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Police/Press Relations During Spot News Situations

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ABSTRACT

Police/Press Relations
in Spot News Situations

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Spot news situations may present strain on the communication relationship between police and the press and may actually hamper the flow of information released to the public. If this is the case, what are the causes and reactions that can cause a rift between these two servers of the public good? Some previous studies have examined the prevalence of stress in the daily job performance of both professions, but there is limited available research on how the two may cross over into the other.

Through an analysis of the history and emerging policies intended to improve the communication process, field research and in-depth elite interviewing with key participants, this study will conclude whether the communication relationship between the police and the press in the Omaha area is moving in a direction that maintains the free flow of information to the public. Spot news was selected as the main criteria for analysis due to the high-anxiety and competitiveness aspects that add to the chaos of uncontrolled situations.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Yellow plastic tape flaps gently in the August dusk. As police officers race about preserving the crime scene for detectives, a crowd assembles. Members of local television stations arrive, their cameras and microphones scanning the scene as images and sounds are recorded on video tape. Police sergeants, lieutenants and patrol officers all feel the heavy strain of performing their assigned duties under one of the most stressful situation of their careers. The media, fully aware of the magnitude of the story they are covering, tries to gather as much preliminary information as possible from assorted witnesses in the crowd.

The call "Officer Down," blared eight minutes earlier from police scanners. Instantly, the professionals of law enforcement and media converge on the spot where the officer's cruiser sits unattended. Six holes in the windshield guide the eye toward the driver's seat, where a young officer's life ended. The rotating blue and red lights on the deserted cruiser flash sweepingly across the darkening sky. The click, click, clicking of the rotating lights and the early evening song of the cicadas is almost deafening above the silent, somber scene. The din is abruptly punctuated by the shrill squeal of a rescue squad. A female officer pulls a banner of

yellow tape across the street as the ambulance speeds up the hill, it's siren fading in the distance. With it, fades the heartbeat of the young officer.

When a police officer is killed, co-workers are tested to the extremities of their training. They humanly feel for their fallen comrade. A flood of emotions can easily succumb the senses of duty. Yet, their job must be done and they have no time to grieve, they have a crime scene to preserve. Police officers represent the rocks of society among the chaos of humanity. Still, a few tears stream down their faces.

Critical incidents, like the death of an officer, are referred to as spot news in the journalistic vernacular. The heart always races a little faster, the blood pumps a little harder and with it, the competitive level is raised a few notches. Stress levels can be high as reporters and photographers search for shots and angles their competitors miss. The job of informing the public of the shooting death of a local police officer is important news. It must quickly be released to the public. Deadline time is now.

While each professional is busy performing the duties they were trained for, this is where communication problems between police and the media can occur. Officers are trying to preserve as much natural evidence as possible for a criminal investigation. Journalists are trying to piece together a picture of what occurred to disseminate information

to the public. Journalists approaching deadlines may think officers are unsympathetic to their desire for information. Meanwhile, police officers may view the media as being too pushy and insensitive.

These tacit thoughts may hinder effective communication between the two groups that can not only effect the flow of information for a particular story or incident, but fester and develop into long-term animosity and conflict. As a result, the flow of information to the public suffers from a battle between two highly visible entities.

The purpose of this study is to explore the communication barriers that may exist between law enforcement and the media, particularly television news personnel. There are many similarities between the media and police from a professional and individual standpoint. Much has been written about media/police relations and job-related stress. However, there appears to be limited research concerning these issues and effective communication between the press and law enforcement.

By studying the literature of both fields, the foundation of police/media relations from inside both disciplines is established. The researcher seeks to answer three questions in this study: to what extent, if any, do communication problems exist between police and the media in Omaha, Nebraska? If communication problems exist, what measures, if any, are being taken to improve communication between police

and the press? If corrective measures are being taken, do police officers and members of the press feel that the corrective measures are effective?

A comparative analysis shall then be used based on in-depth interviews with members of the Omaha television media and area law enforcement to provide more insight into possible problems and potential solutions. Included are the researcher's insights from a fifteen-year career as a television news photographer in the Omaha market. The researcher shall also rely on personal experience to provide depth and steer the study to conclusion.

The background of this study forms a starting point for analyzing the current status of police and press relations on a national scale. It is important to understand why the media covers crime, who is doing the reporting and a basic outline of the conflict that already exists between the two. This is further highlighted by other factors that may lead to conflict in the forum of police/press relations such as stress and job burnout. This analysis climaxes against the backdrop of perceptions and beliefs each profession holds for the other. Included is a brief look at how each are viewed in modern American society by the public they serve.

Questions concerning the status of police/press relations are synthesized under the high-intensity conditions of spot news situations, where numerous instances of cooperation and

conflict in the arena of conflict or resolution occur and are analyzed. The overall goal of this study is to inquire as to whether apparent national trends are compatible with the specific area of analysis.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Why the Media Covers Crime

Crime has long been a favorite topic among journalists. Since the late 1890s, the media has shown a strong interest in predator-related crimes, especially violent street crimes. Crime and justice comprise the most potent imagery conveyed by mass media to the public.[1]

Murder is society's most important crime and Americans are preoccupied with violence.[2] The crimes that are constantly presented to the public are the rarest ones, such as homicide.[3] Violent crime has risen in recent years in most American cities and surveys indicate that most people here in

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[1] Carl Yates, *The Standard Gravure Shooting: The Relationship In Action*. In Police/Media Relations and Victim's Rights, National Press Photographers Association White Paper, Second Printing, (Durham, N.C.:, 1991), p. 8-13. Gregg Barak, *Between The Waves: Mass-mediated Themes of Crime and Justice (Crime and Justice in the Clinton Era)*. Social Justice (Fall 1994) vol: 21, no. 3, p. 133.

[2] James D. Sewell, *The Stress Of Homicide Investigations*. Death Studies, November 1994, vol: 18, no. 6, p.566. Ralph Hyatt, *Criminals: An American Obsession*. USA Today (Magazine), (May 1995) vol: 123, no. 2600, p. 36.

[3] Gregg Barak, *Between The Waves*, p. 133.

Nebraska perceive crime as a serious subject.[4] Fear is augmented by nationwide homicide statistics growing by 25 percent from 1985 to 1991.[5]

This creates the impression that an informed public needs a press that provides adequate coverage of crime-related issues in a timely fashion. Experience teaches that crime is quick, easy and relatively inexpensive news coverage that makes for interesting stories, especially in the visually dependent medium of television.

This ideology is also self-perpetuating since television presents an image of the growing dangers and potential of senseless violence against the public. Television in particular tends to present extreme violence as an everyday occurrence in modern life. Exposure to television can increase the public's perception of crime in a community and television news tends to over-portray the prevalence of murder. As a result, the two most dominant crimes portrayed in media are murder and robbery.[6]

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[4] David Simon, *Too Many Crime Stories? No, Just The Wrong Emphasis.* Nieman Reports (Winter 1994) vol: 48, no. 4, p. 30. The Associated Press, *Crime Commission Releases Statewide Survey.* Pulled from electronic wire services at WOWT-TV, Omaha. (Copy included).

[5] JAMA, *Homicides Among 15-19 Year-Old Males in the United States, 1963 to 1991.* The Journal of the American Medical Association (November 23, 1994) vol: 272, no. 20, p. 15.

[6] Gregg Barak, *Between The Waves*, p. 133.

While media shaping of the traits of violent offenders portrays young, urban black males as the main predator, the media misses the fact that blacks are more often the victims of violence. Television news coverage of crime tends to focus on stereotypes and grieving people instead of describing the wider issues that cause the proliferation of crime.[7]

Modern day crime reporting targets the visual aspects without digging deeper into the causes of crime.[8] Thanks in part to tabloid television programs, shocking crimes appeal to the average person because they add perceived excitement and thrills in lives that are too often stressed, overworked and boring.[9]

This creates a "White-man's view" of what crime is and who the perpetrators are. With the villains clearly identified by the media, this view determines that every villain must be countered by a hero. American culture demands heroes of strong character and courage. Many times media serves up a police officer to fill this role.[10]

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[7] Gregg Barak, *Between The Waves*, p. 133; David Simon, *Too Many Crime Stories?* p. 30; Lou Prato, *"It Was Like A Shark Attack" (Television Coverage of Tragic News Stories).* American Journalism Review (May 1994) vol: 16, no. 4, p. 48.

[8] David Simon, *Too Many Crime Stories?* p. 30; Gregg Barak, *Between The Waves*, p. 133.

[9] Ralph Hyatt, *Criminals*, p. 36.

[10] Gregg Barak, *Between The Waves*, p. 133; Ralph Hyatt, *Criminals*, p. 36.

Since this image of violence sells in the media[11] and appears to be viewed by the public, police officers have become the focus of (or are portrayed more in) a significant amount of news coverage. If this theory is so, police officers should expect journalists at most crime scenes. In addition, since cameras are the "ultimate watchdog" of the public, officers should always assume the camera is rolling.[12] Not only is the officer assigned to handle the criminal incident on location itself, he/she must also be on the watch for the media and its mechanical bloodhounds.

As long as the television media believes the public is concerned about crime in their communities, it will continue to cover these incidents to an even greater extent. This expansion of coverage can increase the possibility of communication misunderstandings and conflict between the media and police.

Police/Media Conflict

Included with an increase in violent crime and the public's fascination with it is inevitable conflict between police and the media. This results when the public's fascination with crime and justice meets the authoritative law

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[11] David Simon, *Too Many Crime Stories?* p. 30.

[12] Penny Parrish, *Police and the Media.* The FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin (September 1993) vol: 62, no. 9, p. 24.

enforcement sector. The media acts as a vehicle to satiate the public interest in crime coverage. As a representative of the public, the press is granted access to crime scenes on a limited basis by law enforcement agencies. Sometimes the ideals of a journalist and a peace officer clash and conflict ensues. Conflict has long been a central theme in the dealings between the media and law enforcement.[13] Animosity roots are well established. Officers never forget being burned by a reporter and journalists remember which officers shafted them.[14] Some officers occasionally question the ethics of the news media.[15] Because of a variety of deep-rooted feelings, some feel this adversarial relationship between the police and media will never completely disappear.[16]

Police and the media have suffered physical turbulence in their communicative history and violently clashed during several 1960s movements.[17] This battle continues today.

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[13] Kimberly A. Crawford, *News Media Participation In Law Enforcement Activities.* The FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin (August 1994) vol: 63, no. 5, p. 41.

[14] Penny Parrish, *Police and the Media*, p. 24.

[15] Donn S. Johnson, *The Press And The Police.* St. Louis Journalism Review (May 1992) vol: 22, no. 146, p. 8-9.

[16] Penny Parrish, *Police and the Media*, p. 24.

[17] Don Corrigan, *The Police Versus The Media.* St. Louis Journalism Review (May 1994) vol: 23, no. 166, p. 17. Patricia A. Kelly, *Police-Media Relations: The Problem.* In

Journalistic trade magazines regularly offer reminders of this ongoing struggle citing examples of photographers arrested by police.[18] Whenever this conflict arises, police and the press are apt to view the other as enemies.[19] There are positive examples citing instances where the press and police get along rather well.[20] However, the literature overwhelmingly suggests that the conflict between police and the media is real and much of this is derived from the image presented on television. Photographers from television news stations appear to be confronted with hostility more often than their print counterparts.[21] Emotional stress and the unsureness of a potentially dangerous situation may contribute to these clashes,[22] but clear communication cannot occur when

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Police/Media Relations and Victim's Rights, National Press Photographers Association White Paper, Second Printing, (Durham, N.C., 1991), p. 4.

[18] News Photographer Magazine. *Photographer Applies Skills To Community Service Time* and *Oak Forrest, Ill. Police Drop Charges After Meeting With Paper's Representatives* (October 1995) p. 18-19.

[19] Michael Sherer, *Working Rights of the Press*. In Police/Media Relations and Victim's Rights, National Press Photographers Association White Paper, Second Printing, (Durham, N.C., 1991), p. 15.

[20] Arthur F. Nehrbass, *Promoting Effective Media Relations*. The Police Chief (January, 1989) vol: 56, no. 1, p. 40.

[21] Michael Sherer, *Working Rights of the Press*, p. 14.

[22] Patricia A. Kelly, *Police-Media Relations*, p. 4.

a mutual lack of understanding and respect for the other's job and place in society exists.[23]

Is there more to this concept than the constant bickering between two natural enemies? Analyzing the training and professional backgrounds of the two professions sheds some light on a somewhat shaky relationship. Law enforcement officers train for entrance into a strict and regimented job where control may mean the difference between life and death.[24] Journalists do not appear to be trained to face the same daily regimentation of the police officer. If differences exist, so do similarities. Some research shows that reporters and police share many of the same stress factors.[25] This may be magnified to cause a breakdown in communication when both professionals are under duress and in the midst of a homicide investigation, or breaking news story.

While television seizes the opportunity to present it's viewers with crime news and sometimes assist with an investigation (showing suspect pictures on news programs, for example), police are basically against the idea of enlisting

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[23] Penny Parrish, *Police and the Media*, p. 24.

[24] Richard N. Southworth, *Taking The Job Home*. FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin (November 1990) vol: 59, iss: 11, p. 19-23.

[25] Chris Harvey, *The High-Stress Police Beat*, American Journalism Review (July/August, 1995) p. 28-33.

the media in the war on crime.[26] This may be due to the imaging of crime presented in the media. Police officers may view all "news" programs the same and not discern between those created for entertainment purposes and those news programs intended to provide the bulk of information to a community.

Nonetheless, police and the "legitimate" news media provide a service to a community: one insuring safety and control while the other presents a flow of information. Even with some similarities in public function, the media and police appear more at odds than ever before. Both are to blame for poor communication and the ultimate loser is the public.[27] A brief overview of the recent problems between the media and police may shed some light on why the channels of communication are so divergent.

Reporters in search of information say they are being stonewalled by police officers with alarming frequency.[28] Police feel some journalists believe that yellow crime tape

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[26] Don Corrigan, *Police Trust Print More Than Broadcasting*. St. Louis Journalism Review (April 1994) vol: 23, no. 165, p. 1.

[27] Patricia A. Kelly, *Police-Media Relations*, p. 4.

[28] Elizabeth Giblin, *Some Tips For Reporters Covering The Police Beat*. Editor and Publisher (November 26, 1994) vol: 127, no. 48, p. 46.

around a scene applies to everyone but them.[29] When two divergent groups perceive the other as a hinderance to the performance of their assigned duties, friction occurs. The end result is law enforcement trying to exclude the media from interfering in criminal investigations while the media waves the First Amendment in the face of police officials while trumpeting the "public's right to know."[30] This effectively hampers two-way communication and, thus, the public (who both are intended to serve) is the loser.[31]

Some feel law enforcement and the media have different agendas where the press calls the shots and police are put on the defensive.[32] Research shows the seeds of mistrust concerning the media are planted early in a police officer's training regimen. Many police training centers teach cadets about the dangers of dealing with the press. As a result, police officers are conditioned to be leery of the motives of journalists.[33] Police officers feel journalists attempt to invoke special privileges in the quest for information. The

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[29] Penny Parrish, *Police and the Media*, p. 24.

[30] Kimberly A. Crawford, *News Media Participation in Law Enforcement Activities*, p. 28.

[31] Carl Yates, *The Standard Gravure Shooting*, p. 9.

[32] Penny Parrish, *Police and the Media*, p. 24.

[33] Elizabeth Giblin, *Some Tips For Reporters Covering the Crime Beat*, p. 46.

media becomes frustrated when law enforcement prevents them from access to information not available to the general public.[34] Therefore, police recruits are put on the street with a preconceived stereotype of the individual media people they will encounter. An added danger is that young officers may group all journalists under the same umbrella.

The news media also discourages a working, long-term relationship with law enforcement. The crime beat is regarded as an entry level area by many journalists.[35] By placing inexperienced reporters or interns on the police beat, long-lasting relationships are not likely to occur.[36] If this is so, younger reporters may approach their jobs with more drive and energy to quickly succeed and garner a promotion to another beat and better working hours. Police may perceive this eagerness as the reporter being overly aggressive, impatient and insensitive. If the crime beat is used as a training ground for journalists and if there is a high turnover of police reporters, deeper issues may never be explored.[37] Police may, in turn, view most reporters as "short-timers" and never get to know and trust a reporter on

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[34] Kimberly A. Crawford, *News Media Participation in Law Enforcement Activities*, p. 28.

[35] David Simon, *Too Many Crime Stories?* p. 30.

[36] Carl Yates, *The Standard Gravure Shooting*, p. 8.

[37] David Simon, *Too Many Crime Stories?* p. 30.

a personal level.[38] This perception may be correct since many reporters dislike the police beat.[39]

This is a grave mistake the media makes not only by potentially damaging police/media relations but by not serving as an adequate watch dog for the public. Police departments comprise such a large amount of tax expenditures that they deserve sufficient coverage to insure that the public's money is spent in a reasonable fashion. The media should cover police departments like they would any other area of government and not view the beat as a training ground for young reporters.

Further damage to the relations between the television media and police occurred with the Rodney King beating in Los Angeles in 1992. Most police officers feel the King incident was never put into context on television. A recent survey shows that although police mistrust all journalists, they trust print journalists more than broadcasters. This is directly related to television's constant replaying of the beating before, during and after the trial.[40]

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[38] Carl Yates, *The Standard Gravure Shooting*, p. 8-9.

[39] Elizabeth Giblin, *Some Tips For Reporters Covering the Police Beat*, p. 46.

[40] Don Corrigan, *The Press and the Police*. St. Louis Journalism Review (May 1992) vol: 22, no. 146, p. 8 and Corrigan's *Police Trust Print More Than Broadcasting*. St. Louis Journalism Review (April 1994) vol: 23, no. 165, p. 1, 17.

Along with this misunderstanding of each other's position and purpose in society is a wide disparity in what are perceived as important issues in the public forum. Police say television zeroes in on sensational incidents at the expense of covering other wide-sweeping social problems that may lead people to crime.[41] An example of this is taking an incident of alleged (or perceived) police brutality and making it national news. Police claim this categorizes all officers and victimizes them as individuals.

The relationship between police and the television news media appears so destined to fail that even when there is cooperation, conflict arises. When police invite the media along on raids, legal issues surrounding invasion of privacy and trespassing can occur.[42] These side bar issues can put a dampening effect on potential future cooperative endeavors.

As mentioned earlier, police and the press are more alike in their jobs than either side realizes. Both strive for information, are first responders to crime scenes, conduct investigations, and many times witness similar events. Some of those similarities encompass stress, job-related burnout,

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[41] Don Corrigan, *The Press and the Police*. p. 8.

[42] Michael Sherer, *Accompanying The Cops: 'Good Ole Days' Are Gone*. News Photographer Magazine (October 1994) vol: 49, no. 10, p. 23-24.

public image and general misunderstandings of what the other's purpose in society is.[43]

Police Stress

Police work is a stressful occupation. High stress is, in turn, related to job dissatisfaction. Negative aspects of police work include shift work, being on call, critical incident exposure, frustration with the courts, rigid discipline within the police administration and a lack of support.[44] Police stress can be dangerous to officers, their families, co-workers and the community.[45] Some feel that law enforcement has institutionalized marital and family

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[43] Patricia A. Kelly, *Police-Media Relations*, p.4; Carl Yates, *The Standard Gravure Shooting*, p. 8; Michael Sherer, *Working Rights of the Press*. In Police/Media Relations and Victim's Rights, National Press Photographers Association White Paper, Second Printing, (Durham, N.C., 1991), p. 14.

[44] Richard N. Southworth, *Taking The Job Home*, p. 19-23, John M. Violanti and Fred Aron, *Sources Of Police Stressors, Job Attitudes and Psychological Distress*. Psychological Reports (June 1993) vol: 72, no. 3, p. 899; Bruce Kirkcaldy, Gary L. Cooper and Paul Ruffalo, *Work Stress and Health in a Sample of U.S. Police*. Psychological Reports (April 1995) vol: 76, no. 2, p. 700.

[45] James D. Sewell, *The Stress of Homicide Investigations*, p. 565.

turmoil.[46] One study indicates that more than one-third of surveyed police officers report severe marriage problems.[47]

Police stress is also caused by organization or administrative pressures along with inherent police work factors.[48] Recruits are informed about the stress they will encounter while conducting police work, but they are not prepared for the "us versus them" attitude that exists in some departments between the rank and file and administration.[49] Officers working high-visibility crime, like homicides, feel additional pressure from superiors, the media and citizens to complete a case.[50] Organizational stressors directly and significantly increase psychological distress and have a direct impact on individual distressors in police officers.[51]

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[46] Richard N. Southworth, *Taking The Job Home*, p. 19-23.

[47] James Janik, *Reducing Officer Stress: Who Needs Peer Support?* The Police Chief (January 1995) vol: 62, no. 1, p. 38.

[48] John M. Violanti and Fred Aron, *Sources Of Police Stressors* . . . p. 899.

[49] Joe Baudler, *Business As Usual*. Editorial in The Shield: The Official Publication of the Omaha Police Union Local No. 101 (November 1995) vol: xx, no. 11, p. 1.

[50] James D. Sewell, *The Stress of Homicide Investigations*, p. 568.

[51] John M. Violanti and Fred Aron, *Sources of Police Stressors* . . . p. 901; Bruce Kirkcaldy, Gary L. Cooper and Paul Ruffalo, *Work Stress and Health* . . . p. 701.

Detectives are especially hampered by administrational stress and event stressors.[52]

Until recently, the law enforcement system did not account for the personal emotions of officers as an important aspect of their work.[53] The individual is many times left to develop personal coping strategies, including dark comedy, humor, jargon, escapism and rationalization and while many of these coping mechanisms are successful, they are short-term placebos at best.[54]

Issues creating stress and job dissatisfaction in police officers include the court system, lack of recognition, department regulations, inappropriate discipline, felony-in-progress calls, high speed chases, crises, physical attack, and the death or injury of another officer.[55] Homicide detectives deal daily with stress from the emotional elements of an investigation. Investigators are stressed by constant pressure, the impact of time, interagency rivalries, judicial

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[52] James D. Sewell, *The Stress of Homicide Investigations*, p. 573/4.

[53] Robert W. Shearer, *Police Officer Stress: New Approaches For Handling Tension*. The Police Chief (August 1993) vol: 60, no. 8. p. 96.

[54] James D. Sewell, *The Stress of Homicide Investigations*, p. 574/5; Bruce Kirkcaldy, Gary L. Cooper and Paul Ruffalo, *Work Stress and Health*, p. 701.

[55] John M. Violanti and Fred Aron, *Sources of Police Stressors* . . . p. 900.

support systems, human service systems, fatigue and multiple murder investigations. For detectives, gratification is slow in coming and the courts can add years to a case.[56]

Early stages of stress-related symptoms are depression, fear, loneliness and sadness.[57] Other stress symptoms include employee turnover, increased use of sick leave, alcoholism, and substance abuse.[58] Feelings of despair, restlessness and anxiety engulf the officer and denial is the most common coping mechanism. Many turn to alcohol as a stress-reducer.[59] As officers age, the probability of stress-related symptoms increases.[60]

Police officers are so engulfed in their professional training that it is difficult to alter their personalities outside the work place. Job-related stress effects police officers in their outside lives, thus placing a strain on personal relationships. The constant pressures on the job

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[56] James D. Sewell, *The Stress of Homicide Investigations*, p. 566-574.

[57] John M. Violanti and Fred Aron, *Sources of Police Stressors . . .* p. 901; Robert W. Shearer, *Police Officer Stress*, p. 96.

[58] Richard J. Conroy, *Critical Incident Stress Debriefing*. FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin (February, 1990) vol: 59, iss: 2, p. 20-22; Gerry M. Stearns and Robert J. Moore, *The Physical and Psychological Correlates of Job Burn Out . . .* p. 127-147.

[59] James Janik, *Reducing Officer Stress*, p. 38.

[60] Robert W. Shearer, *Police Officer Stress*, p. 96.

carry over to home life placing strain on marriages and families.[61] Officers are often reluctant to admit stress-related health problems and close themselves off to significant others.[62] The traits that make great police officers make poor spouses, parents and friends.[63] Many police families end up splintered by divorce.[64]

The training of police officers allows for this social mistake to occur. Since, police officers need to remain detached emotionally in emergencies, desensitization is taught at police academies and officers naturally develop a distance from emotional response.[65] In part due to their job training, police officers can become domineering spouses and authoritarian parents. Police officers suffering from stress can also become cynical toward the public and government.

Stress is somewhat rewarded in the police administrative process. Officer evaluations (which determine promotions and pay raises) rate officers according to how they get along with

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[61] Richard N. Southworth, *Taking The Job Home*, p. 19-23.

[62] Robert W. Shearer, *Police Officer Stress*, p. 96.

[63] Richard N. Southworth, *Taking The Job Home*, p. 19-23.

[64] Grace Kannady, *Developing Stress-Resistant Police Families*. The Police Chief (August 1993) vol: 60, no. 8, p. 92.

[65] Richard N. Southworth, *Taking The Job Home*, p. 19-23; James D. Sewell, *The Stress of Homicide Investigations*, p. 575.

peers and how well they handle stressful situations from a professional, law enforcement viewpoint.[66]

Critical Incident Stress

Police officers are exposed to many scenes outside the normal realm of human experience. Death is a reality to many police officers, especially homicide investigators.[67] Critical incident stress is brought on by the involvement in actions that cause extraordinary emotion and overwhelms an individual's ability to cope.[68] There is little (if any) down time for homicide investigators in which to cope with the human tragedy of violent death.[69] Homicide investigations and death involving children or fellow officers have the greatest impact on an officer's ability to cope.[70]

Police officers are in need of support systems directly following critical incidents involving human life to help cope

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[66] Richard N. Southworth, *Taking The Job Home*, p. 19-23; Gerry M. Stearns and Robert J. Moore, *The Physical and Psychological Correlates of Job Burn Out*, p. 127-147; Robert W. Shearer, *Police Officer Stress*, p. 96.

[67] James D. Sewell, *The Stress of Homicide Investigations*, p. 567.

[68] Richard J. Conroy, *Critical Incident Stress Debriefing*, p. 21.

[69] James D. Sewell, *The Stress of Homicide Investigations*, p. 568.

[70] Carl Yates, *The Standard Gravure Shooting*, p. 8-13.

with short and long-term emotional problems. The Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CIDS) process is designed to offer support for officers directly following such situations. The concept is to tell officers that they are humans and their reactions and feelings are normal, human responses to witnessing such tragic events.[71]

The inception of such a program is relatively new and involves the use of trained psychological professionals. While this is a first step in attending to the mental needs of officers who witness critical incidents, other policies and programs need to be studied further to assure that police officers get individual assistance.

Media Induced Stress

The media itself can sometimes add to the pressure of a police officer's performance level. Included among their regular investigative duties, homicide detectives also need to find time to talk with family members and the media about a crime.[72] Police officers cite their relationship with the press as a principal, negative anxiety.[73] Television

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[71] Richard J. Conroy, *Critical Incident Stress Debriefing*, p. 20-23.

[72] James D. Sewell, *The Stress of Homicide Investigations*, p. 569.

[73] Patricia A. Kelly, *Police-Media Relations*, p. 4-5; Joe Baudler, *Business As Usual*, p. 1.

coverage of the Rodney King incident did not address the working condition of the police and job stress.[74] This bothers many police officers who believe the media neglected wider issues and slanted the story.

Much of this stress may be released through the advent of the Public Information Officer (PIO), an assigned officer who's duties are to inform and contact the press. This may alleviate some of the pressure the media can cause rank and file officers.

While police stress is thought to be related to danger, violence and other inherent work factors, many believe the focus of future investigations should hinge on stressors inside the police administration.[75] Some of that stress may also be the result of the position of the Public Information Officer. Some officers may not agree with the concept, or dislike the idea of one person speaking for all. Regardless, there must be some type of release for these professionals. Pent up emotions can seethe and cause further stress.[76]

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[74] Don Corrigan, *Police Trust Print More Than Broadcasting*, p. 1, 17.

[75] John M. Violanti and Fred Aron, *Sources of Police Stressors*, p. 899-900.

[76] James D. Sewell, *The Stress of Homicide Investigations*, p. 572.

Media Stress

Journalism is a "teeth-grinding stressful" occupation where the pressure is constant. Stress in journalism comes from deadlines, underpay and overwork, more responsibility than authority, revenue concerns, lifestyle changes and changing marketing strategies. News management is increasingly demanding and downsizing dramatically increases the workloads of news rooms filled with fewer and less-experienced employees. The newsroom by its very make-up is a stressful work place due to noise and the chaotic pace as deadlines near. Other forms of stress are caused by equipment and control coupled with a lack of respect and appreciation from managers. Journalists nowadays have to work smarter, harder and differently and are feeling the pressure from peers, managers and the public.[77]

Some newspaper editors suffer from poor training, high stress, heavy turnover and frequent health problems. Editors have a lot of responsibility but no real authority and are under an impossible workload. Many journalists experience a high level of unhappiness due to low pay, need for a change, lack of control in decisions that directly affect them,

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[77] Diana Brown, *Newsroom Stress Is Growing: Why It's Worse And How To Deal With It.* The Bulletin of the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) (January-February, 1993) no. 747, p. 10; Carl Sessions Stepp, *Editor Meltdown.* American Journalism Review (December 1993) vol: 15, no. 10, p. 26-30.

psychosomatic complaints, irregular hours and stress. Years of unchecked stress can add up to heart attacks and brain cancer.[78]

Many journalists find the rush of deadline adrenaline appealing and understand that some stress is a part of the job.[79] While some thrive under the pressure, others develop unhealthy habits like fear, depression, and cynicism. This leads to physical, emotional, or mental illness if unattended. In addition, stress resulting from reporters covering incidents "outside the range of usual human experience" should result in the availability of counseling sessions.[80]

Crime beat reporters are occasionally themselves exposed to danger. Journalists were the targets of violence in Los Angeles and other urban areas during the rioting following the Rodney King verdict.[81]

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[78] Diana Brown, *Newsroom Stress Is Growing . . .* p. 10-11; Carl Sessions Stepp, *Editor Meltdown*, p. 27-30; Betsy B. Cook, Steve R. Banks and Ralph J. Turner, *The Effects Of Work Environment On Burnout in the Newsroom.* Newspaper Research Journal (Summer-Fall 1993) vol: 14, no. 3, p. 123-126.

[79] Carl Sessions Stepp, *Editor Meltdown*, p. 27-30.

[80] Chris Harvey, *The High-Stress Police Beat*, p. 28-33.

[81] Stephanie O'Neill, *"Get The Hell Out Of Here": Journalists Attacked During the Los Angeles Riots. L.A. Stories: A City Ablaze Casts A Glaring Light on the Press.* Columbia Journalism Review (July-August 1992) vol: 31, no. 2, p. 23; Chris Harvey, *The High- Stress Police Beat*, p. 28-33.

Many times, reporters are witnesses to events outside the normal realm of human experience.[82] When witnessing or dealing closely with violence and its victims, journalists can experience a number of trauma-related symptoms. Merely witnessing violence at the very least provokes short-term disassociation and anxiety.[83] Witnessing violence hits the reporter long after the adrenaline has worn off, like during the drive home after work.[84] Long-term exposure to violence and death may result in emotional and physical problems.[85] Many journalists are trying to attain a better balance between career and home life.[86] If witnessing violence is a factor deciding the institution of a counseling program, news managers should consider inclusion of such programs as a part of their business.

Unlike the law enforcement arena, work-related stress is not adequately addressed by news organizations and its

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[82] Chris Harvey, *The High-Stress Police Beat*, p. 28-33.

[83] Science News, *Witness To The Execution: A Study of Journalists Indicates That Witnessing Violence Results In Some Degree of Disassociation and Anxiety.* (September 1994) vol: 146, no. 13, p. 200/1.

[84] Fawn Germer, *When Tragedy Hits Home: Reporters Covering the Oklahoma Bombing.* American Journalism Review (June 1995) vol: 17, no. 5, p. 41.

[85] James D. Sewell, *The Stress of Homicide Investigations*, p. 565-580.

[86] Diana Brown, *Newsroom Stress Is Growing . . .* p. 10-11.

individuals.[87] There is a disturbing deficit of research in the area of job related stress among journalists.[88] After the Federal Building in Oklahoma City exploded, local television stations set up critical incident counseling sessions for reporters, but the effort was wasted since many were still on location performing their jobs.[89] A study of newspaper editors revealed that 66 percent said being a reporter at their paper would be moderately or highly stressful.[90]

Newsrooms need administrators who recognize and alleviate unnecessary stress while accepting a better understanding of the underlying consequences of running an unchecked stress-ridden environment.[91] While some media outlets are starting to realize the physical and psychological well-being of their employees is a long-term benefit to all, more programs need to be accepted industry wide.[92] The managers and administrators

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[87] Chris Harvey, *The High-Stress Police Beat*, p. 28-33.

[88] Betsy B. Cook, Steve R. Banks and Ralph J. Turner, *The Effects of Work Environment* . . . p. 125.

[89] Fawn Germer, *When Tragedy Hits Home*, p. 41.

[90] Betsy B. Cook, Steve R. Banks and Ralph J. Turner, *The Effects of Work Environment* . . . p. 126.

[91] Diana Brown, *Newsroom Stress Is Growing*, p. 10-11.

[92] Some Omaha television stations are offering services to their employees to help reduce stress. KMTV has a staff physical trainer who conducts workouts for employees. WOWT-TV has a work-out room and racquetball court inside the building

of the news media need to be more concerned about the overall well being of their employees, especially in an age of downsizing and consolidation of jobs.

Job Burnout

Some of the problems the press and police have communicating with each other may also be related to another similarity the two professions possess: job burnout. Stress and strain lead to job burnout. Job burnout is related to the amount of stress incurred in the performance of assigned duties. Daily stress is one of a series of factors that may lead to job burnout where the individual reaches physical and emotional exhaustion. Burnout is caused by a lack of supervisor support, autonomy, task orientation, clarity and physical comfort along with higher levels of work pressure. Attitudes, personality and health concerns are all related to job burnout.[93]

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for employee use. WOWT also offers counseling for any employee who chooses to use it. These programs are voluntary, however, but are good first steps in helping address the problems associated with work-related stress.

[93] Carl Sessions Stepp, *Editor Meltdown*, p. 27-30; Betsy B. Cook, Steve R. Banks and Ralph J. Turner, *The Effects Of Work Environment . . .* p. 124; Gerry M. Stearns and Robert J. Moore, *The Physical and Psychological Correlates of Job Burnout in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.* Canadian Journal of Criminology (April, 1993) vol: 35, no. 2, p. 127-147.

Health-related symptoms include nervousness, worry, depression, irritability, loss of energy, hemorrhoids, lost interest in sex, insomnia and ulcers. Work interference with sports or hobbies increases levels of burnout. Job burnout includes the development of cynicism and depersonalization coupled with low levels of personal accomplishment.[94]

This phenomenon is more universal than previously thought and not totally reliant on measurements of health-related concerns. Job burnout is related to the satisfaction one feels in his/her daily life. Interference with recreational activities has created more job burnout attitudes.[95]

Those suffering from burnout develop a poor sense of well-being and alienation. As burnout increases, so does cynicism toward the public and less satisfaction with one's own life. As levels of job burnout increase, so does psychological distress and other health concerns.[96] Journalism stands to lose many of its best people to job burnout.[97] If this cynicism is allowed to rampage unchecked,

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[94] Gerry M. Stearns and Robert J. Moore, *The Physical and Psychological Correlates . . .* p. 127-147; Betsy B. Cook, Steve R. Banks and Ralph J.Turner, *The Effects of Work Environment . . .* p. 124.

[95] Gerry M. Stearns and Robert J. Moore, *The Physical and Psychological Correlates . . .* p. 127-147.

[96] Gerry M. Stearns and Robert J. Moore, *The Physical and Psychological Correlates . . .* p. 127-147.

[97] Carl Sessions Stepp, *Editor Meltdown*, p. 26-30.

the possibility is there that news coverage, style or content may reflect such an attitude.

Job satisfaction seems to reduce psychological distress.[98] Increases in exercise and involvement in sports can serve as buffers to job burnout.[99] However, until some of the root causes of job burnout are addressed (reducing workloads, time expectations, etc.) and employees are given adequate time off from the burdens of their jobs, burnout will continue to remove some of the industry's most capable practitioners.

Outside of satisfaction coming from job performance, and praise from bosses and co-workers, there appears little that can be done to stem the tide of job burnout in journalism. A possible benefit of working in journalism is the day-to-day variety of reporting. But for editors, middle managers and other support personnel, the only satisfactory answer may lie in rotating jobs to allow all the opportunity to experience new challenges. However, from a practical stand point, this solution is unacceptable since journalism has become so job specific and specialized. Law enforcement may be better equipped to rotate personnel in a more orderly fashion.

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[98] John M. Violanti and Fred Aron, *Sources of Police Stressors* . . . p. 899-902.

[99] Gerry M. Stearns and Robert J. Moore, *The Physical and Psychological Correlates* . . . p. 127-147.

Perceptions of Police and the Media

Other problems of communication between the police and the media may be due to misunderstandings surrounding the other's position in society. During the 1960s, police/press relations were severely tested with the Civil Rights Movement and Anti-War demonstrations and police/press relations suffered after the 1968 Chicago Convention.[100]

Although scribes on both side of the debate believe the press and police are more alike than different, there still appears the prevalence of a major split. The media depends on law enforcement for access to newsworthy events and the police depend on the media to responsibly report the news in a manner that will not hamper their effectiveness and activities.[101] Society expects police officers to handle whatever comes their way.[102]

The media has a similar expectation in communicative dealings with police officers and appears to have a tough time dealing with police who won't answer all their questions. A basic misunderstanding about how the press perceives the activities of police officers is apparent in questioning.

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[100] Don Corrigan, *The Police Versus The Media*. p. 17, 19.

[101] Kimberly A. Crawford, *News Media Participation in Law Enforcement Activities*, p. 28.

[102] Richard J. Conroy, *Critical Incident Stress Debriefing*, p. 21.

When journalists ask how an officer "feels" about a particular incident, they fail to understand that officers are trained to react and not feel and may find a response difficult.[103]

Police officers are themselves uneasy about the motives of journalists even though they conduct criminal investigations in a similar fashion. A problem communicating may occur because police officers are trained to be suspicious of everything. This may include the direction of questioning during an interview. Investigators question the truthfulness of everyone they interview so it not unreasonable to expect that they would see their own integrity being questioned during an interview.[104]

Police officers dislike the media's overzealousness in interviewing witnesses before they have.[105] In many instances, this is the only option available to journalists, due to uncooperative police officers or impending deadline pressures. Independent interviewing is just part of doing a good journalistic job. Journalists often wonder if police are paranoid about what independent witnesses may say or whether they are concerned about the integrity of an investigation.

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[103] Patricia A. Kelly, *Police Media Relations*, p. 4-7.

[104] Richard N. Southworth, *Taking The Job Home*, p. 19-23.

[105] Carl Yates, *The Standard Gravure Shooting*, p. 8-13.

These feelings and attitudes are multiplied with the appearance of television cameras. There are many documented attitudes police generally hold about the press when dealing with crime-related issues. Television news coverage is constantly under fire for being intrusive and insensitive when handling tragic events.[106] Many police officers get the impression that the media is unconcerned about the feelings of others[107], that television news crews forget the human side of issues and are rude and unprofessional.[108]

Police sometimes view the press as lacking sensitivity, proper training and awareness in dealing with the human side of crime.[109] Police don't believe the media takes into account the feelings officers may have in incidents where children or peers are killed.[110] They sometimes are angry with certain news coverage and feel that the media creates unjust sympathy for criminals.[111] They feel the media

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[106] Lou Prato, *"It Was Like A Shark Attack,"* p. 48.

[107] Donn Johnson, *The Press and the Police*, p. 8-9.

[108] Lou Prato, *"It Was Like A Shark Attack"*, p. 48; Bryan Grigsby, *Disappointment At Funeral Dress*. News Photographer (October 1995) vol: 50, no. 10, p. 16.

[109] Patricia A. Kelly, *Police-Media Relations*, p. 4-7.

[110] Carl Yates, *The Standard Gravure Shooting*, p. 8-13; Bryan Grigsby, *Disappointment At Funeral Dress*, p. 16.

[111] Patricia A. Kelly, *Police-Media Relations*, p. 4-7.

invades their personal space and routinely blocks emergency routes at critical incident scenes.[112]

In many cases, these attitudes are justified. But just as one should not judge all police officers by the actions of the few, the same courtesy should be shown the television news media.

Reporters and photographers as groups are more altruistic and somewhat the protectors of the more noble goals of journalism and not as concerned with the show business side of television as others in their business.[113] Like police officers, journalists are also trained to question the validity of everything and dig deeper into issues. They are trained to be wary and suspicious and could be construed as amateur investigators. Like police, the media has a specific job function in the public forum and they generally consider themselves adequately trained.

Yet many police officers tend to categorize media people according to their specific medium. Although officers tend to distrust the media as a whole, many report a higher level of trust with print journalists than broadcasters. Television reporting is deemed more unfair and sensationalistic to police

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[112] Carl Yates, *The Standard Gravure Shooting*, p. 8-13.

[113] Conrad Smith and Lee B. Becker, *Comparison of Journalistic Values of Television Reporters and Producers.* Journalism Quarterly (Fall, 1989) p. 793-800.

officers. Although some officers believe a level of trust should be assessed on an individual basis, the tendency is for law enforcement officers to use a wide brush when dealing with television news reporters as opposed to those in print.[114]

Two recent examples of how the media portrays police add insight into the current attitudes among many police officers about the television news media. The Stuart murder case in Boston and the Rodney King beating in Los Angeles began as two distinctly different image presentations by the television media with both ending as embarrassments for police.

In the Stuart case, the media relied only on the reports of a police department representative and failed to inquire into claims outside the official investigation. The media did not follow up on outside tips and conduct their own investigation which would have shown the police were after the wrong suspect. As a result, the police targeted the black community and the media played unwitting patsy, even trumpeting the arrest of an innocent man.[115]

In the King case, the media relied heavily on the video of an amateur photographer to formulate a case against the Los Angeles Police Department. The constant replaying of the King beating on television did not offer the truth for police

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[114] Don Corrigan, *Police Trust Print More Than Broadcasting*, p. 1, 17.

[115] Gregg Barak, *Between the Waves*, p. 133.

officers, who wanted the entire tape shown to prove the officers involved in the beating had just cause for their actions. Working conditions and officer stress issues were not reported in broadcast segments and respondents say this one-sided reporting was never put into context in television news stories.[116]

In both cases, the television news media did not rely completely on its own devices before presenting the story to a nationwide audience. In both cases police/media relations suffered. Out of the King case, police brutality became a major topic in the media nationwide, while in the Stuart case, the media shifted from portraying the police as heroes and competent investigators into bumbling racists. While the media was responsible for helping create these earlier images, it did a quick about face when investigations independent of the police turned up other suspects and issues.[117]

As a further result of the Stuart and King cases, the media again looked at law enforcement officers in a negative light. Many in the media perceived police officers as cynical, aggressive, rigid, paranoid, insensitive and verbally abusive. Those in law enforcement viewed the media as overly aggressive, arrogant, anti-police, self-serving,

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[116] Gregg Barak, *Between the Waves*, p. 133; Don Corrigan, *Police Trust Print More Than Broadcasting*, p. 1, 17.

[117] Gregg Barak, *Between the Waves*, p. 133.

sensationalistic and unconcerned about victim's rights or police investigations.[118]

Few would accept a community free of law and order. Without police officers, anarchy exists. Regardless of what people think, our society needs police officers to enforce laws and protect lives and property. A free press is a segment of our democratic system that many in our society may like to do away with. Nonetheless, it is an integral part of insuring our freedom and acting as a watchdog over government. The opinions of the minority withstanding, both law enforcement and the news media are segments of our society that serve valuable functions and are instrumental in insuring our democratic way of life.

Public Image of Police and the Media

The 1968 Chicago Riots and the Rodney King beating had a profound effect on the national public image of police officers.[119] As witnessed by the public interest in the O.J. Simpson trial, America has maintained a fascination with police work.[120] Despite many of these recent problems, the

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[118] Patricia A. Kelly, *Police-Media Relations*, p. 4-7.

[119] Don Corrigan, *Police Trust Print More Than Broadcasting*, p. 1, 17; Don Corrigan, *The Police Versus The Media*, p. 17, 19.

[120] Penny Parrish, *Police and the Media*, p. 24.

media still realizes that they need police as a source for the presentation of authentic representations of crime and justice. Yet both sides need the other more than they will admit.[121]

Perhaps because of incidents like the King and Simpson trials and the Waco Branch Davidian disaster, law enforcement finds itself being scrutinized by the television news media regularly on the evening news. Police officers realize that their public image is enhanced if they are portrayed in the media as competent and professional investigators that solve crime and help keep society safe.[122] A good professional image helps build trust and respect in the community.[123] Police credibility is enhanced when an image of competence, control, interest, integrity and in-depth knowledge is conveyed to the public.[124] The television news media can also assist law enforcement in their public image and provide an outlet for information to the public.[125]

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[121] Gregg Barak, *Between the Waves*, p. 133; Carl Yates, *The Standard Gravure Shooting*, p. 8-13.

[122] Gregg Barak, *Between the Waves*, p. 133.

[123] Richard N. Southworth, *Taking The Job Home*, p. 19-23.

[124] Arthur F. Nehrbass, *Promoting Effective Media Relations*, p. 40.

[125] Donn Johnson, *The Press and the Police*, p. 8-9; Ellen Soeteber, *Enlisting The Media As An Ally: Media's Relationship With Corrections Officers.* Corrections Today (December 1992) vol: 54, no. 8, p. 28.

The media and police are both seen as powerful and visible entities in our society that worship ingenuity, individual effort and investigative skills. Both are secretive concerning methods, rely on anonymous sources, hold high ideals and consider themselves vital to the community.[126] Even though the media holds the power for delivering information to the masses in rapid order, it has its own image problem in the eyes of American society. Many people think the power of the media is too great and should be diminished. Media people are perceived as arrogant and there are those (outside law enforcement) who believe the media consistently seeks to set an agenda.[127]

One possible reason the press is not trusted is the perception that they are solely out to tell "dirty little secrets" while caring little about the real social issues.[128] Public trust of the television news media is not rated highly.

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[126] Patricia A. Kelly, *Police-Media Relations*, p. 4-7.

[127] Paul Johnson, *Why Media Folk Are Hated.* Spectator (November 12, 1988) vol: 261, no. 8366, p. 22-23.

[128] Bruce Shenitz and Annetta Miller, *The New Facts Of Life: Clearly The Rules Are Changing About Whom The Press Will Out. But That's All Clear.* Newsweek (March 20, 1995) vol: 1125, no. 12, p. 58.

Society seems to view them as being more interested in financial gain and self-interest than serving the public.[129]

Regardless of its public image, the media holds the keys and drives the car on the superhighway of local information. Area newspapers, radio and television are the most reliable sources of information for people concerning events that occur daily in their communities. In many ways, law enforcement is simply along for the ride when it comes to getting desirable information out to the public. Here is where the power of the media is great and that power should be wisely used.

In this age of "reality programming", talk shows and "news magazine" programs it is important to note that there is a blurring of the lines between entertainment-related broadcasting or magazines disguised as news servers and a community's "legitimate" news media. There should be a distinction but many times this can be lost on an audience that is unable (or unwilling) to discern between the two. The unfortunate fact is that many times the "legitimate" media have blurred the lines themselves.

In modern American society, crime is a hot topic. As long as this remains a staple of the television news ideology, it will continue to be covered. In order to quench the

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[129] Beverly Kees and Bill R. Phillips, *The Love-Hate Relationship Between Politicians and the Mews Media*. American Journalism Review (September 1994) vol: 16, no. 7, p. FF4.

public's thirst for spot news coverage, television will continue to have persistent contact with law enforcement officials. Consistent contact means there is increased opportunity for police/media conflict.

Historically, police and the media clashed numerous times since the 1960s. This creates a feeling of animosity between the two camps. A mutual lack of trust and understanding of the other's professional and social roles lead to divergent needs and values. Generally, police officers view journalists as untrained and obtrusive, while media personnel view peace officers as control-freaks. Neither side seems interested in fostering a long-term relationship in the communication forum. Questionable training tactics early in a cadet's regimen possibly lead to the development of stereotypical viewpoints in police officers. Younger reporters are usually designated to the crime beat. Although differences are many, there are similarities between the two professions.

Police officers suffer from job stress, critical incident stress, media induced stress and job burnout while media personnel suffer from stress and job burnout. A wide variety of events and psychological symptoms can occur in the daily lives of police officers and media personnel that may lead to ineffective communication patterns.

High-profile criminal cases have thrust the inability of police and the media to effectively communicate in the

national spotlight. The perception police and the media hold for each other offers insight into deep-rooted feelings that fester and continue to feed an unhealthy communication process.

In any communication process, there are bound to be problems. The perception one has can be altered simply by the tone of another's voice. The study of communication between police and the media is no exception. The literature review indicates there is a huge problem nation-wide. But is there a serious trend of communication illness between police and the media on all levels, or is the idea of a widespread problem too broadly based? Are there communities that buck the national consensus?

It is easy to commit ourselves to the notion that a communication problem existing on a national scene is simply a compilation of problems on a much smaller scale. Is it too fatalistic to simply wring our hands over this dilemma and accept the concept that animosity exists and is too firmly entrenched to eradicate? The lack of extensive research on the status of police/press communication problems on a more localized scale apparently confirms this notion. The picture of police/press communication problems may be painted with too wide of a brush and in need of more detailed analysis.

This lack of extensive literature indicates that it is necessary to determine if there are examples outside the

national norm. This can best be done by taking a specific area and analyzing it thoroughly to determine if there are possibilities of reversing this national trend. A target market in Omaha, Nebraska presents such opportunities.

Such an analysis focuses on three intertwined questions: To what extent, if any, do communication problems exist between Omaha's police and television media? If communication problems do indeed exist, what measures, if any, are being taken to improve communication between police and the press? If corrective measures are being taken, do police and the media feel that these corrective measures are effective?

Chapter Three

Methodology

Human beings are very complex social animals. One aspect of our social existence is the communication processes we establish and maintain during the course of our daily lives. We have all felt misunderstood in a communication process with another person. We have all felt pressures that caused us to sometimes say what we didn't necessarily mean. We have all had moments where we failed to clearly understand a communication message. One problem facing us as humans is the problem of incongruence, where disrupting factors may reduce the similarity of meanings between communicator and receiver, resulting in our inability of having perfectly accurate meaning experiences.[130]

The area of police/press relations is no different and may even become magnified under the stress of spot news situations. A quandary exists on a national scale where the media and law enforcement have problems executing effective communication. Should we just accept this as societal fact and write off bridging this problem? Is such a communication relationship similar to the chemical mixture of nitro and

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[130] Melvin L. DeFluer and Sandra J. Ball-Rokeach. *Theories of Mass Communication, Fourth Edition*, (New York: Longman), 1982, p. 132-133.

glycerin, where the slightest tremor can cause an explosion? Or should we search for reasons why communication problems are present, seek out measures to bridge this communication gap and inquire as to whether possible solutions and corrective measures can be effective?

The researcher holds an acute interest in the answers to these questions. A fifteen-year career in the television news industry in Omaha has allowed the researcher to observe numerous events and practices where the communication process between police and the media have both succeeded and failed. Due to this personal experience in the field, it would be impossible to remove the researcher's insights and expertise from this process. This realization can strengthen the comprehensive understanding of this effort if the researcher assumes the role as participant-observer in this study. Since the researcher already has quality access to events outside the capabilities of the lay-person, it is a positive for this study that the research be conducted in this manner.

While the possibility of researcher bias, or a priori theories may present a problem, the researcher shall utilize more than one form of data collection for analysis. For these reasons, the researcher intends to utilize video and audio tape recordings of interactions and scenes on location and provide adequate labeling and storage of such tapes for future inspection as a supplementary means of triangulation. In

addition, the researcher intends to conduct several in-depth interviews with persons involved in actions of interest to the study with great care taken to insure the accuracy of such notes by simultaneously recording them on audio tape.

The researcher seeks to uncover a deeper understanding of the phenomena through the lived experiences of participants. Results shall be presented in the form of participant dialogue by those interviewed for this study along with impressionist tales where the researcher displays his own experiences in the field.[131] Qualitative research methods are the best possible choice for this type of study. Because the study seeks to utilize personal insight into the feeling individuals have of the communication relationship between police and the press, the researcher believes a qualitative method best suits the needs of this project. Qualitative research with its descriptive, narrative style allows the researcher to interpret the meaning and context of examples presented by individuals who deal with one another in such a communication model.

In qualitative research, data analysis falls into five modes: organizing the data; generating categories, themes, and patterns; testing the emergent hypothesis against the data;

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[131] Catherine Marshall and Gretchen B. Rossman, *Designing Qualitative Research*, Second Edition (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publishing), 1995, p. 117.

searching for alternative explanations of the data; and writing the report.[132]

Exploratory in nature, this model seeks to document the salient attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, events, processes and structures in the communication process between police and the media.[133] It is vital that this undertaking account for alterations that may occur as a result of environment. If human behavior can best be understood in its natural environment while an event occurs, others can better understand that behavior with a working knowledge of the framework the behavior operates in.

Since the researcher seeks to study the behavior in its natural environment, field research is selected as a research strategy. Field research typically yields qualitative data and provides an in-depth view of phenomena by studying the perspectives of the participants in a natural environment.[134]

The main focus of this study deals with the communication process between police and the television news media during spot news situations. Spot news is defined as the occurrence

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[132] Catherine Marshall and Gretchen B. Rossman, *Designing Qualitative Research*, p. 114.

[133] Catherine Marshall and Gretchen B. Rossman, *Designing Qualitative Research*, p. 41.

[134] Earl Babbie, *The Practice of Social Research*, Seventh Edition (Wadsworth Publishing, Boston) 1995, p. 280.

of any criminal situation involving police where television cameras are present.

The decision to limit the study to the area of television is due to increased potential for communication problems caused by the appearance of technology in human communication. The literature review noted several examples where police mistrusted television personnel more than print journalists. Studies also indicate that police officers tend to view television as a superficial and unsympathetic medium. In addition, the ability of television to broadcast spot news events live intensifies pressure on both journalists and police officers. Television's technological advances have infringed on the communication relationship between police and the television media with its mere presence by demanding almost instant visuals and information.

Participant observation and in-depth, elite interviewing form the techniques of data collection selected for this study. The researcher shall search for the presence or absence of a communication problem between police and the television media in the Omaha area.

Persons included in this study consist of a sample of the nearly 700 sworn Omaha police officers who are currently working in a capacity that places them in the public forum for the majority of their duties. Interviews were conducted with officers assigned to public relations whose duties mainly

involve the general releasing of information to the media, Sergeant William Muldoon and Officer Jim Murray. Historical perspective was gained through an interview with recently retired homicide investigator James Wilson.

Other law enforcement interviews were conducted with two command officers (Lt. Dave Friend and Sgt. Mike Cavanaugh) who have spent considerable time working heavy crime areas and shifts that lead to extensive communication contact with media. Command officers and sergeants offer more insight into long-term communication patterns between police and the media. In addition, command officers are the only police designates authorized to speak with the press on the site of spot news scenes. Additional information was gathered through casual discussions and observations of officer's interactions with media in the field.[135]

Additional insight into potential communication problems was offered by former Douglas County Attorney Sam Cooper. Interviewing someone further up the legal chain allows for

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[135] The researcher requested the formation of a focus group with members of the police department for further data collection in this study. Public Information Officer Jim Murray submitted several E-Mail requests for officers to assist in this endeavor. However, none came forward. One problem here was that the notices were required by police procedure to include that such involvement would be voluntary and prospective officers would not be compensated for their time by the police department. Monetary limitations restricted the researcher from offering compensation to officers for their involvement in a focus group.

further insight into potential legal problems that may stem from the releasing of information at a spot news scene that may resurface when suspects appear in court. This is a useful area since many officers might be wary of releasing certain information to the press for fear of damaging a case when it goes to trial.

Media personnel included in the study consist of those working for one of the four television news operations (WOWT, KETV, KMTV, or KPTM) where their job description causes them to have contact with police on a regular basis. This includes photographers, reporters, and management personnel, but excludes those in sales, production, engineering and other areas where their main duties do not present opportunities for communication encounters with police on a regular basis by job description. The total number fluxuates around 80 people.

Recent reorganization of personnel at Omaha television stations and the market's place as a mid-level media outlet demanded further narrowing of potential subjects targeted for inclusion in this study. Front-line anchors and specialty reporters at the television stations do not have duties similar to general assignment reporters and photographers by job description. Therefore, results may be skewed by including anchors, consumer reporters, sports personnel or others in newsrooms who's duties are limited and outside the boundaries of opportunity for daily contact with police

personnel. The researcher feels more accurate results lie with limiting inclusion to general assignment personnel.

In addition, high turnover in recent years in the reporting ranks severely limits the experience level of available personnel at all four stations. For example, KPTM offers no reporters or photographers with at least five years experience in the Omaha market. KETV employs one reporter with such qualifications, KMTV three and WOWT with four. Nearly one third of the total target group are employed as photographers at these three stations. The researcher feels deeper meanings of understanding into patterns are more accurate by uncovering those who have a broader-based experience level. The researcher's paramount interest lies in discovering the long-term relationship between police and the media in the Omaha area. Therefore, the researcher carefully selected representatives that can offer the necessary depth for accuracy in reporting and provide a sense of perspective over a long-term basis.

For these reasons, in-depth interviews were conducted with WOWT News Director John Clark, WOWT Police Reporter Amy Adams, KETV Photographer Peter Frerichs, WOWT General Assignment Reporter Jim Fagin, and retired KMTV and KETV Police Reporter Frank Brown. Clark was selected due to his experience as a general assignment reporter in Omaha for television stations KMTV and WOWT and his current involvement

in police/press situations as the News Director at WOWT. Adams is the only current designated police reporter for any Omaha television station. Frerichs was selected due to his involvement in several situations that led to alterations in policy procedures. Brown's selection stems from his long-time status as Omaha's pre-eminent police reporter for KFAB Radio, KMTV and KETV. Fagin was selected for his status as the senior Omaha area television general assignment reporter. Additional information was gathered in casual discussions and observations inside the WOWT newsroom and with specific incident data input from colleagues from Omaha's other television stations on-location in the field.

Tables I and II provide a reference guide of who was interviewed for this study with a listing of respective person's job title.

Table I

MEDIA INTERVIEWS	AFFILIATION	JOB DESCRIPTION
Amy Adams	WOWT	Police Reporter
Peter Frerichs	KETV	Photographer
John Clark	WOWT	News Director
Jim Fagin	WOWT	Reporter
Frank Brown	KFAB, KETV, KMTV	Former Police Reporter

Table II

POLICE INTERVIEWS	AFFILIATION	DUTIES
Jim Murray	Officer	Public Relations Officer
William Muldoon	Sergeant	Former Public Relations Officer
John Ewing	Sergeant	Burglary Unit
James B. Wilson	Sergeant (ret.)	Homicide Investigator
Sam Cooper	Douglas County Attorney (ret.)	Attorney
Michael Cavanaugh	Sergeant	Command Officer
David Friend	Lieutenant	Command Officer

An additional side note of importance is the inclusion of Brown and Cavanaugh as sources of this study. Each interned in the other's profession before settling on their respective careers. Brown interned at the police station and gained insight into the inner workings of police procedures and practices. Cavanaugh completed an internship with KYNN radio (now WOW radio) and was a broadcasting major before switching to criminal justice through the availability of grant money to pay for his education.

The researcher (due to job description as a photographer and employee of WOWT), encounters daily contact with both officers and media personnel mentioned for this study and has personal involvement in the topic of interest from a professional standpoint. This personal experience has

assisted in the specific targeting of individuals who possess unique characteristics to enhance the depth of this study.

The proximity of the researcher to key interviews conducted for this study creates a very serious potential problem: the potential withholding of pertinant information because some respondents may feel uncomfortable naming specific individuals. For that reason, the names of officers or journalists where a negative experience occurred were excluded from the text of this study. This is to insure that those interviewed would speak openly and that old wounds would not be needlessly re-opened.

Those interviewed were a core of similar questions for probing purposes. Then the researcher expanded questioning into key areas more suited to individual personal experiences. All were asked for their insights into the current status of police/press relations in the Omaha area. Perceptions of what makes a good journalist or police officer were solicited to determine how each views the other in a professional fashion. Examples of personal experiences with each other were noted, accompanied by any resolution. Links between stress factors and other job-related incidents were analyzed to determine if spot news situations are indeed where many communication problems arise. Each was asked for potential solutions to any problems.

Is there a good working relationship, or are there problems? Are there any changes that have recently altered the arena of police/press relations? If so, have these changes aided in improved communication relations between police and the media? When other issues like stress, trust and personal relationships are factored into the equation, has the working arrangement between the two groups grown closer or added other issues to hamper the communication process? Are there hidden factors that create animosity or hard feelings that further a wedge between police and the media? If so, have these feelings and perceptions been addressed successfully?

The goal is to determine if police/press relations in Omaha are in the same condition as those in other areas across the nation, or if Omaha presents a different picture of the working conditions between law enforcement and the media.

Chapter Four

Results

Many of the respondents feel the communication processes between Omaha's police and it's television media has taken a step backwards. Individuals identified several areas where opportunities for improved communication and relationships exist. However, the respondents also noted many areas where friction occurs between police and the media, within the police structure itself and through Omaha's television broadcasting community that must be corrected for effective communication to evolve. These factors appear to create a fragile balance that potentially can be tipped by any single incident, dramatically changing the landscape of the communication process between police and the media.

The interviews yielded a great deal of qualitative data. Organizing the data presents a challenge due to the wide range of responses given by each individual. The researcher intends to analyze the data in a thematic fashion, where the flow of results is dictated by the occurrence of events from individuals.

A brief summary of the previous manner of communication opens this thematic dialogue. Opportunity for an open dialectical exchange existed at one time, but has since been transformed into a formalized and structural system of

communication. Written policies now exist from the police perspective which have resulted in dramatic changes in the manner in which communication occurs between individual police officers and reporters.

Policy changes include the creation of the public information office, the establishment of a formal news media policy and conducting of seminars, and cross-educational training. These changes were the result of an apparent inability to communicate and form the framework of the current foundation of police/press relations in Omaha.

After identifying these policy changes, location of key factors where deep-rooted feelings exist and hampers the communication process follows. These elements consist of animosity, agenda setting, utilization of young reporters, concern over information released at spot news scenes, technological changes, and stress. These deep-rooted feelings continue to undermine the channels of effective communication between Omaha's police and media, according to those interviewed for this study.

By establishing these important elements in the communication processes between police and the media, the researcher feels a deeper understanding of the current conditions of the association between the two groups presents a clear understanding of the relationship. Conflict and periods of breakdowns in the communication process have been

identified by those interviewed as opportunities for major breakthroughs in the area of police/press relations.

Personal Relationships

The previous system of communication between police and the media relied on the personal relationships individuals forged over the course of time. Beat reporters made daily contact with officers by coming to the police department and going through records. Members of each group got to know each other in informal ways, without the stigma of representing an institution in a formal manner. They saw each other as people and not as symbols.

Personal relationships were grounded in familiarity and trust. Officers knew reporters on a personal level and developed a solid working relationship because they knew the style and quality of work they could expect from individual reporters. Sometimes (as in the case of Frank Brown and Jimmy Wilson) they even became friends.

Mutual respect and trust are the basis for successful police/press relations, according to Public Information Officer Jim Murray. Much of this has changed in recent years, due in part to the reduction of police beat reporters, an influx of younger and lesser-experienced reporters, and changes in how television news covers crime-related stories.

The overall result in these changes is a limitation on forming personal relationships across the two groups.

WOWT News Director John Clark senses a "real distrust between the two sides" and points to a "lack of understanding of each other's jobs" as the main problem. In his position, Clark directly communicates problems his reporters have with police to law enforcement administrators. He has been involved in many discussions with Omaha Police Chief James Skinner.

WOWT Police Reporter Amy Adams says part of the problem hampering the current relationship between Omaha Police and the media is that reporters need to "be a little more human, lighten up" and not be so "hard-nosed" when dealing with police. For example, if reporters understand why police can only release certain information at a certain time, Adams says communication between the press and police will continue to improve.

Murray says human communication is important when police are dealing with the press. Although PIOs prepare written releases of information and attain photographs of suspects and victims for the media, Murray says there is no better means of assuring solid police/press relations than dealing face to face with people. This can change the media's outlook even concerning incidents involving police.

He cites an incident where two officers were ticketed by a State Patrol trooper after obstructing traffic on the interstate. Murray says a reporter tracked down one of the officers after the two were suspended. The officer told the reporter "he had a bad day" and "made a mistake." After talking with the officer face to face, Murray says the reporter felt the incident wouldn't have been such a big deal if the reporter talked with the officer before running initial stories. The reporter saw the officer felt remorse over making a bad decision while the reporter presented himself as a human being and not an institution foreign to the officer's human point of view.

Some issues end up as a high-profile story because they involves police officers who restrict the rights of others. Murray confirms that police officers are held to a higher standard by the public. He says society expects police to "get the job done" regardless of the incident or circumstance. When they fail to do so, public perception of police is severely damaged. Noting that officers are viewed as an object, or extension of government and not as individual human beings, Murray says that police officers are an "autonomous" group. This augments the positive aspects the media can gain with police when they deal with them as human beings. Breaking down the stereotypes and getting to know officers on a more personal level creates familiarity.

Much of it comes down to attempting to carve out some type of working relationship that goes a little beyond professional contact alone. "If you have to deal with someone else and your dealings with them make your professional life easier, it seems to me that you would try to get along," Omaha Police Lt. Dave Friend says. "You burn somebody once, especially in our department where the grapevine is so well-established and it travels faster than E-Mail. You burn somebody, or they feel like they've been burned, it could take years to rebuild that relationship."

Familiarity is an important aspect of covering the police beat, according to Adams. She says trust is a vital aspect of maintaining a good rapport with police. When an officer knows the reporter and feels they are treated fairly, they are more likely to work with that reporter in the future. Adams says she calls police contacts daily (regardless of other duties) to keep the lines of communication open. She also advocates media doing occasional positive personality stories on police as a means of insuring fairness and trust. In addition, she says this gives her a competitive edge when inside information is necessary.

Clark says familiarity definitely affects the communication process between individual reporters and sources. He was a beat reporter at KMTV earlier in his career, covering the school system. Clark says he made

contacts on his own that others would have difficulty making on a part-time basis. This supports the concept that officers are more willing to talk to the press if they are familiar with the individual. Clark covered the police beat as a fill-in reporter when the regular reporter was on vacation. He says many police officers "would just as soon not talk to me at all. They just flat out wouldn't tell you anything." A major reason for this was the development of sources and familiarity a regular reporter can build with officers.

A lack of familiarity severely limits the effectiveness of young reporters covering crime-related stories. WOWT General Assignment Reporter Jim Fagin says familiarity is important for journalists because officers "are suspicious by nature and they don't trust most people." Without opportunities to informally associate with each other, Fagin feels officers trust journalists much less than before. "They knew we were human beings and we had the same fears and a sense of humor and families and we were concerned about crime and concerned about taxes, we were human beings," Fagin says. Now many officers look at journalists and think "he's going to get me in trouble, he's going to quote me," Fagin says.

This can affect journalism in several ways as a drift away from designated beat coverage makes its way into the Omaha market. Without regularly assigned beats, reporters may be less able to develop personal relationships with potential

sources. As a result, officers will have to get to know the younger reporters before they feel comfortable opening up to them and offering more in-depth information. "(Channel Six Investigative Reporter Mike) McKnight drops in on people all the time," Fagin says. "Amy Adams takes sources out to lunch and that's how you get to know them. It used to be we hung out in bars. Cops and journalists hung out in the same bars, but I don't think that happens anymore. That was the easiest place to get to know each other."

Police also note this lack of off-duty socializing between reporters and police officers. Omaha Police Sgt. Mike Cavanaugh says there used to be more socializing after work between the two groups, especially in bars. Recent societal changes have altered that and reduced areas where the two groups may meet off-duty. As a result, this reduces the opportunities for each group to learn from the other. "You learn by having a beer with that policeman, you learn by having a cup of coffee with them," Former Homicide Investigator Jimmy Wilson Sr. says. He believes that journalists now have to work harder to develop a personal relationship with officers. "Reporters have to be good salesmen, they have to sell themselves to that policeman, you have to build the trust," Wilson says. "Without that trust (officers) aren't going to tell (reporters) the time of day."

Being honest and getting to know officers on a somewhat personal level can enhance the relationship between the media and police, according to Fagin. "That's the way you have to work with a lot of these guys who are so afraid of the news media," he says. "Because they fancy us as a bunch of negative rumor mongers who like to get people in trouble." It is vital for officers to know individual reporters and know who they are dealing with. "If you don't know the person you are going to be more on-guard," Cavanaugh says. "The general understanding is probably the same the media might get with a new officer. You want to give everybody a fair chance and not give them a chance to disprove themselves."

Having a regularly assigned police reporter is a good link between television stations and police departments. "Amy's there every day," Fagin says. "She gives you a presence. She gets to know a lot of the rising officers. It does help when they think of you first. We should have beats everywhere so that happens."

Adams says she does not experience many problems on a day-to-day basis in dealing with police. She attributes much of this to the fact that as a designated police reporter, she is more visible to police in that role than a general assignment reporter might be.

Former KETV Police Reporter Frank Brown, Wilson and Former Douglas County Attorney Sam Cooper all believe the

relationship between the media and police is far worse than it was even fifteen years ago. Much of this is attributed to the fact that police and the media do not associate as they once did. One area of concern is a lack of respect from both sides. "The mutual respect should go both ways," Wilson says. "It doesn't always happen that way because now you have 'personalities' (in television reporting jobs)." All three mentioned that neither group takes the time to form personal relationships with the other.

As an example of how the two groups don't help each other like they once did, Wilson says reporters waste too much time doing interviews they know are not going to air. Some reporters ask too many needless questions when they know they are only using a short soundbite. "If you stand there and interview the guy for 20 minutes, I'm burning your time and you're burning my time," Wilson says. "I think officers who are interviewed by the press should know that. Try to get this thing condensed down."

Wilson says Brown helped him understand this concept of the soundbite. "Just give me a couple of good bites and sum it up," Wilson says Brown told him. "A lot of policemen become offended at that because it hasn't been explained to them." Wilson says most officers working the street don't know enough about the inner workings of the media industry and what the reporter wants in order to do the story. Wilson says

a lot of damage can be done to both sides because the two sides don't fully understand the other and make limited attempts to adequately inform the other.

Yet, it is apparent that each side occasionally needs the other and should form as much of a positive working relationship as possible. Friend says that if there is a positive working relationship and there is information he wants released to the public, television media is where he would go. He believes the relationship has to be maintained over the long haul regardless of personal feelings. "You can't say 'screw it, I'm not going to deal with them' because you may need them someday," he says.

In the absence of personal relationships, some reporters are at an advantage simply by their longevity in the Omaha television market. Fagin says he is "fairly well-known around here and that helps me out with uniformed officers and even their superiors. You've got to have the trust," Fagin says. He believes that many officers would be more helpful to media personnel if they viewed them as people and not elements of an unknown institution. Fagin understands that officers view him "as a reporter first and I understand they're a cop first. If I'm speeding, they're going to have to give me a ticket, by the same token, if they screw up, I'm going to have to report it." Fagin adds that reporters can "soften" a negative story

about police officers if they view officers as people and not rigid elements of a system.

Friend believes that familiarity does not necessarily breed trust. He says there are reporters who he feels are "excellent reporters, that do their homework and that do very in-depth interviews." He notes that one reporter who did some stories justifying violent actions against police officers "are not liked at all by a lot of police officers." This is because of a reduced perception of trust. "I'm not talking about ability to do the job," Friend says. "He's probably one of the better reporters in town, but there are guys that wouldn't give him the time of day now because of the things he's said and done. This guy has burned himself with a lot of people and I don't know what he could do, other than the passage of time, to ingratiate himself back into the rank and file."

Personal relationships solidly based in trust can assist journalists when they are attempting to get information from police officers. "There are some guys in the media that I would trust with information and I would tell them lots of stuff that I wouldn't tell other people," Friend says. "Some of them are really professional up-front."

The development of trust can also assist police officers if they say something they shouldn't have. "Once you establish that trust," Friend says, "then it goes a long way."

Friend says a reporter told him that an incident they were both working undercover would make "great news." Friend says he told the reporter that if it is aired on the news with the information he supplied, the reporter would have a good scoop and it would be a huge news issue. It would also place Friend in jeopardy with his superiors for releasing the story. He asked the reporter, "what would stop you from (airing that story)?" "The next time I wanted something, you wouldn't give me the time of day," the reporter replied. The story did not air and the two continue to have a positive working relationship. Because of this, Friend believes respect and trust is more developed today than it was a decade ago, but notes that it continues to be based on relationships between individuals.

Brown says 20 years ago "reporters followed guidelines and were more trustworthy" than they are today. This has a direct impact on the communication flow between police officers and the media. Wilson agrees with Brown that reporters appear to be less concerned with following accepted journalistic guidelines. "You will have some reporters that will respect you and I will talk to them off record," he says. Wilson adds that when reporters fail to abide by that personal relationship and violate that trust by releasing certain information, "they'll never get anything else from me," Wilson

says. This adds to the personal distrust of individuals and can spread to the perception of an entire news organization.

This situation can severely limit access to police-related stories for a station. "None of the reporters and photographers that worked for (KETV) were trusted by the vast majority of the police officers," Friend says. "They didn't have any respect, they didn't have any trust because everybody had been burned by this group of people. That's why they hired Frank Brown." KETV, thus, had an inside source for police-related stories.

While the personal relationship formed between police officers and members of the press is diminishing, the relationship must somehow continue. As this relationship quickly became a thing of the past, the mistrust and lack of communication started to become more apparent.

Changes in Police/Press Relations

Until the 1980s, Omaha television stations designated specific individuals as police beat reporters. With a broadening of scope ushered in by consultants, changes in personnel and technological changes in news gathering methods, police beat reporting fell into the hands of general assignment reporters. Today, only WOWT has a designated police reporter. The result of these changes has been a wider array of personnel making transient communication contact with

police. In most instances, assignment editors are the only regular contact with police.

These changes result in a free-for-all methodology in reporters' dealings with police. While this possesses potential for wider-based opportunities of communication, it also results in unfamiliar parties working under an umbrella of uneasiness. While police beat reporters have developed personal relationships with many police officers, they also have developed understandings of police structures and procedures. Officers are unsure of the methods and motives of unfamiliar reporters. Against this backdrop, the relationship between police and the press floated in unsteady waters, waiting for something to cause change.

Changes came quickly, throwing the arena of police/press relations into turmoil and near total collapse. No one was prepared for what was about to occur as the two sides careened toward an inevitable collision.

One specific incident resulted in major structural changes in the way police and the media communicate while in the field. Tensions in police/media relations peaked in late 1989 when a man took hostages and barricaded himself inside a beauty shop. Police had not established a formal perimeter, but they tried to keep the media away from the scene. This caused some ill feelings on both sides. In addition, the flow of information was cut off due to the lack of a command post

or staging area for media personnel. Virtually no accommodations were made for media to operate, leaving individual reporters and photographers to their own devices.

The vehicle for change occurred when a television photographer, who had worked his way inside a house offering a prime vantage point, shot tape of emergency response unit (ERU) officers surrounding the beauty shop. The tape was transferred outside to live trucks and these images were broadcast live on the air within minutes. Police went ballistic. The photographer was rooted out and arrested for endangering the safety of police officers.

This incident brought the realization of a severe relationship problem between Omaha Police and the media to the fore. It also resulted in policy changes affecting the relationship between police and media in Omaha. Three major changes occurred: the establishment of the Public Information Officer (PIO) in March of 1990, the drafting of News Media Policy Guidelines outlining police procedures for dealing with the press, and the inception of seminars for training police recruits in interacting with the press and workshops involving both police and the media.

The Public Information Office

Friend calls the establishment of the public information office "probably the wisest thing the current administration has done for the police department." Friend says he can imagine how frustrating it may have been for reporters to track down officers directly involved in certain cases. "Now, it's got to be much easier to make one phone call to one person" and have the assigned public information officers (PIOs) find these individuals.

The police department permanently assigns two officers as PIOs. When this study was conducted, Omaha Police Sgt. William Muldoon and Murray filled that role. Their main function is to act as the informational link between police and the press. They gather information, direct media to appropriate interviewees and act as the official police spokesperson during developing situations. When called to a scene, their job is to gather information from investigating officers and relay that information to the press.

Murray says his background as a police officer helps in gathering information on the scene for release to the press. He says that by having "been there and done that," he is able to get information the press needs without major restrictions from on-location command officers. Murray points out that he is merely following the tradition set up by Glen Truax (the department's first PIO and currently a homicide investigator)

and Muldoon. Murray says Truax and Muldoon have presented a pro-media approach to the Omaha Police Department and have been instrumental in improving police relations with the media. Murray says he understands the needs of the television news media to get information on a timely basis, but notes that the information needs to be factual and that takes time.

Being a good PIO takes an officer who has worked several different units within the police structure and "can maneuver around a lot of people and has good common sense," according to Wilson. Wilson ended his police career as a PIO. He says PIOs have to get information from a unit commander and clear it through them before releasing information to the press. Experience on different levels, according to Wilson, assists a PIO in getting information because they know what information can damage an investigation and are respected by unit commanders.

Reporters view the advent of the PIOs as a mixed bag. Adams believes the communication between police and the media has improved dramatically since the advent of the public information officer's position. She notes that it is much easier to utilize PIOs as directors to individuals who can directly comment on particular stories. She adds that when something occurs, she now has a limited number of inquiries to make.

Brown says the PIO is a good concept but believes PIO officers sometimes want more control in limiting reporters to a great deal of access they should be able to get. "They want to become the person and controlling when they really don't know what they are talking about," he says. "They give the same standard answer to every homicide and it serves no purpose."

Despite the creation of the PIO position, Fagin says he "still functions as a reporter, even though he is supposed to go through PIOs for information." Soon after the PIO positions were established, Fagin says they were of little use to journalists. "Initially, Muldoon wasn't very good," he says. "He wouldn't give you anything." As a result, the reporter says he would "go out and get my own information, which really angered the police."

An incident where the flow of information from the Public Information Office was severely limited resulted in Fagin utilizing his reporting skills to uncover an unfortunate event and dramatic flaws in the concept of the PIOs. Fagin was assigned to cover an incident where an unidentified man shot another man allegedly armed with a gun, but police were unwilling to offer any information about the shooting. "I told them (PIOs) I had to fill 90 seconds," Fagin says. "I told them 'you can either tell me something or not tell me something. If you don't, I'll get my own information.'"

Fagin says the PIOs disregarded this statement. Through his own reporting devices, Fagin discovered the victim was not carrying a gun, but a wine bottle. He also discovered the victim was shot by an off-duty police officer. The incident also created a lot of animosity from the Native-American community toward the police department.

"The police were furious that I had that (information)," Fagin says. He adds that Muldoon "started coming around" after this incident "and he would realize that he would have to get some information out and I think he started viewing himself as almost damage-control. He'd give us some stuff, spoon-feed us, and we wouldn't go off and do the work that reporters should do." Fagin says utilizing PIOs takes the leg work out of reporting and potentially can stifle information that may get out "if reporters do the job of reporting."

One huge problem lies in determining who the PIOs are intended to serve. They are sworn police officers, but are expected to serve the news media. This systematic contradiction leaves many confused about the loyalties of the PIOs. In addition, they are not trained to act and think like journalists. Fagin says it is difficult for new officers assigned to the PIO position because they don't understand what the media needs. "I try to tell them 'help us out and we can help you out.' We don't have time to go down and look through the records," he says. Fagin says police generally

don't have "news-sense. I think Muldoon got a news-sense. I know Murray does." Fagin says. "They know what's news and what's not news." This assists journalists as they can be alerted by knowledgeable PIOs on important story possibilities.

This learning process works both ways. New PIOs sometimes are thrust into an area they are somewhat unfamiliar with. Murray had an incident shortly after arriving in the Media Relations Office that let him know "how the game was played." Two officers were charged with obstructing traffic on Interstate 80 about 100 miles west of Omaha while en-route to a police function. A reporter asked Murray about the incident and he responded. Murray says he was misquoted in a later story about the officers' conduct. The tone of the story placed the blame with the police department, the Chief of Police and even the Mayor of Omaha. Murray was the only person quoted. He says the reporter and he never discussed the incident because the reporter left town for another job. Murray claims the incident did not create a negative image of all media people in his mind.

Friend says having PIOs can benefit both reporters and police officers. "It works better for us," Friend says, "because it puts our best spin on (an issue) as well." Muldoon is polished and he represents the police department well, according to Friend. He adds that this is important

because he's seen other police personnel do some interviews and cringes over the idea of them representing "me or my group."

In addition, a lot depends on how journalists view these officers. Fagin is not about to utilize just the PIOs as on-camera sources, but as directors to other avenues of discourse. "I'm not going to take everything that they say as gospel," he says. "Because they're still cops and they're out there to make the police look good." He adds that reporters must understand that PIOs are "spin doctors" and will constantly attempt to downplay some incidents.

Police administrators and media representatives agreed on the PIOs as a compromise following the beauty shop fiasco. Both sides realized some order had to be installed in the relationship or it would fall into permanent disrepair. Instead of providing a solution to communication problems, this proved to be the first piece in a very complex puzzle.

The initial plan was that the PIOs would be the only officers who would talk on camera with the press. This implies that the police department's administration advocates the channelling of information into the hands of a few. This initial arrangement didn't work for two reasons. Muldoon says it would be impossible for two officers to answer all questions the press may have concerning a wide variety of incidents. Many times, Muldoon and Murray need to conduct

fact-finding interviews with officers who were at a particular scene in order to satisfy specific media requests. Often, those officers are off-duty. In addition, deadline pressures on journalists make the practice unrealistic.

Second, the media rebelled. KETV and WOWT placed moratoriums on using PIOs for on-camera interviews. An unpublished two-week long study conducted by the researcher at this point in time indicates that the police point of view was dramatically reduced in many television news stories concerning crime. Based on who was interviewed by television stations locally in first segment news stories by the four Omaha television stations, the television media relied more on victims, perpetrators and witnesses than police officers. The data collected indicated that victims of crime were interviewed twice as many times as police officers or other law enforcement officials.[136]

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[136] Roger L. Hamer, *"Who is Interviewed for Local Television News Stories?"* an unpublished paper. This study was conducted during April 1, 1992 to April 12, 1992. The study yielded a total of 214 interviews with local people that appeared in first segment newscasts. First segment newscasts were determined as the area of news coverage allowed until the first commercial break. This was intended to provide a picture of who is interviewed in issue-related stories. Of the 214 subjects, 33 were labeled as victims of crime (15.4% of the total) and police officials were interviewed 23 times (10.8%). In addition, of the law enforcement persons interviewed during this period, 11 (5.1% of the total) were representatives of the Omaha Police Department.

Friend says he never thought about over-using PIOs as on-camera sources as being detrimental to the media's job performance. "What difference does it make who's mug it is as long as you're getting somebody who's delivering you the information that you're asking for," he says. There are "a significant number" of police officers who prefer the PIOs handle the news media, especially television personnel, according to Friend. He says many officers would "just as soon not deal with the news media because they don't want to look foolish."

Police administrators eventually rescinded the policy by allowing on-scene Sergeants and command officers to talk on-the-record with the press. This resulted in the television stations rescinding the moratorium on interviewing PIOs for stories. Even though PIO positions were created to assist in dealing with the media, this one discrepancy shows that the system as planned by police administrators was diametrically opposed to the needs of journalists.

WOWT News Director John Clark says the concept of having PIOs is good, but what tends to happen is that officers who can and should respond to reporters in the field use the PIO as a crutch to avoid contact with the press. When this happens, there is an over-reliance on one person to disseminate information. "It can be a good conduit and a good starting point," Clark says, "but they shouldn't be the

information manager for everything that goes on." Over-reliance on PIOs as sole sources of on-camera interviews resulted in Clark being one of the news directors to issue a directive to his staff to NOT conduct interviews with PIOs and he defends this position. Reporters were instructed to find other sources to directly quote in stories, simply because PIOs garnered so much face-time in stories and subsequently, controlled the relaying of information to the public.

Clark thinks our entire society has evolved to where there is a buffer erected between those that have the information and those that wish to disseminate it. He cites politics as a prime example where "spin doctors" try to paint a happy face on every issue. In this case, Clark maintains that "the best stories are from inside sources telling us what really goes on inside a campaign."

Even some police officers are dissatisfied with the PIO position. Muldoon says due to the PIOs natural position as an informational link to the media, he gets complaints from both sides. One of the problems PIOs are confronted with is the withholding of information from the press that an officer on location could have released. Muldoon is "angered" by the idea that street command officers refer questions from the press to him "that easily could have been answered on the street." He says other officers dislike being "second guessed

by the media" and will constantly avoid answering questions by "pushing it off" to the PIO's office.

Other officers see the position as a lose-lose situation. Cavanaugh spent considerable time on the street as a regional command officer. He sees good and bad concepts concerning the use of PIOs. "I think it's overused." he says. "I'm not sure it needs to be used for the stuff it is on a lot of calls. Look at the overtime those guys put in, being called in for a lot of crap the person on the scene can handle." He's not sure they even need to be on-location at a homicide scene. "You've got a ton of people there," he says. "One of them there can't take five minutes to pick up a phone" or talk directly with the media on location? This over-reliance can also lead to friction inside the police department. Cavanaugh thinks other officers ought to step up and help alleviate problems by working within the guidelines. However, the opportunity to over-use the PIOs as informational sources provides convenience for many officers. When there are no pressing deadlines and officers who have the authority to talk to the press consistently tell the media to "call the PIO" they are using the PIOs as "a crutch," according to Cavanaugh.

Media personnel have also noted this tension inside the police structure. Fagin adds that as time went by, Muldoon "got even better and would help us out a little bit." This was costly to Muldoon because Fagin thinks he "may have

angered some cops who thought he was giving us too much. He mistrusted us at first, then he got to trusting us and then he's gone." Muldoon has since been reassigned to the traffic unit.

A good PIO department can equal positive relations with the media. There are also areas where the PIOs can shape impressionable reporters. "If I ran a police department, I'd have a really strong PIO simply because of those young reporters coming on so they don't distort the information or go off half-cocked," Fagin says. "You can suck them into your side, you can see what somebody doesn't understand and that's when you start taking them into your confidence. You direct them, you can write the story yourself. If you don't have a good PIO, they've got 90 seconds to fill too and who knows how they're going to fill it."

If the flow of information from police to the media is circumvented by inexperienced or uncooperative PIO's or command officers, Fagin searches for other alternative to gather information. He says the PIOs could be "the most expensive phone reference there is in town. I'm going to call him and say 'who's heading up that investigation?' and then call (the investigator) myself."

Simply releasing news releases on an event is inadequate for disseminating information to reporters, according to Fagin. He previously worked for former Nebraska Senator J.J.

Exon as a press aide and would personally call "high-profile reporters" to discuss stories with them. Fagin says that this way, if young reporters make statements or ask questions that are straying, the press aide can redirect the story line. "Even if it's not to make a positive story, to make an accurate story," he says. This personal approach also pays future dividends in the way of tips or exclusive stories from sources.

Fagin says there are direct benefits to police departments with good PIOs. "Positive press all the time means big budgets from the city council," he says. "They can't turn you down, this police department's the greatest thing in the world. You can thank a good PIO for that. Keeping the press informed out there and all these human interest stories, positive type stories. You'll take your hits, but it's far outweighed by the positive ones."

One problem with PIOs is in relaying information or asking the right questions at a developing scene. Is it possible that information can get channeled so much that it becomes distorted? Fagin says he doubts any PIO would ask the same questions he would ask an officer personally. "By the same token, I might be more inclined to be too loose lipped with Murray than a reporter," Cavanaugh says. "The more times the message gets repeated before it gets to the public, accuracy and pertinence may not be there."

Another area of concern here is that this is a one-sided system by design. Police have established a central clearing house for the flow of information, complete with rules its officers should follow. There is no such system in place for the media. Outside of contacting assignment editors, the media has not provided a similar system for police officers to reciprocate.

While numerous problems and countless potentials lie in the establishment of the Public Information Office, it appears to be the best solution for the time being. Until television stations return to a system of beat reporters, there needs to be some centralized system for the two groups to establish some long-term communication patterns. Constant change in PIOs and reporters means relationships have to be renewed or established on a continual basis. With this office intact, the next step lies in developing some written guidelines on how the two groups develop this relationship.

News Media Policy

The earlier incident of the standoff in the beauty shop also determined a need for establishing specific guidelines on how police should interact with the press. The News Media Policy is distributed to all officers and is aimed at what information they can and cannot release to the press at a scene and how they should conduct themselves when the media is

present.[137] Every police officer in Omaha is made aware of the policy and it is assumed they will adhere to the principles outlined in the guidelines.

The policy states that police on location must release basic information to the media in a timely manner. This includes the names of victims (unless notification of kin is pending or death is involved), the names of suspects older than the age of fifteen who are arrested or ticketed, when and where an incident occurred, what happened and descriptions of suspects at large. The policy also states that officers are not to speculate about an incident and are to maintain a professional working relationship with the press.

The pocket-sized copy of the News Media Policy is the result of a 14 page general order issued by the department to its officers. Muldoon says it is assumed that officers read

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[137] Omaha Police Department, News Media Policy, Pamphlet (Omaha, NE: PO 94C 94), pp 1-4. The policy states who may release information to the press and under what circumstances. Only command officers or their designates may release information at the scene of "a major crime" (fatalities, bank robberies, sexual assaults, large disturbances or robberies with serious injury). Public Information Officers must be called to the scene of any homicide, Emergency Response Unit call out, or officer-related incidents. Sworn officers may release information at traffic accidents involving minor injuries, or minor crime incidents if the officer alone is investigating. The policy outlines what information may and may not be released at the scene, professional demeanor and the understanding that the media is there for a specific reason and is not to be interfered with in the performance of its duties. It is inferred that the media knows the limitations of its member's physical presence while on location.

the order, but he doubts it because there were no questions asked by officers when it was originally drafted. He adds that it appears many officers interpret the order to read "don't talk to the press at all." Much of this may also arise from the extremely narrow focus of the policy itself. Taken at face value, the News Media Policy does not even cover the basic who, what, why, where, when, and how theory of basic journalism. The policy, as written, appears to leave much to the interpretation of individual officers.

There is also a grievance system if there are problems journalists encounter with officers while on the street. Adams notes that if there is a certain command officer that is refusing information to the media at a scene, the PIO should be contacted immediately. She says the department's hierarchy needs to know which officers are not dealing with the press in a professional manner.

Murray says it's up to reporters to file complaints if they encounter problems with a certain officer. What happened, who was involved and other circumstances are listed. Documentation of a complaint then goes to the offending officer's Deputy Chief, who presents the document to the officer and requests a written explanation of the officer's account. Murray says the officer is then instructed that he/she is responsible for releasing information to the press as a matter of Standard Operating Procedure.

Complaints filed by the press against police for violating the intent of the Police/Media Guidelines are two-fold. If a formal complaint is filed, the Office of Professional Standards and Internal Affairs departments inside the police administration conduct investigations to determine if the officer committed any illegal act. Punishment can include suspension of the officer.

Most complaints are informally filed, which usually consists of a letter to Police Chief James Skinner and others in the city's administrative structure. In this case, the officer is called in and asked to explain his/her side of the story. If there is reason to believe the officer acted inappropriately, he/she is reprimanded and a report goes into his/her permanent personnel file.

The researcher was personally involved in one such complaint. Less than a year after police officer James Wilson Jr. was killed in the scene presented at the beginning of this study, another officer was critically injured while on-the-job. Officer Keith Thompson and his partner were in the area of 29th and Spencer Streets around 9 p.m. on September 28, 1996. Other officers were pursuing two juveniles in a stolen truck. The fleeing youths careened down an alley and smashed into Thompson's cruiser broadside. The cruiser spun and slammed into a tree. Critically injured, Officer Thompson was pinned inside.

Naturally, television crews converged on the scene, complete with "Live" trucks (due to the time of the incident). The area was roped off with crime tape. Paramedics backed a rescue squad to the perimeter of the tape, directly beside where the media was situated. As the fallen officer was being carried to the squad, police formed a ring around him and raised their arms to block the media's view. Other officers began shining their flashlights directly into the lenses of television cameras. One sergeant grabbed a camera's lens. When informed of the fact that media were behind the line established by police, the sergeant replied, "I just created a new line." Video of the scene showed Chief Skinner in the background watching everything.

Days later, television stations and individual journalists lodged written complaints to Chief Skinner, Mayor Hal Daub and Public Safety Director John Packett. Each returned letters stating that they were distressed about the situation and vowed to make amends to insure a similar situation not be repeated.

Muldoon says there were concerns the officers on location had surrounding public disclosure of the identity of Officer Thompson before his family had been notified. Muldoon claims officers acted as they did because they were "under the impression that the cameras were live" at the time of the incident. None of the cameras directly involved were "live"

at the time, although a KETV camera showed the scene live from across the street. Regardless, officers clearly interfered with the duties of journalists (implied in the terms of the Media-Police Guidelines) by assuming what the cameras were depicting. Grabbing a camera is a direct violation of the guidelines.

When later asked about the formal complaints lodged by television stations during Officer Thompson's incident, Muldoon was unsure of the status. He says the matter has been handed over to higher authority inside the department along with the video tapes and other information. Concerning the Sergeant who grabbed the lens of a camera, Muldoon says that officer could "easily be facing a third degree assault charge."

Even with a written policy intact, it does not necessarily cover all areas where the police and media might conflict. Omaha experienced a rash of standoffs between January of 1994 and April of 1996 and television provided several live remotes of in-progress situations.[138] Muldoon notes that police are severely concerned about safety when visuals of officers surrounding a house are aired while an incident sits in the negotiating stage. Police activity,

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[138] A check of WOWTs Archives showed a total of 214 stories concerning standoffs between January 29, 1994 and April 23, 1996. Of that total number, 65 of those stories were generated locally.

however, draws media attention and here is where several instances of friction between police and the television media ensued. This resulted in the formation of seminars for both police and the media.

Seminars and Cross-Educational Training

A situation involving KETV photographer Pete Frerichs directly resulted in the institution of standoff seminars for media to inform them of the goals and missions of police during standoff situations. A man shot and killed another man in North Omaha following a dispute over a parking spot. The man was later located in a South Omaha residence and police began to move in. Frerichs and a reporter were quickly on the scene and got permission from a resident across the street to shoot video from her house. During this time, police cordoned off the area.

Frerichs videotaped the end of the standoff and subsequent capture of the suspect by police. After the man was safely in custody, Frerichs and his reporter ran out the front door and continued to roll tape. When noticed by police, they angrily told the KETV crew to immediately go to the outer perimeter. There, police officials gathered their names and social security numbers and were contemplating charges against the journalists. Frerichs says they were inside the house before the scene was cordoned off and had

gotten inside by their own devices. Police later decided not to charge the journalists.

Upon later review, police officials met with news directors of the Omaha television stations and offered to conduct the standoff seminars for all area news media. During the seminar, police outlined their rationale and conduct during standoffs, giving the journalists a better understanding into how they deal with persons barricaded inside a house. Upon completion of the seminar, attending journalists were given special passes that allowed them entry into a designated area inside the police perimeter allowing for visual access to a standoff scene. All media would be escorted in and out of the safe area by police. Frerichs says a deputy chief noted that if journalists were to find their own way into another safe area (as Frerichs did in South Omaha) they could remain there and police would not attempt to punish them.

The two-hour session relied heavily on role reversal where each assumed the other's position. Muldoon says many media people understood why ERU officers were angered by being pictured outside the beauty shop when they discovered that bullets can pierce the walls of a house. Many of the officers were behind bushes and other non-bullet proof obstacles when they were shown live on television. On the other side, police officers who failed to see the benefit of media coverage in

most police-related situations, saw things in a different light when they carried a reporter's notebook and tried to get information. "They began to understand the frustrations the media faces in these situations," Muldoon says.

Of the nearly 700 sworn Omaha Police Officers, Muldoon estimates more than half have attended at least one of the four seminars and workshops he offers. Since 1992, Muldoon says every police recruit gets at least some training in dealing with the media on how to conduct themselves, avoid conflict and satisfy the media's needs to the best of their abilities. One of the main issues in the seminars is to provide officers with the ability to conduct communication proceedings with media personnel, including on-camera television interviews. Muldoon offers these seminars to other departments across the country.

Occasionally, Muldoon even assembles a panel of media personnel to offer their perspectives to young officers and answer their questions. Muldoon also tells recruits that the media can either be a tool for getting information and viewpoints out to the public, or "can be a tool for your (a police officer's) undoing. The media is going to be there" he says. "You can either be difficult with them or you can use them to talk to the public and get the best facts possible out to the public."

Most of the seminars are directed at new recruits, but they only spend about two hours during the training process to discuss communicating with the media. Murray says this concept is used more for "empowering officers instead of restricting" or insulating them from the media.

The biggest change in the way police and the press interact at standoff scenes is the safe area inside the perimeter, where they would be assured a good shot of activity. Reporters and photographers must be accompanied into the site and there would be no live broadcasts allowed from there.

Even with this apparent attempt at narrowing the gap in the relationship, some journalists dislike the idea of being told where they can and cannot go by police during a breaking news story. Fagin views this as restricting his freedom to assemble news and information as he sees fit. "They want to corral me," he says. "They were going to tell me where to be. They were going to guarantee me a good shot . . . a good shot in their view. They were going to make me be where they said. I like moving around and we'll find the best shot, the best location, the best information." Fagin dislikes the idea of planting the photographer "in the place where everybody else is. I'm uncontained and they don't really like it."

Fagin is not against the idea of having one crew in the designated area assigned by police, but he feels that

journalists should have the flexibility to allow other crews to openly work the perimeter of a standoff scene. "I think that kind of access is good," he says. "I just don't want them dictating everything I get."

Clark sees both sides of the standoff issue. He says there were "situations where we were butting heads all the time and one of their (law enforcement's) complaints was 'boy, you're getting false information'" out to the public. Clark says the only reason that happens is "that all the other information is dried up."

Adams views the standoff seminar as a positive example of the police trying to reach a common understanding with the media. She says that by including the media in future educational programs, police are making an effort to bridge the communication gap between police and the press. Adams feels that if the media has a better understanding of the reasons behind police actions, they can better deal with those actions in the field and the seminars offer journalists that opportunity. She says any opportunity for cross-educational training may enrich the relationship between police and the press.

Clark likes the idea of "walk a mile in my shoes" or advanced cross-educational training for journalists and police officers, but he knows there are some problems associated with this idea. It is difficult to get people to give up a day off

to attend a seminar, or to work training into a person's regular work schedule. However, Clark believes allowing employees to attend educational opportunities, such as the police standoff seminar, is important to do from time to time.

Currently, the best way for reporters and police officers to see how the other side works is through "ride alongs" where journalists accompany officers in their daily routines. This is usually a short period of time (based on when the journalist has enough video or information to do the story) and is never reciprocated. "Television people always do ride alongs with police to see how they do their jobs, but police never do ride alongs with the media to see what they face on a day to day basis," Muldoon says. "It's really not a bad idea to have police accompany reporters on stories to see what really happens."

Cavanaugh says cross-training wouldn't hurt the relationship between police and the media. "Ride alongs help," he says. "The media experiences what officers experience." He says going the other way, however, may not work. "I don't know if the taxpayers and the administration would go for having everybody stay for a day at a television station." Friend says the idea of educationally interacting with people you consistently deal with is a good idea since it allows for police to understand what the media does and vise versa. "Especially if you are a crime beat reporter," he

says. "I don't agree with the attitude that you can't teach an old dog new tricks."

Cross educational training can extend into several avenues. Cooper says cross-training on the professional level existed before when reporters took more time to discover the intricacies of issues they were covering. He says it begins with talking to the experts involved in a situation and finding out precisely "what is going on." Cooper says reporters who do this produce stories that are "far superior" to processes other reporters use. Cooper doesn't believe police and media can completely cross-train but he says it is possible to have the station's management sit down with other agencies and explain where areas of improvement may lie.

Brown believes cross-training is futile unless television consultants are also informed about the value of open discussions with police. "They're the one's saying 'hire this pretty face, or that person.'" He notes the wide-sweeping trend of hiring personnel based on live shot presence instead of journalistic ability. Brown says this implies that reporters are not as attuned into the structural workings of several systems in modern society.

Wilson says reporters today don't know the processes police go through when conducting a major investigation. This is one area where the relationship may go sour. "(Reporters) don't know how hard it is to get a witness to talk," he says.

"Sometimes that's a major, major obstacle and they can destroy that very easily." He adds that sometimes merely taking the picture of someone who is not directly involved in a crime can deter other people from cooperating with police.

In some cases, journalists may not even understand the intricacies of their own jobs. As Wilson mentioned, television personnel may not understand how their presence at a scene can impact a situation. Brown says he's seen photographers turn on lights in uneasy situations and "almost create a riot. And it's not important to the story to take that picture of people, but you've got that energetic reporter who doesn't know better say 'quick, get pictures of the crowd.' You turn on the light and they start throwing stuff."

Fagin thinks the idea of cross training even at the collegiate level is a solid concept. He says maybe a minor in journalism and a major in a specialty area would give reporters a better foundation for thoroughly understanding systems and processes inherent in certain institutions. "A hell of an idea," he says.

Even though the concept of cross-educational training is new in the area of police/press relations, there are still several old feelings that stand in the way of creating a positive relationship. Muldoon says he is amazed by the "initial negative feel" many recruits have for the media going into their training regimen. Even with the advent of the

Public Information Office, a News Media Policy and seminars and cross-educational training opportunities, this may not be enough to insure long-range positive relationships between Omaha's police and its media. Until deep-rooted feelings are uncovered and eliminated (or at least softened), the landscape of police/press relations may not improve.

Uncovering Deep-Rooted Feelings

A major goal of this study is to uncover the deeper meanings embedded within the topic of police/press relations. Policy changes alone are not sufficient in altering the way the two groups perceive each other. Under-the-surface, tacit behaviors are clearly detriments to establishing effective channels of communication between the two groups. Respondents specifically targeted several areas of concern that may lead to detrimental communication. Previously held ideas or animosity, potential agenda setting, utilizing young reporters on crime-related stories, the releasing of information at crime scenes, technological changes and stress are areas targeted by the individuals as possible zones where deep-rooted feelings fester.

Animosity

Deep-rooted feelings about the goals and needs of journalists present the biggest obstacle to effective

communication in the minds of many respondents. There is a natural-based animosity spurred by real and imagined images of television news personnel that presents a formidable obstacle to effective police/press relations. Many times, bad experiences with individuals result in sweeping disruption of communication channels.

Other areas where animosity festers lies in the police recruit training regimen, the systems of law enforcement and journalism, perceived slanted reporting and voyeurism, reporters pestering authorities for information, and television's informational brevity. Many times officers view all members of the press on their impressions of a few. In addition, some police officers noticed a feeling of animosity inside the police structure itself which spills over into the daily associations with the media.

All of the respondents noted some degree of animosity. Muldoon says recruits holding animosity toward the press may be an extension of the officers intensive training (intended to build camaraderie) combined with some previously held ideals. He adds that many recruits view a "well-balanced story" as negative because it does not provide just the police perspective. Measures to correct the former are under construction, however, altering the latter may depend on police officers understanding the basic tenets of journalism and multiple-source stories.

Nonetheless, the two sides are diametrically opposed just by their very structure and function in society. Murray believes there is a natural animosity between the police and press because the press represents a "bastion of freedom" while "police are an anomaly" in a Democratic society. Since a democracy espouses freedom, he says a police force has a hard time fitting in since its ultimate goal is control over chaos. Murray adds that press scrutiny keeps the possibility of a police state in America to a minimum. Since police are a "visible extension of government," there needs to be a system of controlling that body. This is where the press comes in.

Viewing the media as an institution and not as a sum of its parts can severely damage efforts to bridge the gap. However, the opposite also applies where certain individuals are viewed as representative of all of the institution's members. Omaha Police Sgt. John Ewing says one reason police officers don't like to talk to the television press is due to previous personal experience with specific individuals working in that medium. As a result, Ewing says some officers who have been burned by particular reporters in the past avoid communication contact as much as possible with all members of the press.

Adams notes some animosity, but not enough to effectively drive a permanent wedge in the communication process of police

and media in the Omaha area. While some officers may have had a bad incident with a reporter, Adams says most usually tend to hold that particular individual or respective station responsible and usually don't take their frustrations out on all journalists. She says possible incidents that could severely damage long-term communication between police and the press are limited.

Some of this animosity is directed at officers from journalists and the public on a spot news location. If there is a homicide where the victim is lying on the street, police and journalists can clash over what to do with the body. Homicide detectives need to preserve the scene as much as possible to conduct their investigation. "When you have that out in front of everybody for a period of time, you get criticism from the media, you get criticism from the public because you left that body out there," Wilson says. "Police are really in a Catch 22 situation. The minute we put up shields, then the press is mad at us. And if you take them down, then the public is howling how insensitive we are to be walking around that body" to gather information pertinent to a case. This immediate investigation is vital, Wilson says, "so we don't have an O.J. Simpson fiasco. You're damned if you do and you're damned if you don't."

Animosity between officers and the press is real and as Wilson noted, many times it is caused by misconceptions. Some

of it is also based in perceptions of what goal the other has in mind. Fagin says officers may get the wrong impression of why television journalists are on a scene. "They think we're a bunch of voyeurs," he says. "They think we like blood and guts. Dispatchers are the worst, they don't want to talk to us, they think we're just there to get blood and gore. I tell them that is the last thing in the world on my mind."

Yet, this perception of blood and gore is perpetuated in the media and viewed negatively by some in law enforcement. Cooper says he is "offended" when working a homicide scene and television cameras will stay long after information has been released and visuals completed. Cooper says they stay "until we roll the body out on the gurney and they all want to get pictures of it. Now that adds absolutely nothing to any story I've ever seen. We know it's a dead body and it's going to go to the morgue, why do they want to show that and what effect does that have on the family?" He believes this presence reinforces animosity in some police officers' minds.

This point is constantly reinforced and compounded when photographers seek to get closer to a body than maybe they should. How you (or an institution) are viewed by others can sometimes be an extension of how you view yourself in society's structure. Television personnel sometimes provide fuel for this animosity by proving officers right. When a woman's body is pulled out of a lake outside Omaha, the press

is there. She is wrapped up and being taken to the coroner's wagon. Television cameras roll tape. A photographer from WOWT and one from KMTV are to the left of the coronor's wagon, fifteen feet from the area the woman's body is being loaded in the wagon. Suddenly, a photographer from KPTM appears to the right of the wagon. He moves to a spot within three feet of the rear tailgate. The photographer is tightly framing shots of the body as it is being loaded.

Afterward, the WOWT photographer talked to the KPTM photographer, explaining that some police officers tend to look at all television photographers as a bunch of blood suckers when someone gets too close. The KPTM photographer responded, "That's what we are aren't we, blood suckers?" A quick discussion of sensitivity issues followed, ending with the KPTM photographer saying no one ever told him about sensitivity issues when covering the news. This incident shows that television personnel sometimes tend to prove others right in their estimation of their abilities as journalists. It also points out how unprepared many media personnel are when they provide their communities with glimpses of reality through a camera lens.

Television personnel are also the target of scorn by officers who think they may have been unfairly portrayed in a story. Fagin says one officer "still holds a grudge against me" for a story on an officer accused of police brutality. "I

did a very fair job of reporting," Fagin says. "He even admitted it one time. I dug up the stuff that an investigator should dig up and I did the stories. He went ballistic and he continues to hold a grudge."

Still, in some instances officers acquire some sense of animosity before they give journalists a chance. "There are a lot of officers who have animosity toward the media from their first day on the job," Cavanaugh says. "It's probably not based on past experience because they haven't had any past experience probably. I don't know if it's reputation maybe, that may be a big part of it. With a lot of people that never changes over their whole career. They basically don't trust anyone within the media. That's unfortunate."

Some officers may view journalists as more of a bother on spot news locations and feel their presence unnecessary. Fagin says officers have told him they'd sometimes rather not have journalists on the scene. "We're just something else that they've got to deal with," he says. "But we're a fact of life and they can't keep us away. They've got no choice, they have to put up with us." Friend believes the two groups have to "use common sense" more when dealing with the other. He reinforces the earlier statement that the goals of police and the press are diametrically opposed and that sometimes the duties of police officers and media personnel conflict. "We just have to work something out," he says.

Cavanaugh can understand the media's view. "They have a job to do," he says. Officers may misconstrue that journalists should attempt to be fair to all parties depicted in a story. Animosity may thrive because officers look at an issue from the police perspective only. "Sometimes an officer might develop this animosity when they see themselves or another officer being reported in a negative light," Cavanaugh says. "Sometimes it may be unfairly, sometimes it's just perceived as being unfair because the officer may look at it from a slanted perspective. I think I look at it a little more fairly than others because of that limited experience I had before in news. But I have seen occasions where I thought the media did a very poor job of slanting a story."

All of these points may also lead to animosity and deep-held beliefs that build into unconquerable grudges. Murray says that holding a grudge against reporters who misquote or "set up a police officer is detrimental to effective communication with the press. Sometimes, it is part of the job." Yet, many of Omaha's police officers own the mentality that they won't talk to the press because of what they stand for. "You can't change that. They're so set in their ways and you find that with older veterans," Wilson says. "They'll have one incident and that will sour them about the press" and view everything they do as "negative."

Cavanaugh believes it is a mistake for officers to hold others responsible for the mistakes of the few. He understands the benefit of the seminars offered recruits about dealing with the media, but believes it may not be enough. "It probably didn't have much of an impact," he says. "Maybe because it happened then and six months later, you forget about it."

Cooper says many in the media often badger coroners and county attorneys about the identity of homicide or accident victims. He says many times notification of relations is pending and that information cannot be released. He believes this pestering adds to the animosity many feel about the press, while perpetuating the concept of journalists as voyeurs and blood-suckers.

There are stylistic and promotional aspects of television news that can also add to this animosity. Cavanaugh is bothered by the limited information written in many of television news' evening teases. For example, if an officer's involved in a shooting the teaser may read, "Police shoot a man in North Omaha, the story at ten." The teaser is intended to attract viewers and it is difficult to give an accurate portrayal in such a brief time frame. Cavanaugh says other officers have mentioned this as bothersome as well.

Animosity exists not only between reporters and police officers, but among departments inside the police structure,

according to Muldoon. This can sometimes gum up the communication process even before the media becomes part of the equation. Muldoon says other departments inside the department may view the PIO as a "leak" when instances of poor reporting or misinformation are presented in the public forum.

Muldoon says this offers an example of the tension and stress that can exist inside the police department between his office and the Criminal Investigation Bureau (CIB). While many times, this can boomerang and reflect mainly on the reporter, added tension between the PIO and CIB offices leads to CIB demanding more controls on the amount and type of information given to the press. It also reinforces animosity toward the press.

Wilson says since the PIOs are mediators between police and the press they can be ostracized by co-workers and the media. He says PIOs must be able to communicate with both the press and other police officers well. Wilson says when he was named a PIO and he'd go up to CIB to gather information, "I've got people treating me like I'm a reporter. But if you're known as a straight shooter, you are a policeman, they should realize that." Still, he noted that PIOs must be able to walk a fine line between the two sides.

Cavanaugh says he thinks PIOs get a bum rap from their peers about their duties. In addition, he believes the job descriptions of PIOs should be streamlined. "I think they

should just narrow the scope of what the PIO does," he says. Even with two people, there is a lot of overtime and they are used for things that are outside their expertise."

While animosity presents several facets and presents real problems in the area of police/press relations, the possibility of agenda setting intensifies the obstacles in the communication relationship.

Agenda Setting

Does the Omaha television media have an agenda when doing stories on the police department? Do specific individuals' personal impressions of police officers seep into their coverage of individual officers? The existence of an agenda was split along respective groups: the media denies agenda setting on a broad scale, while police officers are sure agendas exist on both the personal and institutional level. Here is where the earlier examples of officer's perceptions of slanted reporting may ensue.

Wilson believes the structure of most Omaha media as institutions presents opportunities for agenda setting. "The press has an obligation to get the information out to the public, but I think there are some agendas in there as a whole media outlet," Wilson says.

Friend believes some agenda setting exists simply in the way some reporters gather information for their stories. For

example, if a complaint of police brutality is reported to the press, some reporters may interview several witnesses about what they saw occur. At best, they may interview only the PIO or one officer to get the police viewpoint. Sometimes the police viewpoint may not be shown at all, especially if no one is available for comment. Friend says these reporters would "go out and interview a dozen different people who claimed something happened and they would never give the police officers' side of it."

Friend says he doesn't think the Omaha television media has an overall agenda to "bash cops." He adds that this misunderstanding may be the fault of police for not explaining "why we do what we do. We don't do a very good job of selling ourselves to the public." Journalists can assist with this misunderstanding by offering to do more stories describing "why police do what they do" and learn the processes police go through at the same time.

Clark says there are "people who feel that we (media) have an agenda, that we set out to come up with some agenda to follow when we go out to do a particular story." He says this is not the case when coverage of police-related stories is covered or in the general news coverage philosophy at WOWT. Clark notes the impression of an agenda may be due to a general distrust of the goals of journalists in a wider spectrum. "Just in the course of dispatching our job, I think

people tend to read into it something sinister that isn't there," he says.

The possibility of agenda setting as a part of the television news structure is an interesting point. Friend says by basing its economic structure on ratings, the media naturally owns some aspect of an agenda. He also believes there are many principled people in the profession whose "agenda is to report the news as fairly as possible, so agendas are not all bad."

Another aspect where the television structure itself provides the impression of an agenda in the minds of some officers lies in it's desire to excel. Friend says there are a significant number of officers who feel the media's agenda is "an insatiable need to be first. When you see television news advertise who had the greater viewership, they (officers) feel that that's the agenda," he says. "To get there and be the first one with the exclusive story."

None of the reporters or photographers interviewed believed there were overall agendas present in the Omaha television news market. Every respondent did note that certain individuals inside the television community possess personal agendas to some degree. Friend believes there are reporters who possess an anti-police agenda. He noted one reporter who's television program is "very anti-police. It's obvious," he says. As a result of this (at least) impression

of an agenda, the reporter is not viewed positively by officers. "This guy couldn't get the time of day from any cops unless they absolutely had to talk to him," Friend says.

Adams warns that "one bad apple" can tilt the balance of the communication relationship between police and the press dramatically. She cautions other reporters to remember that in a homicide investigation, police can "only tell you what they can tell you" at a scene due to the nature of an investigation. She says most officers understand that reporters just "need a bone" of basic information thrown their way in order to conduct their own business. Adams echoes the research that officers and reporters should be treated according to individual merits and not collectively categorized. She terms reporters and officers that use a wide brush when dealing with the other as being "in the minority."

The flip-side is how individual police officers view their personal experiences with members of the press. An incident that "sticks in your craw" can lie there and fester for years, Muldoon says, adding that it is best for the officer to let go of a bad incident as soon as possible. Holding a grudge does nothing but create more communication and image-related problems. "It is best to be as cooperative as possible with the media and the best way to do that is with good p.r. abilities," Muldoon says. "Just take every day one

day at a time and don't consistently grind the ax when the media approaches you."

Sometimes that perception of individuals can spread to the perception of an entire television station. Cavanaugh says there was a time when one station garnered a reputation for "sensationalizing the news and being anti-police in some of their reporting." He says this is cyclical and now he views another station "from my perspective to be more sensational while sacrificing accuracy and credibility. It goes back and forth, it seems," he says. "One incident can piss you off and that station goes to the top of the list. There's always been complaints and some suspicion on both sides. There are some people that you don't trust and a lot of people in the middle area."

Muldoon feels that if any agenda exists, it is not intentional but an off-shoot of extensive coverage. "Any time several reporters are working the same story and looking for different angles, there is a certain amount of agenda setting," he says. For example, if a reporter is assigned a side bar on the victims of a crime-spree, that reporter may not include information relevant to the story because they may assume another reporter is covering that aspect in a separate story on the perpetrator. Muldoon says the PIO should be on the alert for misinformation reporters may present when pursuing a story. Muldoon says he sees no wide-sweeping

agenda by the Omaha press, but notes that individual agendas exist and can be damaging.

If the media, or persons within that community, have an agenda, Murray says there are going to be communication problems. He believes those who feel the Omaha media has an agenda as a whole may be juxtaposing a perception of national media images. "I'm sure there are bad cops across the nation," Murray says, "but there are "bad reporters too." He feels that media personnel representing the national press that "come in with an agenda" do more to damage police/press relations that anything else. Murray says some have the intent of "doing a Geraldo-type story" and will bend whatever is said to their pre-fabricated story line. For this reason, Murray adds that it may be a good idea for police to initially be wary of the media and its intentions. He doesn't believe the Omaha media uses similar tactics, although he noted a story where a reporter "burned some bridges" over the handling of an incident where off-duty police officers hired and allegedly assaulted a stripper at a bachelor party.

Grinding an ax, or avoiding contact with specific individuals is a human device we naturally forge in our daily relations with others. "If I had a bad experience with one individual and the next time I run into that individual and three or four other individuals that might have been at a story, I'm going to go to somebody else" Clark says. He adds

that it is preferable to "look for somebody that you've worked with before that you've had a good experience with. The problem is now that they probably can't say anything (due to restrictions outlined in the Police-Press Guidelines)."

Regardless of the position one takes on agenda setting, the fact remains that one incident can result in an overall "chilling effect" between the police and the media which can take some time to undo. Murray says many officers continue to "use a wide brush" when dealing with the media and fail to look at each reporter individually, especially after a negative police-related story airs. He says that "police officers are a minority" and "a sub-culture" all their own. When they feel threatened and unjustly categorized by the media, there is a tightening of the ranks. Murray says it is in the best interests of police to "not hold grudges" and "get over it" quickly if they feel they have been wronged by the press.

Many times, one incident can affect how police officers view a certain reporter, even if those officers are not directly involved. Murray notes an incident with a television reporter that left him swinging in the breeze. Three homicides occurred within a six block area a few hours apart in a Central Omaha location. The reporter did an on-camera interview asking Murray if the incidents were related. Murray said at the time that there was no indication they were. The

reporter then said she had information from another police source that they were indeed related. Murray restated that he did not have official information that the killings were connected. Murray says the "reporter came out looking the worst," since many people inside and outside the police department felt the reporter had ambushed Murray. Murray says other officers have developed an image of this particular reporter, but there are no wide-sweeping restrictions placed on talking to her by police.

It may be that the perception of an agenda leaves police with the impression that certain reporters are anti-police. Friend says some reporters feel that they are not responsible for "making the police department happy." He says they view their role as reporting the news factually and as fairly as possible. "And if they happen to step on somebody's toes, then screw them," he says. Sometimes you have to set aside your own feelings, Friend says "or that kind of attitude will get you burned."

Cavanaugh doesn't feel that he personally has ever "been blindsided" by a reporter, but he notes a few instances where he felt a station had two individuals that were unfair in their overall portrayals of police. One of these individuals is no longer in the market, and the other "I still wouldn't trust at all. I would never cooperate with him. He has a tendency to reinforce my feelings with his further behavior

not necessarily toward me but in other areas. I don't hold a grudge against the media, but I do against those particular people."

The imprint of agenda-setting or "being burned" carries more weight toward the negative side than the positive. Cavanaugh says it is difficult to persuade other officers that a particular reporter is fair and trustworthy. "You trust your personal experiences more than you trust another person telling you about their experiences," he says. He adds that a negative experience relayed to another officer "will carry more impact." All respondents believe agenda setting (or the impression that an agenda exists) can cause severe damage to the long-term communication relationship between the police and press. Should agendas become prevalent in the relationship, it remains doubtful that any benefits to be gained over the short-term can replace the potential damage done to the relationship over the long haul.

While agenda setting seemed directed at certain individuals, this remains a small number when considering the number of media personnel employed by Omaha's television stations. Those individuals targeted as agenda-setters in the minds of police officers are somewhat ostracized and well-enough known by police officers to potentially thwart their potential impact. A potentially more damaging aspect of

police/press relations may lie in the unknown; young reporters assigned to cover crime-related stories.

Young Reporters

The sounds of shovels struggling against the frozen earth and the whoosh of heaters behind hastily thrown up sheets are clues that the ground needs thawing before the body can be exhumed. A woman admits to killing her boyfriend and burying his corpse under a dog house in her backyard. Homicide investigators and coroners are getting closer to uncovering the body after a seven hour struggle against the rock hard, frozen ground. The pungent smell of decomposed flesh pierces the crisp winter's air.

A police cruiser sits in front of the two-story wood house. The house is enveloped in yellow police tape. Detectives stand inside the screened in porch gathering what clues remain inside the house where seven months earlier, the woman killed the man she accuses of abusing her. A police sergeant walks outside. He had gone inside to warm up and was returning to his post on the sidewalk, insuring that no unauthorized persons enter the crime scene.

As the sergeant reaches the sidewalk parallel to the cruiser, a young trenchcoat-clad reporter from KMTV quickly strides up to him, notebook at the ready. "What can you tell me about what happened here, sergeant," the young reporter

blurts out, catching the surprised policeman off-guard. "Nothing," he replies, "I can't tell you anything, I just got here and..." "Well, there's got to be something you can tell me," the young reporter counters. "I've got to get some idea of what happened here." The sergeant lifts his shoulders and tilts his head. "Sorry," he shrugs. "You'll have to talk to homicide detectives."

The young reporter sighs and spins a 180 degree turn. He stalks off shaking his head, gets into his car and leaves. His photographer watches the young reporter drive away. He rolls his eyes and offers a sigh of relief. "He has no clue about what he's doing," the photographer mumbles. "He's been here five minutes and thinks everyone should tell him everything." The photographer tightens the battery belt around his waist and continues the seven hour vigil.

At the scene of a police chase, two adults are handcuffed and placed in police cruiser. An 18-month-old baby is held by a woman police officer. The chase began in Omaha, but ended off the interstate across the river in a large field outside of Council Bluffs, Iowa. There are 11 cruisers from two different agencies on the scene and about 10 media persons.

It was clear that it would be a wait for confirmed information. Whenever a media person walked in the direction of officers, the policemen would move to another area. They apparently wanted to get their facts straight. There are no

command officers on the scene from Omaha. WOWT's live truck sits in the field. It was five minutes after five and the producer wanted a live remote from the scene.

This is when mistakes and misconceptions can occur. Many respondents believe reporters need to develop more street-smarts when working on crime-related stories on location. When they arrive on the scene of a spot news event, reporters need to know where to go, who to talk to and how to gather information. If the reporter seeks out officers who don't have jurisdiction, they can become nuisances and are bothersome to police. This can create tension, especially under the stress of spot news situations.

At the chase scene, a young WOWT reporter waits for information. The clock is ticking. After scanning the scene, a senior photographer/reporter relays some basic information to the reporter. "Two in custody," he whispered. "A man and a woman. A child in the car at the time of the chase. Officers from Omaha and Council Bluffs involved. Stopped the car near I-29 and Broadway as they tried to head back to Omaha. Go with it." The young reporter walked over and did a 40-second live shot. She had accurate information, was live on location and did not disrupt police procedures.

How a reporter works a scene may be key in how they are viewed by officers on-location. The night of Officer Thompson's accident, Fagin says he was "fully prepared to

describe the scene" (as in the earlier example) but he needed a couple of facts. Reporters can quickly get basic information by talking with officers as they work a scene. The key is to walk beside officers getting tidbits of information by asking quick questions. It is easier when they don't have to stop what they were doing. It is advisable to ask basic questions of officers working the outer areas. "Due to familiarity, I think they were able to talk with me, moving fast for two or three seconds," Fagin says. He notes that officers trust him enough "where I could say 'hey, do you have an arrest in this?' 'no.' Nothing official, but I've got to regurgitate something here. That's all you can do and that was before a PIO was on the scene." Younger reporters may not understand how utilizing unobtrusive tactics can assist them in gathering information from officers working the scene.

Reporters need to be adept at utilizing interview techniques which evolve out of natural conversations. At the scene of a shooting near 37th and Ames Avenue one Thursday night around 8:30, another WOWT photographer and reporter team stood on the north side of the street waiting to cross. Omaha Police Sgt. Chris Carmean stood beside them, also waiting to cross to the scene. The photographer and Carmean exchanged a few pleasantries. Before the two journalists and police sergeant had crossed the street, the photographer had obtained preliminary information on what occurred at the shooting

scene. A subsequent interview on-location and follow-up comments by the PIO the next day mirrored the initial information. Again, officers were not obstructed from their duties by meddlesome reporters and journalists got accurate information in a timely fashion.

All of the respondents noted a general feeling that young reporters filtering into the Omaha television market are not well-prepared enough for tackling police-related issues that may lead to tension in the relationship between police and the media. Ewing says he doesn't believe younger reporters understand the complexities of the police structure or even the basics of good journalism. This alleged shallow pool of knowledge tips the balance of credibility against reporters when dealing with police officers.

Journalists themselves note problems with young and lesser-experienced reporters covering the crime beat. Fagin believes many younger reporters entering the Omaha market drop the quality of the reporting pool of all the television stations. "A lot of these young reporters coming out, they're not fit to work in this market," he says. "They may even have trouble in a small market." Adams says using inexperienced reporters on the police beat is a bad idea considering the amount of coverage the Omaha media dedicates to crime coverage. Brown believes many of these reporters are not "real journalists. (Stations are) hiring kids right out of

college. It used to take someone to work their way up to television. Most people had some news background before they made it in the so-called big league. But with the new technology and video cameras, it's instantaneous. They want actors right now instead of true journalists."

Even if these young reporters are somewhat prepared, there are other problems. Clark terms the idea of placing cub reporters on the crime beat as "dangerous." While young reporters need someplace to start, he prefers allowing young reporters to "cut their teeth on feature stories before throwing them into a full-time police assignment." Clark warns that young reporters may start out covering lighter topics, but will face spot news stories eventually and have "got to learn somehow and somewhere." He also notes that young reporters often need guidance from more experienced staff members and management when covering difficult crime-related stories.

Young reporters who are not assigned a beat, however, may be at a disadvantage in developing the skills necessary to effectively develop sources and forge solid relationships. Fagin says they don't get the opportunity to understand the inside workings of government or police operations. "Amy will get her calls returned, I'll get my calls returned," Fagin says, "but I have a feeling that some young, unknown reporter is going to have a harder time getting their calls returned

from a non-PIO. Even if you determine (the specific investigator) that you need to talk to, I don't think they're going to get their calls returned as readily as someone who's well-known. They don't know who this person is, they don't know what they're going to do."

The concept of Omaha's television market being a "jumping off point" for young reporters to bigger markets creates this flowing pool of inexperienced reporters. This can severely affect the relationship between police and the media. Cavanaugh believes many young reporters are not interested in forming any long-term relationships with police officers while they are biding their time for a move upward. "All they're looking for then is that story," he says. "That's all that matters to them and they're not looking past that story. That's unfortunate."

Ewing says that over-anxious and upwardly-mobile young reporters are more willing to "sensationalize" information released by police than more experienced reporters. Ewing says "the scoop becomes paramount" in a reporter's goal of climbing the professional ladder and getting better assignments, working conditions, and pay opportunities. To Ewing, the lure of the scoop can tempt some journalists into making "unscrupulous" judgements in the processes of gathering information for a story. Cooper agrees, adding that younger

reporters are now out for a story and "there's not a lot of concern about what or who it would hurt."

Muldoon notes that there are some reporters he has learned to be cautious with. He believes he has developed a rapport with most reporters he sees on a regular basis, but grants that the younger, lesser known reporters can take an angle to a story and completely change the factual basis of events to fit a pre-conceived idea. This can be a dangerous practice that leads to officers feeling they were "set up" by the media to produce a sensationalistic story.

There is a perception that younger reporters don't work as hard as they should in researching a story or completely understanding a system. Clark says much of the blame for sloppy and lazy reporting by young aspiring journalists in television news lies in the lack of a solid foundation of good reporting skills. He says it is "critical that those people learn the process of how to work a story (while in school). They need to stress 'where do I go? where do I start? who do I call? what kind of information can I garner for this story?'" before grabbing the camera and going into the field.

As a working professional, reporting skills can be best learned on the lighter topics a young reporter will cover, according to Clark. He adds that reporters have to "get some information so your story has some meat to it. Even simple stories, there's got to be some meat. That's the kind of

stuff I see lacking." Clark says if the story isn't "imparting or communicating any information then the reporter hasn't done his job."

Changes in the journalistic style created for this younger pool of reporters may be the cause of some of this laziness Clark mentioned. Some respondents say young reporters don't seem to do the research their predecessors did before doing a story. Cooper says reporters used to be more open in discussions with attorneys concerning issues before cases went to court. Twenty-five years ago, reporters would read the police reports and "come back and say, what can I report," Cooper says. "I wouldn't have even thought about doing something like that fifteen years later. It has to do with trustworthiness." Cooper says that way when cases went to trial, reporters were in a much better position to know what cases were important and who the major players were.

Brown says that reporters "need to be trustworthy, know how to dig for the facts, be respectful of law enforcement and be respectful of other people, especially the relatives of victims." He adds that until those who make the decisions in how news is covered change this, "we are going to continue to have the same problems and that big division between press and police."

Muldoon views young reporters covering the crime beat as a double-edged sword. He says they present an opportunity for

education in the processes and systems of police work. The flip side is that young reporters' inexperience may lead them to think a story is balanced when only one side may be presented or an inappropriate person may be asked to comment.

Unsureness over how to ferret out specific individuals and a lack of balance in a story can severely strain the police/press relationship. Muldoon cites a story KETV aired concerning a no-knock search warrant served at a home. Officers allegedly kicked in the door and searched the house looking for suspects. Finding none, the officers left but the house was a mess. The reporter interviewed the woman who lived there and the story gave the impression that police kicked in the door for no valid reason. For balance, the reporter tried to contact officers involved in the incident, but was unable to reach them because they were off-duty.

The reporter instead interviewed a judge, who according to Muldoon "could not speak directly on this case, but only in generalities." The story left out the side of those officers directly involved in the incident and gave the impression that police were unwilling to respond. Muldoon says he could have aided the reporter in getting proper comment, but "they never called me to ask for help." The station ended up running a second story including police explanation two days later.

Here is where Muldoon says a good PIO can assist a young reporter in compiling factual information for a story. "Give

us the opportunity to respond before running the story," he says. "We can usually help find the right people to talk with. Many times a reporter will come here with an idea of how a story should go and have some of the information wrong or misunderstand something." Some of this may be attributed to Cooper's comments on reporters not going over certain cases and issues with county attorneys before diving into a story.

The consultant-driven landscape of television news discussed earlier has resulted in Omaha television catching up with national trends to hire young reporters who look good on camera, regardless of their journalistic abilities. "Because everything is live, news stations are hiring people who fit that mold of going on the air, people who can dance right now, live," Brown says. "They don't have to be good reporters, they've just got to be able to look good and say what's out there. To hell with some of the facts, as long as you can say 'that bus went over a bridge and two people were killed' they love you. And if you look good, that's what they want."

Regardless of the visual appeal in television news reporters, they still have to be able to impart some information to be a credible journalist and to fulfill the public's right to know. One place to learn is in smaller markets, like Kearney and Hastings. Here, young reporters learn the process of how to get a lot of information. Reporters are supposed to be information gatherers. "I've

often said, I'm an expert at finding experts," Fagin says. "I don't have to know a lot about the law, because I know plenty of people who do. Medicine, police, anything, you name it. I'm able to find these people. So at the scene of something, I can get rid of the superfluous information that I'm given and find accurate information and do it very quickly."

There is also danger in young reporters getting key information wrong in a police-related story that may have massive repercussions in the future of police/press relations. Fagin believes that if an inaccurate story gets on the air, many officers may never talk to any reporter again. "I've heard said to me many times, 'I got burned once, never happen again,'" he says. "That reporter has done a disservice to news reporting in general. To that reporter, other reporters, news reporting and the public's right to know." Fagin says young reporters "have to take it more seriously. It's a job to them, but it's real life to police. It's their jobs, it's their emotions, we have to remember that." This is where future instances of animosity may develop.

Young reporters are limited by the amount of information they may get on the scene. Much of this may be attributed to a lack of familiarity. Friend says if there is a young reporter that he personally does not know, "I would keep them at arms length. I would not distrust them, but I would not buddy up with them like somebody I've dealt with before. I

don't automatically distrust them, but I wouldn't let my hair down around them." He adds that he would be less likely to release more detailed information to them as well.

Another area of concern in the relationship lies in the view members of each group hold as to their profession's place in society. Friend says reporters with even a few years experience in television news may still possess idealistic visions or the drive to succeed quickly and move on. "People that are new to the business of reporting have this kind of altruistic thought of freedom of the press and the public's right to know type of thing," he says. This overambitious drive to succeed or dedication to certain standards may cause more harm in the future. "Anyone who's a zealot, usually ends up burning bridges," Friend says.

Many times those comments from the media of freedom of the press or the public's right to know are magnified through another area of concern in police/press relations; the context and extent of information released to the press during spot news situations.

Releasing Information

The Omaha Police Department's News Media Policy provides a very basic and narrow view of what information can be released to the press and under what circumstances. Not only is the policy restrictive of who may release information, but

a limited listing of what information may and may not be released creates a wide disparity of interpretation.

The policy specifically notes the following may be released: names of victims unless death occurs, the names of persons arrested or ticketed under the age of fifteen, when and where the incident occurred, what occurred and descriptions of suspects at large. The policy specifically notes that the following information may not be released: fatality victim names until notification of relatives, suspects named on a report but not arrested, contents of admissions or confessions, opinions concerning guilt or innocence of arrested parties, whether the incident was gang related, or the release of internal reports or communication.[139]

The policy creates debate concerning the depth of any information released to the press, especially during developing spot news situations. Limiting the free flow of information released to the media during a breaking spot news story is advocated by many investigating a case and those who will eventually try to convict suspects in a court of law. Generally, law enforcement personnel favor limiting specific information released to the press while the media supports a more open communication forum. This area elicited a wide

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[139] News Media Policy, p. 2.

array of concerns and issues. Respondents targeted several areas, among them: appropriate time-frame questioning of police, standoff situations, specifics or detailed information of an incident, inaccuracies and corrections, how reporters ask for information, officer's fear of certain information potentially damaging a case and protecting relatives and innocent parties from the media spotlight.

The earlier assertion that more experienced reporters possibly work a scene and gather information in a less obtrusive way can play a big part here. Wilson says experienced reporters are more attuned on how to ask for information and when appropriate opportunities arise. He says the intensity of homicide investigations leads to heightened competitive levels in reporters and many journalists feel information should be readily available. Homicide investigators also feel stress and undue pressures. Wilson says reporters are sometimes viewed negatively when they push investigators for information. "They've (older reporters) got the maturity to know this is not the right time," Wilson says. "You don't learn that in school, you learn that out in the street." Wilson adds that reporters need to understand that sometimes releasing information to the press is more aligned with an investigator's immediate schedule than a journalist's.

Many times the manner in which reporters ask for information at a developing situation causes friction in the

relationship. "I've had people become angry with me," he says. "Demand information. Tell me that that's the right of the public to know that. It is their right, but there's a time when they should know it." Wilson understands the impatience of some reporters. Like anybody else doing a job, that reporter wants to do a good job. "That's like me going in to get a confession from a suspect, I don't want it next week, I want it right now," Wilson says. "The media's no different."

There appears to be an unwritten pecking order as to when information is officially released. Friend says it basically comes down to who's performance is better going to serve the public at a given point in time. "The first thing is to preserve the crime scene and a lot of people new to the media don't understand that the more people that contaminate by their mere presence a crime scene, the more difficult it is to analyze that situation," he says. "So you try to keep people out. Sometimes reporters take that as 'you're trying to hide something, you're trying to deny me my media access.' That's not necessarily the case." He adds that most media personnel understand that officers have certain duties to perform as the immediacy warrants.

However, some officers note that police could be a little more cooperative in releasing basic information to the press. Cavanaugh says police personnel working a scene can usually

make time to talk with the press, within reasonable time-frames. "If I had to work that hard where I didn't have five extra minutes during the day, I'd quit," he says. "If I'm working on a triple murder and it just occurred and you need something within the first hour maybe not," he says. Cavanaugh believes some officers may slow the process of releasing information beyond the Police/Media Guidelines stipulated "reasonable time-frame."

Another area of concern is the need for reporters to understand which officers can officially release information and under what circumstances. Many times, inexperienced reporters facing approaching deadlines attempt to gather information from officers who are not commanding the crime scene through a formalized interviewing process (as in the example of the sergeant outside the house). Attempting to officially interview inappropriate officers shows that most journalists don't know the pecking order of the police hierarchy. Most respondents noted that reporters should find out who has jurisdiction at a particular scene and what rank officer is on hand before questioning police. Ewing says this lack of understanding how police officers "work a scene" leaves many officers rolling their eyes as reporters stumble over themselves searching for the lead investigator.

By not knowing who to question, reporters may also not know how to properly approach an investigator or command

officer working a spot news scene. Frustration can surface in journalists and seep into the communication methods of journalists. "They come in there and start demanding things and wanting them," Wilson says, upset at the insensitivity of some members of the media. "I can tell you reporters that I wouldn't give the time of day to, but I still respect the fact that they're out there doing the job," he says. "It's just that they don't know how to do it and the same goes for policemen. Most of the time the guy that knows how to work people is going to get (information)."

Some officers believe the press' ignorance of how police systems work causes investigators to withhold releasing enough pertinent information. Ewing says if reporters are unfamiliar with police processes in routine investigations, the potential is there that they may disclose information that can severely damage a case. For example, he feels disclosing the type of weapon used in the commission of a crime, can tip off potential suspects. Ewing notes that crooks also watch television news and information released in the media can assist criminals in developing alibis, concealing or destroying evidence or escaping altogether.

Exactly what information can and should be released on the scene of a spot news story caused some confusion from respondents, so much so that the sides argued amongst themselves. For example, Muldoon says the type of handgun

used or the number of times a victim was shot can give out information only a few people are aware of and potentially damage an investigation. In addition, he says crackpots and thrill-seekers often call police with bogus information that may lead investigations in the wrong direction. Ewing says reporters need to realize there are facts in investigations that police simply cannot release, not because they are being difficult or dislike the media, but because they don't want criminals to know specific information concerning a case.

Clark disagrees with this outlook. He says the number of times a person has been shot or the type of weapon used rarely damages a police investigation, especially if a suspect is in custody. Brown agrees with Clark in this area but says information beyond a certain point is relatively unimportant in most stories. "We don't usually need to know how many times a person was shot (for example) unless there's something so bizarre that other people need to know that would help catch a person," he says.

Surprisingly, Former Douglas County Attorney Sam Cooper usually doesn't see a problem with releasing some information about a handgun used in a crime. "But it's going to vary from case to case, what evidence do we have, what evidence don't we have," he cautions.

Still, many officers feel information released that details specifics in a crime may irreparably damage a case.

"I understand the media's right or need to want to publish this information," Friend says. "But not to the detriment of the investigation or the victim involved." These officers feel more detailed information can easily be released later on after it has been confirmed by investigators as relevant and not owning the potential of damaging the case in court.

Another consideration in the dispute over what information should be released to the press is the cause of death as newsworthy. Brown says reporters and officers often argue about the cause of death even being relevant to the story. "Sometimes they hold things back when they shouldn't," he says of officers releasing information to the press from a spot news scene. "If a person is bitten to death by a dog, we need to know that. When a person is stabbed or strangled, they have a tendency to hold that information back." Cooper says specific information is usually held back until an autopsy is performed to insure accuracy as to the cause of death. While none of the officers interviewed said they would withhold how someone was killed, for many officers, it appears that knowledge that a person has died appears sufficient, without further detailing.

The single issue where the most critical discussion, misunderstanding and friction occurs is when standoffs are involved. Muldoon says certain information can be harmful if released while a standoff situation is on-going and

subsequently televised live. Muldoon says the arrival of power trucks (a standard operating procedure) and a reporter's speculation as to what that means can suddenly transform a situation. When a barricaded gunman sees himself on television, he may take "rash action" which could result in the deaths of any hostages. Muldoon says this tends to create a severe problem because the communication process between the gunman and police negotiators can break down and agitation between the police and media ensues.

Clark says restricting reporters from accurately describing what is happening violates the public trust of the media. A reporter broadcasting live the fact that power trucks arrive on location where a standoff is in progress is doing the job of a reporter. He says this type of detail is just good reporting and a utilization of factual information. Clark understands police concerns over what is reported live during a standoff situation, but says seasoned reporters are the "eyes and ears of the public" and are "trained observers" that report what they see, especially in the absence of officially sanctioned information. Restrictions of either movement or information by law enforcement on any media personnel are viewed negatively, according to Clark.

Adams says that many times during on-going investigations all reporters need is for police to "throw us a bone" of information. "Something we can use as factual information or

confirmation of what is going on," she says. She adds that if most officers understood that reporters only seek tidbits of confirmed information, they may be more forthcoming with releasing some basic information to the media. This serves purposes that are beneficial to both groups. The media gets some factual information to accurately report and law enforcement personnel are not constantly being bothered by members of the press.

The earlier mention by Friend on the media's "unsatiable need to be first" is apparent in standoff situations. Many times, a scene can be the location of live broadcasts even before police have secured the area. This adds more pressure to all law enforcement agencies on location and increases the potential for stressful encounters between the two groups. Brown says at one time the Omaha media had a "gentleman's agreement" with police calling for embargoes on when they would release information or conduct live remotes on certain stories. "You wouldn't release something right away," he says. "You'd wait about 45 minutes to an hour, especially during standoffs." This allows police some opportunity to diffuse a situation before it develops into a full-blown standoff and subsequent news story.

There appears to be solid reasoning in the "gentlemen's agreement" that can slow the immediate need for disseminating information by the media, while increasing the accuracy of

reporting. Brown says without this brief cooling off period, reporters may disseminate the wrong information unwittingly. He says this is a perception problem that police see and view the media as unable to admit when it has made a mistake in judgement.

In some cases, the competitive zeal to be first to report an incident can lead to erroneous facts in stories. Brown cited an example where a 72 year-old man was the apparent victim of a home invasion and was severely beaten. Brown says he called his newsroom and told them to wait for police to tell him more about the incident before going with the story. He was told to go live with what information he had "right now. I did a live shot and tell people about this home invasion, about how bad it is and how police don't know that much about it and that's the end of it," he says. "Two weeks later we find out this guy's a 72 year-old dope dealer and it was a rip-off. Do we do a follow-up about that? No." Brown says inaccurate reporting in police-related stories adds to friction in police/press relations, but the failure to admit reporting erroneous facts drives a wedge further between the two groups.

Another area that causes friction in the relationship is releasing information that investigators feel may heighten pre-trial publicity or eventually damage a case in court. Police officers sometimes feel journalists release too much

information and it later becomes more difficult to win convictions in a court of law. "I'll tell people 'if you print what I'm going to tell you that can't be used, it's going to hurt this case' and out of respect for me don't do that, don't destroy our case," Wilson says. "Because six months down the road, when we're in a trial and that information got out and it's so important that certain aspects of an investigation are very guarded."

Cooper says information on a case that is released into the public forum can even affect the willingness of potential witnesses to come forward. "There are a lot of positive things that the media does," he says. "But when a police officer says don't publish this because it's going to hurt the case, reporters should have some respect for that. There's a reason for the guy saying that."

In high-profile cases where a lot of information has already been released, it is worrisome to the county attorney's office about the depth of that information and the possibility that publicity may have irreparably damaged a case. Cooper says instances of requests for changes of venue resulting from pre-trial publicity are few, but they do occur. "It is a concern," he says.

Investigators can also tend to be more protective of the people they are dealing with and will dramatically filter some information released to the press. Wilson says there is still

information on homicide cases that he has not released because he feels there are certain facts in some crimes that are beyond the use of journalists in their quest to do a good job. Some information "may sound very juicy in a story, but it would serve no purpose except to hurt the family," he says. He believes people feel violated "because the press got a hold of" certain information. He says this information is "going to come out soon enough in court, so the investigator is trying desperately to protect an individual. Somebody who comes in and gives you information, you're putting their life on the line, you're putting them in jeopardy. I think it's the obligation of the police department and especially that investigator to insure that some information be guarded very carefully." Cooper adds that just in the performance of their duties, journalists are going to learn enough important information about an incident "almost inadvertently."

There are also instances where journalists inadvertently damage investigations while they are in the early stages of investigation. Cooper says publishing names of people close to an investigation or even showing their picture on television can have a dampening effect on getting potential witnesses to come forward. "When you've got people who could come forward and testify who are not going to because they are afraid (of being shown on television). We don't have a witness protection program."

It is also possible for journalists to endanger the lives of people by publicizing them in homicide cases. Guilty parties may even attempt to silence witnesses. Witnesses are sometimes threatened out of testifying after they are depicted on television. "You have threats that are real, too," Brown adds. He noted a case where a woman was an eye-witness to a murder. He interviewed her later and she was herself murdered a week after the interview. "She was killed because of what she knew," Brown says. "Without a witness protection program, there are people who can reach out and get you," he says. "So, sometimes it's best not to put their names out."

Friend says he worries about pre-trial publicity in some cases for other reasons. Using care in releasing information that may be potentially damaging to a case can actually be cost-effective. "It's so costly for the taxpayers," he says concerning re-trying a case. "In some cases, it saves the system money and insures that the state (who has to try the case) isn't going to spend a lot of money"

However, Friend also believes pre-trial publicity is virtually a non-issue even in high-profile cases. "In today's society, I don't know how anybody can not know about a major event, even if it were just in passing their knowledge," he says. Friend adds that most people don't follow a case extensively, so pre-trial publicity is usually "not that big an issue."

Wilson says the county attorney's office and the police department should work closer on what type of information is released. Yet, here is another system clashing with two others that have more daily dealings than the three institutions together. "Right now the county attorney is quick to say, 'we're not giving them that information' but they're not the one's the press are living with everyday," he says. "It's the police department who's living with them everyday." But police and the media must realize that the county attorney is "going to be the one to stand up in front of that judge and get his case across," Wilson says. He recommends written guidelines that include input from the county attorney's office, media and police representatives. Still, this is not an air-tight solution. "Things aren't always going to run smooth and you're going to get some overzealous people," he says.

The flip side is that sometimes officers are overly protective of information. At the chase scene in Council Bluffs mentioned earlier, an officer from Omaha began talking with an officer from Council Bluffs about the incident. KMTV Photographer Dave Charington turned his camera their way. "Here's what happened," the Omaha officer began. He then noticed Charington's camera pointing at them and motioned the other officer to move further away along with him.

Charington says he did not intend to videotape the officers' discussion, but just wanted to hear what they were talking about. No official information had been released and Charington says the officers may have felt he was "putting them in an interview situation. I just wanted to know what was going on," Charington says. "I wanted some information and I knew the shotgun microphone would pick up their conversation." Charington says he is not disappointed in the officer's misreading of his motives and says he regularly listens in with his camera-mounted microphone through an earpiece. He patiently waited for Sgt. Carmean to talk with the press.

Granted, this was not a homicide investigation. The officer's over-protectiveness of information may seem drastic, but the chase did cross state lines and there was a child involved. In addition, recently arrived command officers were discussing the incident with officers involved in the chase. Charington says he thinks the officer wanted to keep out of the media eye when it came time for releasing information.

Other times, the pendulum swings the other way. Friend says officers must weigh how much information is to be released to the public versus possible jeopardy of an investigation. "When you release information on homicides, there's always a couple of things you hold back," Friend says. "Ostensively, the thought is that only the criminal would know

about those things. A lot of times the media wants to scoop each other and so they push for more and more information." Friend says he is "probably more conservative" in releasing certain types of information over other officers.

"The media has a right to know certain things," Friend says. "I think sometimes it's in conflict with what the investigator would like to do. In some cases I wouldn't release anything. Like in the sexual assault of a child. I think the only thing that pertains there is information about the suspect."

One final area respondents mentioned is the tension, stress and mistrust that can result inside an institution concerning what information is released. Muldoon notes a "conflict" with CIB over the type of information they want released to the public during an on-going investigation as placing a strain on the flow of information. He says some officers working in CIB fail to see the necessity of releasing any information to the press. "Many of them see reporters as the liberal, one-sided media and don't see the forest from the trees," he says, concerning the importance of releasing information. Muldoon cautions that when information is given to the press, if it is presented in the wrong or inappropriate manner, the tension with CIB increases and the demand for tighter restrictions on the flow of information is heightened.

As a by-product of all of this, there are occasions where

officers on location rely too heavily on the PIOs to release information to the press. Ewing echoes the concern of many officers that they don't want to give out wrong information prior to an investigation or they are leery of giving out sensitive information that may jeopardize a case. Another reason on-location officers are wary of releasing information except to the PIO is due to time limitations. "In my opinion, I think the time crunch excuse for using the PIO is wrong," Cavanaugh says. Nonetheless, some command officers defer to the PIOs, even though they are authorized to release information to the media.

The whole point of the PIOs is to present both groups with specific individuals to look for when information is to be released during on-going spot news situations. Investigators rely on PIOs filtering out information that shouldn't be released and rely on them to take all the media's calls and interview requests. If the PIOs are not effective or reporters are instructed to find another person to interview, tension and stress can be heightened on both sides. Reporters would either be forced to entice other officers to speak on camera, or utilize 'witnesses' and potentially unreliable sources. Fagin says this can take away from the time investigators spend at a scene. "He's supposed to be investigating and now he's having to deal with me," he says. Fagin believes the department's administrators are going to

need to rely on strong PIOs because they may see the trouble that could result by media personnel directly calling on investigators. Yet, that concept is not necessarily bad.

Allowing more opportunities for communication between police and the press without the third-party filtering processes of the PIOs may actually improve the overall relationship between the two groups. "I like to get (investigators) because they know more than the PIO would know," Fagin says. "One response elicits another question and they can answer a lot more than they've given but they don't always do it because they're not asked." In addition, reporters get better and more information directly from the investigators involved. "Because if you're interviewing Muldoon, he's not asking the same questions of the investigator that I would ask," Fagin says. "I'm getting information second-hand. I like (directly talking with investigators) better. That's the way (reporting) is supposed to be."

While all of these concerns can create conflict and tension in the police/press relationship, it is disturbing to note that the flow of information to the public is what ultimately suffers when a break in communication occurs. No one knows for sure what information best serves the interests of the public. Until some agreed upon guidelines are adopted that provide enough information for the public, society will

have to depend upon the better instincts of each group. Some confirmed information is necessary for journalists to impart accurate data to the public. This is a growing concern in the area of police/press relations, especially with the increased pressures advancing television news technology places on the relationship.

Technological Changes

Technological changes have changed the face of police/press relations dramatically in recent years. The early days of local television news were filled with police-related incidents, fires, shootings, and car accidents that provided the basic staple of a newscast. This presented "not a really clear picture of what is going on in your community," Clark says. Television news has branched out dramatically due to technological changes and is capable of covering stories that were previously untold. "Now, we have so many more resources with graphics and text and chyron that we can tell other stories that we didn't tackle before," Clark says. It is possible that the expansion of stories that can be effectively told on television may reduce the reliance on police-related stories in the future. This, as a by-product, may result in the abolition of the police reporter in mid-market television stations, as skills are more attuned toward

general assignment reporting and a more broad-based coverage of issues.

Television's ability to rapidly present a live image from the scene and the police's reliance on a public information officer as the sole source in releasing information to the television media conflict by design. While one system seeks to rapidly disseminate information, both visually and audibly, the other channels information into a narrow point that takes time for confirmed information to be released. Several remotes may already have been broadcast before a PIO arrives on location and interviews command officers before talking to the media. One system is nearly instant, while the other is methodical. When information comes without being officially sanctioned by police and is broadcast live, tensions can escalate and the relationship between the two groups can deteriorate.

When instances such as this arise, television reporters are left describing the scene and speculating on police actions. This further fans the fires of adverse relations between police and the media. "I know one of the criticisms (of the media) was 'you're doing a live report and you're telling the gunman that the power truck is pulling up and you're speculating on why," Clark says. "The reason is because, nobody has come to us at the scene and said, 'okay guys, here's what's going on and here's why we're doing it and

if you report this at this point in time, you're going to put this person in jeopardy. No one want's to put somebody in jeopardy. Talk to us, tell us, work with us. Then we don't cause any additional problems." Clark says when the situation warrants it, someone from the police side must handle the flow of information until the PIOs arrive.

Reporters understand the need for them to do live remotes from the scene of a breaking spot news story, but are sometimes uneasy about speculating on police actions. Adams has been in situations where she is instructed to go live before information has been officially released. She understands the problems the public information officer faces when they arrive and some misinformation may have already been broadcast. She also understands her role as a television news reporter and one of those goals is to be live on the air quickly with accurate information.

Live technology adds to the perception of the media's insatiable need to be first. This perception can drive further wedges in the relationship between police and the media. "Because of new technology, it's who can put it on first and that creates a bigger division between police and the press," Brown says. Changes in technology have altered the personal relationships between police and the media. Brown says when he started in Omaha media 23 years ago, reporters from every station went to the police station to go

through reports daily. "Today, that's unheard of because everyone wants the quick story, the quick fix," he says. "And because we can go on instantaneous, we don't really want to hear the facts, we just paint a picture of what's taking place right there and with little follow up."

Brown mentioned an incident where a man was shot in Council Bluffs. Live reports panicked the public by stating that someone shot a man from the interstate and was on the loose. "We come to find out he had an argument with his girl friend and she shot him while he's breaking into her house," Brown says. "We panic the public about some shooter and in reality, it didn't happen." There is further danger in reporting what is called "scanner traffic." This is a discussion between officers broadcast over two-way radios. All media outlets use scanners and while they may provide reporters with important information for background, it usually leads to erroneous information if broadcast as fact.

However, in the quest to be live on the air first, reporters must use some common sense and remember the importance of factual reporting skills. Brown says the earlier example could have been avoided had the media given police ample time to investigate circumstances leading up to the shooting. "All we had to do was wait a little bit and talk to the police and find out what's going on," Brown says.

"We've got the bells and whistles for going live now, so we're (many times) going live for the sake of going live."

There are some instances where technology overwhelms people if they are not familiar with its use. Some respondents believe police officers are somewhat intimidated at the thought of being on television while performing their duties. Officers may even view reporters as agents of an institution and not as individuals. The human element is sometimes erased by a thirty pound camera, outfitted with lights and microphones. Fagin thinks officers are frightened by stiff acting television reporters. "It's easier in newspapers and it's really easy on the phone, but man, when you're in television and they realize that they're getting quoted on that powerful medium, especially with that camera there, it just scares the hell out of them," he says. These feelings may even be heightened with the appearance of a live truck at a scene.

Just the arrival of the tools of the television news trade are enough to cause some officers uneasy feelings. Cavanaugh says there are officers who are somewhat intimidated by the mere appearance of television equipment on a scene. "A lot of cops are definitely afraid to talk into a microphone," he says. "I don't know if it has to do with the mistrust of the media, or if it has to do with just not being familiar. It depends on the individual." For those individuals,

Cavanaugh says having the PIO is a great idea. However, they are still likely to be pictured in a news story, so the intimidation factor still exists.

Despite having seminars where officers are given opportunities to experience being interviewed on-camera, many officers simply rebel at the concept. Friend says as a command officer, he would occasionally ask other officers who may have been working the scene closely and have a more thorough understanding of details to talk with the media. "They would say 'oh, no, absolutely not' almost just cringe" at the thought. He believes some police officers may have a fear of the unknown. "They just don't want to do it until they've done it once or twice," Friend says. "They may not be comfortable," Cavanaugh says. "Maybe they don't like the media, or they're just not comfortable speaking into a camera and microphone."

Friend says the fear officers feel may be induced by their abilities as effective communicators as individuals. "When you put a camera and a microphone in somebody's face and they have fractions of time to explain a situation, you want to be able to do that and not look stupid," Friend says. He says most officers don't understand that the media needs a short informative soundbite. He says that comes from "doing it and understanding what the media wants."

Police officers are trained to assume control over situations they encounter and maybe this is one area where they lose some of that control. Misunderstanding the intent and presence of television personnel and equipment can up the ante when dealing with media in the minds of many police officers. If they are working a spot news scene, there is already a certain amount of stress (especially if a suspect is at large, or an officer is injured). Stress is another major component which can create problems in the relationship between police and the press.

Stress

How humans deal with stressful conditions may be largely determined by the feeling of control one assumes about a situation. If we feel in control and are sure of ourselves, we possibly can endure more stress than if we are unsure or tentative in our thoughts and processes.

The infringement of outside elements combined with working under stressful or emotional situations can severely heighten feelings in usually under-control people. KETV Photographer Peter Frerichs recounted a run-in with a police officer at a scene where a 12-year-old boy was shot outside the Boys Club. When Frerichs arrived, the boy was being loaded into an ambulance. While staying a distance "of approximately 20 feet" from the victim, Frerichs began rolling

tape. Suddenly, a hand engulfed his lens. A police sergeant had covered the lens and told Frerichs to stop shooting video of the boy. When Frerichs initially protested, the sergeant told him to move back or risk being arrested.

After a short time, Frerichs had a discussion with the sergeant concerning his rights and feelings of sensitivity during the event. Frerichs maintained that he was staying out of the way of rescue workers and police, there were no police barriers in place restricting access and that he was standing on a public street. The idea that the sergeant attempted a form of prior restraint in determining what visuals Frerichs could videotape also became a central issue of the discussion.

The officer involved says the boy's injuries were "not serious, but serious enough and (Frerichs) was trying to film this kid's face." He therefore asked Frerichs to step back. The officer was concerned about releasing visual identification identifying the boy before relatives were notified. "They were coming up on the noon news and I didn't want this kid's face shown all over the television," the officer says. "I was all but threatening (Frerichs) with arrest if he didn't move back."

The sergeant repeated an earlier concern that the relatives of the victim had not been told of the boy's injury. He was clearly upset that a juvenile was involved. Frerichs said the sergeant "may have just had a bad day" and that

further review by the police department resulted in a letter being sent to KETV noting that the police officer was in the wrong and that Frerichs had been within his professional boundaries. Frerichs says he holds no ill will toward the sergeant and feels that this was an isolated incident.

The sergeant also feels this was an isolated incident, but clearly remembers the lessons he learned that day. He says he "understands the First Amendment," but feels the situation changed when a "helpless and scared child" was involved. He terms this incident as "one of the issues when I think about bad blood between the media and the police department." The officer adds that to this day, he wouldn't give Frerichs "the benefit of the doubt on something, where I'd give it to someone else." The officer adds that this incident is not indicative of the majority of media in Omaha.

Was this indeed just an "isolated incident" where the stress of the event caused both parties to act differently than they normally would? Both persons involved give every indication that they are level-headed and professional in their daily activities. Is it possible that the stress of deadlines and feelings of compassion for a scared and helpless victim of random violence collided that afternoon?

Murray says stress is a major factor in the life of a police officer. "More police officers are killed by heart attacks" than by any other means, he says. This prevalence of

stress has not hampered the overall effectiveness of police when dealing with the media, according to Murray. The earlier incident involving Frerichs and the sergeant centered around the shooting of a 12 year-old boy. Frerichs says the sergeant may have been stressed and "acted in a manner" he normally would not have. The officer believes both parties said and did things under the stress of the moment they may not normally have done. When human beings are involved in critical incidents outside the realm of normal experience, the possibility of stress-related confrontations can occur.

While stress is well-documented as a problem facing police officers, Muldoon says the same situations that lead to police job-related stressors can also affect reporters. He mentioned a recent article where a consultant suggested that reporters are "more stressed out than police officers." Deadlines, competition, exposure to violence and gory scenes coupled with the lack of a support structure lead to feelings of isolationism and psychological problems. Add to this a perceived lack of information and cooperation from police and reporters may have more problems dealing with stress than police officers, according to Muldoon.

Many incidents between police and the press may be directly attributed to the presence of stress in a spot news situation. Wilson says both sides need to be aware of the human emotions that can come to the fore under high-stress

investigations. "That problem that's in your backyard at that time is the most important thing to you," Wilson says. "That's a hard thing to deal with for the police and the media. I really don't care about your problems when I have a couple of dead bodies out there. Maybe that's selfish, but it's important to me that we not destroy anything out there, or do anything that will be detrimental to the case, than getting the story out to a bunch of people sitting at home eating their popcorn watching TV at night. That's important, but not at that time. You'll get your story later on, but right now, I've got a lot of problems." Understanding the stress created by homicides or other incidents resulting in death may be the most beneficial aspect in improving the relationship between police and the media.

With more newscasts on Omaha television stations, more reliance on live remotes and less bodies to cover a breaking spot news story, the pressure and stress leveled on television personnel has dramatically increased in recent years. Faced with the stress of an incident itself, police or public reaction to television's live presence and the competitive nature of the industry, the pressure to perform demands people who can get the job done under intensive time restrictions. On the night Officer Thompson was injured, Fagin notes that WOWT had three people on location (himself, the researcher and an engineer) to gather information, videotape the scene for

future use, set up a live signal, transmit some videotape, and "be live on location" in a very short time frame.

For these reasons, Fagin believes stress is a major factor in the communication process between media and the police. Conflict can be averted if reporters understand the proper manner in which to communicate with police during a developing investigation. Fagin says more experienced news personnel can better handle the stressors created in the area of modern television news gathering.

While police view their duties as the most important issue at the time, television personnel also see their role as vital to society. "We had no choice, we were going to go live," Fagin recalls. "We had to be on the air, that was the most important thing and we knew it. It's our 10 o'clock news and we're going to go live." Experienced personnel appear to be better able to handle the pressures created by impending deadlines. "The photographer had to get the tape that was going to be used the next day and day after day after day. We got both the tape and we got it on live. And that was because we've been around," Fagin says. "I don't know if I could have done that with a young photographer. I don't know if it could have been done with a young and inexperienced reporter."

Friend agrees that stress is a major factor in police/press relations and that sometimes tensions can boil over. He says when police were searching the Southside

Terrace Housing Development for suspects in the Jimmy Wilson Jr. homicide, stress and tensions built dramatically. This led to verbal exchanges between officers and the media. Friend says this "altercation" developed because of media deadlines. "There were a lot of emotions running high on both sides and the media wanted to get this story in and because it was so big (an issue) each wanted to get as much information or more than the other guys," he says. "Police officers saw it as kind of mercenary on the part of the media." It is easy to see how the goals of the two groups conflict especially under stressful situations which lead to detrimental actions that could damage the relationship.

Murray says police in Omaha are given the means to help reduce stress in their lives. The Omaha Police Department has its own staff psychologist to help officers cope. Murray says about "two-thirds" of all officers have used this service, mostly for the resolution of problems that are occurring at the family level. Peer counseling is also available, but Murray "would like to see it used more." He believes that this is an effective means of cluing officers in to the possibility that their names and addresses may appear in the media if they are charged with any wrongdoing (legitimate or not). This is an effective means of addressing situations that can build into media induced stress.

The institution of stress-reducing measures has been noted by some reporters in their dealings with investigators. Adams notes a recent change in the manner of communication between homicide investigators and the media. She says "homicide has opened up" a little more in recent years and is more attuned of the needs of journalists and the reliance on successful communication. She cited one investigator who was rather closed lipped with the media while he was assigned to homicide. Since that officer was re-assigned, Adams says his demeanor toward her has improved greatly. This validates the research noting that pressure of homicide investigations holds an effect on communication processes between media and police.

Even with some stopgaps in place, police officers and journalists are human beings and susceptible to factors, such as stress, that may affect their temperament and actions. These may also lead to further problems in the police-press relationship. "Most people don't think rationally when they are under an emotion of fear or stress," Friend says. "Not a lot of people will react and think through something. They will just respond and if I say something that pisses you off and you respond, it just kind of escalates from there. You need somebody to come in there and kind of de-escalate it."

Does the media need critical incident stress debriefings? "Should have because the reporter sees just as much as a policeman," Wilson says. He adds that reporters don't deal

with critical incidents in the same way, but it's not any less stressful on journalists to witness an ugly scene. "He's still seeing it and it affects him as a human being," Wilson says. "Investigators will tell you when you go on a scene, just sit down and look at it. The most seasoned homicide investigator is going to be affected by blood and guts. Subconsciously, you are affected by it. And the same with the reporter, they're no different, they're human. They just don't know the whole story. It's probably worse on them because they don't know the whole story."

Exposure to scenes of human tragedy is one reason Brown got out of the television business. He says a person can only dehumanize critical incidents for a short time. Eventually, the strain takes its toll. "After a while, it gets to you. I couldn't take it anymore," Brown says. "I've had more doors slammed in my face by victim's relatives because an assignment editor or the news director says you have to interview the victim's relatives an hour after it happened. There's no purpose in that. That starts to get to you. We need something ourselves, I mean you can go batty and that's what was happening to me, I had to get out."

A victim's family and friends are experiencing a great loss when a death occurs. As Brown mentioned, it is stressful for reporters to attempt to interview people who have suffered this great tragedy. It is also important that reporters

understand the stress others are experiencing and develop a feeling of sensitivity as well.

Wilson says he understands the emotions people go through when reporters approach them after a loved one is killed. Following the death of his son, Wilson says if he had been approached by reporters, he'd have "throttled them." The long-term relationship between Wilson and Brown bonded further from this tragic incident. Brown was effected almost as much as Wilson. The two had been friends for years and Brown watched Jim Jr. grow to manhood. "Frank's there talking to me after Jimmy's killed and he's standing there crying as much as I am, trying to do the story," Wilson says. "That takes a certain kind of person. You don't just send Norman Newkid to do that. You can't, but they're doing it. I see them doing it and it's a joke with policemen who see news reporters sticking a microphone in the face of a victim's family and they're saying 'How do you feel?' 'How do you think I feel?' I mean that's pretty elementary there. There's a way of finding that out, if the reporter knows how to do his story right, he can convey that without asking the person that."

This lack of sensitivity by television news reporters eventually forced Brown to reexamine his career goals. After arriving on the scene where a woman's husband was shot to death, relatives told Brown the woman was under heavy sedation and incoherent. Brown says another reporter said they would

interview the woman exclusively, because that reporter was on the scene first. "This lady couldn't make a complete sentence because of the tragedy, but yet she had to do the interview," Brown says. He offered to piggy back the interview so as to not bother the woman a second time. The other reporter refused, demanding exclusive interview rights. Brown says he was forced to do a separate interview with the woman because he would have been scrutinized by his bosses had he not at least attempted an interview. "So I take something back and it's unusable," Brown says. "That's how insensitive this business is."

Understanding the impact of deadline pressures on journalists and additional work loads are not sufficient in themselves of helping reduce stress at critical incident scenes. Journalists cannot expect police to recognize these pressures. When deadlines are pressing journalists, Cavanaugh says police aren't aware of these pressures facing reporters. "I don't think the awareness of deadlines would change that," he says. "I don't know how you can change someone's behavior or approach on something like that."

Until there are sufficient measures enacted where journalists will be provided access to stress-reduction methods, it is reasonable to expect more incidents where job-related stress enters into the territory of police/press relations. Individual journalists and police officers must

attempt to better understand the impact stress can have in the communication relationship. In addition, members from both groups must also understand the psychological effects of witnessing critical incidents of human suffering that not only affect them, but other people. Neither group is comprised of super-human people. Individuals and co-workers must understand that exposure to dehumanizing events can present long-term problems. Reporters and officers alike must understand that there are several factors that boil over into communication clashes that may damage the future of police/press relations.

The Future of Police/Press Relations

Respondents target the demise of personal relationships as a key area where severe damage has occurred in the communication effectiveness of both groups. This lapse in human communication resulted in the establishment of the Public Information Office, the drafting of a News Media Policy, and the institution of seminars and cross-educational training. These are all efforts to re-build the relationship between police and the press.

Yet, these programs have mainly proven insufficient in eliminating deep-rooted feelings that appear to undermine the relationship. Feelings of animosity and agenda setting are firmly entrenched in many officers' minds. Younger reporters

filtering into the Omaha television market leads to decreased familiarity and trust. Confusion over what information can and should be released to the media during spot news situations results in unclear channels of communication. An increase in spot news events which are broadcast live via newer technology also increases the tension and stress which may result in further communication problems.

How the relationship develops from this point depends on how issues such as those addressed in this study are handled in the future. For the future of police/press relations in Omaha, Nebraska to move forward in a positive manner, several steps must be taken. Written policies intended to outline procedures have dramatically reduced the flexibility present in a more open forum. This good-intentioned development has the capability of strangling what little breath there remains in the relationship. Strict adherence to the limited scope of the News Media Policy can potentially reduce the amount of information released to the public from police officials at spot news scenes. This could signal a return to the free-for-all quest for information methodology of the late 1980s.

As the results of this study show, there is some limited flexibility present in the current communication process. Much of that depends on the individuals involved and their personal working relationship. Opportunities for developing future relationships on a more informal basis appear to be

diminishing. This could be further impacted by police officers possibly leaning on the side of caution and limiting the communication between the two groups to the bare items outlined in the News Media Policy.

If this were to happen, individuals must learn how to cooperatively work within these potentially tightened parameters, become more attuned as to how their actions and communication patterns can affect the stability of the relationship and begin to rekindle the incidences of trust and familiarity between the two groups. Successful communication in the future depends heavily on an individual's perspective and place in his/her respective system and the willingness to improve communication across groups.

Realization that a cooperative working relationship benefits both groups while serving the public interest in a progressive fashion can be attained through a positive working relationship. However, symbols and communication processes can be interpreted a variety of ways. With the stress of spot news situations thrown into the mix, the relationship (according to former Homicide Investigator Jimmy Wilson) "can be very strained at times." Individuals must work together to reduce potential strain on the relationship.

While the future of police/press relations may be only a major incident away from crumbling, many respondents noted some major areas where the relationship hangs in the balance.

Many respondents believe the higher echelons of Omaha's city and police structures must let the communication relationship flourish or it will surely die. Nearly all of the respondents say the power structures of city and police administrations are key in determining in what direction the relationship will head in the near future.

The relationship could be greatly improved if its development were seriously supported by police and city administrators. According to Muldoon, a reissue of a new and more inclusive policy that is followed and supported by top administrators and capped with training and refresher workshops could assure a more even temperament from police when dealing with the press. "That way, everyone's been trained," Muldoon says. This may also reduce the potential for irreparable damage resulting from a simple misunderstanding.

Muldoon recommends continued training, mandated attendance in workshops and the ability "to keep the doors of communication open" be seriously considered in the future. Although he believes police/media relations have come "a long way" since 1989 and he feels the groups can move even closer together, he doesn't believe relations will improve. Muldoon foresees police "deferring comment" on issues they currently discuss with the press, a reliance on techniques that "are not state of the art" and the channeling of "all questions from

the media going through the county attorney's office." All of this contributes to a return to the shaky past of the communication process between police and the media.

It is vital that steps be taken from the police perspective to insure this will not happen, Muldoon says. He believes many police officers view the seminars as "feel good schools for the media" and refuse to attend, thus maintaining their own views and perceptions of the media. The problem is there is nothing compelling older officers to attend workshops and seminars aimed at developing a positive communication relationship with the media. Budget restraints eliminate possibilities for officers to be paid for participating and time limitations reduce the likelihood of individuals voluntarily giving up personal time off to attend seminars.

A similar problem faces television staffs. Clark says getting employees to give up their free time or attempting to allocate time for employees during scheduled work hours for participation in advanced training seminars is difficult. Additionally, if police don't view seminars and cross-educational training opportunities as a serious issue that provide long-term benefits, these opportunities may no longer even exist. The media must also view these issues seriously or the result would be further reduction of possible meetings between the two groups in an informal atmosphere. If there is no apparent interest, the opportunities for each group to

openly speak about the relationship on a continuing basis may be dramatically reduced. This may eventually trickle down to the seminars offered to recruits and further erode any possibility of productive discourse.

There are benefits from the seminars that make the experience worthwhile to all officers, especially in dealing with the electronic media. "I hear a lot of officers who have gone through the seminars tell me 'I had a television camera stuck in my face the other night and that training session really helped,'" Muldoon says. Without even brief experiences in a training seminar, officers may be more inclined to defer comment in the future. This may also result in journalists' increased displeasure with the cooperative abilities of street officers and further the gap between the two groups.

Wilson also believes in-service training for street officers teaching them how to deal with the media is a good idea. "Absolutely," he says, "but it's taken too lightly by the department. But I think it's very, very important." Wilson says the "powers that be" should be more involved in disseminating this idea to line officers. Extended training once officers complete their training as recruits is used in many areas of a police officers professional growth, the same could be extended to media relations, if supported by the administration.

Younger police officers aside, the biggest problem is to get "the right people" to attend, according to Muldoon. An experienced officer who dislikes the media is not required to attend any sessions on dealing with the press and already entrenched stereotypes are perpetuated. This directly points to a lack of support from the structural hierarchy of both the police department and the city's administration. The introduction of recruits to some training in dealing with the press is a positive step, but Muldoon sees limited success if the training is not mandated or eventually expanded. This indicates that many higher ranking officers fail to see the benefit of the workshops in assuring a positive working relationship between police and the media. Without even cursory attempts to indoctrinate officers in dealing with the media and personal relationships taken out of the area of police/press relations, one can see the possibility that a void has been created.

Media personnel also see a lack of support from the city's top administrators as detrimental to the future of police/press relations. Fagin thinks the future allows for the police/media relationship to co-exist once the political aspect is ironed out. He terms Omaha's current police administration "the most politicized police department I've ever seen." He believes the need for a PIO that understands the media's needs is even greater than before. "They're

always going to have to get along with us, they just don't have a choice," Fagin says. "As more people come in and they don't know what they are doing, they're going to need somebody to talk with these young reporters. If they see irresponsible news stories going on, even the Chief of Police is going to realize they need to have somebody dealing with this."

It is important to note that media personnel also need to take the seminars seriously and not view them as an attempt to control information. Standoff seminars, for example, can offer an inside look at the procedures and processes police go through to insure a situation is handled the safest way possible. Since the research indicates younger reporters do not have a solid background on police actions, the seminars can offer a wealth of information, while providing these reporters with the opportunity to become familiar with street officers and ERU team members.

The influx of more television news programming in the Omaha area means there may be more of a dependence on a solid working relationship between the police and press in the future. It could even work to the administration's advantage. Both Muldoon and Fagin say if police departments realize that good positive news stories equal a lot of potentially good publicity, the administration may finally be swayed into forming a good working relationship with the media. Both say that positive press coverage over a long term means bigger

budgets for the police department. "You get the public on your side and you sell it to the public by selling it to a reporter," Fagin says.

The communication relationship between Omaha's police and media may not improve until these anti-media higher-placed politicians inside the department are ousted. Many respondents feel that Police Chief Jim Skinner and Mayor Hal Daub fail to understand the importance of having the news media view the police department (and City Hall) as a ally and not an enemy. This political power struggle inside the city's administration and police department exploded in late April of 1997 when eight Deputy Chiefs presented documentation to the media that expenses for instigating a helicopter program in Omaha far exceeded public estimates released by the Daub Administration and that crime statistics released to the public were inaccurate. The Deputy Chiefs charged this inaccurate information was knowingly forwarded by Public Safety Director John Packett.

Daub initially stood beside Packett and insisted the aide take a polygraph test. Packett failed the test and was fired by Daub. The feud was smoothed over when Daub himself took a polygraph test concerning his involvement in the controversy and passed. He apologized to the Deputy Chiefs for doubting their charges. Chief Skinner admitted he and Daub had not had open channels of communication for some time and that led to

the controversy. Packett insisted he was the scape-goat in the ordeal and professed his innocence. A week later, Daub was re-elected mayor by less than 900 votes.

If the avenues of communication opportunities are reduced between the police department and city administration and their top officials are unable to openly communicate, the future may be bleak for the press, especially when it comes to gathering information. Both Muldoon and Clark point to litigation as posing a major barrier to continued or improved police/media relations. Muldoon sees a future where the holders of information are "territorial" and wrapped up in a "power thing" about releasing timely information to the press. Clark says this has already happened where "information has tightened up considerably concerning some cases. Police are the messengers and are getting hammered by the county attorneys," he says. "Everybody is so afraid of everybody else and a lawsuit or an appeal being thrown out in the legal process that the information process has dried up, so to speak, for us. Even informally, this has added to the tension and caused some conflicts between the media and police."

Further limitations on the flow of information directly lead to increased tensions between the groups. This may result in a return by reporters to the increased interviewing of witnessed and by-standers for information. Accuracy may suffer as will the communication process if this is the sole

technique of information gathering available to the press on the location of spot news scenes. This could also result in bad publicity for the police department if the public sees them portrayed as aloof and above the fray in the local media.

Tighter restrictions on information may eventually mean extension to visual access at crime scenes. As a result, Frerichs envisions future local television coverage of standoffs akin to the Gulf War coverage where all visuals were cleared before being released for public dissemination. Police officials have already asked for some restrictions in "live" television coverage during standoffs. At this point, television stations have refused to give in to these requests.

Brown says there needs to be more cooperation between the two groups especially when the police officers are in training, but offers the idea of extending post-collegiate training sessions to the media. "They need to know what we need, we need to know what they need," he says. "Maybe some of these new reporters can go through bits and pieces of officer's training to see what police officers need, or some kind of homicide investigation or talk to the county attorney because they are the ones who are ultimately going to try the case and they don't need us damaging the case. There needs to be a lot of cooperation, because the rapport we had 20 years ago doesn't exist today." While this aids journalists in understanding police procedures and practices, it may also

help solidify trust and familiarity through a sense of camaraderie police recruits experience during their own training sessions.

Another aspect of increasing the understanding of reporters covering crime-related stories lies in further extending training opportunities into the legal system. Cooper says there should be a half-day seminar with the county attorney's office showing the media the processes they go through, what they do, why they do it and how they do it all the way through appeals. "Explain what courts get involved, here's what a motion to suppress is, here's what a preliminary hearing is for," Cooper says. "I've seen more erroneous things on television just because the reporter doesn't understand the system." A deeper understanding of the system after an arrest can assist reporters in understanding why some officers believe releasing certain information damages a case.

When analyzing the overall state of police-press relations, Clark doesn't believe the current situation is much better than before. "I don't know that it's any worse, but it certainly isn't any better," he says. He believes one reason for this lies in narrowing the opportunities for communication with multiple police sources due to the advent of the PIO position. It is possible that channeling all information through such a narrow source creates the impression in the public's mind that police officers are not held accountable.

One manner in which the PIOs could be strengthened is by having an officer with a journalism background work that position. "I think this (PIO) system of having a police officer or a sergeant is a mistake," Faqin says. "How can you expect an officer or a sergeant to go up to a lieutenant on the scene and demand information? How can they do that? They're talking to a superior officer. I think it should be a civilian, but then the cops won't trust them, but the news media will. The cop, unless he has journalistic training, he doesn't know the questions to ask another cop."

One possible way around this is to have the prospective PIO go through the police academy, not as an officer, but as a civilian trying to understand the inner circle of police activity. As it stands, police officers with little or no training in communication dealings with the media are thrust into the PIOs position. This results in a learning process by fire for the new PIO and can hamper any continuity currently created and stifle the development of furthering the position and taking police/press relations to a higher level. New officers installed as PIOs are even unfamiliar with their own current policies and practices. The position is largely grounded in on-the-job training with a limited background.

Not everyone sees a dark future for police/press relations brewing on the horizon, however. Cavanaugh says that lacking a major incident where police can clearly say

they were "blindsided by the media," the relationship will basically remain the same. "There was more socializing and give and take before, but I really don't think there was that much difference about how we perceived our jobs or how most people perceived most reporters," he says. "We could go 10 years without having a negative story being aired about cops. I don't know if that would change some people's minds or opinions about the media." Cavanaugh says he believes the two groups have already endured the worst scenarios the relationship will face.

Friend sees a more positive relationship evolving in the near future. At the worst, he sees the relationship as one that will remain static, or even improve. He bases much of this on the personal relationships that are forged in the field. "I think there are some kinships here," he says. Friend believes a camaraderie develops between the two groups when exposed to each other on a continuing basis, especially during early morning hours. "If we work the same hours and I see (the same reporters) at 2:30 in the morning, I think that just tends to create a bonding," he says. Friend says that if each side can better understand the role and purpose of the other, the relationship will improve. He says the only way to do that it is to work with people over a long term basis where trust and mutual respect is given the opportunity to blossom.

Other respondents believe the relationship is moving in a positive manner as long as there are no major setbacks to damage what has already been built. Murray thinks the communication process between Omaha Police and the media is progressing in a positive direction. He bases his outlook on the desire of television stations to continue covering crime-related stories. If that trend continues, Murray believes the relationship may eventually flourish. Adams believes much of the future rests in the hands of the people on the street. She says continued successful communication depends heavily on the individual officer and reporter and their working relationship. Mutual respect and trust can do a lot to further the communication relationship.

"I feel to this date, the relationship between police and the media is outstanding, despite individuals saying media relations is bad," Muldoon says. He notes a comparison between two cities where the relationship between the media and police produced diametrically opposite results. Two cities of similar size suffer the deaths of police officers in the line of duty. In one city, coverage is wide-spread with live reports from the scene, to the arrest of suspects, through the funeral and burial service of the officer. The other city had limited television coverage with a story "only on the obituary page," Muldoon says.

"The relationship between media and police is directly proportional to the amount of media support and portrayal a department receives when something like this happens," Muldoon says. "The community pulled together and showed they supported their police department and that is a direct result of the type of coverage the media had given the department prior to that incident. This shows the fruits of good cooperation with the media and it carries on to the public's image of you as a department." It also creates a bonding between the police department and the community it serves.

There are other notable examples that assist in solidifying the relationship, while providing a solid service to the public. Cooper notes how the press helps out when police ask them to inform the public concerning the whereabouts of missing children, suspect automobiles and in airing video of robberies. In Omaha, regularly televised segments like "Crimestoppers" on KETV and WOWT's "Heartland's Most Wanted" provide the public with details of a crime and pleas for help from those with information. "In that aspect, the relationship has been good," Cooper says. He believes that continued efforts to include both sides in problem-solving efforts creates a more stable working relationship.

When problems do arise, they should be handled in a direct fashion that leads to positive solutions instead of finger-pointing. Brown believes there should be a complaint

board comprised of people who are not connected, but familiar with the business of both police work and reporting. He says when an incident between the two groups arises, the board should be able to gather information about the incident and discuss the situation with the offending persons face to face or at least with the news director or police supervisor.

Maybe the two groups need to be even more honest with each other in resolving disputes. Wilson believes a successful relationship relies on frequent meetings between representatives who are designated by each profession. "I think that both sides should come to the table and air their differences and say 'look, this is why we don't want to do this, not because we dislike you but for valid reasons,'" he says. This would allow each to hear the other side's point of view concerning an issue and work together to search for solutions. As it stands, there is no open discussion from the managers of either side informing their subordinates about resolutions of conflict and future areas of concern. The troops need to be more involved in conflict resolution.

There are aspects of the relationship that serve vital public purposes in informing the public. With a positive future relationship, the opportunities exist for furthering the long-term commitment of that communication process. However, as many respondents noted, there are problems outside the realm of the individuals that could pose serious problems.

A more inclusive project needs to be undertaken to insure the goals of both sides are met and that each side perform the duties they are assigned to do.

Chapter Five

Solutions

This study's intent was to uncover some of the underlying feelings and problems that exist in the communication process between the police and media. A similar study counting the number of formal grievances (for example) would not have yielded as much in-depth data as a study utilizing this methodology. The sheer number of formally filed instances where the relationship had clearly broken down are relatively few. John Clark says that by simply looking at the "limited number" of reported incidents citing poor communication between Omaha media and police, one would get the impression that "overall, we probably don't have that bad a relationship." The results of this study contradict that assessment and note several areas of concern by respondents.

Fortunately, there is significant literature on how police and media can mend fences in their communication relationship. The easiest solution would be for both police and media personnel to stop and think about the other's plight for a moment. However, in the middle of the frenzied atmosphere of breaking news, this luxury is usually not a viable option. This simple thought, however, may be the best long-term solution. If police and the press really understood

they were more alike than previously thought, the chances for better communication would dramatically increase.

This understanding starts at the academic level and the ignorance of journalists concerning police procedures should be reversed immediately in the journalism schools. Aspiring journalists are required to take a number of course work in college to provide a well-rounded individual with a liberal arts background. Maybe the time has come for more pertinent areas of study to be adopted into specific areas of the curriculum. Cross-educational training can be started on the collegiate level to help journalists become aware of the structures and procedures of police officers by including criminal justice courses in the journalism curriculum.

In law enforcement, training schools must rescind the unproductive practice of indoctrinating cadets as media haters. For police, it is better to have the media as an ally than an enemy[140] but the media should heed the same advice (especially since crime is a frequent staple of newscasts). Having potential police officers take a television class during their undergraduate years is also a good step in aleviating their fears of being interviewed later in their professional careers.

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[140] Ellen Soeteber, *Enlisting The Media As An Ally*, p. 28.

This serves a dual purpose. Few deny that the media possesses great power in image making. The power of the media works against officers unless they understand the impact news coverage can have on the department in the eyes of a community.[141] To that end, law enforcement needs to develop long-term relationships with the media.[142] That long-term committment should begin before officers enter the field.

Acknowledging this, it behooves law enforcement agencies to adopt policies that provide a good public relations image while not jeopardizing their own investigations when dealing with the media.[143] The worst thing a law enforcement agency can do is close its doors to the media, or further disable opportunities for dialectic exchange. A proactive and open policy with the media allows for effective communication that will reach the public in a factual manner.[144] Police managers should open up a direct and accessible dialogue with the media and should make the media react to them. Police

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[141] Penny Parrish, *Police and the Media*, p. 24.

[142] James J. Onder, Jack Mahar and Barry McLoughlin, *Improving Your Image In The Media*, The Police Chief, May 1994, p. 60.

[143] Kimberly A. Crawford, *News Media Participation in Law Enforcement Activities*, p. 28.

[144] Ellen Soeteber, *Enlisting The Media As An Ally*, p. 28.

administrators also need to use the media to get the good stories within their departments out to the public.[145]

When these stories get into the public domain, the entire image of police officers could be dramatically altered. Officers would be seen more as human beings instead of rigid and unyielding authoritarians. If the police deal with the press in an honest, straightforward manner and are reasonably accessible, the chances are that the coverage they receive will be perceived from their viewpoint as more positive.[146]

For as little as journalists know about police work and administrations, police officers know even less about their media counterparts. Therefore law enforcement at all levels needs adequate training in media relations. Delegation of the public information officer as the only source to talk with the media may be a convenience but in the wider communicative forum is a mistake.[147] Using this single voice too often can give the impression of the department's top administrator being too busy to deal with certain issues or that the department is not led in an orderly fashion. It can also

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[145] Penny Parrish, *Police and the Media*, p. 24.

[146] Arthur F. Nehrbass, *Promoting Effective Media Relations*, p. 40-44.

[147] Carl Yates, *The Standard Gravure Shooting*, p. 8-13; Arthur F. Nehrbass, *Promoting Effective Media Relations*, p. 40-44.

result in a monopoly of discourse where other, more informed voices are suppressed.

Police officers and administrators need to understand that the media needs expert quotes from those in authority.[148] With a minimum of training, an officer can be adequately trained at effectively communicating with the press.[149] Police administrators need to address media training for all officers, the media's portrayal of law enforcement and officer's attitudes toward the media.[150] Until police see the importance of the media in enhancing their community image and utilize the main function of mass media, many will continue to feel isolated from the rest of society.

Reporters are taught that it is best to get necessary information about an incident from officers at the scene. It would also benefit police if all line officers were trained in media relations, since street officers are the ones who deal with the press at the scene and are usually asked for comment on an incident. As a news contact, the investigating officer at the scene will know much more than the Public Information

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[148] James J. Onder, Jack Mahar and Barry McLoughlin, *Improving Your Image in the Media*, p. 60.

[149] Arthur F. Nehrbass, *Promoting Effective Media Relations*, p. 40-44.

[150] Penny Parrish, *Police and the Media*, p. 24.

Officer who usually seeks out a high ranking investigator on location and is briefed before talking with the press.[151] This helps insure accurate information and can increase the credibility of the department and individual officers, while enhancing their public image.

In addition, over-reliance on the PIO as the only source of quotes for the press is detrimental to law enforcement, because it creates a heavy burden and increases stress on that officer.[152] It can also create some animosity toward that officer and a reliance of line officers to refer all media questions (even the most basic facts of a case) to the public information officer and dramatically slow down the flow of information to the public. Reporters (who may have already been on a scene for some time) notice that the PIO interviews an officer on location. This can create the impression that certain officers do not wish to talk with the media and form false impressions.

Still, there are those officers who despise the press because of some earlier incident and are reluctant to deal with the media. Most of those burned by the press were either not well enough informed to talk with the media or didn't know

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[151] Elizabeth Giblin, *Some Tips For Reporters Covering the Police Beat*, p. 46, Parrish, p. 24.

[152] Carl Yates, *The Standard Gravure Shooting*, p. 8-13.

how to handle problems when they arose.[153] Police should judge trust with reporters on an individual basis and not generalize.[154] Naturally, the reverse should also apply. In-service training programs for officers can set standards for communicating with the media.[155] When speaking with a reporter, police should be sure of the rules concerning on-the-record and off-the-record statements.[156] Reporters, in turn, must establish that they are trustworthy and honest for beneficial dialogue to exist between the media and police officers.[157]

This is where the biggest concerns from those interviewed occurred. A lack of trust, coupled with unfamiliarity of individuals creates the uneasy feeling of one side having to grovel for tidbits of information. If reporters accepted the concept of gathering some basic information initially (even if it is only based on observation) and attempting more in-depth interviews at a later time, the stress of deadlines, critical

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[153] Arthur F. Nehrbass, *Promoting Effective Media Relations*, p. 40-44.

[154] Don Corrigan, *Police Trust Print More Than Broadcasting,* p. 1, 17.

[155] Penny Parrish, *Police and the Media*, p. 24.

[156] Arthur F. Nehrbass, *Promoting Effective Media Relations*, p. 40-44.

[157] Don Corrigan, *Police Trust Print More Than Broadcasting,* p. 1, 17.

incidents, and media-induced stress may be greatly reduced. If police and reporters understood that a tidbit of information can go far in a live television format, initial requests for information may be more rapidly attained and initial demands on police officers reduced.

Law enforcement agencies should be as open and honest with the press as their investigations allow them. Police officers need to realize that the media has several deadlines daily and cannot afford to wait for the PIO to arrive, interview a command officer and release information.[158] This point is when many reporters put pressure on line officers for information. When a deadline is nearing and reporters have empty notebooks, they can be very difficult to deal with.

Even with effective training in communicating with the press, problems can result. In the event that the press runs a story that is not favorable to police or if an officer feels victimized by a particular story, police management should meet with journalists immediately. Not only does this help keep future lines of communications open but future stories may be perceived as more favorable or fair.[159] In addition, there are several factors that may have lead to a misunderstanding of facts or a misquote during an interview.

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[158] Donn Johnson, *The Press and the Police*, p. 8-9; Carl Yates, *The Standard Gravure Shooting*, p. 8-13.

[159] Penny Parrish, *Police and the Media*, p. 24.

If the issue is bothersome to the officer, the best thing to do is discuss the situation immediately before a negative image develops and festers.

Overall, police/media relations could be dramatically improved if law enforcement officers and the media would just talk and listen to each other more.[160] Communication is a two-way street and journalists could do much to improve their standing with law enforcement as well.

Television journalists should also be more prudent in utilizing depictions of crime scenes in the present and in future news stories. Many police officers think crime coverage should be relevant.[161] This relevancy includes the use of file pictures depicted in generic crime stories. There must be not only truth in the written script, but in the visual presentation as well. News personnel should be cautious in using video of specific crime-related scenes (especially high-profile ones) that may shine an unnecessarily bad light on officer depicted.

In addition, the media needs to remember that police officers are human and have opinions of their own. If isolated issues are allowed to be largely overplayed and create an undue picture of crime, journalists are not only

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[160] Penny Parrish, *Police and the Media*, p. 24.

[161] David Simon, *Too Many Crime Stories?* p. 30.

jeopardizing their relations with police and misleading the public, they may also be violating a standard of ethics. Police officers should understand that the media is not going to vanish from spot news scenes. As holders of information, they have the ability to form an impression of relevancy in the minds of journalists.

Television personnel are more likely to gain the confidence of officers if they show they are trustworthy, likable and honest. Reporters can help their own cause by occasionally doing lighter features on officers, showing them in a more human light. Not only does this help reduce the pressure and animosity between police and the press, it creates a better understanding of the human element in police work.[162] In general, reporters need to understand that officers are under a great amount of stress on a daily basis and have ingrained, desensitization mechanisms that allow them to perform their jobs when others would break down.

Television news photographers can also assist when shooting visuals of police officers. Photographers must use a critical eye when capturing images of officers at spot news scenes. In many instances, the cameras are on-location for a long period of time. The officers are there even longer and at times appear to stand around and laugh and joke. If these

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[162] Elizabeth Giblin, *Some Tips For Reporters Covering the Police Beat*, p. 46.

images are videotaped and transmitted to the public, the impression is that officers are laughing about another person's misfortune. Many times a form of dark or gallows humor keeps both journalists and police officers sane during times of high stress. Photographers should be careful when zeroing in on specific individuals while covering critical incident scenes.

Relations between the press and police would dramatically improve if they better understood the other's work situation.[163] Reporter ride-alongs can go a long way toward developing trust with officers and as time goes by, communication tends to open up more.[164] With the suggestion that officers accompany television news crews on occasion, this can apparently help each determine how the other half lives. If reporters and police officers saw each other a little more often in a slightly more relaxed setting their attitudes about each other might change.

While press credentials may mark the journalist as someone who is trustworthy and cleared by police, the press needs to do a better job of understanding police

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[163] Patricia A. Kelly, *Police-Media Relations*, p. 4-7.

[164] Elizabeth Giblin, *Some Tips For Reporters Covering the Police Beat*, p. 46.

procedures.[165] This could also go a long way toward eliminating some negative feelings police officers have about journalists. Even in the age of downsizing at journalistic outlets, reporters need to cultivate police sources by making routine daily contact.[166] News via-telephone was once a staple of the broadcast industry and it seems broadcasters have utilized this form of occasional contact in decreasing fashion. It takes very little time to make contacts in the police department, but a little extra effort to keep them.

Journalists could do several little things to enhance their image to both law enforcement and the public. News staffs need to be better educated about sensitivity in reporting grief. Photographers who show up at police officer's funerals wearing shorts and t-shirts are perpetuating the image of journalists as insensitive vultures hovering around a victim.[167] Plus, it's unprofessional and does nothing to further the image of television news photographers. If you dress and act like a slob, you'll be viewed and treated as a slob. T-shirts and shorts have little

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[165] Andrea Sachs, *No Time For Ethics? When A Cop Wants Your Press Card.* Columbia Journalism Review (May-June 1993) vol: 32, no. 1, p. 14; Kelly, p. 4-7.

[166] Elizabeth Giblin, *Some Tips For Reporters Covering the Police Beat*, p. 46.

[167] Lou Prato, *"It Was Like A Shark Attack"*, p. 48; Bryan Grigsby, *Disappointment At Funeral Dress*, p. 16.

value in the business world and television news (for better or worse) is still a business.

Journalism schools need to focus more on the skills necessary for covering deadlined, critical-incident coverage.[168] There are few stories as full of human emotion as spot news stories and the presence and actions of a journalist may be what people remember most. How the journalist acts at a scene when human life hangs in the balance says a lot about the individual and the profession. If the reporter laughs at the scene are on-lookers seeing an internal coping mechanism in action, or do they view the journalist as uncaring and cynical?

Just as journalists must understand the pressure and stress associated with experiences outside the realm of human experience, they must also understand how their presence at a critical-incident location can be perceived by others. It is beneficial to remember that police officers use many of the same coping mechanisms.

Little more shall be said here about the images captured at crime scenes and subsequently shown in the media. However, one problem that many have with the media evolves from the photographs run in newspapers at crime scenes. In publication, running homicide stories in digest sections and

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[168] Patricia A. Kelly, *Police-Media Relations*, p. 4-7.

other short-form layouts do not sit well with the public and police. Many feel this trivializes the loss of human life.[169] This should also apply to television news' teasers, stingers and other visual previews where short bits of tape are used to "sell" a story. It definitely should extend to the use of specific incident homicides being used as "file tape" in generic news stories. Sensible and relevant use of crime footage may go a long way toward improving the media's image with police and the public.

Other solutions for improving the collective image of police officers and the media include softening the image of police as rigid, withholders of information and journalists as self-serving raiders, eliminate stereotypes and work together for the public's good. While both need to maintain a certain image of fairness and stability, both need to meet halfway for resolution of the conflicts that lead to poor understanding. One solution is cross-educational classroom teachings that offer insight into the other's discipline.[170] Recent Supreme Court decisions have led to the conclusion that the media and police must find some common ground and resolve their

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[169] Richard P. Cunningham, *Readers Express Dissatisfaction With Crime Coverage*. The Quill (January 1994) vol: 82, no. 1, p. 16.

[170] Patricia A. Kelly, *Police-Media Relations*, p. 4-7; Carl Yates, *The Standard Gravure Shooting*, p. 8-13.

conflicts.[171] If police and the media are to start to bridge the gap that separates them, it is apparent that the two entities should embrace the idea that they need each other more than they will admit, or think possible. To understand each other better, they also need to comprehend the reasons they sometimes act as they do under stress and devise some positive means of alleviating some of the strain.

Stress Solutions

Coping strategies and job satisfaction are important for reducing stress.[172] Law enforcement has recently realized the importance and benefits of training and education in stress management. These efforts need to be furthered to present police officers with necessary support from peers and administrations in order to be effective over the long-term.

Sometimes simply acknowledging there is a problem goes a long way toward healing. By instituting the Critical Incident Stress Debriefings law enforcement officers know there is a support system and that their emotions are normal in the face of abnormal events. Critical Incident Stress Debriefings are led by mental health professionals and encourage the free

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[171] Kimberly A. Crawford, *News Media Participation In Law Enforcement Activities*, p. 28.

[172] John M. Violanti and Fred Aron, *Sources of Police Stressors* . . . p. 903.

expression of emotions through a support group.[173] However, it is important that police administrators continue to be aware of the symptoms of stress and develop methods to combat it. Administrators need to support long-term coping strategies and care for the mental and physical health of their officers. CISDs are a short term solution. Short term initial intervention is helpful in dealing with long term cumulative effects, but a short-term strategy may result in long-term difficulty in managing life.[174]

It has been suggested that police administrators develop policies that promote and maintain job satisfaction with work in addition to reducing the stressors inherent in the police administration's hierarchy.[175] The root causes that prominently play a role in stress should be addressed. Some solutions to stress include job rotation, ongoing training, and administrative support of the officer as an individual. In addition, periodically scheduled debriefing sessions may help agencies reduce the prevalence of long-term stress.[176]

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[173] Richard J. Conroy, *Critical Incident Stress Debriefing*, p. 21.

[174] Richard J. Conroy, *Critical Incident Stress Debriefing*, p. 22; James D. Sewell, *The Stress of Homicide Investigations*, p. 577-578.

[175] John M. Violanti and Fred Aron, *Sources of Police Stressors* . . . p. 903.

[176] James D. Sewell, *The Stress of Homicide Investigations*, p. 576-579.

Police administrations owe it to their officers and communities to assist in dealing with critical incident stress and assuring that everything possible is done to insure the mental health of their officers. In addition, police officers must find a way to become vulnerable and show love and respect for loved ones to help ease their situations at home.[177] Many times, self-expression is adequate enough to relieve built up stress.[178] Whatever the individual need, police administrations should be on the lookout for symptoms that erode the competent police officer.

Coupled with an array of other reasons, police officer stress is instrumental in the preformed image law enforcement personnel have of the news media. If journalists make an attempt to understand the complexities behind officer's concepts of reporters, there may be a window of opportunity for the improvement of communication between police and the news media when high-stress events (like spot news) occurs.

Is stress associated with critical incident investigations an important factor in the communicative relationship between police and the media? At this point, there is a severe lack of research to affirm this question. However, if there are communicative problems between police

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[177] Richard N. Southworth, *Taking the Job Home*, p. 23.

[178] Robert W. Shearer, *Police Officer Stress*, p. 96.

officers and their spouses and other family members, the possibility exists that there are similar communication problems with less-significant others. Additional research into this question is badly needed.

Depression, alcoholism, feelings of isolation, over-work, constant pressure and splintered families and divorce. These are symptoms identified with police officer stress. Law enforcement does not hold a patent on these symptoms. Other high stress careers experience similar signs. Journalism is one such profession. Although there is wide acknowledgement that working in a news room is a stressful job, there is surprisingly little research concerning what journalists should do to help ease the physical and mental strains of job-related stress.[179] Therefore, it is rational to assume that members of the press can suffer long-term psychological effects stemming from similar stress-related situations that occur to police officers.

Regardless, it would be wise of the journalistic community to follow the lead of police and other rescue operations that experience high doses of stress through human suffering. The availability of Critical Incident Stress Debriefings is a start and consideration of instituting similar should be initiated by media managers.

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[179] Betsy B. Cook, Steve R. Banks and Ralph J. Turner, *The Effects of Work Environment* . . . p. 125-126.

Other suggestions center around utilizing a form of talk-therapy and an increased sense of camaraderie. Much of the pressure in a news room can be reduced by talking with peers and bosses about the stressors. There must be some form of outlet for pent up emotions to occur for the health of the individual. Journalism managers need to be aware when employees are using such methods to rid themselves of excessive baggage connected with witnessing events outside the realm of human experience. Many times, journalists can help reduce stress in themselves and co-workers by being more supportive of each other in the newsroom setting.[180]

Unnecessary stress is driving good people from the business. Some other solutions to news room stress include better pay, built in escape valves, flexible schedules, better training and support, limited meddling in minor affairs by middle management, praise, more editorial control and a sense of teamwork. Also, the four day workweek has shown to be beneficial in reducing job burnout and stress in journalists.[181] Many of these goals are attainable at a minimal cost to employers.

In addition, news managers need to be more in tune with the causes of work-related stress. One way is to involve the

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[180] Diana Brown, *Newsroom Stress Is Growing*, p. 11.

[181] Carl Sessions Stepp, *Editor Meltdown*, p. 30.

rank and file more in decision making when devising new ways to package the news product. This involvement energizes employees and they feel they have more control over their own lives. [182] By realizing the increased pressures advances in technology can put on newsroom employees, managers will go a long way toward keeping the industry's brightest lights shining.

On their own, journalists need to take more time off or find some means of escaping the constant pressures of deadlines more often. Stress can be dramatically reduced simply by getting enough sleep and exercise and maintaining good self esteem.[183] The basic idea here is that if employees feel good about themselves, they will be more productive.

Included with this is a softening of the stereotypical image of the reporter as a hard-driving, hard-drinking, cigar smoking, busybody who lives, breathes and sleeps journalism. There must be a separation of the time spent on the job with time off it. Journalists have to understand that their mental and physical health depends on their being able to say "the deadline has passed, it's time to gear down."

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[182] Betsy B. Cook, Steve R. Banks and Ralph J. Turner, *The Effects of Work Environment . . .* p. 132-133.

[183] Diana Brown, *Newsroom Stress Is Growing*, p. 11.

It is unknown if deadline pressures, the heat of competition and living under the scrutiny of meddling middle managers are major contributors of stress which may hamper communication with law enforcement officials. An open field of future study lies here for the opportunistic researcher.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

There are numerous factors and situations presenting potential barriers to better communication between police and the media. By studying the basic background of both institutions, it becomes apparent that the two professions possess more similarities than previously thought. By making an effort to understand deep-rooted causes behind animosity and see the other side's viewpoint, the gap may be reduced, channels of communication improved and the image of both enhanced. However, judging by the results in the study just presented, attaining such goals is a difficult task.

There is one possible solution that offers a positive outlook for the future of Police-Press relations. The idea of cross-educational training between journalists and law enforcement on the collegiate and professional levels is a solid one. Since the two professions encounter each other on a daily basis (many times under the extreme duress of a spot news situation) it would be beneficial for both sides to enter into such a reciprocal educational opportunity.

Journalism schools do a poor job of training prospective reporters and photographers about how to do their jobs on a daily basis, let alone how to deal with severe situations, such as spot news incidents. Journalists should be better

versed on what police can and cannot say about on-going investigations in breaking news stories. When reporters fail to understand why police cannot answer specific questions, they believe police are stonewalling them, not realizing that their comments may jeopardize an investigation. It would greatly benefit future police/press relations if journalists were trained better in this arena of police protocol during criminal activity investigations.

Journalism schools should also make a better effort to incorporate at least some criminal justice classes for students wishing to become the next generation of journalists. This can help present a better understanding of police procedures and structures. It appears past the time for journalism schools to devise a more modern curriculum accommodating the real experiences they will encounter in our modern society. The time for incorporating a prospective journalist's scholastic prowess into more relevant coursework is long overdue. If the basic nuts and bolts of reporting are not being effectively taught, how can further communication development occur?

In addition, professional journalistic societies like the Society of Professional Journalists, the National Press Photographer's Association and Radio and Television News Director's Association should become more involved in seminars and training sessions concerning Police/Press Relations. News

managers should heavily endorse job-related training sessions and coursework for working professionals. In an industry where technology constantly changes, it is also important to constantly update the human aspect educationally as well.

While stereotypes are difficult to eliminate, positive direction needs to be taken here. Those in law enforcement need to rescind the idea of teaching recruits that encountering the news media is akin to walking alone down a dark alley. Police/media communication cannot improve if suspicions and animosity are taught and ingrained before future officers and journalists enter their chosen field. In addition, law enforcement managers need to understand that when the media lodges complaints, they are to be taken seriously and attempts at reconciliation are beneficial to both groups.

The possibility of stress being related to future police/press relations should also be explored. Journalists appear to bottle up stress and do not have as many viable support options as police officers do at this time. Stress-management activities should become an accepted part of the educational background of both fields. Since both are highly-stressful occupations that lend themselves to the occurrence of job burnout separate of each other by nature, stress may play an important role in the future of police/press relations. By the same token, the elimination of stress may

assist in improving police/press relations in the long run. Nonetheless, both industries need to accept responsibility for the health and welfare of employees.

The concept of critical incident debriefings should be expanded to the media as well, because the research indicates that journalists are exposed to a larger dose of incidents outside the realm of human experience than most professionals. The investment media businesses and police departments put into the training and experience of its people is a vital resource and should be closely guarded. For the managers of both professions to get the utmost from their employees, it is to their benefit to assist in their mental and physical well-being. Studying the options of critical incident stress debriefings for the media is a logical step.

The general feeling of those interviewed for this study, indicate that there is a turning of the page on the horizon of police/press relations in Omaha. While some innovative and positive measures have been achieved, sadly, Omaha is similar to national trends as reflected in the research forming the foundation of this study. There will always be some incidents that are cited as detrimental to continued positive relations, but the data collected from the interviews shows that there are far more positive examples than negative incidents when trust and familiarity is factored in to the equation.

Much of this is due to the longevity of some television reporters and photographers in the Omaha area. When severe turnover of once-familiar faces hits the market and a heavy influx of young reporters and photographers hit the streets, the possibility of more friction increases. As familiarity between individuals diminishes, so does the potential long-term benefits of trust.

Longevity, familiarity and honesty appear to equal a fairly good chance that positive relations will occur in Omaha's police/press relations. Most relationships are based on the individual personality of those involved in the field. Police/press relations are an extension of human relations and it should be remembered that humans are involved on both sides. Mandates and regulations are a structural reality of the system, but it takes people to put any plan effectively to work. If one believes the other person is a human being and deserving of the considerations and respect we all strive for, communication at all levels should be effective. Alas, this is not the case in every communicative exchange, but when we know who we are dealing with, the possibility of working out a compromise increases.

The shooting death of Officer Jimmy Wilson Jr. on August 20, 1995 presented the researcher with direct involvement and a window of observation into the issue of police/press relations in Omaha. This incident spawned the concept that

stress brought on by spot news situations could formulate into severe problems in the communication process between police and the media.

While the impact of a young police officer's shooting death created a highly stressful situation, Omaha Police appeared overall to handle their relations with the press in a highly professional (and human) manner. When information became available, it was passed on quickly dispelling rumors and allowing for the constant flow of reliable facts necessary for the media to conduct its job. It is important to note much of the researcher's personal experience in communication with police officers that day was the result of previously constructed relations with many of those officers on location.

One such example occurred once the "live" truck arrived shortly after the shooting. While setting up a signal outside the established police perimeter, Sgt. Cavanaugh said the perimeter was being expanded. He agreed to wait a few minutes, allowing for the live shot when told the truck would move back immediately afterward. His request could easily have been refused. Once inside the original police perimeter, journalists are rarely asked to move further back unless their lives are potentially in danger.

In addition, it would have been easy for Cavanaugh to refuse to allow for the live remote. This exchange could have turned into a major incident had it not been the result of a

relationship based in familiarity and trust. This allowed for the option of a compromise that appeased both sides. There were no demands placed on either individual. No one was threatened with arrest or charged with obstruction of a working journalist. Following the live broadcast, the live truck retreated and both sides acknowledged the other's professionalism and sensitivity.

Jim Murray says this experience and outcome "could not have gone any other way in Omaha, Nebraska." Murray says the relationship between the police and media is such that officers will not restrict the press unless the press is stepping over the boundaries of established barriers. Had the remote been attempted directly inside the first perimeter, the outcome quite possibly could have been different due to direct interference in a police investigation. Murray is right because in this case the original police perimeter was in the process of cordoning off when journalists first arrived. They were asked to move back and they complied.

Not all of these personal relationships with police officers was as good as the aforementioned example. Other command sergeants sometimes walk right past journalists and leave a scene even though they were earlier informed about the need for information on location. Understandably, this angers journalists when it occurs. It is good practice to not interfere with the investigation, or bother officers for

information while they are busy. However, police officers are also trained observers. They know why journalists are there and should talk with the press when they can. The vast majority of police officers who are allowed to talk with the press appear to in sync with this and are generally understanding of the needs of journalists. The majority of the time, there appears to be little trouble getting information from police on location.

However, when journalists do get shunned by command officers, it severely affects their perception of that particular officer. Journalists may think this particular officer fails to view them as professionals (and human beings) to not even acknowledge their existence can envision a negative image of that officer. The creates another stereotype in the mind of a participant that continues to erode the relationship between the two groups.

It is apparent in further dealings with this particular sergeant that he appears to not like the media, or have any wishes to talk with journalists. His constant reply to requests for field interviews is, "There is nothing I can tell you." If that truly is the case, then this officer should find another profession because he is not investigating a crime in the manner that he should. If he seriously wants to become a part of the solution and not a continuation of the problem, he should re-read the police's News Media Policy.

However, journalists can all learn from the saying "you get more bees with honey than vinegar." Taking the time to talk with officers (when they have the chance) and let them know you and acknowledge they are human goes a long way toward breaking down those barriers previously outlined. It does little good to make an issue with the officer who disrupts the media at a scene. Just as police need to talk with the media after a bad experience, the press should do the same and seek out police administrators when officers do not comply with department policy. This was what happened following the injury of Officer Keith Thompson when officers shone their flashlights into camera lenses and grabbed a camera. The unresolved issue here is what happens after the complaint is lodged? If the issue is closed, no one has yet been notified to this extent.

Basically, it all comes down to trust. A police officer in uniform is a trained professional as is a journalist with a television camera over the shoulder. Most are good, honest people who hold a stake in the events shaping the community because they live within that community. When each views the other as compatriots instead of adversaries, the communication relationship can naturally evolve and even improve. If more trust is placed in the other to know their work and responsibilities, the relationship transforms from adversarial to at least tolerable. Judging by the research, journalists

have to work dramatically hard to achieve this foundation of trust with police officers, due to the effects of negativity naturally associated with being a member of the press.

If more officers understand that the media on location usually just needs a bit of confirmed information, their image with the press might dramatically improve. Amy Adams' idea of "just tell us what you can tell us" should be the staple of all media training regimens when it comes to the denizen of spot news situations. Again, the News Media Policy states that officers are expected to release basic information on location. To perform their duties, journalists just need official confirmation of what they probably already know. Police officers could assist in the development of a positive relationship by accommodating this request.

The media can help itself as well. If reporters take more time and talk with officers on a cordial basis, their image with police officers would also improve. If reporters show police officers they are fair and non-judgmental in their demeanor and (especially) in their reporting, they would notice a great advancement in their communication process with police. Sometimes just a wave of the hand or a "how ya doing?" breaks down walls of police/press mistrust. Although police officers and journalists are members of institutions and parts of systems, it still comes down to being human and realizing the other person is human as well.

Deadline pressures may result in a desire for a fast-food style of information gathering. Many times reporters are in too much of a hurry to get in, gather information, and get out of an area quickly. If they were to take the time to occasionally talk with police officers on at least a casual basis, the communication relationship would improve. Much is said about the midwest being more laid-back and slower paced than larger coastal cities, but much of that appears to have changed. It is possible that these personal relationships could become instrumental in the future success of positive relations existing between the Omaha police and its media. Additional research is necessary here to provide more depth.

On the surface, by utilizing PIOs, drafting a News Media Policy and offering seminars and workshops, the Omaha Police Department appears to advocate an active stance in Police/Media relations. It infers that the department's managers believe there are workable solutions to communication problems with the press. However, deeper probing has uncovered that there are individuals within the police hierarchy that are not convinced of the importance of a solid working relationship with the media. If this is the case and results in narrowing the possible communication exchanges between police and the press via tighter controls over who may speak with the media a reduction of other voices, increased

animosity and increased instances of communication problems may occur in greater frequency in the future.

For a more positive relationship to occur, police managers must understand the benefits that could result from increased dialectical exchanges. While the PIOs may provide an accessible initial contact for the media, utilization of one particular officer as the sole source of official comment is detrimental to the long term relationship. When different authoritative voices appear in the media, diversity and depth is enhanced. Allowing for diverse voices in the media could aid in the public's perception of a competent police force capable of releasing information, instead of relying strictly on one person who communicates to the public through the press.

It also can mean that the PIO is used more as a verifying source for interviews gathered in the field. Even if they rely exclusively on field interviews, journalists can verify information gathered in the field with the PIO to insure accuracy and remain on good terms with all officers. Familiarity and trust are important factors in the relationship and opportunities for development must by allowed for the relationship to grow.

The results of this study indicate that changes have occurred in the manner in which Omaha's police officers and television media communicate. Policies and programs designed

to improve the relationship have been installed. The effectiveness of such policies and programs is aimed at directing individuals toward a more positive working relationship between the two groups, but without mandatory participation the results are somewhat limited in scope.

Several areas where problems arise have been diagnosed. The results show that trust and familiarity between the two groups equals a better communication relationship. Respondents note that there is great potential for developing closer relationsips in the future, but only if there is a concentrated effort on both sides to advance cross-training seminars and create opportunities for informal discourse. On the surface, Omaha does not present the tenuous problem of the magnitude that the research indicates exists on a national basis. Individuals from each group warn, however, that deep-rooted feelings festering animosity and even chilling effects between the two institutions could severely damage any progress gained. Awareness of the fragility of this area of human communication can help insure that it's strength (no matter how it is interpreted) lies in the ability to work things out on a human relations basis.

Understanding these hidden elements and overcoming the adverse potential they present is a major challenge facing future development of police/press relations in Omaha. A conscious effort to deal with the pressures that result in

stress in both professions is needed for each group to bettern understand themselves and their motives. In addition, cross-training educational opportunities must be considered at the professional level with mandatory participation mandated from each group's hierarchy. Cross-educational training and seminars should also be considered at the collegiate level to help insure that stereotypes and misconceptions of each respective profession as an institution be eliminated or at least truthfully based in personal knowledge and experience.

Future research is greatly needed in this area of human communication. The possibility that the relationship can easily shatter is just a misunderstanding away. Since members of both institutions rely heavily on the face to face form of human communication, it is in the best interests of each to continue to improve in accepting and understanding the function of the other. If the groups are able to communicate better between themselves, the public is better informed. Above all, because both entities operate in the public's best interest, they should constantly think of the people they are intended to serve as the beneficiaries of a strong communication relationship.

APPENDIX

"To serve  *and protect"*

News Media Policy

The Omaha Police Department strives to maintain a professional working relationship between all police officers and news media representatives so that both may accomplish their objectives. News media have an obligation to gather information and will be permitted to pursue their activities within the confines of the law and without interference from police personnel. The complete news media policy of the Omaha Police Department is contained in the SOP, Volume 1, Public Relations section. This is a summary of procedures that are in effect.

****AT THE SCENE OF A MAJOR CRIME****

Police have the obligation to preserve the integrity of the scene, to gather evidence, and to complete other needed investigative activities. Major crime incidents include shootings, cuttings, carjackings, sexual assaults resulting in serious injury, large disturbances, bank robbery or robbery with serious injury, traffic fatalities, and other police situations that generate news media interest. **In order to ensure that information released to the news media is accurate, only the command officer in charge of the incident or the command officer's designate is authorized to release information regarding the incident to the news media.**

Field Lieutenants are ultimately responsible that news media representatives are briefed at an incident being investigated by Uniform Patrol Bureau officers and a news release is prepared or that the Public Information Officer is called to the scene to disseminate this information.

Special Investigation, Special Operations and Criminal Investigation Bureau Unit lieutenants are ultimately responsible that news media representatives are briefed at an incident being investigated by their respective units and a news release is prepared or that the Public Information Officer is called to the scene to disseminate this information to the news media.

The Public Information Officer MUST be called to the scene of any homicide, Emergency Response Unit call out, officer-involved shooting, injury traffic accident the result of a police pursuit, serious injury to a police officer, death or serious injury occurring at a city facility, or other very serious police emergencies.

In cases of homicide or ERU call out, only a command officer of the unit or the PIO is authorized to speak with the news media concerning the investigation. In cases of officer-involved shooting, injury traffic accident involving a police pursuit, serious injury to a police officer, and death or injury occurring at a city facility (pool, etc.), only the chief of police or his/her designate (PIO) is authorized to speak with the news media concerning the investigation. Officers questioned by the news media shall refer reporters to the appropriate command officer.

As soon as possible, the command officer in charge of an incident or the Public Information Officer (PIO) will brief news media representatives present at a scene with basic information concerning the incident.

RELEASE BASIC INFORMATION:

- names of victims (except in death investigations);
- names of persons arrested or ticketed over the age of 15;
- when and where the incident occurred;
- what occurred (facts only, DO NOT SPECULATE); and,
- description of any suspects still at large.

DO NOT RELEASE THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION:

- any fatality victim name until next of kin have been notified
- suspects named on a report but not arrested;
- the contents of any statement, admission, or the fact that a confession has been made;
- opinions concerning the guilt or innocence of the arrested party;
- information concerning whether criminal activity was GANG related;
- the release of any internal communication, interoffice communication, chief's report, or supplementary report.

AT THE SCENE OF TRAFFIC OR MINOR CRIME INCIDENTS

Any sworn *officer* may release *basic information* regarding traffic accidents or minor crime incidents that the officer alone is investigating to news media who arrive on a scene. The phrase *officer alone is investigating* shall mean that an investigator from the CIB, SIB, or SOB bureaus is *not* coming to the scene to take charge of the investigation. Minor crime incidents can include any misdemeanor crime that the officer alone is investigating; any traffic accident; any felony crime that the officer alone is investigating such as felony assault, robbery, burglary, or theft. A News Release Form (PO 94) should be made on serious incidents, shootings, carjackings, etc., and faxed to the duty officer at the front desk.

Investigators of very serious personal injury accidents, fatalities, or accidents generating numerous news media inquiries shall fax or hand deliver a copy of the accident report OR a News Release Form (PO 94) to the Duty Officer at the Front Desk before the officer goes off duty.

OTHER PROCEDURES IN PLACE

1. COURTESY: Police officers shall be courteous with news media representatives.
2. ORANGE COLORED NEWS MEDIA Identification cards are issued to news media representatives and they will be allowed to go as near as feasible to the scene itself. News media representatives will be allowed to remain wherever the general public is allowed.
3. CRIME SCENES: Whenever possible, a scene should be established by rope or tape.
4. FIRE SCENES: The decision to allow news media to pass beyond fire lines will be the responsibility of the on-scene Fire Commander. Officers shall not stop news media from approaching the fire command car unless specifically told to do so by the fire commander.
5. VIDEO TAPING: News media representatives may photograph or video tape police officers performing their official duties. Officers will not physically block or cover the lenses of cameras or video taping equipment.
6. PERSONS IN CUSTODY - NO MEDIA CONTACT: Officers will not advise victims or

witnesses to avoid speaking with news media representatives. Persons involved in incidents who *are* in police custody shall NOT be allowed to discuss such incidents with news media.

7. TRESPASS ON PUBLIC PROPERTY: News media will not be asked to leave quasi-public property such as shopping malls and the general grounds of an apartment complex using the request to leave ordinance unless the property is closed to all persons for the purpose of preserving the scene.
8. COMMAND OFFICERS: The rank of sergeant and above may grant permission to give feature story interviews or interviews on investigative case follow-up to news media representatives. News representatives requesting feature story interviews and ride-alongs should be directed to the Public Information Officer for needed authorization.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

- PROFESSIONAL DEMEANOR: Always show concern for any crime victim or complainant and never minimize or trivialize a situation that the news media has chosen to cover.
- NOTHING IS OFF THE RECORD: Off the record comments have been reported as "unidentified police sources have said..." This often compromises criminal and internal investigations.
- PREPARATION BEFORE THE INTERVIEW: Command officers should take a moment to prepare themselves by noting what information can and cannot be released for their particular situation.
- DO NOT SPECULATE: **Give only known facts that fall within your area of responsibility and in accordance with this policy.**
- JARGON: Use plain English to answer question. Do not use police jargon.
- EMOTION: Never show anger or frustration with the news media. Do not act defensive.
- MICROPHONE IS ALWAYS ON: A flippant remark or comments about another case or the internal workings of the police department can become the real story that is reported on.

Omaha Police Department
Public Information Office
444-5867

WOWT 6
NEWS & INFORMATION

April 6, 1992

Mr. James Skinner
Chief of Police
Omaha Police Division
15th and Howard
Omaha, NE 68102

Dear Chief Skinner:

Too often you only hear from Omaha news directors when there has been a problem in covering a particular story.

In this case I am writing to let you know of the extraordinary cooperation we received from the Omaha Police.

This involved the recent weekend crackdown on drag racing. My photographer, Roger Hamer, says he was given the kind of cooperation and access to the scene which really enabled him to tell the story. In this case the officer in charge was Lt. Charles Prokupek. He is to be commended for his outstanding cooperation with us in telling the story.

I just wanted to let you know how much we appreciated the efforts of Lt. Prokupek and all of the officers at the scene.

Sincerely,

John Clark
News Director

cc: ~~Roger Hamer~~

3501 FARNAM STREET
OMAHA, NEBRASKA 68131
TELEPHONE 402/346-6666

City of Omaha
Hal Daub, Mayor

Omaha Police Department
505 South 15th Street
Omaha, Nebraska 68102-2769
(402) 444-5600

James N. Skinner
Chief of Police

(402) 444-5666
FAX? 444-4225

September 5, 1995

Roger Hamer, Photographer
WOWT-TV
3501 Farnam Street
Omaha, NE 68131

Dear Mr. Hamer: Roger

Thank you for the letter of sympathy you sent to the Omaha Police Department concerning the death of Officer James B. Wilson. On behalf of the family of Officer Wilson and the entire Police Department, thank you for your concerns and letter.

In your letter you expressed appreciation for the help given towards the media at the scene of Wilson's shooting by Sergeant Michael Cavanaugh, Sergeant William Muldoon, and Sergeant Michael Vittitoe. It gives me pleasure when someone takes the time to commend one of our officers, especially someone from the news media. I am sure Sergeant Cavanaugh, Sergeant Muldoon, and Sergeant Vittitoe appreciate your comments as much as I do.

A copy of your letter will be placed in the officers' Police Personnel file for future use by the Police Administration.

Sincerely,

James N. Skinner
Chief of Police

JNS/rkh
ty/Hamer

c: Deputy Chief Steve Coufal
Sergeant Michael Cavanaugh
Sergeant William Muldoon
Sergeant Michael Vittitoe

Thank you for taking the time to write to show your support of the Omaha Police Department. Sergeant Vittitoe, Cavanaugh and Muldoon all performed very professionally during this critical incident. We appreciate them very much.

DRUG USE IS LIFE ABUSE™

September 5, 1996

[redacted]
Mr. Jim Skinner
Chief of Police
Omaha Police Department
505 South 15 Street
Omaha, NE 68102

Dear Chief Skinner:

I am writing to call your attention to a situation that developed during last week's coverage of the aftermath of the police chase/accident at 25th and Wirt.

Since you were at the scene I don't need to go into a lot of background detail.

What happened to my news photographer trying to cover that story was something that shouldn't have and it's a topic we've all discussed on many occasions. It was, regrettably, a case of some police officers trying to be news "editors" by shining their flashlights directly into the lens of our camera and, in one instance, a police sergeant putting his hand over the lens.

Chief, I know you don't condone this kind of behavior. I know you've taken steps in the area of training and issued directives to deal directly with this kind of thing. Yet, it happens. I recognize it was a highly charged, emotional scene for officers who were dealing with one of their own who was critically injured.

But I don't feel there was any need for professional officers.to impede our ability to cover this tragic story.

I've included a videotape copy for your review.

Sincerely,

John Clark
News Director

cc: Roger Hamer
Loren Tobia, KMTV
Roseann Shannon, KETV
Karl Bieber, KPTM

3501 FARNAM STREET
OMAHA, NE 68131
402/346-6666
FAX: 402/233-7880

Nebraska News Photographer's Association
20609 Laramie Road
Elkhorn, NE 68022
September 9, 1996

Chief James Skinner
Omaha Police Department
515 South 14th Street
Omaha, NE 68102

Dear Chief Skinner:

As president of the Nebraska News Photographer's Association, I must protest the conduct of some of your officers at the scene of the accident and subsequent injury of Officer Keith Thompson on August 28th.

Since you were on the scene at the time, you are familiar with the situation. As Officer Thompson was taken to a rescue squad, several officers blinded the cameras with flashlights. Others created a human shield with arms raised, while another officer (Joe Schenkelberg) grabbed a camera lens and physically planted himself in close proximity of a camera, clearly interfering with a journalist's ability to cover the story. All of this in an attempt to stop the news media from performing its duty to the public.

Do you condone such actions on the part of your officers to interfere with the working press at a news event?

While no one can blame officers for feeling sympathetic toward Officer Thompson, these organized acts violate the guidelines of the News Media Policy currently in effect. Officers are instructed to act in a professional manner and not to allow emotionalism to interfere with the performance of their duties. Shining flashlights into camera lenses infers speculation about what visuals are being recorded, another violation of the policy. Covering a lens with a hand is a blatant violation.

Media personnel were situated behind the crime scene tape. That line was well established before Officer Thompson was taken to the rescue squad. Command officers were aware of the media's physical positioning. At one point, Officer Schenkelberg was reminded that media was behind the line established by police personnel. He responded that he had just created a new line.

We are not trying to trivialize the situation concerning Officer Thompson. We fully understand the seriousness of his

injuries and wish him and his family the best. However, the circumstances surrounding his injury are news. When an officer representing the public is injured, the public has a right to know. That right includes visual reporting. By officers interfering with media personnel, the relationship between police and the press is severely damaged.

The Nebraska News Photographer's Association requests that those officers involved in this incident be informed as to the seriousness of their actions the night of August 28th and dealt with accordingly.

We respect the feelings of officers when a comrade is injured. However, we cannot allow a few officers to damage the relationship between the media and police. Therefore, the Nebraska News Photographer's Association condemns the actions of those officers involved and requests that steps be taken to insure that this unfortunate fiasco does not occur again.

I look forward to hearing from you and hope we may work together to heal our working relations.

I may be contacted at 346-6666 (ext. 7273) or at 280-5416 by telephone. Written correspondence may be sent to 20609 Laramie Rd., Elkhorn, NE, 68022.

Sincerely,

Roger Hamer
President
Nebraska News Photographer's Association

cc.
Omaha Mayor Hal Daub
Omaha Public Safety Director John Packett

City of Omaha
Hal Daub, Mayor

Omaha Police Department
505 South 15th Street
Omaha, Nebraska 68102-2769
(402) 444-5600

James N. Skinner
Chief of Police

September 23, 1996

Roger Hamer
Nebraska News Photographer's Association
20609 Laramie Road
Elkhorn, Nebraska 68022

Dear Mr. Hamer:

I am in receipt of your letter regarding the incident at Officer Thompson's accident scene.

I have forwarded a copy of your letter and the video tape that was given to us by John Clark, who is the News Director of WOWT, to Captain Thorson, (Northeast Precinct), in order to insure that he and his Command Staff are aware of this matter and your concerns.

I too am concerned about our relationship with the news media and have always attempted to do everything possible to further that relationship and will continue to do so in the future.

Sincerely,

Jim Skinner
Chief of Police

JNS/DT/pm

Murray, James (OPD)

To: OPD EVERYONE
Subject: Focus Group

Roger Hamer a photographer from WOWT (Channel 6) is working on a graduate thesis and is interested in forming a "focus group" consisting of police officers willing to discuss issues (Police Community Relations). This is a purely voluntary effort and there is no compensation involved. Anyone interested is encouraged to call Mr. Hamer at 346-6666 (ext 7273) by Wednesday 12 March 1997 .

STUDY RESULTS (FROM 4-1-92 TO 4-12-92)

KPTM

Interviews---27 W/M-17 W/F-5 B/M-5 men-22, women-5

7 of 27 interviews were choice W/M-3, W/F-3, B/M-1

Interviewed one victim-W/F Interviewed 1 officer (Omaha)

Who was interviewed-W/M-63%
W/F-18.5%
B/M-18.5%

KMTV

Interviews-65 W/M-41 (63%), W/F-10 (29%), B/B-4 (6%) AA/M-1 (1.5%)

Men interviewed 46 of 65 times.

22 Choice Interviews- 13 W/M (59%), 9 W/F

42% of the women interviewed were victimes of crime.
Interviewed 5 police officers/ 3 from Omaha.
Interviewed minorities 7.7% of the time.

KETV

Interviews-73 W/M-39 (53.4%), W/F-26 (38.4%), B/M-4, B/F-2
H/M-1, AA/M-1.

Men interviewed 45 of 73 times.

7 choice interviews-W/M-6, B/M-1.

Interviewed 25 victime, W/M-6, W/F-16, B/M-1, B/F-1, H/M-1.
Interviewed 9 police officers/ 5 from Omaha
17 of 28 women interviewed were victims of crime (60.7%).
6 of 39 W/M were victims of crime-15.3%.

Interviewed minorities 11% of time.

WOWT

Interviews-49 W/M-28, W/F-15, B/M-3, H/M-3.

18 choice interviews-W/M-6, W/F-8 (53.3%), B/M-1, H/M-3

17 victimes of crime, W/M-6, W/F-8 (53.3%), H/M-3
8 interviews with law enforcement (2 from Omaha)

TOTALS

Interviews-214	W/M-125	(58.4%)
	W/F- 65	(30.3%)
	B/M- 16	(7.4%)
	B/F- 2	(1.8%)
	H/M- 4	(3.6%)
	AA/M- 2	(1.8%)

88.8% of all interviews were with whites.
Women were interviewed 31.3% of the time.
Of 65 W/F interviews, 33 were victimesw of crime (50.7%).
7 of 24 minorities interviewed were crime victims (29%).
All four Hispanic men interviewed were crime victims.

55 choice interviews conducted.

W/M-	28
W/F-	20
B/M-	3
H/M-	4

48 of 55 choice interviews were with whites (87.2%).
B/M selected for choice interviews 18.7% of the time.
Interviewed 23 police officers/11 from Omaha area.

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