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Community Policing Relations: Texas Law Enforcement Practices in One Community

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INTRODUCTION

The art and science of policing is a highly relevant topic today, as the United States faces frequent concerns regarding the strategies and attitudes of law enforcement agencies towards the general populace. Over the last several years, a number of high-profile incidents in which the use of force by police has led to the death of unarmed black males in communities such as Ferguson, MO, Dallas, TX, and Staten Island, NY, have contributed to increased concern over the strategies used by law enforcement across the country. Driven by differing ideologies and policing philosophies, conflict over prevalent policing methods has permeated every level of American discourse, from protests in our streets to political rhetoric in elections. In consideration of the nation's turmoil regarding policing practices, the United States Conference of Mayors endorsed the philosophy of community policing as a method of improving long-term police-community relations in 2015 (United States Conference of Mayors, 2015). In contrast to long-accepted traditional theories of policing, the Conference of Mayors felt the community policing model might offer a promising way forward for U.S. communities. However, few empirical studies have been conducted examining law enforcement's perceptions of the community policing model in contrast to other widely-utilized approaches. In this study, we seek to expand our understanding of the benefits and challenges of community policing by documenting the perceptions and experiences of members of the law enforcement community in one mid-sized central Texas city. Our findings shed light on some of the implications that a shift in paradigm has for both theory and practice.

The official definition of community policing provided by the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) involves three key components: organizational transformation, problem-solving, and community partnerships (Office of Community Oriented Policing Services [COPS], 2014a). While this is the definition most often cited, there is essentially no definitive consensus on how to best characterize community policing as a concept. Communities have implemented the community policing model to different degrees across the U.S. In 2003, 60% of police departments had problem-solving partnerships with community agencies, and 58% of departments had full-time community policing officers (Hickman & Reaves, 2003). Further, a meta-analysis from 2014 analyzed 65 community-policing research reports, finding that community policing improved police legitimacy and citizen satisfaction but had limited effect on crime itself (Gill, Weisburd, Telep, Vitter, & Bennett, 2014).

In seeking solutions regarding police-community relations in the U.S., it is important that we critically evaluate law enforcement models as well as the theories that inform and guide them. Further, scholars and practitioners in the fields of criminal justice and community development must understand more

about how local law enforcement officers view community policing. While robust crime reporting data provides important information on the effectiveness of policing in communities across the U.S., they provide little insight into the ways in which frontline officers perceive the benefits and challenges of various approaches to policing. In this study, we examine the community policing model and explore its implementation and perceived effectiveness in one central Texas community, from the perspective of the law enforcement officers who are responsible for implementing it. While findings from a small-sample study in one community cannot be generalized to the larger population of U.S. cities, we contend that our findings suggest some of the ways that local law enforcement officers may perceive community policing. Further, we believe our data highlights the need for additional research on law enforcement officers' engagement with community policing. This study will hopefully play a role in inspiring continued study of community policing methods in other cities, which could begin to detail a broad range of best practices from varied contexts. Prior to addressing our research question, we examine the relevant literature regarding theories of community policing, historical and social context, and implementation strategies, challenges, and effectiveness. We examine the relationships among these elements of community policing, in order to fully detail the complexity of the community policing approach.

COMMUNITY POLICING

Modern policing finds its origins in the work of Sir Robert Peel and the birth of the London Metropolitan police in 1829, the first 'professional police' force of its kind (Chriss, 2013). In the wake of political reform in the late 19th century, American policing modeled itself after Peelian principles, which included creating a highly centralized and standardized system of crime control. As early as the 1950s, however, substantive concerns were being voiced about the lack of police-community relations in contemporary approaches (Cordner, 2014). In the 1970s and 80s, foot patrols became unexpectedly popular in several cities such as Flint, MI and Newark, NJ, at the same time that several community-based theories of policing such as problem-oriented policing and the "Broken Windows" theory of community disorder were being developed (Kane & Reisig, 2014; Kelling & Moore, 1988).

A major turning point came when departments recognized that citizens were as concerned with fear reduction as they were with crime intervention (Kelling & Moore, 1988). In essence, citizens not only wanted their neighborhoods to be free of crime, but also wanted them to be perceived as safe places to live. Several other factors influencing the rise of community policing were policing research that described traditional methods as less effective than

originally thought, the growing diversity of policing personnel, and the fact that community policing had been recognized as the strategy with the lowest rates of police abuse (Brogden & Nijhar, 2005; Cordner, 2014). While several cities nationwide began developing programs in the 1980s and 90s, community policing was formalized in 1994 by the creation of the Department of Justice's Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (Cordner, 2014; COPS, 2014c). Twenty years after the department's creation, COPS has invested over \$14 billion in community policing technology and training and added 125,000 community policing officers to the streets in 72% of the nation's police departments (COPS, 2014a).

As mentioned previously, the official definition of community policing, as provided by the COPS, involves three key components: organizational transformation, problem-solving, and community partnerships (COPS, 2014b). Organizational transformation refers to developing a departmental culture that encourages transparency with the community and allows front-line officers autonomy in decision-making. Problem-solving relates to proactive responses to societal problems and conflicts. Lastly, community partnerships work to leverage capacity with nonprofits, other government agencies, the media, and other stakeholders (COPS, 2014b). While the COPS definition is the one most often referenced, there is essentially no definitive consensus on what community policing means outside of a general philosophy (Cordner, 2014). As a result, there is variation in the way the model is appropriated and utilized across the country. In the formative years of community policing, two major theories came to the forefront to shape how community policing is perceived and implemented: the ten principles of Trojanowicz and Bucquerouz (1998), and the "Broken Windows" theory (Kelling & Wilson 1982).

The ten principles of community policing outlined by Trojanowicz and Bucquerouz (1998) include commitment to community empowerment, long-term proactive problem-solving, grassroots creativity and support, helping populations with special needs, and policing ethics. These principles heavily emphasize police-community relations, which places policing legitimacy in the hands of the citizenry, as well as stressing that community problems should have long-term solutions. Compared to the "Broken Windows" theory, the ten principles have been utilized in local police departments much more infrequently. This is likely because many of the ten principles are a substantial departure from traditional policing culture, thereby making implementation far more difficult and unlikely.

The "Broken Windows" theory of community policing was introduced to the public in a 1982 article in *The Atlantic*, written by George Kelling and James Wilson. The name "Broken Windows" derives from the authors' observation that in any given neighborhood, if a single window in a building is left broken, then over time all the windows in the building may also become broken. It suggests

that the physical state of a neighborhood communicates whether norms of social order and control are enforced in a community. Kelling and Wilson (1982) argue that the success of previous foot patrol experiments was due to their ability to prevent “public disorder”. They state that public disorder is “a signal that no one cares,” and that the responsibility to ensure that the community does, in fact, care, falls on the shoulders of local law enforcement. In contrast to the ten principles of Trojanowicz and Bucqueroux (1998), “Broken Windows” emphasizes quick fixes for crime and social control. While the ideas behind “Broken Windows” are a cornerstone of modern community policing, it has become a highly controversial theory in recent years. Supporters point to the strong connection between disorder and fear, and the considerable impact of ‘highly visible’ police in difficult areas (Kelling & Coles, 1997; Sousa & Kelling, 2009). Detractors point to the proliferation of zero tolerance and community harassment policies, as well as a trending majority of scholars denouncing “Broken Windows” as a viable policing strategy (Bucqueroux, 2014; Taylor, 2006; see Harcourt & Ludwig, 2015; Weisburd, Hinkle, Braga, & Wooditch, 2015).

The COPS definition of community policing provided above highlights many different aspects of both theories. However, it conspicuously leaves out some of the more radical of the ten principles that emphasize intensive community relations and services to vulnerable populations. In policing, as in many professions, the theories an institution supports will be a strong predictor of how the institution develops their daily operations. In this current study, an analysis of how individual officers understand community policing will provide a backdrop for understanding the philosophies that the law enforcement in this community endorse, and consequently how community policing is applied in their tactical decision-making.

IMPLEMENTATION AND CHALLENGES

In part due to a lack of consensus in how to best define community policing, there is a multitude of ways in which community policing has been implemented in local police departments. For Chicago’s Alternative Policing Strategy (CAPS), monthly beat meetings, civic partnerships, long-term foot patrols, and five-step problem-solving efforts all play a significant role (Skogan & Steiner, 2004). However, a case study of eleven major cities identified numerous other tactics within each of the COPS-defined aspects of community policing. These listed tactics have each been used to positive effect in communities nationwide, and when taken as a whole, represent the value of creativity and adaptiveness in implementing community policing. Organizational transformation involved civilian volunteer programs, flattened organizational structure, the use of multi-disciplinary teams, and numerous versions of crime-tracking databases. Problem-

solving tactics included officer empowerment in decision-making, community organizing tactics, and county-wide training programs on violence prevention. Community partnerships included formal partnerships with a wide range of community agencies, a crime-prevention television program, and citizen satisfaction surveys (COPS, 2009). At its core, community policing represents communities and police working together to devise highly creative means of addressing crime and social issues (Trojanowicz & Bucqueroux, 1998). Unlike traditional policing, each implementation of community policing will look different from one community to another based upon the unique needs of communities and their residents.

Creative innovation is one major asset of the community policing philosophy. However, a strategy with such extensive latitude has high potential for uneven implementation, which research bears out to be true for community policing (Chappell, 2008). The Bureau of Justice Statistics reported in 2003 that only 14% of local police departments had a formal community policing plan, yet 58% of departments had full-time community policing officers, and 60% had problem-solving community partnerships (Hickman & Reeves, 2003). A recent analysis of 474 police departments, focusing on underlying factors for utilization, found that only agency size had a positive relationship with community policing, and only the level of vertical organization had a negative relationship (Morabito, 2008). A study where students conducted ride-along observations in a Florida police department found that while there was strong support for community policing, significant barriers kept the agency from implementation (Chapell, 2008). The most commonly identified barriers included a lack of personnel, officers being too busy or having not been properly trained, and cultural resistance within the agency.

Additional challenges that departments may face as they shift to community policing include the tasks of educating the public, moving accountability to the community, and decentralization of decision-making (Trojanowicz & Bucqueroux, 1998). Further, traditional evaluative techniques are not always appropriate for community policing, as it rarely utilizes clearly defined services and outcomes (McElroy, 1998). Officers may develop strong resistance to tasks beyond crime prevention, and organizational priorities often shift quickly to address changing criminal trends (Graziano, Rosenbaum, & Schuck, 2014). Indeed, research indicates a broad spectrum of attitudes of law enforcement towards community policing. Officers may view the general philosophy as positive, while still being critical of how it is executed within their department, or they may not necessarily trust community members to participate (Chappell, 2008; Glaser & Denhardt, 2010). A 2003 study, analyzing 120 surveys from members of one Midwestern police department, found correlations between positive views of community policing and perceptions of departmental support for

community policing tasks, while finding no correlation between views of community policing and officer demographics (Schafer, 2003).

Though each community will face its own unique challenges and opportunities in implementing community policing, by describing the specific experiences of one central Texas community, this study hopes to more fully illustrate the array of potential approaches and outcomes for other American communities.

EFFECTIVENESS OF AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMMUNITY POLICING

Evaluations of community policing require a fundamental shift in understanding what outcomes communities desire to see. Traditional policing can easily link the definition of success to falling crime rates, or to any other number of standardized crime-fighting outcomes. Community policing seeks instead to respond with highly creative and adaptive interventions to the long-term factors that underlie crime and violence in communities. These factors can include social disorder, fear of crime, quality of neighborhood relations, even poverty and hunger, none of which are easily evaluated (Cordner, 2014). One of the most extensive research studies on community policing completed to-date is a meta-analysis from 2014 that analyzed sixty-five community policing reports. The study found that community policing improved police legitimacy, social disorder, and citizen satisfaction, but had a limited effect on crime and fear of crime. In essence, community policing has demonstrated excellent short-term benefits, but may lack the desired long-term outcomes (Gill et al., 2014). Because much of the research on community policing over the past twenty years consists of case studies that have often produced contradictory findings on the effectiveness of community policing, this meta-analysis provides a more comprehensive assessment than previous studies have.

When Chicago's Alternative Policing Strategy program (CAPS) was evaluated at its ten-year-mark in 2004, researchers found that fear of crime for all genders and races in Chicago had dropped below 50%. Further, it had declined 20% or more for African-Americans, women, and older adults (Skogan & Steiner, 2004). The study also noted that Chicago saw a considerable decline in crime during the time that community policing was formalized, but refused to make a causal link as many other American cities saw a decline in crime throughout the '90s as well for a variety of reasons (Skogan & Steiner, 2004; Cordner, 2014). Two other studies, one a case study conducted in 2000 for eight years in a suburban police department (Connell, Miggans, & McGloin, 2008), the other a 2002 cross-sectional study conducted with national crime reports for 164 cities (MacDonald, 2002), arrived at contradictory conclusions regarding the

effectiveness of community policing. The case study found an “abrupt and permanent” drop in violent crime not long after implementation, while the cross-sectional study determined that community policing was not related to any change in violent crime rates.

While the relationship between community policing and crime reduction remains unclear, there is consensus that community policing has a positive impact on fear of crime and on police-community relations (Cordner, 2014). An aggregated study using police interviews and public crime records found that a positive perception of community policing increased both the individual and neighborhood quality of life. Its implementation also mediated the effects of socioeconomic disadvantage in terms of neighborhood safety, particularly when citizens felt that their voices were being heard by police (Reisig & Parks, 2004). Community policing and traditional policing may be best served as complementary strategies. Whereas traditional policing can provide a time-tested means of crime intervention, community policing can be a positive mediating force on long-term factors of community crime and violence.

As the newest policing theory for many countries worldwide, community policing still has a long way to go in defining best practices. The recommendations provided by Skogan and Steiner (2004) in the ten-year evaluation of CAPS included providing officers with the training necessary to conduct community-level problem-solving, as well as the need for clear procedures for how front-line officers can bring citizen concerns to the attention of departmental decision-makers. Both recommendations are predominant in other policing literature (Chappell, 2008; COPS, 2009). Barriers to implementation, such as those previously mentioned, also provide opportunities for police departments to transform their organizational structure, culture, and priorities. Other recommendations include implementing referral systems to community agencies at the beat level, developing measurable outcomes, and increasing ‘public friendliness’ to gain trust and community involvement (Peaslee, 2009; Pandey, 2014).

In 2015, the United States Conference of Mayors released a report of policy recommendations for future police-community relations, in light of the Ferguson shooting and related events. These policy recommendations included using community policing as a philosophy instead of a program, and that officers should be trained in conflict de-escalation and respectful community engagement (United States Conference of Mayors, 2015). While the first twenty years of community policing may have shown as much difficulty as it did promise, this appeal for U.S. cities by a political authority to genuinely utilize the tenets of community policing demonstrates the hope that has been placed in this philosophy to transform communities. In the current study, we intend to describe the effectiveness of community policing in one central Texas community, through

the perspective of the law enforcement members whose recommendations can best illuminate the unique capacity of local policing to support community needs.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The primary objective of this study was to examine the implementation of community policing in one central Texas community and its effectiveness. In contrast to previous studies of community policing which examine effectiveness based on robust crime reporting data, the current study sought to understand effectiveness as perceived by members of the law enforcement community. We explore a variety of factors that underlie the implementation and effectiveness of the model, to include preferred theories, historical and social contexts in policing, attitudes officers hold about community policing, and challenges faced or opportunities presented through implementation of community policing strategies. Further, we document some of the unique ways that community policing has been implemented successfully in this setting.

To examine the implementation of community policing and local law enforcement officers' perceptions of the model, we utilized a qualitative study design conducting in-person semi-structured interviews with a nonprobability purposive sample of officers drawn from three law enforcement departments in one mid-sized central Texas community. The community from which officers were recruited was primarily urban and had a population of approximately 130,000 at the time of the study. The departments represented were the county Sheriff's Office, the city Police Department, and the local Highway Patrol District. Two participants were recruited from each office, resulting in six interviews. All participants were required to have had community policing experience as identified by their department. To recruit participants, the primary investigator contacted the three law enforcement heads of department to request permission to interview members. In collaboration with the department heads, researchers sent a recruitment email to law enforcement members in each of the departments requesting participation in the study. The first two members from each department who responded and who met criteria for inclusion were admitted into the study. While recruiting such a small sample ($n = 6$) precludes generalizability of findings, it allowed the primary investigator to conduct in-depth interviews that explored a multiplicity of issues related to community policing and officers' perceptions of its strengths and challenges.

Interview questions covered areas such as definitions of, and attitudes towards, community policing. They also dealt with implementation, effectiveness, and challenges related to community policing. The primary investigator conducted and transcribed all interviews. In analyzing data, we utilized a grounded theory approach for qualitative data analysis. Open coding was used to

analyze and identify prevailing codes and patterns of the transcribed data, the findings of which were used to inform the final results and applications of this study.

FINDINGS

Respondents held varying titles, positions, and specialties within law enforcement, and had worked in local law enforcement from anywhere between a year and a half and twenty-six years. Two of the respondents functioned as patrol law enforcement, while four were either in leadership or a specialized position. Five of the respondents were white males. Half of the respondents lived in a suburban area of the community and the other half lived in areas outside of the community. For simplicity, we use the title ‘officer’ to refer to any of the six respondents.

After completion of coding and qualitative analysis, three themes emerged relevant to the focus of our study. The first theme is the respondents’ preference for the Trojanowicz and Bucqueroux (1998) model of community policing. The remaining themes identify building positive police-citizen relationships and engaging with youth.

PREFERRED THEORY OF COMMUNITY POLICING

The first major theme that emerged was significant support for the Trojanowicz and Bucqueroux model of community policing. When asked how to define community policing, responses given by respondents tended to include language that reflected ideas found in the ten principles, such as valuing the community’s voice and involvement, officer autonomy and creativity, proactive problem-solving and engagement, communications skills and de-escalation, and meaningful relationships. One officer described community policing as, “build[ing] a bridge between the police and the public”. Respondents frequently used expressions such as “make a difference” and “get involved in our communities” to describe the philosophy behind community policing. However, respondents often added their own unique descriptions and language, emphasizing what community policing meant to them in their particular area of work.

For one officer, the ability to act with discretion and creativity in their work was invaluable, and a significant aspect of how they defined community policing. This officer shared an incident in which they were assaulted during an arrest and chose to take the perpetrator to the hospital rather than adding further charges, because the officer was concerned about the individual’s state of intoxication. The officer admitted that:

Yes, [they] just committed felony assault on an officer, [their] intoxication state has nothing to do with the offense, I mean just ‘cause you get drunk or high doesn’t mean you can go out and do whatever and get away with it.

However, they believed “in that instance, [they] didn’t need to go to jail, [they] needed to go to the hospital.”

Another officer described several occasions where their department had intentionally solicited the involvement of the community, or had responded to citizen requests to fulfill community needs. For example, their department frequently acted upon requests via phone or social media for speeding enforcement in specific school zones at specific times of the day. When asked how effective they believed community policing to be, this officer responded by saying “it’s almost impossible to quantify how well you’re performing in community policing... the only real measure is the satisfaction of the citizenry.” These responses emphasize how the ten principles provide a framework for effective policing, by first placing the citizenry’s satisfaction as the foremost target for measuring success, and then identifying the tools necessary to improve satisfaction, such as giving leeway for officers to respond to citizens’ day-to-day needs and to apply creativity and compassionate discretion in difficult situations.

There were two topics on which some officers’ opinions diverged from the substantial support for the Trojanowicz and Bucqueroux model. The first was a clear division of opinion among respondents on the topic of policing and race relations, specifically concerning the model’s principles of empathy and accountability. Two respondents expressed sympathy for residents that were clearly fearful of interacting with them, or that wanted to record the interaction. In contrast, four respondents expressed negative opinions regarding those who were critical of law enforcement, decried a growing lack of support for law enforcement as a result of national incidents, or believed that concerns of racial tension were not applicable to local law enforcement. While three respondents clearly described that accountability and being “held to a higher standard” were an integral part of their work, one of these three respondents stated that they saw recording police interactions as an appropriate way to be held accountable, stating that:

I got in the mindset where they’re [the citizenry] paying me to do a job and act in accordance with the law... so if I’m always making the right decisions and doing the things that I need to do, I’m not going to have a problem with anybody recording anything I say at any time, because it’s all a matter of public record.

Alternatively, one respondent expressed that the concept of accountability, although necessary, had been taken too far lately. Such conflicting views among

law enforcement suggest the need for additional research on the implications of community policing for policing and race relations.

A second topic of disagreement with the Trojanowicz and Bucqueroux model revolved around the value of the “Broken Windows” hypothesis. Despite general support for a ten principles approach, some respondents reported beliefs that were more congruent with a “Broken Windows” approach. For instance, one officer expressed concerns about the possibility of police becoming too friendly with their community and consequently being unable to enforce the law. Another explained how of the enforcement of a no-tolerance policy in one apartment complex helped to drive away young adults that had been engaging in criminal behavior in public areas and had thereby made it unsafe for the children in the complex to play outside. Outside of these two responses, however, respondents overwhelmingly described a model of policing far more consistent with the ten principles than with “Broken Windows”. Two officers described the “Broken Windows” tool of “chasing the numbers” (e.g., quota-driven policing and crime-tracking databases) as either having a negative impact on their work, or being an inadequate means of measuring effectiveness of policing.

For the respondents that defined community policing using precepts similar to the Trojanowicz and Bucqueroux model, the model’s tenets were consistently affirmed and were highlighted through stories that the respondents held up as examples of effective community policing. While definitions given by individuals do not always correlate with how a philosophy is implemented at the departmental level, the fact that respondents openly and consistently described actions and beliefs congruent with the ten principles of Trojanowicz and Bucqueroux shows at least a minimal integration of this philosophy in local law enforcement departments.

EFFECTIVENESS OF COMMUNITY POLICING

Throughout the interviews, respondents did not hesitate to describe the challenges they knew existed to implementing community policing or ensuring its effectiveness, such as lack of time, minimal crime-specific expertise, extensive costs, apathy or resistance from the institutional culture, and others. However, all six respondents stated they believed community policing had the capacity to be effective, and each of them consistently referenced two specific aspects of implementation, building positive relationships with citizens and engaging youth, that they had seen as valuable and beneficial to their work.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH CITIZENS

As the second major theme, one of these aspects of implementation was the highly relational nature of community policing in the local community. Outside of several community outreach programs or prevention units geared towards specific needs, community policing as a whole has not been an official departmental program anywhere in the local community for some time. Therefore, respondents described that the chief means by which community policing is integrated in local law enforcement is through encouraging officers to purposefully build positive relationships with citizens. All six officers shared their own stories about the importance of treating individuals with patience and respect at the point of arrest, assisting citizens with day-to-day needs, building rapport with residents through hearing concerns in informal conversation, and taking the initiative to be compassionate with citizens in moments of crisis.

As described previously, several respondents gave similar responses when asked to define community policing, one of which was “being a part of the community”. One respondent spoke repeatedly about the value of living in the community they policed. This officer stated “whether I’m in my uniform or out of uniform, they all know I’m police”, and described the night before, when someone in their neighborhood had knocked on their door for help, knowing they were law enforcement. For this officer, community policing was a concept to be applied 24/7, regardless of whether they were on- or off-duty. They valued being available, both as neighbor and officer, to respond to any need. Living in the community they policed was a significant component of why community policing was effective.

Other respondents described occasions on which they had helped citizens with day-to-day needs. One described fixing a lock for an older woman who had not been able to hire someone to help her. Others reported instances where they had gotten to know citizens by being present in the community “at a donut or coffee shop and visiting with the residents... and hearing their concerns.” Two respondents expressed how much they valued treating citizens with dignity and respect at the point of arrest. One described how they waited to handcuff a man until his ex-wife and children had driven around the corner so they wouldn’t see their father being arrested. Another shared that when they have someone say ‘thank you’ for giving them a ticket or arresting them, they “know [they’ve] done [their] job right and treated them right”.

Whether through building relationships with ordinary citizens or by showing empathy for those being arrested, respondents valued such opportunities for two primary reasons. First, these interactions were described as a powerful means of building trust. Officers felt that the individuals with whom they interacted in these instances would, in the future, have positive memories of how

they were treated by the police. Such positive memories have substantial value for law enforcement because, as one officer suggested, “99 times out of 100, the way that citizens treat you and the interactions you have with them is based on their perception of the police.” For those who had been arrested, the officers believed that those whose experience with law enforcement had been positive were likely to be “a little bit more cooperative and a little bit more honest with what’s going on” if they were arrested again. Second, several respondents expressed a strong desire to make a difference in the lives of those with whom they interacted. For example, one officer described a particularly difficult arrest during which they maintained composure and patience. A few months after the arrest, the individual who had been arrested went out of their way to pay for the arresting officer’s meal, and at one point spoke with them to say that “you changed my life... because of what you did it made me realize I was headed down the wrong road.” Hearing they had changed this individual’s life was an experience which the officer expressed as deeply meaningful.

Throughout the interviews, respondents shared an array of stories describing how they had tried to create common ground with citizens by fostering relationships. Several credited relationship-building with being able to mitigate, to some extent, crises created by the lack of tolerance, mutual communication, and cooperation between police and their communities. Officers frequently described how relational experiences helped to break down the paradigm of “us versus them”, built meaningful trust and cooperation with citizens, helped to “undo stereotypes” about law enforcement, and improved community satisfaction of law enforcement as a public service. Overall, the opportunities that respondents or their departments had taken to build community relationships, and the ensuing impact of those relationships on their work, were consistently some of the most effective and meaningful experiences of their career.

ENGAGING WITH YOUTH

The third major theme to emerge was an emphasis on engaging youth as being integral to the effectiveness of community policing. All respondents revealed stories of how they or colleagues had sought to build relationships with young people. They gave reasons for doing so that were similar to those previously mentioned; wanting to make a difference or to change people’s perception of law enforcement early in life. One additional reason that was consistently reported was the desire to proactively “steer [youth] in the right direction.” Several respondents shared personal stories about how they had been able to walk alongside young people. One officer reported stopping a young man from starting a physical altercation by teaching him how to walk away from a fight. Another reported believing that after they presented to an entire high school, if they had

helped just one or two people, that they had made a “great gain.” One officer became emotional as they described a night shift in which they had sat and talked with a young man who had run away because his school administration had discovered he was bisexual, had informed his family without his consent, and was planning to dis-enroll him. That officer later found out that their actions had made a difference in how the young man was able to handle the situation, and how the family made changes to be supportive of the young man. This respondent felt moved that despite all the obstacles they normally faced in interactions with the public, this time they got to “take the wins where you can get them.”

Some officers described incidents where other officers had had significant interactions with young people, such as a recent incident shared on social media where an on-duty officer was photographed playing basketball with a couple of kids just for fun. Another recounted how officers had tried to apprehend a hit-and-run that had killed a child’s dog. When they were unable to find a suspect, they came back with a Toys “R” Us gift card to try to make the child’s Christmas a little better. Both of these stories were shared multiple times. They affirmed that interactions like these were a substantial point of pride for the officers’ departments.

Five out of six respondents shared the frustration of hearing parents tell children that the police will come and “get them” if they misbehave. For the officers, being used by parents as a scare tactic was hurtful and frustrating. They suggested it meant that children would grow up to see the police as “the bad guys” and would feel paranoid instead of protected around law enforcement. They instead hoped that children would be able to see the police “as good people” and that “we’re here to help them”. This type of experience was especially influential for the officers that chose to emphasize having positive interactions with young people as an important aspect of community policing. One officer described a service that “sounds kind of not very important, but it’s a big one.” Their department provides badge stickers for officers to pass out to kids. In emphasizing the importance of this service, the officer made clear how essential it is for law enforcement to have friendly interactions with kids, especially in mitigating the idea of the police being out to “get them”.

At least two officers said they believed the most effective, or even the only effective, function of community policing was that it helped to “get these kids at a younger age” and make a positive impact that “might be [their] spark to strive to do better for [themselves]”. One officer explained that when they were little, an interaction their father had with an officer was what motivated them to want to be in law enforcement. This same respondent believed that in building relationships with youth and helping them make good decisions, “not only are you leading them in the right path, you’re keeping them out of trouble, [which] exponentially betters the situation down the road.” Five respondents emphasized that the earlier

in a person's life they were able to help them make better choices or see law enforcement as "the good guys", the less likely it would be they would find themselves on the wrong side of the law. For these respondents, engaging youth represented one of the most basic crime prevention tenets of policing.

It would be difficult to overemphasize just how frequently this theme of engaging with youth emerged during interviews. In each story shared, respondents expressed the belief that this part of their work had potential for long-term impact, and consequently brought them significant professional fulfillment. This, alongside the importance of community relationships, were the foremost reasons that respondents would give for believing community policing is effective.

DISCUSSION

In this study, we have sought to expand understanding of the way local law enforcement perceives and implements community policing as part of their work. We did so by interviewing six law enforcement officers from three different departments in one mid-sized central Texas community. We paid special attention to the way that officers described community policing and how such an approach contrasts with a perspective that has become dominant in criminal justice theory and practice over the past several decades, the "Broken Windows" approach (Kelling & Wilson, 1982). The majority of respondents in the current study described a theory of community policing distinctly related to the ten principles of Trojanowicz and Bucqueroux (1998). These ten principles consequently pave the way for effectively building community relationships and engaging youth as key aspects of community policing.

In light of the previous research, our results highlight several interesting findings. Current scholarship tends to emphasize "Broken Windows" as the most prevalent theory of community policing today, in part because the ten principles of Trojanowicz and Bucqueroux appear to be more radicalized in nature and their implementation can necessitate intense organizational transformation (Bucqueroux, 2014; COPS, 2007). Given this reality, we find it noteworthy that respondents in the current study consistently offered descriptions of community policing congruent with Trojanowicz and Bucqueroux's ten principles. Providing further evidence of the salience of the ten principles approach, respondents suggested they saw community relationships and youth engagement as being at the forefront of community policing's effectiveness. These practices are intertwined throughout the ten principles, particularly those principles of decentralized and personalized policing, helping those with special needs, and grassroots creativity and support (Trojanowicz & Bucqueroux, 1998). The respondents frequently identified these practices, and by extension, the ten principles framework, as their most effective tools in providing community

policing services. In contrast, the “Broken Windows” theory emphasizes that the role of officers is to provide discipline and interrupt disorder, rather than relationally engage citizens (Kelling & Wilson, 1982).

Another unexpected finding was that among respondents, the discussion of community policing focused on interpersonal and one-on-one interactions, with minimal attention paid to programmatic implementation of the theory. Even though interviews spanned a considerable range of leadership and departmental positions, law enforcement officers consistently spoke about community policing in terms of relationships. This is not to say that community policing is not implemented at the community level. Most respondents briefly mentioned programs they were aware of or had participated in through their department. However, respondents tended to focus on the ways in which community policing had been effective on a personal level. In essence, this particular interpretation illustrates that there are two different ‘philosophies’ of community policing. One is a philosophy that is defined by sanctioned departmental guidelines, community-level engagement, and programmatic implementation. The other appears to be a philosophy maintained by the individual officer that, regardless of the manner or presence of departmental implementation, values an array of community policing principles as foundational to their professional fulfillment. We note this finding may be particularly important for community leaders working to improve police-citizen relationships. A strategy that prioritizes developing relationships with community officers may be more effective at garnering support from local law enforcement than more top-down strategies and programs.

It is also noteworthy that all six respondents in this study brought up the topic of policing and race relations as they discussed community policing. A diverse array of ideas and opinions were presented, suggesting several relevant implications. As mentioned previously, two respondents asserted that a lack of tolerance, communication, and cooperation between law enforcement and the community is in part responsible for the racial tension commonly reported in the media today. Interestingly, the respondents that shared experiences of building community relationships and engaging with youth, two practices closely intertwined with the ten principles framework, described the outcomes of those experiences as having strengthened trust, empathy, and communication between themselves and those with whom they interacted. Consequently, it might be assumed that other aspects of the ten principles would be of value in addressing racial tension. For example, two respondents in the current study expressed sympathy for citizens who might be fearful of interacting with law enforcement, or wanted to record their interaction, based on recent national incidents. A law enforcement department that implemented as policy the principles of policing ethics and grassroots creativity might be encouraged by these respondents to develop neighborhood meetings where officers and residents alike have the

opportunity to share their concerns and seek appropriate solutions alongside one another.

This implication extends into the almost-universally shared experience of respondents overhearing a parent inform their child that the police will “get them” if they misbehave. Respondents consistently described this scenario as hurtful and frustrating. They wanted community members to view law enforcement as a resource and a help, instead of having children grow up to be fearful of them. One respondent expressed a belief that the national media has had an impact on the willingness of the community to trust law enforcement, stating that if “a cop [elsewhere] shoots a guy, unjustified, now the people I see day to day have that image in their head”. If, through the thoughtful and ingenuous use of tools such as building relationships and engaging with youth at the community-level, communication and understanding is in fact improved between the police and the citizenry, this may create common ground where community members can express personal or systemic reasons for being fearful. This might also allow law enforcement to emphasize their desire to be trusted and share mechanisms they can implement to improve trust in both directions (e.g., police badge stickers for young children).

Future studies should continue to examine attitudes of law enforcement towards community policing, challenges of implementation, areas of programmatic implementation, and discrepancies of opinion concerning historical and social context or preferred theories of community policing. Future research is also recommended to document the perspectives and experiences of community leaders and residents towards community policing. In their efforts to support community flourishing, community leaders may benefit from partnering with law enforcement officers that are open to community policing philosophy and strategy.

While this study emphasizes a local perspective and is non-generalizable, similar studies on these themes will be valuable for the development of a wider body of literature on promising practices. At the conclusion of the study, recommendations were provided to law enforcement department heads. Recommendations included encouraging departments to explore which of the ten principles enjoy the most support in their departments, providing officers with additional means and opportunities to invest in community and youth interactions, and taking into consideration the experiences of individual officers as they consider future plans for implementing community policing programs. These recommendations serve as exemplars of several ways that departments could potentially strengthen and extend community policing.

The current study has several limitations that should be noted. First, as a small-sample, exploratory study, we recognize our findings are not generalizable. They speak to the perspectives of law enforcement officers in one community.

Nevertheless, respondents' answers to the semi-structured interview questions provide a unique depth of understanding into community policing in this population that is often not available through survey research. Future studies should examine a larger and more representative sample of law enforcement officers' perceptions of community policing across the U.S.

A second limitation that should be noted is that due to recent events regarding policing in America, as well as the widespread media coverage and intense scrutiny of such events, there is a high chance of respondent bias regarding subjectivity and self-censorship. Measures were put in place to mitigate such bias. However, it is not possible to mitigate all such effects. Policing in America and police-community relations are hot-button issues that have been widely discussed and that evoke strong opinions among both community members and law enforcement officers. We also note that increased awareness of this issue might make it a very salient issue for respondents. Because both the media and popular movements such as Black Lives Matter have a significant impact on the ways in which the public and law enforcement experience conflict between police and citizens, future studies would do well to document and explore the impact of public representations of such conflicts. Finally, respondents self-selected for the study. This indicates that there may exist respondent bias towards a positive perception of community policing.

In interviewing local law enforcement officers from a mid-sized central Texas community about community policing, several significant findings emerged: the prevalence of a mindset congruent with Trojanowicz's and Bucqueroux's ten principles, and the value of building community relationships and engaging with youth for both personal and professional fulfillment. Years of public dialogue on law enforcement tactics, punctuated by several recent incidents drawing public concern, has left its mark on American history and in many community members' minds. This study offers a glimpse into community policing, a law enforcement theory gaining attention for its potential to address many contemporary policing issues, by highlighting a community-level perspective of its workings in the words of the officers who implement it. Our findings suggest several ideas that might inform practice and suggest future directions for scholarship on the impact of community policing for communities, law enforcement, and the nation as a whole.

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