, another interviewee stated that "sometimes the community puts a lot on the police officer. They think they should be able to solve things when you can't sometimes." It is important to remember this is not inherently the community member's fault but more likely due to the CSI effect since many of us live in a heavily saturated media-based world. During these interactions, the officer must explain to the community member why their actions or reasonings do not align with their law enforcement agency's standards, which can lead to negative perceptions and relations. This is another reason why focusing on relationship building and developing trust is critical to community policing because it will help minimize the likelihood of negative interactions or allow them to be resolved more peacefully. While community policing has its many positives, it is important to point out these negative scenarios because they help find the cracks in community policing, create avenues for change, and ultimately allow for safer communities with the help of both law enforcement officers and their community members working together.

Regarding improving citizen-law-enforcement relationships, the most recurring word from the interviews was trust. It was a prevalent idea in the literature too, but popular due to the lack of trust between citizens and law enforcement. According to the mentioned gallop poll study in 2019, almost half of Americans (43%) do not trust the police (Chabot, 2020). Every interviewee said trust and respect are vital to creating positive citizen relationships. One of the best examples of this comes from a member from a CASA unit explaining the importance of trust by stating, "You don't have trust, it goes downhill. Trust goes with everything. Trust goes with your community. It, it goes with your job. It goes with your life. It goes with your family. It goes away if you don't have trust." Suppose trust is as vital as this detective and the others say.

In that case, it could be an explanation and solution to the deterioration of citizen and law enforcement relationships. Therefore, putting relationship building, specifically geared towards improving trust, towards the forefront of law enforcement training or operations could be paramount to solving this problem.

According to Sunshine and Tyler (2003), the face-to-face interactions citizens have with law enforcement have a lasting effect on how they view law enforcement officers and their agencies. Adding to this, Carr et al. (2007) noted that despite lack of trust in law enforcement officers due to legal cynicism from face-to-face encounters and generational attitudes, the participants in the study still believed more law enforcement officers and stricter sentences would be beneficial. Knowing this, creating environments and interactions that produce trust and respect should be a goal both parties aim for and want in order to help restore relations. Even Giles et al. (2006) highlight the significance of communication between law enforcement and citizens since 98% of law enforcement practices revolve around effectively communicating and ensuring the safety of their citizens. Therefore, it would be highly beneficial for law enforcement agencies to emphasize relationship building geared towards trust and respect via face-to-face communication with their citizens. Education could be used to help build trust by officers teaching citizens the proper way to handle a situation, and in return, this could show communities that officers care deeply about their community's future. However, relationships are not one-sided, and citizens need to engage in respectful and trust-provoking behavior for the relationships to grow positively and decrease the social distance between them (Gallois & Giles, 1998; Gallois, Ogay, & Giles, 2004). The National Research Council (2004) agrees, explaining that citizens must be willing to provide cooperation for law enforcement agents to perform to the best of their abilities. With the combination of cooperation, respect, and trust from both sides it

will benefit both sides immensely and help foster more positive relationships and attitudes towards law enforcement.

It is important to note that this will not be a simple evolution, especially in communities with profoundly negative views of law enforcement. As Rosenbaum et al. (2005) describe, prior held beliefs, positive or negative, about law enforcement officers are a reliable predictor of attitudes towards law enforcement officers and agencies. Therefore, these rooted views will be a steep uphill battle to amend. An uphill struggle both sides should eagerly want to climb due to the reoccurring negative news and social media narratives regarding citizens and law enforcement officers. While it will require immense dedication from both sides, it is feasible. It is the timeline that both sides will most likely become frustrated over since it is no simple fix. It will take years of education and training for law enforcement officers and years of attitudinal and behavioral changes for citizens to overcome. However, peaceful relations between both sides should be worth it to everyone, regardless of the time it may take. Innocent lives will be saved if both sides agree to work on their relationship.

One of the most unexpected discoveries from my research was the emphasis some officers placed on the value of education. For example, one of the officers explained the importance of "education over citations" and detailed how that it's not only a way to save lives, but it creates better citizen-officer relationships. This officer continued by explaining that attempting to diminish crime via only citations is not an effective way of reducing possible future crime. In fact, Goldstein (1987) demonstrated that one of the critical values in community policing is the ability to educate citizens to help them avoid being victims of crime. Emphasizing education over citations could improve relations with communities and decrease the social distance via CAT between the officers and their community members. Therefore,

establishing the importance of education in law enforcement agencies and their officers could not only create a more knowledgeable and safer community, but a positive environment that both can coexist and appreciate each other.

To add to this, another detective suggested the idea of community education via completing job-related activities with local law enforcement. The detective suggested ride-a-long, virtual scenarios (varying in risk level), and touring their department or the county jail. Therefore, creating programs or spreading awareness to citizens about the learning opportunities they have with local law enforcement could be unduly beneficial in building better relationships between the two. While creating programs could be costly and time-consuming, this could be done through the reallocation of funds that law enforcement agencies receive from the state and government. Even the research from Weitzer, Tuch, & Skogan (2008) discovered that Black citizens with less education believed police dereliction was a significant problem within their communities, while Black citizens with better education did not think it was a problem. With the media constantly using the race narrative, the reallocation of funds is warranted due to the positive effects it could have on citizen-officer relationships.

Which brings my final topic, police reform. While many types of police reforms have been discussed and implemented since the 1840s (Greene & Mastrofsky, 1991), our nation is still struggling to find a balance between law enforcement and their communities. All the officers I interviewed believe police reform can be a positive if done correctly. However, they all discussed varying styles of reform. One detective admitted that training makes a huge impact, and that the current training regimen and POST (Peace Officer Training Standards) need to make adaptions to them. Adding communication courses (Giles et al., 2006), specifically focused on building positive relationships, and adding more community policing units and training for them

could significantly increase positive attitudes and behaviors towards law enforcement officers (Goldstein, 1987). Furthermore, instilling a department within law enforcement agencies that focus on teaching interpersonal communication skills and humanity-oriented lessons could be beneficial as well.

Aside from verbal training, law enforcement officers should more frequently implement self-defense tactics without weapons. For example, one detective discussed his beliefs in practicing a mixed martial art, like jujitsu, to de-escalate situations more peacefully and establish a less threatening presence (Giles et al., 2004; Klockars, 1985). However, as the officer explained later, a career in law enforcement is tiresome, and most officers do not have the time or energy to commit to learning a mixed martial art outside their work hours. Therefore, it would be tremendously beneficial to incorporate on-the-job training for officers to learn a mixed martial art to de-escalate certain situations more effectively and safely for both the officers and citizens.

Another detective discussed the value of educating citizens and how it could be integrated as a type of reform to keep citizens' and law enforcement officers' interactions peaceful and safe. This aligns with the literature as well because citizens who have preconceived negative attitudes towards law enforcement officers could be more inclined to be less respectful, resist cooperation, react poorly within the interaction, and cause both themselves and the officer to become reactive (Rosenbaum et al., 2005; NRC, 2004). These are all concerns both sides should want to avoid. Therefore, it would be beneficial for officers and their agencies to establish educating citizens as a top priority. With this, PIOs should create public service announcements with the press and social media posts (to target multiple demographics) explaining and detailing proper conduct with law enforcement officers and safety tips in general.

Finally, one detective discussed the importance of defining law enforcement officers and their agencies' deficiencies and how they could combat them. This is an excellent idea, especially with the help of a community policing board and the government at a state level. The community policing committee could act as a liaison between their communities' members and local law enforcement agencies and have meetings discussing the improvements needed to create a safer community. At the same time, state officials could implement a new division to investigate issues within their law enforcement agencies in their state. These reforms would create new jobs and allow for checks and balances between law enforcement agencies and state officials. Furthermore, this would also improve community relations if the local law enforcement agencies took their communities' voices into account and made the desired changes. A variety of beneficial reforms could be established, and many of the officers I interviewed shed light on new possibilities for reform that could positively impact communities, law enforcement officers, and their agencies.

## Limitations of Study

There are a number of methodological limitations in the current work that should be considered. While the interviewees provided ample data, the sample size was still too small to create generalizable results. Furthermore, the officers interviewed all belonged to the same department. While a few did have experience in other departments, they mostly answered interview questions based on their career at their current department. Due to the nature of qualitative interview studies, they prolonged the study because of scheduling conflicts and cancellations.

There are a few limitations I had and the first was access to multiple different law enforcement organizations. I selected one law enforcement department because of the ease of

access and working relationship I had previously established with the agency. The second limitation was the time available to investigate and conduct interviews. With more time or a longitudinal study, I could have researched additional ways to improve law enforcement and citizen relations.

**Future Research**

Future investigations are necessary to validate the kinds of conclusions that can be drawn from this study. Future research should consider interviewing other law enforcement agencies and interviewing law enforcement officers ranging in rank or experience and officers working in different departments to obtain a diverse pool of data and attempt to represent each agency in its entirety.

Subsequent studies could further explore this issue by using a quantitative methodology to ease workflow and productivity. A quantitative method could allow the researcher to conduct a larger-scale investigation. A nationwide analysis could help uncover specific issues law enforcement agencies have with their citizens and shed light on how other agencies combat issues that arise with their citizens. Finally, future research should examine how law enforcement officers implement education to understand better its impact on citizens and law enforcement officers' relations. As well as uncovering ways to educate the youth could improve future relations with law enforcement officers.

**Conclusion**

This research identified factors that can lead to more positive relationships between law enforcement officers and the communities they serve and provide ways in which positive portrayals of law enforcement officers can become more prevalent in the press. Based on this analysis of law enforcement relations with citizens, it can be concluded that focusing on building

trust, emphasizing educating citizens, and utilizing community policing to its full potential are essential factors to consider. Furthermore, allowing for open discussions to target areas needing improvement based on community and law enforcement concerns would help create beneficial reform for both. The results regarding law enforcement portrayals within news media indicate that law enforcement agencies and officers that choose to be transparent and utilize social media will increase their trust with communities and positive news media from the press. From the perspective of law enforcement officers, this study showcased new solutions for creating positive relationships between law enforcement, communities, and news media.

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**Appendix A: Informed Consent Letter**

We would like to invite you to participate in this research project on the relationships between law enforcement, communities, and news media. We are studying law enforcement officer's experiences with the communities they serve and their attitudes and beliefs towards news media and their representation in the media. This research will help provide insight into possible solutions for creating more positive relationships between law enforcement, communities, and news media.

We will ask you to participate in an interview that should last around 45 minutes. Your participation is entirely voluntary. The interview will be recorded and transcribed using Zoom's software. All responses are completely anonymous and confidential; your name will not appear anywhere on the interview and or in any of the transcriptions. Completion of the interview will constitute your consent to participate. We are not offering any compensation for participation in this research project.

As a participant, you should not encounter any psychological risks beyond those experienced in everyday living. For loss of confidentiality risks, all the data from the interviews will be saved on the lead researcher's laptop that is backed with a two-step security system. One of the benefits which may reasonably be expected to result from this study is giving law enforcement officers an opportunity to voice their opinions and concerns in a safe and secure environment. Second, the subject's answer will provide more researcher into a field that has a small pool of data. Finally, the data could uncover ways in which law enforcement officers, their communities, and the news media can foster more positive relations.

By completing this interview, you indicate that you have read and understand the information provided above, that your participation is completely voluntary, that you may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled, that you may print a copy of this form to keep for your records, and that you are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies. If you have any concerns, complaints, or general questions about the research or your rights as a participant, please contact Human Subjects Protection to speak to someone independent of the research team at (209)-946-3903 or IRB@pacific.edu.

If you would like to participate, please contact Bradi Kooyman to schedule a date and time for the interview. Please see contact information provided below. If you have any questions regarding the research project, feel free to contact one of us using the phone numbers listed below. Thanks again for your help.

Sincerely,
Lead Researcher: Bradi Kooyman
(209) 607-2144 / b_kooyman@u.pacific.edu
Professor: Teresa Bergman / tbergman@pacific.edu

**Appendix B: Interview Questions**

1. Law Enforcement Occupation Demographic Questions
   1.1. How long have you been an officer?
      1.1.1. How long were you an officer?
   1.2. How long have you been with your current department?
   1.3. What was the last department you were a part of after-service?
   1.4. What department did you serve the most time?
   1.5. What are your thoughts about the media's representation of officers?
   1.6. What are your thoughts about community policing?
   1.7. What are your thoughts about racial differences in policing?
2. Research Questions
   2.1. R.Q.1. What factors do law enforcement officers believe will aid in building positive relationships with their communities?
   2.2. R.Q.2. What factors do law enforcement officers believe will create a more positive public image in mainstream news media?
3. Interview Questions
   *These questions have been created for individuals currently working for a law enforcement agency. The format of the questions is subject to change if the individual is retired.*
   3.1. How would you describe your relationship with the community you serve or served? Why do you think it is, or was, the way it is?
   3.2. What are some factors, if any, that you think could, or could have, improve your relationship with the communities you serve?
   3.3. What factors, if any, do you think negatively affect your relationship with the communities you serve?
   3.4. How would you describe the current portrayal of law enforcement officers and agencies in news and social media?
   3.5. How would you describe the portrayal of law enforcement officers and agencies in news and social media throughout the ages? Do any periods in specific stand out to you the most? If so, why do you think that is?
   3.6. Do you think the news media helps or hurts the projections of law enforcement and their work to the public? Why do you believe that? Do you have any specific examples of news/social media stories?
   3.7. Do you think changes or reforms need to be made regarding how law enforcement officers interact with citizens? Do you think these changes, if any, will improve relations with the public or the news/social media?
   3.8. Implementing community policing would improve community relations with the public and media? If yes or no, explain.
      3.8.1. Are there certain aspects of community policing valuable to law enforcement agencies and the public or news media?
      3.8.2. Are there certain aspects of community policing detrimental to law enforcement agencies and the public or news media?
   3.9. How would you describe your role as a law enforcement officer? Do you have a specific approach you take to your work?