

**Title:**

“All It Takes Is One TV Show to Ruin It”: A Police Perspective on Police-Media Relations in the Era of Expanding Prime Time Crime Markets.

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**Abstract:**

In this paper, we draw on interviews conducted with Canadian police investigators for a study of mass media representations of police work in order to better understand their unique perspectives on the nature of police-media relations. In contrast to the orthodox position of the policing literature that holds that police are the dominant partner in the police-media relationship, investigators interviewed felt that they had lost control over representations of their work in media stories. This loss of control is attributed, in large part, to the pressure placed on reporters to feed an insatiable public appetite for crime-related stories. Particularly worrying for investigators is the belief that they are no longer able to maintain secrecy over their investigative activities and techniques – a shift that they see as having a significant negative impact on their work. What is required, officers believe, is better collaborative means of working with news media outlets.

## **Introduction**

In the latter half of the twentieth century, media representations of policing have become increasingly commonplace. These representations, which take the form of news accounts, fiction, and a variety of entertainment-documentary hybrid programs, have become a central feature of police organizational struggles for legitimacy (Reiner 2003). Perhaps not surprisingly, given both the importance and frequency of their representation by various forms of media, the police have become quite sensitive about their public image (ibid; author cite). As Reiner explains, negative stories about police deviance are, not surprisingly, viewed with consternation. However, positive representations of policing also raise concerns, primarily that public expectations about their “crime fighting wizardry or superhuman patience, tact, and integrity” will increase (Reiner 2003: 267; see also author cite 2010).

In this paper, we draw on interviews conducted with police investigators for a study of mass media representations of police work in order to explore their unique perspectives on the nature of police-media relations. These investigators’ experiences dealing with media outlets and/or seeing their work represented in print and television media stories lead many of those we studied to conclude that the public’s insatiable appetite for crime-related stories has fundamentally altered the nature of police-media relations. With a twenty-four hour news media increasingly driven to satisfy that appetite, police investigators feel that police organizations are no longer in control of their organization’s public image. Of particular concern for the majority of those interviewed, they also feel that police are no longer able to maintain secrecy over their investigative activities and techniques – a shift that they see as having a significant negative impact on their work.

In order to explore police perceptions concerning the nature of police-media relations in this era of expanding crime-related news coverage, we begin by examining the relevant literature on this relationship. The discussion then moves to an explanation of the methods used to acquire the data presented here and the techniques employed to analyze that data. We then examine police interviewee thoughts on their representation with news stories and, from there, to their concerns over the content of media messages about policing and the extent to which sensitive police information can be become public property. We then employ the example of a “Mr. Big” operation, the details of which were publicly broadcast, to illustrate the organizational stresses that police feel can exist as a result of an ever-increasing public appetite for detailed policing stories. The discussion then shifts to what police have to say about how their organizations attempt to control how they are portrayed in news stories. Following this section, we turn to an analysis of the ways in which the police feel that they can and should work more effectively and cooperatively with news outlets in order to increase control over their representation in news stories. The paper concludes with some final considerations on future research avenues.

### **The Complexity of Police-Media Relations**

A considerable body of literature exists on the relationship between the police and the media, and the news management and public relations aspects of media management within police organizations (Chibnall 1977; 1979; Hall et al. 1978; Ericson et al. 1989; 1991; Schlesinger and Tumber 1994). Although the literature focuses on diverse aspects of the relationship, a number of key themes emerge which present what might be described as the orthodox view of the police-media relationship. To summarise this orthodoxy, scholars suggest that mass media images of policing are important, as they are a source of information on the police and on the whole have helped to legitimate police work. Conversely, the media also play

an important ‘watch-dog’ role, acting on behalf of the general public to discover instances of police impropriety and miscarriages of justice. As a result of the latter, the police have generally been suspicious of their treatment by the media, despite the fact that content analysis studies have repudiated the basis of such suspicions (Crandon 1990; Chermack 1994). Regardless, this suspicion, which is often mutual, has contributed to a relationship between the police and the media which has been likened to a stormy marriage (Mawby 1999: 266). Within this stormy relationship, the police are frequently portrayed as the dominant partner. Indeed, within studies of police-media relations the police are generally depicted as ‘gatekeepers’ to information sought by the media, gatekeepers who often recognize and exploit the media’s need for exciting crime stories (Chibnall 1977; Hall et al. 1978; Ericson et al. 1989).

In describing police gatekeeping practices, researchers note that police agencies frequently withhold information from reporters (Ericson 1995). In fact, many police organizations have specific policies that require the exclusion of particular elements from discussions with the media. Most frequently, this includes denying information about victimization, although in the past it was also generally understood that matters of police deployment and detection, police budgets, and internal priorities are not matters for the public record (Ericson et al. 1989). The most oft cited justification for such high levels of secrecy concerning police matters is that disclosures could jeopardize investigations and adversely influence the production and value of evidence. Another reason advanced by police agencies for secrecy over investigations is to maintain the privacy of civilians involved in a particular incident: victims, those considered vulnerable (e.g., youth), and those involved in sensitive matters (e.g., sexual offences) (Ericson et al. 1989). A less commonly discussed, but equally important, motive for withholding information from the media relates more directly to police

operations. As Ericson et al. (1989: 128) explain, “secrecy regarding police operational matters was [also] formulated in terms of not giving the criminal element information that would be to their benefit”, such as specific investigative tactics that led to an arrest. Indeed, it is believed that any advantages associated with displaying one’s investigative skills to the public would be overshadowed by the intelligence gained by potential criminals (ibid).

Nonetheless, in some instances the police will actively disclose knowledge of potential benefit to their operations and image (Ericson et al. 1989; Manning 2003). For example, they regularly seek out publicity related to specific law-enforcement crackdowns (e.g., drugs, gangs) based on the assumption that such publicity may have both a general deterrent effect and increase levels of public support (Ericson et al. 1989). Further, the police often attempt to increase citizen consciousness about crime through major-occurrence news releases (ibid) and to solicit the public’s help when investigating high profile cases (Innes 2003). In such instances, however, if the police are unable to quickly solve the case the media attention they sought may backfire, and members of the media and the public may begin to question their competence (ibid). Yet another consideration is that involving the media in a case sometimes contributes to the high profile of a case, thus presenting an opportunity for an agency to secure additional funding and/or resources (Innes 2003). Given the increasing importance of publicity as an element of the police mandate (Ericson et al. 1989), in recent years some degree of cooperation with the news media has come to be seen as core components of police work and, as noted, has been included in many official policies (ibid).

Returning briefly to the orthodox view discussed above – which suggests that the police hold a position of dominance in their relations with media – a growing body of literature suggests that a reappraisal of this perspective is required (Innes 2003; Mawby 1999). This

reappraisal is required because police-media relations have grown increasingly complex, as have the institutions individually, making it ever more difficult for the police to manage the media (Mawby 1999). For example, the number of media outlets has expanded exponentially over the past few decades as we have entered an era of 24/7 news broadcasts, which has placed significantly more pressure on members of the media to develop stories. In turn, increased pressure is placed on the police to meet this growing demand (ibid). Thus, the days of an inner circle of reporters who are sympathetic to the police getting the scoop from friendly police officers in smoke filled bars are long gone (Ericson et al. 1989; Mawby 1999). A mutual understanding – wherein the police supplied information and the press portrayed the police favourably – has also long since disappeared, as both sides face increasing and often conflicting sets of institutional demands (Ericson et al. 1989). It is the effects of these pressures on police investigators' views of their treatment by mass media outlets that is the substantive focus of the present study.

### **Method of Inquiry**

This paper is informed by data drawn from in-depth qualitative interviews conducted with thirty-one Canadian police investigators for a study of the relationship of mass media production and police investigational work. The core concerns of this study were: 1) to determine to what extent media portrayals of police investigative work cohere with actual police roles and functions, and; 2) whether police investigators perceive media products as having an influence on public expectations in relation to their investigative role and work duties. The interview guide constructed in advance of entering the field contained a series of question related to the above research questions. It also included a series of questions related more generally to

the relationship between mass media outlets and police organizations. Among questions posed to interviewees were variations of the following:

- 1) in what ways do police investigators and the organizations they work for attempt to control the representation of their work in media outlets?
- 2) how successful do they feel police are in controlling crime-related media messages?
- 3) what are the strengths and limitations of the strategies they employ to control the release of information to the media?
- 4) what are the perceived effects of media reporting on their work?

In order to answer these and other questions posed, approval to conduct interviews with police personnel was sought from municipal, regional and/or provincial police units from two Canadian provinces: British Columbia and Ontario. Seven police units representing two major Canadian cities and several medium sized communities agreed to participate. Once this approval was secured, one of the authors conducted semi-structured interviews with police investigators from the following investigational units: homicide, major crimes, sexual assault, property crimes and forensic identification. Interviews typically ranged from one to two hours, with an average interview length of one and a half hours. Each interview was digitally recorded.

**Table 1:**

| <i>Interviewee category</i>      | <i>N</i>  |
|----------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>Police Investigators:</b>     |           |
| Major Crimes Investigator        | 7         |
| Homicide Investigator            | 9         |
| Sex Crimes Investigator          | 3         |
| Property Crimes Investigator     | 1         |
| Forensic Identification Officers | 11        |
| <b>Total</b>                     | <b>31</b> |

To analyze the data collected, interview tapes were transcribed and then subjected to a two-stage coding process. In the first stage, open coding was used – that is, data was analyzed thematically, with particular attention paid to how emergent themes addressed the research

questions posed. To assist in the development of a list of appropriate notes were taken of potential themes during the interview process, with special attention paid to interviewees' choice of words in response to questions posed. In the second stage, focused coding was employed: transcripts were printed and then manually coded through line by line readings. To ensure reliability, as well as to identify emergent sub-themes, transcripts were re-read and independently re-coded.

### **How Police See Their Representation in the Media**

A recurring theme in interviews with police investigators was the desire to see police organizations exercise greater control over what information is released to the media and how this information is released. In large part, their views were borne from anger and/or dismay over what they saw as frequently erroneous depictions of themselves, their work or the operation of their organization within media accounts. Indeed, one of the most frequently cited reasons for the development of these feelings was that news stories are often based on bits and pieces of "evidence"; many officers felt that the media rarely presents the whole story. A Homicide Investigator explains in relation to investigative programs such as *W5* in Canada and *60 Minutes* in the United States, "They never have all the information. They go on with bits and pieces." Confounding this problem, he added, "First and foremost, [the media usually present] a negative twist to the police investigation." A Forensics Investigator echoes these sentiments: "I've been to scenes and known the facts of what's going on and gone home and the news is completely off. They're broadcasting this stuff to be real and true and people are believing it." A couple of respondents also believed that business interests may dictate which news stories are published or broadcast. For example, the Property Crimes Investigator interviewed – a self-proclaimed news junkie – explained that the media "form their opinions, their views, their values on what they

want to do and sell it to make money. You know, the media will say what they want to say ... Sexy, flashy, glamorous – that’s what they want. High impact stories!”

Of greater concern to interviewees, however, are those instances when they do cooperate with the media, only to find that they have been misquoted or misrepresented in the resulting news story. Respondents frequently noted this as being an especially egregious problem that significantly and negatively influences their relationships with members of the media. A Major Crimes Investigator, for example, stated, “I’ve never seen media stories – including of my own testimony – that were ever accurate.” A Homicide Investigator similarly noted, “I’ve been in court and given evidence and I’ve read the paper the next day and they’ve described me in court and what I said, and I’ve sat back and thought, ‘That’s not the same court case I was in.’” A Major Crimes Investigator stated: “I have had instances where I was interviewed for five minutes and they take two excerpts from different segments and put them together and it’s not at all the way it was said.”

As a response, some interviewees stated that they no longer follow the news media. Others explained that they and their fellow officers read or watch the news, but joke about what the “real story is.” As one police officer stated, few police investigators treat the news as gospel. Still others noted that misrepresentations of their work in media stories often draw unfair criticism from both media and the general public. Given the extent to which interviewees reported instances of misrepresentation in the media, it is perhaps not surprising that the majority of interviewees held particularly strong opinions regarding news outlets’ portrayal of their work. For instance, several reported feeling disrespected by the media, believing that they are only portrayed as “knuckle-dragging donut-eaters.” A Homicide Investigator succinctly conveyed this position by noting, “I actually can’t remember ever reading an article where they talked about

how nice an investigator was or how professional they were or how dedicated they were.” A Homicide Investigator from another organization concurs: “Just look at the newspaper. Either we’re heroes and brilliant or we’re complete idiots, and there’s very little in between.”

While some officers were clearly resentful about negative portrayals and what was often perceived to be unfair criticism, others viewed it as simply a part of the job. Indeed, one officer stated that he “learned to let it be like water of a duck’s back.” Those who echoed this latter perspective stated that regardless of their representation in the media, they still have a job to do and cannot let media stories affect their work. This point is represented within the following quotation from an interview with a Homicide Investigator:

No matter what the police do, there’s a voice saying ‘You shouldn’t have done that,’ or ‘You should have done that.’ Do I think it plays a role in or impacts our job? I don’t think it does because no matter what they show on TV, or no matter what they portray the police as, the day-to-day policeman has a job to do and there are only certain ways you can do it.

Of particular concern for several interviewees is the speed at which members of the media are forced to operate. Clearly, the police and the media have competing demands: while the media timeframe relates to print and on-air deadlines, the police timeframe relates to the gathering of evidence that will lead to a conviction in court. Consequently, as a Major Crimes Investigator commented, members of the media generally do not “like the pace that we go at in order to get the evidence that will stick in court.” The quicker pace at which members of the media must work to meet deadlines, often raises concerns that the media will compromise an investigation. The same investigator also noted observing instances when members of the media approached key witnesses for stories. One of the authors observed the effects of this dynamic while conducting interviews for this study in a homicide unit. During this time, a high profile case involving the murder of a young professional woman was a major media event. To generate

newsworthy information and comments to fill out their stories, reporters were interviewing the woman's family, friends and neighbors. Several of the resulting stories featured headlines suggesting that police had identified the woman's husband as their prime suspect and that an arrest would be imminent. While decrying the fact that reporters were 'trampling on their investigation', knocking on doors to talk to potential police witnesses, the head of the homicide unit told the author in a somewhat aggrieved tone, "the media says that the husband's our suspect, and *I* don't even know if he's our suspect."

### **Too Much Information is Getting Out**

A common theme to emerge in interviews was that media outlets – drawing on information gleaned through 'trampling an investigation' – release too much information to the public that police would like withheld. In fact, all those interviewed were of the view that too much information is being released about policing and investigative tactics, and that these disclosures are problematic for police.

The most frequently cited reason for withholding information from the public was to maintain the integrity of the investigation. Respondents indicated concern that making certain facts public may jeopardize the investigation in both the short-term (e.g., gathering evidence, interviewing witnesses) and the long-term (e.g., if the case goes to trial, possible parole hearings in the future). As the Property Crimes Investigator explained, the media does not

realize that at, the end of the day, you're really hurting not only the investigation but you're probably hurting thousands or hundreds more because there's a certain technique that the police have used for many years that has worked, that has been proven credible, but now you're all of a sudden making the decision to now let the public know exactly what's going on. You know, the police will have to come up with something new.

In relation to questions about the types of information that, when released, can be harmful to an investigation, several interviewees expressed concerns that photo line-ups can be

compromised as a result of the publicizing of suspects in news stories. As a Homicide Investigator explained, the media “shows photographs of the suspect, which means that we can no longer run photo line-ups with our witnesses because they’ve already seen the person on television.” A Homicide Investigator from another police department recounted an example from a recent case he worked on:

A: One girlfriend phones the suspect and says, ‘You wouldn’t believe what I just saw on TV. I don’t think you and your friends are who they say they are.’ And that’s where that type of information is being published in the media, that’s where it’s going – it’s reaching these targets that we’re working on.

Q: And that becomes quite problematic.

A: Yes, and expensive for us as we invest all this time and effort into these techniques and all it takes is one TV show to ruin it.

Of particular concern to interviewees was the fact that an infinite number of investigative techniques are not available, and that investigations might suffer as a result of too much information about police trade craft being leaked to the public. When asked for an example of a media story that depicted the extent to which police investigators felt they had lost the ability to control the type and/or amount of information released by media outlets, interviewees had several instances to draw from. The examples provided ranged from news stories about police deaths in custody, to a high profile pepper spray incident, to a media broadcast of the details of a police undercover operation. Of these, in this section we want to specifically look at the latter: the Mr. Big Case<sup>1</sup>.

In 2007, an American broadcaster released a prime time ‘true crime’ news show on the subject of a Canadian police investigation into a high profile murder case. Within the hour long

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<sup>1</sup> In order to protect the identities of those who participated in this study, we are deliberately choosing to leave out some of the identifying details of this case, as well as similarly identifying information concerning the subsequent broadcast of this case on a major American news network.

program, detailed information was provided with respect to how the police lured the suspects into confessing through the use of an undercover agent – a classic police set-up known as a ‘Mr. Big’ operation.

One of the authors interviewed a police investigator who had worked on the case and was significantly upset about the level of information that the broadcaster had been able to secure – through a court-ordered subpoena of files related to the case – and subsequently made public. When asked about the source of his unhappiness, he stated that the release of information concerning police operational techniques, such as Mr. Big, “compromises the technique. That technique solves an awful lot of murders. More than any forensic case ever will!” An investigator in another department with knowledge of both the case and the television program noted of the broadcast, “They put a lot of detail on the scene, a lot of detail on the investigation and I think worst, a lot of detail on the undercover technique.” Similarly another colleague stated, “It pretty much gave up the whole Mr. Big scenario and how it worked.” A Major Crimes Investigator in another unit opined about the television program, “that should not have been released, that’s a technique – a trade craft, you could say – a police trade craft that should not be disclosed to the public.” The head of an investigative unit, also with knowledge of the case, was asked whether he was surprised by the amount of detailed information that was made public. His reply:

I wouldn’t say stunned. Probably, of course, because I knew that was coming. It had been delayed from an earlier time. If it had been broadcast at that earlier date, there would have been more of a shock value to investigators, although there certainly was shock value to people in the investigative field that that would come out. But [information about police techniques are] coming out more and more and more in the papers.

One of the concerns frequently raised by media outlets in defense of releasing information about police activities is that such information can be of important public interest pertaining to issues

of civilian oversight. An experienced police investigator was asked whether there was a public interest component that would justify release of details concerning the police use of this technique. His response: “No, I don’t think so.” In subsequent interviews with police members of both this same organization and others – all of whom had at least passing knowledge of the case, the technique and the television broadcast – this view was widely shared.

### **Trying to Control the Message**

In each of the interviews conducted, respondents were asked about the extent to which they or their organization attempt to control the message that is portrayed by the media, about both specific cases and policing more generally. Given that most individuals interviewed felt police had generally lost control over how they are portrayed in mass media, it is of little surprise that the majority of respondents were of the view that it is important to control information presented to the general public and that their organization could do more to alter misconceptions fueled by media stories.

In relation to what their organizations currently do to control the flow of information, several interviewees identified prepared media releases as being the way in which the police are able to exercise the greatest control. Media releases permit extensive control in at least two ways: first, the police are able to carefully select and edit the words and details included, and; second, individual officers in an investigation do not have to immediately respond to media questions probing for more information.

Another primary means by which police organizations seek to control media accounts of their work is through the use of designated media relations officers (MROs), who prepare press releases, field media calls and represent the police organization at press conferences and media events. The use of MROs thus serves to take pressure off investigators. As a Major Crimes

Investigator explained, referring requests to the MRO serves the dual purpose of having specially trained representatives relaying the police message and interacting with the media, but it also helps to relieve investigators of what are often viewed as unwanted distractions. Similarly, the Property Crimes Investigator exclaimed that by referring requests to the MRO, “I get to wash my hands of it pretty quick.” However, some problems do arise from an extensive reliance on MROs. For example, if important messages need to be made public, a Major Crimes Investigator noted that a lack of resources in the Media Relations department “often delays the message getting out because there’s only one or two people doing that.”

Despite some recognized limitations, most interviewees felt that the benefits of having a dedicated MRO far outweigh the pitfalls. Several officers stated they believe that when a small group of officers have regular contact with the media, the police are better able to present their message and effectively control what is revealed to the public. Importantly, MROs are able to learn who can be trusted, and who within the media they must handle with caution. One Homicide Investigator was herself a former media relations officer. In discussing MRO work, she explained, “you could filter and protect what would get out. They could still misquote me and take it where they wanted to take it anyway, but you could learn which [members of the] media you could talk to and which [members of the] media you would get along with.” If she was misquoted too often, information would no longer be provided to that journalist. In this sense, the orthodox view of the relationship – wherein the police occupy the more dominant position vis-à-vis the media – may hold.

### **The need to rethink media strategy**

While recognizing the importance of attempting to control both the release of information and the representation of the police agency and its workers, the majority of those interviewed

were also cognizant of the fact that trying to control the message too much can have negative consequences, as it pushes media outlets into seeking other sources in order to develop their stories. Further, failing to provide information to the public in a timely fashion can raise suspicions about police actions. For example, a Homicide Investigator argued that providing detailed accounts of an investigation to the public immediately may assist in removing some suspicion of police actions, especially in relation to incidents wherein a member of the public is injured. Referencing a high-profile case in which a suspect was killed while in police custody, a Major Crimes Investigator concurred:

It is extremely frustrating for police. We all wanted our media liaison people to get on the air and put the other side of the shoe forwards. I certainly wished there was more proactive work done by our side to explain the investigation ... I think we want to control the message a bit too much. It may be helpful for the public if they heard from the grassroots member without rehearsing or anything like that.

Indeed, controlling the message too much or withholding too much information may raise curiosity or suspicion among members of the public. Several respondents recognized that this often leads members of the public to wonder what the police are hiding. This point was clearly articulated by a Property Crimes Investigator, who commented, “We always say ‘no comment’ or ‘we can’t say anything about that right now because we’re still investigating’, et cetera ... When we say stuff like that the public automatically jumps on, and the media immediately jumps on, ‘what are they hiding?’”

Not only does offering ‘no comment’ raise suspicion, but it also forces the media to use alternative sources to gather their information. For investigators, this can be especially problematic and may lead to the levels of misinformation that they perceive to exist in the news media. To prevent such things from happening, a Major Crimes Investigator explained that media relations courses currently being offered through his organization teach officers not to

give too much information to the media, but also not to “shut down” reporters altogether. Offering too little information, he suggested, leads the media to contact members of the public – including neighbours and family members of the victim or the accused – in order to develop their stories, with the potential that an investigation might be harmed, as witnesses are potentially compromised.

In response to perceived problems with the media representation of policing, police officers, and various policing techniques, the majority of interviewees indicated a need for police agencies to work more effectively and cooperatively with media outlets in order to frame policing messages in more positive ways. One of the most frequently identified methods for doing so was to use news outlets as a tool to better educate the public on the police mandate and role. For example, a Homicide Investigator noted that

one of the things that we've undertaken here is to start educating the public within these [media] releases about what we can and cannot do. That we don't make the laws; that the case law is driven by the courts and we have to abide by those. That we don't lay the charges; we build the case and put it forward, but we don't lay the charges.

Alongside press releases, taking more time to talk to those reporters covering investigations, in order to explain necessary processes, was thought to be a beneficial approach. A Sex Crimes Investigator explained, for instance, that people are often quite receptive when he explains the differences between media representations of his work and the realities of policing to them. A Homicide Investigator clearly articulates this vision when he said, “I would just like to raise the bar in terms of how we provide information to the media, the public, and how the media reports it. So much of it just looks like we're just trying to protect ourselves from criticism rather than genuinely educating people.” This view was shared by other police officers, who similarly thought that the most effective method of educating the media, and thus the public, was to be

both more forthright and forthcoming. For example, a Property Crimes Investigator advocated for greater transparency as follows: “Rather than saying ‘no comment’, give a little of the obvious about it. And that’s all people need, a little bit of the obvious. For us to say, ‘This is where we’re at, this is what we’re doing, and this is what we hope to do,’ and I think we could do a better job at that.” He went on to propose that seeking outside help, from retired members of the media, for example, in training officers in media relations may be a valuable and necessary step in articulating their message more effectively.

Several investigators interviewed explained that working harder to develop collaborative relations with the media would be especially useful in helping the police regain a measure of the control they felt they had lost. A Major Crimes investigator developed this idea further by explaining that “instead of the two factions (the police and the media) going, ‘What are they going to say, what are they going to do’, we [need to] develop more of a relationship, a business relationship with the media.” He felt that developing these relationships may increase trust and may result in the media presenting fewer stories based on speculation since the journalist would know the subject of the story personally. Such a self-reinforcing and mutually beneficial relationship would not only allow the police to take some control back and alleviate some concerns over unethical reporting practices, but it would also provide members of the media with their much needed access to police officers and copy material.

### **Concluding remarks**

To recall, the orthodox view of police-media relations suggests that the police occupy a dominant position in the relationship, while the media serves an important purpose by providing an element of civilian oversight (Crandon 1990; Chermack 1994). In contrast to the orthodox view, however, some have suggested that a minimal level of cooperation with the media has

become an important component of police work (Ericson et al. 1989) and a growing body of literature argues that a complete reappraisal of the orthodox view is necessary (Innes 2003; Mawby 1999). According to this latter perspective, increasingly complex relations between the police and the media have qualitatively altered the nature of the association and have made it ever more difficult for the police to control the media (Innes 2003; Mawby 1999).

Although the police may occupy a position of dominance on select occasions – such as when MROs discontinue cooperation with members of the media who frequently misquote them – our findings suggest that police officers interviewed perceive the media as occupying a more dominant position, and some feel that they have lost control over their representation in media stories. Given the rapid expansion of prime time crime markets and the exponential increase in the number of media outlets, there was also awareness among interviewees that it was imperative that they develop new strategies and tactics for more effectively dealing with the media. Consequently, there is an explicit desire among officers to work more cooperatively with the media in ways that may prove to be beneficial for the police, including using the media as a tool through which to educate the public on the police role, function and mandate. Such strategies must be developed with full awareness of the fact that the police must consider both the short-term and long-term implications of making certain information public, thus there will always be a need to negotiate precariously between the public's right to know and operational requirements for secrecy.

Notwithstanding the aforementioned conclusions, three noteworthy limitations of this study must be addressed. First, interviews were conducted with officers from two major Canadian cities and several medium sized cities. It is possible – and perhaps likely – that these urban centres differ in meaningful ways from other regions. Certainly, the extent of the media

presence in these cities differs markedly from that of smaller cities and towns in Canada and other countries. Second, most of those interviewed were senior ranking officers with several years of investigational experience. It is possible that experience is an important factor in structuring one's relationship with members of the media, as well as one's perceptions. Lastly, although one officer interviewed had previously served as a MRO we did not directly recruit MROs for this study. Given their more frequent contact with the media, it is possible that MROs perspectives may differ from those of detectives and other police investigators.

While the present paper offers an useful contribution to the literature in this field, there remains a continuing need for further research that focuses on the evolving nature of the relationship between the police and the media. Indeed, more diverse samples of policing agencies may provide unique comparative insights into the dynamics of the relationship in urban centres compared to more rural areas. Moreover, cross-national comparisons of the relationship may shed further insights. For example, we still know far too little about the extent to which the police-media relationship in Canada and the United States (which have comparable media outlets and policing structures) is similar to or differ from that in the United Kingdom, Australia and elsewhere. Lastly, a greater emphasis should be placed on understanding the media's perception on their relationship with the police, as much of the research to date provides one side of the story – that of the police. Members of the media may have a qualitatively different understanding of their interactions with the police.

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