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. 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.

The media may invade privacy or defame character of individuals. They may interfere with the rights of defendants to a fair trial. They may also uncover crimes and criminals. Exonerate those convicted unjustly.
Community Relations Context

- Police media relations is rarely hidden from the public.
- The average citizen’s secondhand experience of crime and the police through the media affects their attitudes toward and expectations of the police.

Commitment to Crime Coverage

- The media commitment to crime coverage is great.
- There is some differences in opinion as to what is too much crime coverage.
- The proportion of crime news to total newspaper space is anywhere from 3 to 10 percent.

The Subjectivity Factor

- Newspapers can emphasize crime by the placement of stories.
  - In large city newspapers, sensational crimes are often given more space than significant news of national and international events.
  - Can a news story be totally objective?
Restricting Coverage Argument
- Rarely has a general policy to restrict crime coverage been made and adhered to

Heavy Coverage Argument
- Systematic sensationalizing

Exploitation of Crime News
- A favorite topic of the media is violent crime.
- There has been evidence that newspapers exploit what they claim to be public interest in crime in order to sell their newspapers.

Public Reaction to Media Coverage
- The average American child watches more than 20 hours of television a week, and studies have shown that youths exposed to violence and aggression on television and in the movies are more likely to copy that behavior. However, there is a need for more research.
Public Reaction to Media Coverage (cont’d)

- Television has been criticized by citizens for what has been perceived as exploitation of crime coverage.
- *The War of the Worlds*
- Tylenol poisoning
- Pepsi tampering
- Columbine High School

Conflict Between Media and Police

- It is clear that accounts of sensational, violent crimes sell newspapers and draw attention to radio and television news.
- A hindrance and a help
  - The press works at cross-purposes with the police, and law enforcement is hindered.
  - In kidnapping cases, where the relationship between press and police is most critical
    - Safety of the victim
    - Cooperation given by the press to the police
    - The Mattson case
    - The Lindbergh kidnapping case

- The press has occasionally thwarted police work in other cases as well.
- By reporting detailed clues discovered by the police or announcing the time and place of a planned investigation.
- The press sometimes tips off the criminals, who may destroy evidence and avoid capture.
• The reporters have helped the police to solve crimes and have solved crimes themselves.
  • The brutal murder of Bobby Franks
  • The murder of Mrs. A.D. Payne
  • The murder of Madge Oberhalzer
• Other media exposes
  • Watergate
  • President Bill Clinton’s affair

• Champions of the Innocent
  • The press has uncovered crimes and criminals, and it can point to a long record of exonerating people already convicted of crime.
    • Joe Majczek
    • Willie Calloway
    • Innocence Project

• A Clear Need for Guidelines
  • The Background
    • The police and the media have different functions, and the difference can bring them into conflict.
    • The police task is to:
      • Prevent crime
      • Maintain law and order
      • Protect the citizens
      • Apprehend lawbreakers
The media in a free society have an obligation to seek out and report the truth, even though the truth may embarrass or hinder the police. The information becomes a product that they package and sell in competition with other media.

Competing Rights
- Conflict between police and media often arises because the police are caught in the crossfire of competing rights under two key amendments to the U.S. Constitution.
- First amendment guarantees an almost absolute right to print virtually anything, free of legal restraint.
- Sixth amendment guarantees every person the right to a fair trial, which means a trial by peers who have not been influenced by prejudicial publicity before or during the trial.

Recognizing the Need for Guidelines
- The Bruno Hauptmann Trial
- The assassination of President John F. Kennedy
- The trial of Dr. Sam Sheppard
- The trial of O.J. Simpson
- The murder of JonBenet Ramsey
- The Elizabeth Smart case
- The Caylee Anthony Case
Complicating Issues

- Publication of a victim's name and address may increase potential danger to the person and lessen their ability to resolve the personal emotional trauma.
- This holds true for rape victims.
- The trial of William Kennedy Smith.
- Both rioter and the police have been known to perform for the media.
- Occasionally the media has manufactured the news.
- Immense damage can result during a civil disturbance as a result of a lack of restraint by the press or police.

The disturbing frequency of hostage and terrorist activity involving mass media and local police in almost free-for-all, three-sided confrontation.
- This has been exacerbated by technological advances in communications such as satellites, microwave relays, and portable cameras and recorders.
- Of major concern and frustration to the police in these events is the apparent erosion of police control over the situations.
- The terrorist-media contact becomes more amiable than the police-media contact.

Setting Guidelines

- Guidelines or statements of principles do exist.
- Katzenbach guidelines
- Wisconsin guidelines
  - What can be released
  - What cannot be released
  - Problem areas
    - Interviews and photographs
    - The circumstances of arrest and previous criminal record
Who in the police agency should make the relevant decisions?

- Statements relating to crime should be made by the ranking member of the department.
- If no ranking member then the police officer at the scene.
- If in doubt then withhold the information.

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Such voluntary guidelines are not legally binding, but by properly disciplining violators, a police agency can ensure that members of the department observe the guidelines.

- In criminal cases police officers at all levels may face a great deal of media or public pressure to release information that should be withheld.

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Crisis Guidelines for the Media

- The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders urged news organizations to develop guidelines for responsible coverage of riots.
  - Use unmarked cars and equipment
  - Extreme care in using inflammatory words
  - Prohibitions against giving exact locations
  - No “live” coverage
  - Media ask the police for protection
Local stations and network affiliates may have individual policies that vary from these guidelines. Police officials need to work closely with local media. The interests of the police and media sometimes conflict, but they both want to see order restored as quickly as possible in riot situations. The media need the police to get the facts. The police need the help and the restraint of the media. They have a second basis for cooperation and for working out, together, plans for dealing with disorders.

Police Community Relations

* Media is the primary link between the police organization and its external communities
* Media is instrumental to the police as they manage their image and create support for their programs
* Police must be proactive in creating a successful partnership with the media.

The Police Information Officer (PIO)

* Maintain liaison with the media
* Critical person during demonstrations
* Uses a news briefing to disseminate the facts to the public
* Ideal unit to set up internal training programs in press relations
**Marketing Police Community Goals**

- The police must be creative in marketing police community relations
- Their efforts must go beyond the media and traditional outreach strategies