A Content Analysis Technique for Newspaper Articles Related to Police: An

Exploratory Study

by

Adam Creatura

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Signature and Release Page

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        Adam Creatura, Student   Date

Approvals: _____   11-20-06
        Dr. James A. Conser, Thesis Advisor   Date

          _____   11/20/06
        Dr. John M. Hazy, Committee Member   Date

          _____   11-20-06
        Dr. Christian Onwudiwe, Committee Member   Date

          _____   11/20/06
        Rick Mahan, Committee Member   Date

          _____   11/30/06
        Peter J. Kasvinsky, Dean of School of Graduate Studies & Research Date

Abstract

Police image created through the media has a powerful influence on the public. This study utilized a unique content analysis technique to detect the image of police developed by a local newspaper. The research question was: "Can a content analysis technique for newspaper articles related to police reveal an overall image of the police?" It was hypothesized that "There are more newspaper articles portraying police negatively than positively." Police related articles were analyzed to discover how many positive articles there were as opposed to negative ones. The content analysis technique was designed to detect an image creating pattern for police if indeed there was one. Results identified that although positive articles were greater in number, negative articles were considerably more prevalent in front page and repeated newspaper coverage. This study recognized the importance of police agencies understanding how they are perceived in printed media so they can more effectively relate to the public. The research provided a tool that can be utilized by police departments concerned with how their image is presented to the people they serve and protect.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

This thesis is concerned with how a local newspaper portrays its image of the police through its printed articles. Its emphasis is placed on a method of analysis that can be used to determine the overall image portrayed by a newspaper. This thesis sets out to develop and effectively implement a structured method for analyzing the content of newspaper articles. Therefore, not only does the thesis attempt to uncover an image creating pattern, it also presents a unique content analysis procedure used to detect a pattern if indeed there is one. The study focused on answering the following question: Can a content analysis technique for newspaper articles related to police reveal an overall image of the police?

What is the reason for selecting a local newspaper as the focus of the study over other media types? Keep in mind the selectivity of newspaper media. People can choose the articles they wish to read. Also keep in mind the fact that the major local newspaper in a city has little competition because it generally is the only newspaper for the jurisdiction. Therefore, the newspaper writers and editors do not have to necessarily "sensationalize" police stories to beat out its competitors like local TV news stations often do in order to gain viewers over other television channels (Weitzer & Kubrin, 2004). For example some local TV news programs might emphasize certain stories in order to attract viewers, therefore altering the viewer's perception on certain topics (Weitzer & Kubrin, 2004). A local newspaper does not have to compete in this way. Also, TV news will increase reports on particular matters in order to increase ratings, whereas newspapers do not necessarily have to increase the frequency of certain issues

for the same prior mentioned reason (Weitzer & Kubrin, 2004, p. 501). TV is obviously visual so it naturally has a greater impact on the senses. Print puts forth information in a more passive manner (Weitzer & Kubrin, 2004). Due to all these reasons, newspaper media is likely to be a more accurate depiction of police than TV provides.

Why does this topic need to be studied? Articles in all local newspapers share one similar attribute: They all are presumed to be factual and truthful by the individuals who read them. Local newspapers are designed for the purpose of conveying accurate information to the residents within the newspaper's readership. For example, when one reads a newspaper from the town they are from, that person is often interested in finding out what is happening in and around the area. Regular readers then rely on their local newspaper as an important source of information when it comes to making decisions on how to perceive the various people, organizations, and institutions written about within the newspaper.

Police agencies and their officers are a popular segment focused on by local newspapers. Because the police are often reported about in local newspapers, it is important to know how they are being portrayed. Whatever predominant police image is being created, it is likely to be the image a local newspaper reader holds towards them. This is important because the police are responsible for the general safety of the citizens within their community. Because the police work directly with the community members, it is crucial for the police department to establish good relations with the people they are serving and protecting. When police-community relations are positive, it allows police agencies to perform their duties more effectively by working hand and hand with the public.

Community policing is a prime example. "Community policing links police and neighborhood residents in a joint effort to address urban crime problems" (Maxfield & Babbie, 2001, p. 248). As a police department, knowing your community and having their support is a very effective crime fighting tool. For example, police departments conducting programs where parents can bring their children to meet their local police officers, provide a chance for parents and their children to gain knowledge on what to do to keep their children safe from criminal situations and safety hazards. Topics in these "meet and greet" programs range from discussions on how to avoid strangers to awareness on the dangers of firearms and drugs. On the other hand, if police-community relations are poor, officers will find many obstacles while performing their jobs. An example of poor police-community relations would be when the citizens adopt the attitude that the police are their adversaries. This can result from citizens in high crime areas mainly seeing the police making arrests, questioning subjects, and being cautious around other citizens in their neighborhood. Miscommunication and faulty perceptions of police will lead to conflict and unresolved problems. To avoid this, police departments must work very hard to deliver a positive message to the community.

The purpose of this study is to decipher (as stated earlier) how a local newspaper presents police agencies through its printed articles by using a content analysis technique uniquely developed for this particular study. It is the image created by the newspaper that has a very important role in determining how police-community relations are developed. It is also important to an agency to have a technique that could be used on an on-going basis to gauge the image being portrayed in local newspapers.

It is important to note that the researcher discloses that he is a full time police officer. He acknowledges this for reasons of potential bias, but his primary concern is to develop a technique that will assist agencies in gauging the image portrayed in local newspapers so better community relations can be fostered.

Police administrators can use this study as a basis for image perception of their own departments. The data gathering process along with the technique implemented to decipher the information can be used by departmental heads as a tool to get insight on how the public views their policing policies and practices. They can learn what areas of their agencies' performance that are appreciated by the community they serve and what job related activities need improved. Successfully applying the content analysis technique to individual departments could allow management to pass on valuable information to patrol officers who are the ones most in contact with the community. Such positive policing practices are desired by the community and creates a solid base upon which to build a progressive and highly functional police department.

Chapter two of this study will address the literature review for the research project. Included in the review are publications and texts relating to police and how they are portrayed throughout the media. The literature review will also include publications, texts, and online sources dealing with the subject of content analysis. The theory guiding the research project, communications theory, will also be described in the next section. Chapter three "Methods" will explain where and how the data were gathered for the study and it will also have a detailed description of the original content analysis technique specifically created for the study. Chapter four of the thesis directly focuses on the results and findings obtained from the use of the content analysis technique. Chapter five

contains a summary of all major findings of the study and also addresses any problems or limitations the research project had. In addition, it also discusses what could have been done differently, and includes recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

There are numerous published works dedicated to exploring the relationship between police agencies and the people they serve and protect. This chapter reviews selected publications related to the police and how they are perceived by the media. Again, this particular thesis attempts to derive how a local newspaper portrays the police in general and the main focus is on the original content analysis technique used to detect the perceived image (the content analysis technique created for this study is described in detail in Chapter Three of this thesis). Also, sources were reviewed covering the subject matter of content analysis and how it is applied for research purposes. Therefore, this literature review is divided into two sections: the first dealing with media and the police and the second focusing on content analysis.

Communication is the underlying theme for the thesis. Communication is a broad subject so there are many interpretations of what "communication" actually is. Communication involves how information is transmitted and what effects the information has. It is described by one definition on-line at *Dictionary.com*: "n: the discipline that studies the principals of transmitting information and the methods by which it is delivered (as print or radio or television etc.)".

The Importance of Media to the Police

Reviewed first was *Popular Culture, Crime, and Justice*. This book was a compilation of various research studies dealing with the criminal justice system. Each study contained in the book describes the methodology of the study, the results of the study, and the conclusions drawn from the research project.

Chapter six, entitled "Police, Courts and Corrections in the Media" by Steven M. Chermak, dealt directly with the subject matter of this thesis. He wrote, "Newspapers, television stations, and radios are among the most influential sources used by the public to develop opinions about crime and the criminal justice system . . ." (Chermak, 1998, p. 87). He set out to determine how police, courts and corrections are portrayed in the media by collecting data from crime stories presented in newspapers from six different cities (Dallas, Detroit, Cleveland, San Francisco, Albany and Buffalo). He grouped the cities by their crime rates and three categories were created: cities with "frightening" crime rates (Dallas, Detroit), cities with "significant" crime rates (Cleveland, San Francisco) and cities with "average" crime rates (Albany, Buffalo) (Chermak, 1998). From each grouping the researcher selected two local newspapers and one television station to collect content data on crime related stories. He coded a total of thirty-six days of newspaper content and fifty-six days of television content. In addition to the content analysis, he also observed and interviewed employees working for a newspaper and a television organization both located in an anonymous large city.

After the researcher described the methodology of his study, he then went on to make a statement that is related to this thesis project: "Criminal justice organizations have a vested interest in how the public perceives their organization" (Chermak, 1998, p. 89). The prior quote reflects the importance of police agencies having a positive influence on the public they serve. As noted in the introduction, police agencies perform their duties much more effectively when working with a supportive community. Police reported activities through newspaper media is one very crucial source of information supplied to the public. Because of this fact, it is important to understand the image

newspaper media is creating for police organizations. According to the researcher, the results of his study show that "[m]ore than 38 percent of the crime stories analyzed covered activities by the police" (Chermak, 1998, p. 91). This percentage displays how often police organizations are represented throughout the media. Given the popularity of police within the media, it is important how they are perceived by the public. Although Chermak stressed how police are often portrayed favorable throughout news media, he did indicate: "Police department corruption, scandal, and officers who break the law are priority news items" (Chermak, 1998, p. 93). The prior quote is a concern for police organizations and this is why more progressive police departments are actively involved with the media in order to help develop an accurate understanding of how their agencies operate.

Chermak concluded by stating, "Police officers have a significant stake in what is presented about their organization because of direct public scrutiny" (Chermak, 1998. p. 98). Through his observations, he had noted how police agencies are realizing the importance of their media created image and how they are taking aggressive steps to work hand-and-hand with the media to produce an accurate and positive image of their departments. According to the researcher, the media is often willing to work closely with police organizations because it ultimately creates more efficient news reporting (Chermak, 1998).

Policing and the Media: Facts, fictions and factions specifically focused on the police and their relationship with the media. It described how police organizations are presented in media coverage by recalling various studies dealing with police and all media types.

The book began by describing how the public gathers information on the police. It described how direct contact is one way of learning about the police but went on to state how dealing directly with the police ". . . is likely to be heavily supplemented with information gleaned from newspapers, television, radio, film and the Internet" (Leishman & Mason, 2003, p. 3). The overall theme of the book adhered mainly to the police being represented positively throughout media reporting but also recognized that stories of police scandal and corruption are prime material for journalists and reporters. It contained an interesting notion credited to researcher Robert Reiner that supports how police are more often portrayed positively. He claims that when a police scandal is reported, there is focus on the one bad individual amongst an honest organization, therefore placing the blame on the one or few officers involved instead of casting a negative image on the department as a whole (Leishman & Mason, 2003). After detailing Reiner's studies early in the book, the authors make the following conclusion about police and how they are portrayed in the media: "Ultimately, mass media coverage does tend to be supportive of police, representing and reproducing order through its underlying common-sense ideology about crime and policing" (Leishman & Mason, 2003, p. 25).

Policing and the Media went into more detail about police media coverage by stating how police officers often hold a "skeptical disdain" towards journalists due to the way they report police matters (Leishman & Mason, 2003). The authors further stated: "For many police officers, the media are still frequently perceived as yet another hostile and unsympathetic quarter from which unjustified criticism can regularly be expected" (Leishman & Mason, 2003, p. 29). The book claims police culture as a whole is often

mistrusting of all media types. Although Leishman & Mason (2003) wrote on how police
are often aversive towards media reporters, they stated the following:

> . . . despite police misgivings about media (mis)representations of them,
> accumulated evidence from content analysis studies convincingly demonstrates
> that the way in which the police are presented in the press and other mass media is
> for the most part, a positive portrayal. (p. 29)

Reporting Crime: The Media Politics of Criminal Justice examined how crime is
reported throughout the media and what effect the reporting has on the criminal justice
system. It highlighted how police agencies are directly impacted by their media created
image. Chapter four of the book "Promoting the Police" gave excellent insight into the
importance of police-media relations. At the start of the chapter there were two
statements which support the basis of this thesis. First was: ". . . as far as routine news
about crime is concerned, it is the police who are looked to the most by journalists"
(Schlesinger & Tumber, 1994, p. 106). Second, the authors stated the following:
"Policing has always been a staple of crime-reporting, and the police are inherently an
object of more general reporting interest given their symbolic position as the everyday
representatives of law and order" (Schlesinger & Tumber, 1994, p. 107).

Knowing how prominent the police are throughout the media, the book
recognized how police organizations are actively taking part in promoting a positive
image to the public they serve. It specifically focused on the London Metropolitan Police
and the initiatives the agency took to help develop a more professional image. The
Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir Peter Imbert was interested in developing a
service oriented image rather than one focused primarily on the enforcement side of

policing (Schlesinger & Tumber, 1994). The book detailed how Commissioner Imbert realized back in 1988 the importance of how the public perceives the police. According to the authors, Imbert hired the Wolff Olins consultancy firm to recognize the weaknesses in his force and to point out what steps needed to be taken to create an optimistic public view of his department. The authors stated the following reasons for Imbert's progressive movement to help bolster the image of the Metropolitan Police Department: ". . . adverse media content was perceived inside the force as causing frustration, low morale, and lack of confidence in management by the staff. The poor public image was seen, moreover, as contributing to problems in recruitment (Schlesinger & Tumber, 1994, p. 108).

The report developed by the consultancy firm was titled *Force for Change* and its primary concerns were the police department's identity and how it was perceived. Objectives indicated by the report stated how the department needed to positively develop its attitude, behavior, and communication towards the community along with changes in upper management processes. The consultancy advisors stated that implementation of these objectives "would produce more favourable public opinion towards the police" (Schlesinger & Tumber, 1994, p. 109). This informative chapter ended with one very appropriate statement as it relates to this thesis: "There has been an uneven, but quite definite growth of general expertise in the police in response to the perceived need for image building and influencing public perceptions . . ."(Schlesinger & Tumber, 1994, p. 136).

A summary abstract illustrated in the June 2004 issue of the *National Institute of Justice Research Review* relates well to the police-media theme of *Reporting Crime: The*

Media Politics of Criminal Justice. Media Power and Information Control: A Study of Police Organizations and Media Relations contained the following pertinent statement: "Findings in this study indicate that a police department's media image may be affected more by how it handles news and manages information than by crime rates" (Lovell, 1994, p. 1).

In relation to the poor recruiting problems faced by the London Police Department, as mentioned in *Reporting Crime*, was the article titled *Big City Police Departments Face Recruiting Crisis . . .The Media Did It?* It covered how the media focusing on wrongful police acts has steered people away from wanting to become police officers. One particular incident covered in the article was how the former police commissioner of Buffalo gave mouth-to-mouth resuscitation to save the life of a woman lying on the street suffering from a heroin overdose. The first aid administered by the commissioner started the women breathing again. As it turns out the commissioner then had to be treated with hepatitis B shots for his heroic act. This brave act received only a few seconds coverage on that night's news but a police chase of a stolen car that struck a pedestrian, blaming the police for the injured pedestrian, was the lead story of the same news broadcast (Butterfield, 2001). It is this focus of the media on negative police events which is believed to have a definite connection to individuals not wanting to join the police force (Butterfield, 2001).

Police-Community Relations and the Administration of Justice stressed how the media plays a crucial role in developing expectations about police. A statement made in the book is direct and simple and also synonymous with this research project: ". . . the public are influenced considerably by the news media" (Hunter, Mayhall & Barker, 2000,

p. 135). Knowing how widespread policing is throughout the media and the media's influence on society, the authors state "The amount of emphasis given to police actions and the media's interpretation of those actions as either proper or improper has tremendous effect on the public's perception of the police" (Hunter et al., 2000, p. 135).

The following is an excerpt from *Police-Community Relations and the Administration of Justice* that exemplifies the reason for this thesis. Hunter et al. (2000) stated:

> The media represent a principal link between police agencies and the public they serve. Media impact on virtually every citizen is enormous, and crime news is a major media topic. Except for the relatively few people who become directly involved with the police, private citizens learn of police activity, of crime prevention, of the pursuit and apprehension of criminals and their disposition in the courts by what they read in the newspapers and see or hear on television and radio. True or not, positive or negative, what a citizen reads, hears, and observes in the local media largely defines the citizen's perception of the police (p. 224).

A study that supports the importance of the media created image of policing is the research project titled *Image Control: How Police Affect the Presentation of Crime News*. Recognizing the importance of the media created police image, the aim of the research project was to focus on how the police behave in order to control their presentation in the news media (Chermak, 1995). In the study, the following statement was made that is pertinent to this thesis: "The level of success achieved by police departments, when attempting to dictate a positive media image of themselves, affects how others define their role in society" (Chermak, 1995, p. 21).

The methodology used in the article was content analysis examining how the police were presented in both print and electronic media. In addition to the content analysis, the author also performed an ethnographic observation of one large newspaper and one large television station spanning approximately three months.

Findings from the study concluded police have an active and distinct role in determining which crime and police related stories make their way to the news. Not only do police organizations have a say in what is released, they also play a role in determining how the selected story is presented. Police officials use their abilities to downplay and emphasize certain aspects of a given police related story during its production phase (Chermak, 1995). Knowing the powerful role of police organizations when it comes to releasing information on occurrences within police work, the author stated how news reporters will often establish relationships with police officers who are willing to provide story information. Creating working relationships with police is credited as a way for journalists to produce more efficient crime stories (Chermak, 1995).

Overall, the findings of the study included two very influential statements. First, the author stated "Police input into the news selection and news production decisions affects how they get presented to the public" (Chermak, 1995, p. 26). Second, he noted: "Results for the content and ethnographic analysis indicate that police departments seek public support and assistance by feeding news media stories that are promotional, define the boundaries of their work, and legitimate their role in society" (Chermak, 1995, p. 35)

With reference to the importance of good police-community relations as stated in the introduction to this thesis, the next segment of this literature review will cover selected

publications about the police and the community and how their relationship deals with the topic at hand.

Community policing, in the book titled *The Move to Community Policing*, was described as a "customer-based" approach to policing. It is a way for police departments to work hand-and-hand with the public they serve. "This customer based approach leads to the development of partnerships with the community to better meet community needs and thus enhance police effectiveness" (Ford & Morash, 2002, p. 1). The aim of community policing is for the police to establish a relationship with the people they serve so they can prevent problems in their community rather than just reacting to incidents as they arise.

Since this particular research project is not about community policing, the subject is only being addressed as it relates to the overall theme of this thesis. For example, the above quote stresses police effectiveness is directly correlated with good community relations. And good community relations often begin with the public viewing the police in a positive light. One of the most important ways the public gains information about their police force is through the media. Therefore, the success of a police department attempting to implement community policing is directly affected by their overall image initially presented through media sources. And, as is the case with this particular study, it is the police image created by a local newspaper that stands to have a heavy impact on the everyday functioning and effectiveness of police agencies in general.

Now, returning to police-community relations, *Policing in the Community* elaborated on the vital importance of police agencies understanding and communicating

with the people in their jurisdiction. It offered an informative chapter dealing solely with police and the media.

When it comes to police-public relations that are fostered through media reporting, *Policing and the Community* by McDowell shared views that are consistent with the Chermak's research study titled *Image Control: How Police Affect the Presentation of Crime News* discussed earlier in this literature review. Chermak illustrated in his research how police departments play an active role in governing what police stories are released and what information the stories contain once they do make it to the media. According to McDowell in his book, police agencies operate with "secrecy" when it comes to releasing information to news sources. McDowell (1975) supplied reasons why police departments are reluctant in providing journalists and reporters with information on crime stories:

> This has been done to assure the security of officers, informants, victims and others. In addition, restraints on the release of information are guided by the need to avoid prejudicial pretrial publicity by police officers which could jeopardize an upcoming case (p. 265).

McDowell went on to state that controlled release of information to the media may serve the department's interest when it comes to how their media image is presented to the public. Due to these reasons, and again recognizing the similarities to Chermak's research, the author states ". . . the police have traditionally sought to control the manner in which news is released about the department and its activities" (McDowell, 1975, p. 265). This being known, it is clear police agencies recognize the importance of their media created image.

<u>The Content Analysis Technique</u>

The remainder of this literature review will address the research method chosen for this thesis: content analysis. "Content analysis is the analysis of text documents" (Trochim, 2001, p. 165). "Typically the major purpose of content analysis is to identify patterns in text" (Trochim, 2001, p. 165). This research method involves breaking down information into categories so it can be tested. "What makes the technique particularly rich and meaningful is its reliance on coding and categorizing of the data" (Stemler, 2001, p. 3). This thesis project involves categorizing information presented in articles from a local newspaper. The specifics of the research design will be described in the next chapter of this thesis.

Research Methods for Criminal Justice and Criminology contained an informative section dealing with a research project involving a content analysis of police related newspaper articles. As discussed in the book, the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) established by the 1994 Crime Bill to promote community policing was interested in the public image of community policing as presented in local newspapers (Maxfield & Babbie, 2001). The book went into detail about the study. Maxfield & Babbie (2001, p. 329) illustrated the appreciation of content analysis technique:

> Stephen Mastrofski and Richard Ritti (1999) conducted a content analysis of stories about community policing in newspapers serving 26 cities. The researchers found over 7,500 stories from 1993 through 1997, most focusing on a small number of themes: community, resources, and producing real results for the

community. Stories that offer a viewpoint on community policing are nearly

always overwhelmingly positive" (1999:10-11).

The authors mentioned that the study was ". . . an example of content analysis, the

systematic study of messages and the meaning those messages convey" (Maxfield &

Babbie, 2001, p. 329). According to the authors, the content analysis research method fit

well for studying communications.

An on-line source attempted to answer the question "What do Americans get from

their newspaper?" (The State of the News Media 2004, www.stateofthenews.org). In

order to answer this question a study was conducted utilizing information in articles from

16 different newspapers. After breaking down the information gathered within the

articles they were then placed into categories by topic. For example, the study included

articles dealing with government, foreign affairs, military, domestic affairs,

entertainment/celebrities, lifestyle, crime, business/commerce, science and

accidents/disasters (The State of the News Media 2004, www.stateofthenews.org).

Percentages were then produced showing what topic inspired the most articles. In the

study, articles dealing with government matters had the highest percentage of front page

coverage followed closely by articles about foreign affairs. The research performed in

the study is a working example of how content analysis is implemented to gather

information from newspaper articles.

This particular thesis project relied solely on the information collected through

newspaper articles, and the information was processed through an original content

analysis technique developed specifically for this study. The next chapter (Chapter 3 –

Methods) describes the unique content analysis research method in detail.

This literature review explained the importance of police image as created by media reporting. The media has a strong influence on public opinion in general and the actions of police personnel are prominent throughout media coverage. Knowing the importance of their media created image, police organizations are actively working to develop a positive relationship with the people they serve and protect. A crucial step in developing this relationship is the thorough creation of a positive media image. This thesis set out to answer: "Can a content analysis technique for newspaper articles related to police reveal an overall image of the police?" and it was hypothesized that "There are more newspaper articles portraying police negatively than positively."

Chapter 3

Methods

As stated at the end of the literature review, the research question for this thesis is: "Can a content analysis technique for newspaper articles related to police reveal an overall image of the police?" It was hypothesized that "There are more newspaper articles portraying police negatively than positively." In order to answer the research question and prove or disprove the hypothesis, the data gathered for this thesis were tested through an original content analysis technique created for this thesis.

The data gathered for this study consisted of 610 police related articles contained within 90 consecutive issues of a local newspaper published in the Mahoning Valley of Northeast Ohio from February 01, 2005 through May 01, 2005. The newspapers were obtained through regular residential delivery service. All articles dealt with police agencies within the United States. Police blotter information and police related articles about departments outside the U.S. were excluded. This study did not involve any hazards to human subjects and was therefore exempt from full review by the Human Subjects Research Committee of Youngstown State University (see Appendix A).

After analyzing both the headline and content of the 610 police related articles, they were categorized using six separate variables that together make-up the content analysis technique developed for this study. The variables were as follows:

1) Type of Article Headline = Positive, Negative, or Neutral. Whether an article headline was positive, negative or neutral was determined by reading the entire headline. Certain key words and phrases contained within the headline were used as deciders to classify the headline as positive, negative, or neutral. For example,

a positive article may have included words such as (but not limited to): "courageous", "successful", "heroic acts", "new police programs", "community policing" and "arrests made". A negative article headline may have included the following words and phrases: "scandal", "corruption", "excessive force by police" and "lawsuit brought against police". A neutral article headline would have contained words and phrases that did not at first directly relate the article to the police or its content would create an unbiased opinion of the police. An example would be the following: "Theft at Local Bowling Alley" or "Police Called to a Dispute". Although these words and phrases could have been determining factors, the headline was designated as positive, negative, or neutral after reading all the words contained in the headline.

2) Type of Article Content = Whether the police related article was positive, negative, or neutral was first determined by reading the entire article. Certain key words and phrases in the article were used as deciders to classify it as either positive, negative, or neutral, using similar tests as for the headline variable. Again, these words as phrases could have been a determining factor in classifying the articles but an article was not categorized as positive, negative, or neutral until its entire content was examined.

3) Description of the Article = Articles were placed into one of the following four categories :

    i. Award (including implementation of new police programs, positive successful interactions with the community, promotions and new hires, heroic acts, achievement awards, effective police work

including citations, arrests, successful drug raids, detective work/undercover operations leading to convictions, traffic stops leading to arrests, establishing Operating a Vehicle under the Influence (OVI) checkpoints, and increased patrols)

    ii.   Scandal (including police corruption, police brutality, excessive force, abuse of power, poor police work, accepting bribes and/or payoffs, court trials based on wrongful actions of police and all other police activities logically accepted as creating a negative image for police)

    iii.   Injury/Death (reports of an officer(s) being injured or killed while on duty)

    iv.   Other (all other police related topics containing no bias)

4) Position of Article = The articles were categorized as Front Page or Not Front Page.

5) Type of Picture = The pictures were categorized as positive, negative, or neutral after viewing the pictures and logically determining their meaning. There was also a designation for articles containing no pictures.

6) Repeat = Whether a certain type of reported police related story was repeated more than once (for example an ongoing investigation into a particular scandalous event involving the police). Articles were designated as Yes or No for this variable.

For the first two variables, "Type of Article Headline" and "Type of Article Content", positive article headlines and content were designated the number one (1) when

they were entered into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences-Student Version 12 (SPSS) for statistical testing. Negative ones were assigned the number two (2) and all neutral article headlines and content were entered as zero (0). For the third variable, "Description of Article", articles categorized as "award" were assigned the number one (1), articles classified as "scandal" the number two (2), ones dealing with "injury/death" were assigned the number four (4) and articles designated as "other' were entered into SPSS as zero (0). Regarding the fourth variable, "Position of Article", front page articles were entered as the number one (1) and articles not on the front page were entered as zero (0). "Type of Picture", the fifth variable, involved categorizing positive pictures as the number one (1), negative pictures as the number two (2), neutral pictures as zero (0), and articles with no picture were assigned the number four (4). For the final variable, "Repeat", articles that were repeated were assigned the number one (1) and articles that were not repeated were entered into SPSS as zero (0).

Chapter four presents the results of this content analysis technique as it was used to decipher the meaning of the 610 police related articles. There are percentages detailing each variable, relating how many positive articles there were as opposed to negative ones. It also details what articles (positive or negative) made the front page of the newspaper more often. In addition, the results show what article category is more likely to be repeated.

Chapter 4

Results and Findings

"Can a content analysis technique for newspaper articles related to police reveal an overall image of the police?" is the research question of this thesis and it was hypothesized "There are more newspaper articles portraying police negatively than positively." The results of the 610 police related articles that were analyzed to answer these issues are contained in this chapter. They were statistically tested and the findings are discussed below as to their overall meaning to this research.

Findings

Tables 1 through 6 identify the six research variables and the percentage breakdown of each for the 610 police related articles analyzed:

Table 1

Percentage Results of the Article Headline Variable

	Positive	Negative	Neutral
Article Headline	37.9%	12.3%	49.8%

n = 610 articles

Table 2

Percentage Results of the Article Content Variable

	Positive	Negative	Neutral
Article Content	51.5%	15.1%	33.4%

n = 610 articles

Table 3

Percentage Results of the Article Description Variable

	Award	Scandal	Death/Injury	Neutral
Article Description	51.0%	14.9%	2.6%	31.5%

n = 610 articles

Table 4

Percentage Results of the Article Position Variable

	Front Page	Not Front Page
Article Position	13.1%	86.9%

n = 610 articles

Table 5

Percentage Results of the Type of Picture Variable

	Positive	Negative	Neutral	No Picture
Type of Picture	1.8%	0%	14.3%	83.9%

n = 610 articles

Table 6

Percentage Results of the Repeat Variable

	Yes	No
Repeat	20.7%	79.3%

n = 610 articles

Of the 610 "article headlines", 37.9% were positive, 12.3% were negative and the majority, 49.8%, were neutral (see Table 1). For the "article content" variable, the analysis technique determined that there were more positive police related articles in the selected newspaper than there were negative ones (51% positive, 15% negative) (see Table 2). Therefore the hypothesis "There are more newspaper articles portraying police negatively than positively" was not supported.

Reinforcing the "article content" variable was the analysis of the "article description" variable. Table 3 indicates that 51% of the articles were classified as "award", 14.9% as "scandal", 2.6% dealt with "death/injury", and 31.5% of the police related articles remained neutral.

Analysis of variable four, "article position", showed that only 13.1% of all the articles of the sample made it to the front page while 86.9% did not (see Table 4). Table 5 indicates 83.9% of the 610 articles reviewed did not contain a picture (the "type of picture" variable), 1.8% were positive, none were negative, and 14.3% were neutral. It was surprising to find so few police related articles containing pictures since police operate in a public environment. The sixth variable, concerning whether an article was repeated (the "repeat" variable), was found to be displayed in 20.7% of cases, so 79.3% of the articles were not repeated (see Table 6).

Results from the frequency tables weigh heavily in favor of the newspaper presenting more positive police related articles than negative ones. However, there was an interesting finding when SPSS Cross-Tabulation Testing was run. The variable "article position" was cross-referenced with the variable "article description" (see Appendix B, Table B1) and it showed there were a total of 311 articles classified as "award" (positive), 91 articles classified as "scandal" (negative), 16 articles classified as "death/injury", and 192 were classified as neutral. Although the positive articles outnumbered the negative ones by more than 3 to 1, negative articles made it to the front page nearly twice as much (34 negative front page articles, 18 positive front page articles). In addition, the variable "article description" was cross-referenced with the variable "repeat" (see Appendix B, Table B2) and the analysis found that of the 91 negative articles 64.8% (59 articles) were repeated while only 9.3% (29 articles) of the 311 positive police articles were repeated one or more times throughout the sample issues of the selected local newspaper.

Discussion

The content analysis technique developed for this study was able to detect how negative police related newspaper articles landed more front page coverage than positive ones. It also revealed that negative articles are far more likely to be repeated as opposed to positive articles. Initially it was hypothesized that negative police related articles would outnumber the positive ones, but the opposite was found. It can be reasonably said the belief that the selected local newspaper is printing more negativity about police may result from the fact that negative articles occupy the most popular position of the paper more so than positive articles. Also, repetition of certain scandalous police activity throughout different issues can give the perception the newspaper is focusing mainly on the negative aspects of policing.

Results of this study relate well to prior research discussed in the literature review. It had been brought forth that police are often portrayed favorably throughout the media but the author stressing this point also made the following statement: "Police department corruption, scandal, and officers who break the law are priority news items" (Chermak, 1998, p. 93).

An important reason for conducting this research lies in the fact "Criminal justice organizations have a vested interest in how the public perceives their organization" (Chermak, 1998, p. 89). "Police officers have a significant stake in what is presented about their organization because of direct public scrutiny" (Chermak, 1998. p. 98).

Chapter five of this thesis describes the conclusion and summary of this study, the limitations of the research, and recommendations for future research on the subject of

police media relations. It contains what could have been done differently in the study and how it could be expanded upon when conducting future studies.

Chapter 5

Conclusions, Limitations, and Recommendations

In this study it was hypothesized "There are more newspaper articles portraying police negatively than positively" but the opposite was found. However, the content analysis technique determined that although there were considerably fewer negative police related articles; the negative ones were far more likely to make front page news. Also, the technique revealed negative police activities are repeated overwhelmingly more than positive police practices. Therefore, the research question: "Can a content analysis technique for newspaper articles related to police reveal an overall image of the police?" was in part answered. The findings support the contention that reporting on the negative aspects of policing (in the selected local newspaper), although fewer in number when compared to positive police cases, takes priority for front page and repeated coverage.

Based on this study's findings, it is believed that the content analysis methodology utilized in assessing the sampled newspaper's image of police can be used by police departments. Police agencies could utilize the technique to assess how newspapers are reporting their performance to their local communities. If done according to the rigors of research, such assessments would add to the perceived reliability and validity of the technique. Replication of the content analysis methodology and utilization in an agency environment is encouraged.

There are several limitations to this study. The primary one is that only one researcher read and categorized the 610 police related articles by way of the content analysis technique. Another limitation would be that only one newspaper was looked at in the study over one selected time frame. Also, information printed in a local newspaper

was the only type of media researched for the thesis. It should also be mentioned that during the time frame of the study, the local newspaper experienced a labor strike by some employees.

Recommendations for future research would be to have more than one person reading and classifying the police related articles. For example, give the selected newspaper to a focus group and have them categorize (by consensus) the police related articles according to the variables used in this study.

One way to add to the study would be to direct attention on time frames. For example, one newspaper would be the focus of the research but the content analysis technique would be applied to police related articles taken from the archives of the paper in 1960 (or any time frame desired) and comparing the results to articles from present time.

Or, the study could focus on police agencies with public information officers offering their evaluation of how police are presented in the newspaper. Directing the study specifically to pubic information officers can develop better police-media relations by allowing the officers to evaluate how their agency is being presented and what improvements need addressed.

Another recommendation is to have more than one newspaper in the sample for the study. Two newspapers can be researched and compared to see if police image portrayal within the papers is similar. Also, information could be gathered from different cities or regions of the United States to see how police perceptions vary within geographic areas.

The study could be expanded by researching more than just printed newspaper media. Suggestions would include adding information gathered from questionnaires given to police officers to evaluate their views on how police are presented in the media. The same questionnaires can be given to journalists and newspaper readers to discover how they perceive police media. After information is gathered from all three groups, the results could then be compared to the data extracted from a selected newspaper's police related articles that were analyzed using the content analysis technique. The content analysis technique can also be coupled with community surveys to compare the image being portrayed by a newspaper to direct responses from citizens on how they view the police.

Police related newspaper articles can also be agency specific. For example, articles dealing with city police can be divided into categories such as City 1, City 2, City 3, and conclusions can be drawn as to what city has more positive reporting articles as opposed to negative ones.

Research can also be done comparing the information gathered from police related newspaper articles to information gathered about police through local television news broadcasts. For example, information about police activities can be extracted from a local newspaper over a selected time frame and during the same time frame the researcher can be gathering information on police related stories broadcasted on a local news channel.

Police image created through the media has a powerful influence on the public. Perceptions people hold about police are created through what one reads in newspapers, views on-line, hears on the radio, and views on television. This study offered a way to

detect police image within a local newspaper. Police understanding of how the public perceives them will help to develop better police community relations. Establishing a good relationship with the people they protect and serve is the foundation of effective policing.

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Appendix A

Human Subjects Research Committee Approval

June 20, 2005

Dr. James Conser, Principal Investigator
Mr. Adam Creatura, Co-investigator
Department of Criminal Justice
UNIVERSITY

RE: HSRC Protocol Number: 144-2005
        Title: A Content Analysis for Newspaper Articles Related to Police: An Exploratory
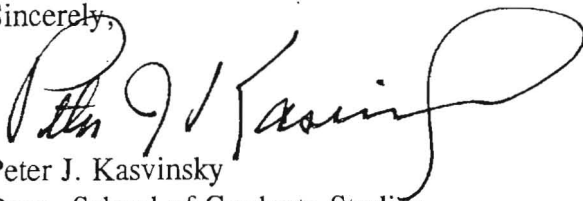   Study

Dear Dr. Conser and Mr. Creatura:

The Human Subjects Research Committee has reviewed the abovementioned protocol and
determined that it is exempt from full committee review based on a DHHS Category 4
exemption.

Any changes in your research activity should be promptly reported to the Human Subjects
Research Committee and may not be initiated without HSRC approval except where necessary
to eliminate hazard to human subjects. Any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects
should also be promptly reported to the Human Subjects Research Committee.

The HSRC would like to extend its best wishes to you in the conduct of this study.

Sincerely,

Peter J. Kasvinsky
Dean, School of Graduate Studies
Research Compliance Officer

PJK/cc

c: Dr. Tammy King, Chair
        Department of Criminal Justice

Appendix B

Selected SPSS Cross-tabulations

Table B1

position * script

Crosstab

Count

		script				Total
		neut	award	scandal	death/injury	
position	not	165	293	57	15	530
	frontpage	27	18	34	1	80
Total		192	311	91	16	610

Table B2

repeat * script

Crosstab

Count

		script				Total
		neut	award	scandal	death/injury	
repeat	no	158	282	32	12	484
	yes	34	29	59	4	126
Total		192	311	91	16	610