
The Correlation Between Police And Media

The Catawba County Sheriff Department is a prime organization built on a solid foundation, and moral values. The Sheriff's office major responsibilities include security and maintenance of the county jail, as well as county schools, and other government entities. Unlike smaller departments that have main objectives of being a deterrent towards crime. The Sheriff's office has a major responsibility with community relationship and making sure the government functions stay running. Our department is unique to surrounding departments because of the large area we are forced to safeguard. Though extremely big the sheriff department only has 198 deputies and employees. This includes people in the jail, as well as courts, and schools, which leaves very few people to do the job of patrol which is what most people think about. Though very large, the department manages to stand as the focal point, and model agency of the county. Departments like this have huge responsibilities, and to keep something like this functioning it requires active members of the community.

This is where volunteers and interns come into the equation. A day in the life of an intern involves many different tasks, and is a unique experience that promotes growth, and rounds you to be a better person. Interns play an important role in daily tasks around the office and are important to keeping a functioning office. For example, one of the major responsibilities of the sheriff office is managing gun permits for the citizens of the county. Due to the high population, and genuine political views of the county this is a very tasking job. Interns are a very important piece of this puzzle. One of the major responsibilities of interns is to keep this part of the department organized and flowing. Some days are spent filing hundreds of files in an effort to keep organized. Other days are spent doing fingerprints to make sure you don't keep people waiting too long. Like described some days around the office can be very boring but provide a major key in the daily operation of the department.

On other days interns spend their time riding with or shadowing sworn officers throughout the department. This is often times where you learn the most, and where some of your most exciting memories come from. During the time spent with officers you are normally out of the office, which means you never really know what you are getting into. I for one have been everywhere from helping elderly people, to as much as a homicide scene. These are situations that will be burned into your memory forever, some for the good, and some for the bad, either way they are experiences you can look back on. Through each situation there is always something to learn, and often times even more comes from the conversations with the officers afterwards. This valuable experience is something that will change you forever, it forces you to grow, forces you to learn, and in the end, you come out with a completely new respect for officers, and the job they do.

Over the past few years one thing that has really been visible to anyone who keeps up with current events is how police have been labeled in the news. This internship gave me the opportunity to learn a lot through the unique experience of seeing it first-hand. Through the internship you see how an office runs, and the importance of keeping a functional office. You notice how delicate cases can be, and the detail that must be put into cases for them to see the end. But you also see how outside forces can affect how officers do their job. This was something that seems hard to ignore, and something that I had to look into. Mass media is a

great tool and, in many situations, helps to develop better departments. However, there are instances in which it causes more problems than it helps.

Mass Media

Media is something that has been around since the day of man. In early times it may have just been word of mouth. Things have evolved in ways that many people could never imagine. Going from writing to now having information in the palm of our hands the way we get our information has changed in big ways. Mass media has developed through the use of technology. Instead of an audience of a few hundred people, media outlets are now able to reach thousands, which in many cases has been an advantage. For example, the Hickory Daily Record, a local newspaper, is able to communicate information regularly and keep the citizens of Catawba county informed of what is going on. However, through extensive research there are problems that can arise through this fast process of communication.

History of Police and Media

To really dig into the roots of police and media, along with whether it effects how police do their job we need a brief history lesson. Police in media is not a new thing, though it may be more readily available to people today, it is not new. Police have been criticized by the public eye far before the past few years. One case that tends to come to mind is the 1992 race riots, which involved footage of Rodney King being beaten by police (Soo-Kwang Oh and Hudson, 2017). One of the key differences from other situations before was the news coverage and how it affected how people were able to see what was going on. Though the footage hit deep and engraved feelings that were rooted in neighborhoods, and African American communities what really made this event special was how it was covered. Not only was it on display but it showed how media was able to stir opinion and cause public outrage (Soo-Kwang Oh and Hudson, 2017). One interesting thing that was shown through the riots was how the news changed its perspective based on how the audience was responding. According to the study done by Soo-Kwang Oh and Hudson (2017) they contrasted just how news changed once it was aired to the public. According to the study issues such as causes of the instances, and politics increased as the story progressed, where as legal issues, and police reaction decreased (Kwang Oh and Hudson, 2017). This study was important because it shows just how powerful media influence is on those who view it. Instead of broadcasting both sides, they are strictly feeding off of the reaction from those watching. Under the same study by Kwang Oh and Hudson (2017) there was shown to be a decrease in coverage on Rodney King, and a huge spike in coverage of racism. Though this could be evidence that media has a way of digging into the roots, or core issues and problems. It could also be inferred that instead of reporting the facts of a story, media attempts to dig deeper in search of a story to keep more views. This case was a landmark case, that sets up the backbone of this paper. Although this case is nearly 20 years old the basic foundations of media still stay the same.

Media Twist on the Story

The relationship between police and media has always been a shaky one. Due to the power police have over people, they tend to catch a lot of flak from not just people but news stations. However, this is not necessarily a bad thing our country is based on a system of checks and balances, and it is important that there is media to counteract the power given to our police

force. Yet what we are here to look at is whether or not media inherently tries to make police look bad to the public. In a study conducted in Finland they studied just how a high-profile case effected the public trust in police (Kaariainen, Isotalus, and Thomassen 2016). Though the study was conducted in Finland, there was a lot to be learned from the research done. Though they are from different walks of life it is important that we look at other countries around us, and how media affects them. In this study done by (Kaariainen et al., 2016) they focused on a high-profile case involving Jari Aarnio a man who was accused of police misconduct in 2014. Though this case was focused on a single man's behavior, it was interesting to see how police were negatively impacted by how media portrayed it. Through the course of the investigation and looking at media posted by news outlets across Finland there were 48 articles in which brought up concerns of trust in police (Kaariainen et al., 2016). As the year drew to an end, and the case started losing the interest of the public there were even more post involving police trust. Kaariainen et al., (2016) note that an additional 10 articles were posted in the month of December alone that concerned trust in police. The most interesting thing to note from this research is the data gathered. According to the data gathered by Kaariainen et al., (2016) there was a gradual increase in trust in police. However, in 2014 we see a slight decrease in trust along the same time the articles were released. Though there was no dramatic evidence to support media played a role in the negative attituded towards police, there was some evidence that showed how media chose to deliver certain stories.

Interaction of Police and Media

Though it was obvious in the study done by Kaariainen et al., (2016) that media did have a way of twisting information that they showed to viewers to better fit their audience. There are other important factors to remember when considering whether media has a direct impact of police, and their ability to do their job. In an article done by Stefanovska (2015) they describe how in some cases it is often a beneficial interaction between police and media. In rural areas such as Catawba County sometimes print media is plays a very important role as well. Unlike other sources of mass media print media is different in the way of how they get their information. According to Stefanovska (2015) print media generally attempts to focus on police effectiveness. However, something to be noted is that much of it tended to be a more positive tone, but one thing that really played a role was the political stance of the paper (Stefanovska, 2015).

Print media is different from other sources of media in the way they gather their information (Stefanovska, 2015). Print media only comes out once a day, and the stories take a day, sometimes more to reach the reader. Because of this media outlets are able to do more research, and in some cases show a more accurate picture of the events they are reporting (Stefanovska, 2015). Another reason for this is that in small towns papers often contact the departments and attempt to make contact and speak with reporters prior to releasing the stories (Stefanovska, 2015). This is something very unique to small print media shops because they generally have access based on their location, and direct relationship with departments. Print media is unique in the way that they tend to run their stories.

However, regarding this study done by Stefanovska (2015) it is important to remember that these positive media releases were not the same across the board. Depending on the political nature of the paper the stories tended to sway as to how they impacted police. For example, one media outlet showed only 3.3 percent of its articles related to police were positive in the

tone in which they were delivered (Stefanovska, 2015). This shows that not all print media shops have the same relation that was previously described, but instead adjusted the story to fit the narrative they had set. This is something important to remember when going forward in our research.

Use of Video in Media

So far research has shown that there is not really a huge impact regarding media, and the ability for police to do their job. But one thing that has not been explored yet is the effects video has on the public, and how that may turn public opinion. Though all research is important, video has been a focal point of media activity in the recent years. Due to this being so recent it is imperative that it be covered, and to see just how impactful it really is. As talked about earlier as technology has advanced so has the way we view media. Split decisions officers are forced to make are now played out for the world to see and having an idea of the role this plays in public opinion is imperative.

In an article by Boivin, Gendron, Faubert, and Poulin (2017) they attempt to find the answers to these questions. The study was done in response to use of force videos and attempted to gather the reaction and how it impacted people (Boivin et al., 2017). One thing that was extremely important is that the study did not focus on minorities, however surveyed a spectrum of people including all races. Though this may not seem very important it can ultimately be important because it gathers information based on a whole population, and not just one specific population (Boivin et al., 2017). Use of force is something that has been a focal point of media attention and has played a key role in many recent riots, and public outrage towards police forces across the country. To effectively know whether media is the direct impact of this it is important to see how people respond to these questions without watching the video (Boivin et al., 2017). The interesting part of this study was that it proved prior suspicion regarding just how impactful these sources of media could be. Those who did not view the video prior to answering questions regarding whether police used excessive force tended to have the lowest responses regarding police use of force (Boivin et al., 2017). On the other hand, those who watched the video tended to respond that police did use more excessive force than necessary in situations (Boivin et al., 2017). Overall, this study shows just how impactful media use of video can be to the public. Though in prior studies such as the one done Stefanovska (2015) regarding print media there was not a huge impact on public perception of police. We now see that the new wave of mass media and use of video plays a more prominent role after all.

Impacts of Media on Police

Through our research the primary goal was to determine whether there was a role in whether or not media had an influence on police, and their ability to do their job. Media is a daily part of our lives, and due to the little public interaction officers have with individuals on a daily basis, much of the opinions drawn on by police are due to what we see in the news, and different sources of media. Through research it has shown how much of the media we see on a daily basis has little impact on how we view police (Kaariainen et al., 2016). Yet we also know that much of the information provided by media outlets depends on their political agenda, and in turn media outlets often times tweak the story to better fit their political views (Stefanovska, 2015). Something to be drawn from these findings is that regardless of how little it may affect the viewer, or what story is being shown it does have some effect, and in some cases that may just

be the image of police we have in our mind (Rantatalo, 2016). Image is everything for those involved in public departments, and with so much of that image drawn from regular viewing of media, it is something that must be looked into. In a study done by Dowler (2002) they do just that.

One interesting thing done in the Dowler (2002) study is the impact regular viewing of media related to police has on people. Though there was little evidence to support the claim that media has an effect on public opinion of police effectiveness, there were some interesting findings (Dowler, 2002). For example, one thing to note is that this was not the same across all groups of people. Dowler (2002) states that the African American community showed to have some negative attitudes towards police, and this may have been linked to direct viewing of media. There was also an interesting finding that attitudes tended to differ depending upon the amount of media that was viewed on a daily basis (Dowler, 2002). Overall this study was imperative though it showed no direct findings there is evidence to support the claim that media has an effect on those who regularly view it.

Secondly, in an article by Rantatalo (2016) they discuss the image of police, and how it is drawn from the public eye. Policing like any other public service is all about public image. Policing involves direct contact with the public whether that be arrests, or community relations keeping a good positive image is at utmost importance (Rantatalo, 2016). In this study much of the data analyzed was positive regarding police, whether it be their effectiveness, or recent busts, it was more positive than negative (Rantatalo, 2016). However, one thing to be noted was that regardless of what was in the media it tended to effect public opinion, and the more negative the more impactful it was (Rantatalo, 2016). Going forward if there is one thing to be noted it is that not all that is posted in the media regarding police is bad. But like seen in the Rantatalo (2016) study all it takes is a small amount of negative media to effect how you are viewed in the public image. For police to effectively do their job it is important for them to hold themselves at the highest standard possible and limit the amount of bad media that is published.

Integrating Research and Practice

Looking back on the Rodney King case, and how media twisted the story to achieve more views (Kwang Oh and Hudson, 2017). We can now look back and see that not much has changed on how media works today. This internship has given me the unique experience to be able to see the responsibilities of a police force first hand. But more than that it has given me the ability to see how outside forces effect how police forces are able to do their job. Looking back on the instance of Rodney King we are able to see the need for media. Media is a balance that is able to balance the power given to police forces, and in that since it is much needed. However, there are instances when media serves a different role, and in that since media can act as a burden.

First and foremost, it is important to acknowledge that not all media is bad. During my internship I was often in close proximity to different news outlets. For example, during a day spent in the courts I noticed two reporters from the Hickory Daily Record sitting in on a high-profile case going on in the area. For the most part they said nothing bad but were merely reporting the facts of the case to the public. However, I did start noticing some changes as the trial went on that connects back to some of the research. Looking back, we went over how media twisted their story to better fit the audience (Kwang Oh and Hudson, 2017). But we also noticed that this was often times to fit in with the narrative set by the editors, which was especially evident in the

research done by Kaariainen, Isotalus, and Thomassen 2016. Through this case I saw examples of both of these factors as work. During the trial the defense argued that there were issues in the investigation, and that the defendant may in fact be innocent. They attacked the integrity of the Sheriff's Department, as well as the integrity of the officers involved. This story began running through the papers, and you could see public opinion starting to turn. This is something that was apparently obvious to me as to how media is really able to stir public opinion, on major issues involving law enforcement.

Another aspect that is important to remember is how media throughout the United States impacts even our small department. In the article by Boivin, Gendron, Faubert, and Poulin (2017) they discuss just how impactful use of force videos in media can be on public opinion. With the immediate access to recording devices, and body camera footage, more and more videos tend to be popping up in today's time. This is something that must be taken into account because as shown by Boivin, Gendron, Faubert, and Poulin (2017) it has a huge impact on how citizens view the police. Through my internship I have had numerous discussions with deputies, and officers, about how they feel their job was affected by these events. Some officers wish that our department would use body camera footage, they feel there would be far less complaints, if they were able to show the whole situation, rather than just being complained on, others feel this would only cause more problems. During one of my discussions it was brought up how media doesn't show the whole story. They take the incident and air it out to the public without showing the footage that led up to that event. It appeared through much of this conversation that the individual believed that media outlets wanted nothing more than for him to mess up so they would have a story to run with. These instances happen in the blink of an eye, and in many times, officers are put in the position to make decisions that will affect them forever. To get rid of bias, media outlets need to begin their own investigations and focus more on facts, than creating their own stories.

On the other hand, through gathering information around the department there is a sense of fear in their ability to do their job. Not because they feel unequipped but because they feel as though the public is against them. Through conversation there has been many instances when officers would not risk pulling their gun because they are scared someone will be videoing and it will end up on the news. Though some may say this is a good thing, and may lead to less excessive force incidents, there are problems. This fear leads to issues with officer safety, which is also important. An officer that is scared to do their job at the end of the day is not an effective officer.

Though there are many instances in which media causes problems for police, it is a relationship that is important for both parties. Through my experiences I have grown to know many local reporters on a personal level, it is important for both parties to work together. In an article by Stefanovska (2015) they talk about how these relationships are not always bad, and this is true from what I have seen. It is a relationship that must work, but there must be respect and privacy. Through conversation with those that are directly involved with the press, I have learned that there is certain information you just do not talk about. There are instances that pertain to officer safety, as well as privacy that if you let press to close, they will run with. On the other hand, I have learned that you must share, you can't hide stuff from the press, or it will only turn out bad.

This internship has taught me a lot about the relationship between media and police forces. It has shown how dangerous bad press can be to an agency, as well as how hard it can be for

officers to do their job in the wake of bad press. Officers have a hard-enough job as it is, once the public trust is gone in police it makes the job that much harder. Police have a duty to protect the public, yet they rely a lot on the public to do their job. Through media some of that trust has been eroded, as this happens so does the effectiveness, and ability for the police to do their job. Whether intentional or not media does have an effect on officers. It has led to policy change, and effects the minds of those on the front line. Going forward it is important that police and media fix this crucial relationship and help to rebuild the trust of the public.

Reflection

This internship has been a huge learning experience for me both as a student and as a person. First and foremost, it was neat to see things I have learned through my time at Appalachian play out in a real setting. I have learned to see patterns in criminal behavior, and in turn have a better understanding of how to approach different situations. But one thing I have noticed is that there are certain things in policing that cannot be learned through class, or books. You notice through working alongside these guys that most of the most valuable skills to be an effective officer is learned through experience. Looking back, I will be grateful to finish this internship because of the lessons I have learned through my own experiences.

First as an intern you get used to working in an office. This was new to me, though I have worked full time jobs in my life, I had not worked in an office. Getting used to working in this environment takes some time. Time goes by slower, this was something I had to get used to. Coming from working outside to working in an office time seems like it drags. You find yourself looking at the clock, and it becomes hard sometimes to stay on task. Another thing that can be challenging is dressing professional. This doesn't seem like a hard task, and in the end, it is not but it does take some getting used to. You have to allow yourself plenty of time in the morning to get ready, and make sure you have plenty of dress clothes. Though this doesn't seem hard it is just something else to get used to. Overall office life is not bad, you get close with those that work around you and soon after you start those small hurtles don't seem to bother you anymore. However, it is important to remain professional and diligent throughout your time there.

Though there are some speed bumps through this internship there are chances for you to really see areas in which you could see your career. For me that was working with investigations, and the warrant division. These are areas of law enforcement that really caught my attention. First investigations, an area where I could really see myself making a career. I have always had the drive to never let a problem go unsolved and being able to do that on a professional level is something I have always wanted to do. Though there tends to be more paperwork than the movies show, the reward is even better. Being around the detectives and being able to tell someone you solved their case is a feeling I will never forget. On the other hand, riding with warrants was something I didn't expect. The warrants division is unique to other departments I have talked to. Daily task involves nothing but tracking down people with warrants. Though this area is more dangerous than other areas, it was something I really thrived in. Like stated earlier this internship was unique in that it allows you to experience different areas of law enforcement and see areas in which you would like to get into.

Overall this internship will forever be something in which I look back on with a smile. I have built more relationships during my time here than I would have ever imagined. But more than

anything I have grown as a person. I have noticed through this internship that my priorities have changed. Through situations you learn to be grateful for the things you have because there are people out there that don't have the same opportunities that I have had. On the other hand, you grow a deeper respect for people who work in law enforcement. Prior to doing this internship I always knew being an officer was a hard job. But you never know how hard it is until you witness it first-hand. Those who work in law enforcement have to deal with people on the worst days of their lives in one way or another. For some it may be an arrest that will change their lives forever, for others it's something that has impacted for their life. Either way most interactions with police are never good. Yet each day officers come in and do it to the best of their ability. If there is one thing, I have gotten out of this internship it is that everyone of us should be thankful for the job they do, because it is an extremely hard job. This internship gives you a different outlook on everything around you, and for that I am grateful.

In finishing up my career at Appalachian State I would say this internship has been a highlight of my career. I have learned more in this semester than I could ever imagine. I have learned how to deal with people. Learned tricks that would help me to be a better officer. But most importantly I learned that I am capable of being an officer, and believe I have what it takes to be an officer. I have grown into a better person, a better student, and can now leave Appalachian a student eager to enter the workforce.

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