Although interest in the psychological aspects of policing was virtually non-existent prior to the mid-1960s, research has now expanded sufficiently such that a subdiscipline known as “police psychology” has emerged (see Bartol and Bergen, 1992). Most research to date has focused on understanding police stress (e.g. Patterson, 1992), with significant, but lesser, emphasis on the study of authoritarianism (e.g. Colman and Gorman, 1982), job satisfaction (e.g. Burke and Deszca, 1988), police solidarity (Shernock, 1988), cynicism (e.g. Regoli et al., 1990), alienation (e.g. Wagoner, 1976), and other personality characteristics (e.g. Beutler, Nussbaum, and Meredith, 1988). As the research base has broadened, some have begun to challenge the validity of stereotypical characterizations of individual police officers and questioned the implications that any inaccurate generalizations have for police-community relations (e.g. Perrott and Taylor, 1994).

Concurrent with these psychological investigations is debate at a more sociological level regarding the evolving role of the police in society. More particularly, are the police to continue to act as crime fighters or should they assume a more generic role as service providers? Certainly, the movement away from the largely reactive “professional” style of policing toward “problem-oriented” or community-based policing (CBP) in both the US and Canada eschews the role of the crime fighter for that of service provider. Although some have openly criticized this philosophical shift as simply another attempt by the police to regain social control over the oppressed (e.g. Gordon, 1984), it seems of more
concern as to whether CBP is efficacious or even represents a clearly defined policy initiative (e.g. Clairmont, 1991; Leighton, 1991).

In spite of considerable research contributions at both micro and macro levels of inquiry, two particularly important issues remain to be resolved in the outcome literature. First, relatively little empirical research has dealt directly with the issue of police ethnocentrism even though reports of police solidarity coupled with outgroup deprecation often emerge in the literature and in more public media-based criticisms of the police. Reports of inordinately high levels of authoritarianism, alienation and solidarity also point toward an ethnocentric pattern in the police. Additionally, the development of police stress and cynicism reflect in large part the response of individual officers to feelings of alienation and an “us versus them” approach to life.

The second issue relates to whether the police actually perceive themselves as part of a changing ideology. Skolnick and Bayley (1986) have warned that attempts to implement fully CBP (hereinafter referred to as the service model) may encounter resistance from within the ranks, but little is yet known, outside of anecdotal reports, as to how successful this transition has been. Although Clairmont (1990) has provided early insight into this issue with his extensive interviews of officers in transition, little empirical evidence exists regarding officers’ acceptance of the service model when it has not explicitly been identified as the focus of assessment. Specifically, when officers report relative acceptance of the service model are they reflecting a true ideological shift or a reluctant coming to terms with the inevitable? Brooks et al. (1993) have begun to address this question by assessing differences in crime control versus service orientation as well as perceptions of community support and cooperation, but utilized scales composed of relatively generic questions which may not have elicited any sense of a “real” situation in participants.

Both ethnocentrism and acceptance of the service model are important issues in terms of police-community relations. More specifically, reports of tension between the police and minority groups, often explained in terms of police racism (see Cashmore and McLaughlin, 1991, for a particularly negative series of essays on this topic), imply that the police are an especially ethnocentric group who make extreme ingroup-outgroup distinctions. The level of acceptance of the service philosophy also has profound implications for police ethnocentrism and police-minority relations, as the alienation which the service model purports to address is often most acute between the police and minority communities (see Perrott and Taylor, 1994, 1995).
The present study was designed primarily to investigate the themes of ethnocentrism and role orientation (particularly crime fighting versus service provider) in a sample of urban police officers. Following from this primary goal was an attempt, by means of a measure of behavioral intention, to assess any differences in the likelihood to arrest members of different ethnic groups. The methodology utilized reflected the concern that the police literature has been characterized by the frequent use of self-report measures coupled only rarely with checks to specific workplace referents. Even in situations where field work is reported, the level of analysis seldom extends beyond anecdotal reports laced with conventional wisdom (e.g. Niederhoffer, 1967; Van Maanen, 1984). The present study attempted to address these concerns about the real world ramifications of findings by requesting officers to respond to hypothetical, but well defined, action scenarios to assess all components of police attitudes: cognition, affect and behavioral intention. Although this approach does not allay all concerns regarding external validity including various response biases, it may at least provide some insight into how officers believe they respond in actual performance situations.

To achieve this goal, eight action vignettes were developed describing a fairly wide range of activities that are encountered more or less frequently by uniformed police officers. The vignettes were designed to be stereotypical of officers’ experiences and included features likely to induce consideration of extralegal factors (e.g. demeanor of offender), rendering conclusions based solely on direct comparisons of type of offense unreliable. The vignettes were categorized into three general types of police activities: crime fighting, law enforcement and service (see Appendix for vignette narratives).\(^1\) The “break and enter” and “abused child” vignettes, although very different in some regards, were seen as both representing the sorts of activities that police officers would associate with pursuing “real” criminals. The “impaired driving,” “traffic ticket,” “possession of marijuana” and “major disturbance” calls were classified as law enforcement situations in that even though they represent statute violations they would likely be viewed by police officers as mundane or perhaps even annoying to respond to.\(^2\) The vignettes, which could be classified as “service” type calls, included the “loud party” and “domestic violence” scenarios.\(^3\)

In order to address questions of ethnocentrism and solidarity, each vignette was followed by a number of questions assessing the degree of perceived public, managerial and peer support the officer perceives when acting in that type of situation. This perceived support would relate to the
officers’ additional self-report as to whether an arrest would be made or “discretion” (i.e. not making an arrest) would be exercised in the circumstances outlined. Consistent with the contention that feelings leading to an ethnocentric pattern are linked inextricably to police stress, was a question asking officers to rate the level of perceived stress associated with the type of activity outlined in each vignette. Officers’ perception of the value of each activity was assessed by questions regarding the frequency, social significance and personal satisfaction associated with each call. Finally, officers were asked to indicate how likely they were to clear the complaint without laying charges (i.e. use means other than arrest to resolve the situation) as a measure of behavioral intention and police discretion.4

In an infrequent example of the use of the vignette technique in police research, Powell (1981, 1990) presented a number of action vignettes to police officers varying the race of the suspect as an independent variable. Although he concluded that the samples of officers he surveyed were inclined to take more punitive actions against black than white suspects, his methodology and description of methodology were problematic. For example, in the first study Powell’s report that the most significant anti-black race difference was in response to an impaired driving vignette was accompanied only by a brief notation that the description of the black offender as an attorney and the white offender as a police officer may have “had an added effect on the discretion used by the police for this particular offense” (Powell, 1981, p. 387). The present study followed up on these provocative findings by varying the ethnicity of the suspect within the domestic assault vignette. In retrospect, the use of a domestic assault vignette could be criticized on the basis that one would not expect any variability in the likelihood to arrest, due to emerging zero tolerance domestic assault policies across many Canadian and US police departments. Nonetheless, at the time that this questionnaire was distributed these policies were still being implemented across various jurisdictions and it was reasonable to suspect that considerable variability still existed in the likelihood for police officers to make arrests.

Hypotheses

Given previous work, which challenges the presence of inordinate levels of ethnocentrism in the police (Perrott and Taylor, 1994), we were disinclined to accept the inevitability of police stereotypes and viewed
the purpose of the present study to be largely descriptive. Nonetheless, the following directional hypotheses were proposed assuming the presence of ethnocentrism in the sample.

(1) Police officers perceive highest peer, managerial and public approval when responding to “crime fighting” situations as opposed to “community service” and “enforcement” situations. Crime fighting duties are also perceived to be the most socially significant.

(2) Police perceive the greatest source of approval for their actions from other police officers and perceive a relative lack of support from police managers and the public at large.

(3) Police officers are more likely to arrest black suspects than white suspects.

METHOD

Subjects

The police department surveyed is located in a medium-sized Canadian city of approximately 115,000 people and is situated within a larger metropolitan area of approximately 300,000 people. The department had worked from the CBP model for approximately four years at the time data were collected and was the same department in which Clairmont (1990) had conducted his interviews. All sworn police constables (i.e. the entry level rank for Canadian police officers) who could be contacted were asked to complete questionnaires (over 90% of the department’s total complement). Five officers indicated their unwillingness to participate at the outset and were not provided with questionnaires. Of the 177 surveys that were distributed, 97 were returned completed representing a response rate of approximately 55 percent. Approximately 81 percent of the officers reported being attached to front line (patrol and traffic) duties, while the remaining 19 percent of respondents worked in plain clothes or uniform support duties. Approximately 34 percent of participants had less than 5 years experience as police officers and 81 percent of the respondents had 16 years experience or less. At the time data were collected, there were seven
white women and five black men on the force. In order to protect a sense of anonymity, respondents were not asked to indicate gender or ethnicity on the questionnaires.

**Measures**

The questionnaire utilized in the present study required that officers provide some demographic information before responding to the eight vignettes. The order of seven of the vignettes was counterbalanced in four different presentation sequences across respondents to control for order effects. The domestic assault vignette was included as the last situation in all questionnaires due to the experimental manipulation. Four different versions of this particular vignette were utilized varying only on the basis of the ethnicity of the suspect/offender who was variously described as white, black, Lebanese, or Greek.

The eight standard questions following each vignette were answered on an 11 point Likert scale and queried the officers as to the:

1. level of perceived stress associated with this type of intervention (0 “not at all stressful” to 10 “very stressful”);
2. social significance of police action in this type of call (0 “not at all significant” to 10 “very significant”);
3. level of personal satisfaction when intervening in this type of situation (0 “not at all satisfying” to 10 “very satisfying”);
4. likelihood of clearing the call informally without making an arrest or laying charges (0 “not at all likely” to 10 “very likely”);
5. level of perceived public approval for action (0 “public would view not at all favorably” to 10 “public would view very favorably”);
6. level of perceived managerial approval for action (0 “managers would view not at all favorably” to 10 “managers would view very favorably”);
7. level of perceived peer approval for action (0 “peers would view not at all favorably” to 10 “peers would view very favorably”);
8. frequency of the type of call (0 “encounter situations similar to this – never” to 10 “encounter situations similar to this – always”).
Procedure

Most respondents were provided with, and completed, the questionnaire before beginning their tour of duty (some officers returned their questionnaires to a sealed box at a later time). Participation was on a voluntary and anonymous basis. The four different presentation sequences as well as the four variations of “ethnicity” in the domestic assault vignette were alternated so that distribution was on a quasi-random basis. During the debriefing process, an informal attempt was made to determine whether the respondents had any knowledge that they had received a vignette varying on the basis of the ethnicity of the offender. As far as the authors could determine through a brief sampling, study participants had remained naïve as to the presence of the manipulation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Police Perceptions of Action Scenarios

Table 1 shows the mean values for the relative frequency of occurrence of each type of call, the social significance and personal satisfaction associated with police action in each type of situation, and the likelihood not to arrest. The most frequently encountered situation was that of the traffic ticket. It is interesting, although perhaps not surprising, that an activity in which police officers spend so much time was rated as the least socially significant. Conversely, the contention that the police spend relatively little time in more valued “crime fighting” activities (e.g. Hunt et al., 1983), appears to be supported by results in Table 1. The sample of officers reported, on average, encountering break and enter calls “sometimes” and abused child calls only “rarely”. In spite of the infrequent nature of these types of interventions, the sample of respondents rated these types of activities as being the most socially significant. These findings support the notion that typical police officers spend much of their time performing duties which are not role congruent and relatively little time with what they perceive to be meaningful activities. This may be problematic particularly for officers who are firmly entrenched in a crime fighting or more extreme “John Wayne” mode of policing and who may experience cognitive dissonance when
acting as providers of community service. The domestic assault vignette ranked fifth out of the eight vignettes in terms of social significance, a value which on average fell between the corresponding “moderately important” to “quite important” scale descriptors. This result suggests that even if officer attitudes are in a state of transition regarding the importance of eliminating domestic violence, concern should be maintained that they are still not giving this issue the attention it deserves.

In terms of personal satisfaction, it was again the crime fighting calls that received the highest ratings. However, the rating for the abused child call was substantially lower than that of the break and enter call. Relatively speaking, it appears that while it is very satisfying to arrest an offender for a break and enter, it is somewhat distasteful to arrest a pedophile. Of all the police calls, it was the domestic violence situation in which police officers reported the least satisfaction. This result suggests that in spite of the recognition that police intervention is moderately to quite important in this type of situation, police officers attain little satisfaction from acting in these circumstances.

Not surprisingly, the sample of officers was most likely to arrest in cases of break and enter and abused children. This likely results from

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vignette Type</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Social Significance</th>
<th>Personal Satisfaction</th>
<th>Clear Without Arrest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Crime Fighting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abused Child</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Break and Enter</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law Enforcement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impaired Driver</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traffic Ticket</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possession of Marijuana</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Disturbance</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loud Party</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Violence</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
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</table>
the perception that these are “good” arrests combined with the fact that societal expectations demand that officers arrest in these types of circumstances. The officers were least likely to arrest an offender for possession of marijuana, likely reflecting the perception that this is not a particularly serious offense. Additionally, the fact that the scenario evoked sympathy for the offender may have played a role in the low likelihood to arrest. Conversely, the relatively high probability of issuing a traffic ticket likely results from contact with a disrespectful citizen. With the exception of the most serious offenses, results suggest that police officers utilize a great deal of discretionary power in their decision to lay or not to lay charges which may be mediated by extralegal factors such as the demeanor of the offender.

The sample of officers ranked the likelihood to arrest the suspect in the domestic assault vignette as fifth out of the eight vignettes. Even though this mean response was toward the “arrest end” of the scale, the suggestion of the use of any discretion whatsoever is not consistent with the emerging mandatory arrest policies in Canada and the US. In addition to the hypothesis that this result reflects continuing insensitivity to the plight of female victims of domestic violence, it is useful to also review two competing or at least mitigating hypotheses. First, the description provided to the police officers may have led to the perception of a low probability of having this type of charge proceed through the courts. Second, the mandatory arrest philosophy remains relatively novel and historical training has encouraged police officers to see the value of a mediational and crisis-oriented approach when dealing in cases of family violence (Homant, 1985). In fact, some are already questioning the efficacy of mandatory arrest policies which strip away all discretionary powers from the police (see, for example, Manning, 1993; Schmidt and Sherman, 1993). Therefore, although it is certainly legitimate to question the extent to which this rating reflects cultural and historical insensitivity for female assault victims, this unidimensional attribution is probably overly simplistic and fails to reflect accurately the ambivalence and ambiguity faced by police officers when responding to these calls.

**Perceived Stress**

Given police folklore, the level of perceived stress associated with each of the eight vignettes was not surprising (see Table 2). The officers rated the abused child call as most stressful, suggesting that they are not completely hardened by their vocation and are still affected when dealing
with particularly heinous crimes. The break and enter, major disturbance and domestic assault calls also were rated as being moderately to quite stressful. The fact that the sample of officers reported that they experienced considerable stress when responding to domestic assault situations provides further evidence as to why officers’ reticence to become involved in these cases does not necessarily completely hinge on a cavalier attitude. At the other end of the perceived stress continuum are the traffic ticket, possession of marijuana, and impaired driver vignettes. The officers surveyed reported that responding to these three types of calls, all within the law enforcement category, was only “a little” stressful.

To further elaborate on these findings, it is important to note that the stress ratings associated with the break and enter call suggest that either the crime fighting role is highly stressful for the average police officer, or the officers have been socialized to believe that this role is stressful. Additionally, the high stress rating associated with the abused child call and relative lack of stress associated with the traffic ticket call may also be the result of the officers’ perceptions as to what should be stressful rather than what actually is stressful. Furthermore, the relative frequency of the different types of calls may also play a role in the degree of cumulative stress experienced. For example, although responding to a break and enter may be highly stressful, this particular type of call is relatively infrequent. Conversely, even though the issuance of a single

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vignette Type</th>
<th>Stress Mean</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Crime Fighting</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abused Child</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Break and Enter</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Law Enforcement</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impaired Driver</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traffic Ticket</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possession of Marijuana</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Disturbance</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Service</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loud Party</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Violence</td>
<td>5.9</td>
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</table>
traffic ticket may not be particularly stressful, the cumulative impact of this frequently encountered and often unpleasant type of police action may result in levels of occupational stress not accounted for by this study.

**Approval Ratings**

Mean approval ratings were compared to test the level of perceived police, managerial and public consensus as to the appropriate role of police in society. Discrepancies between levels of perceived peer and managerial or public approval were examined in order to pursue the theme of alienation and ethnocentrism, as large discrepancies would reflect an absence of shared purpose between police officers and the other two groups. To assess the level of perceived public approval, officers were asked “How favorably would the public as a whole view your actions in this case?” The questions regarding level of perceived managerial approval and peer approval were posed the same way, substituting “police managers” and “police officers” for “the public”. Differences across the three “approver” categories were examined by means of one-way repeated measures ANOVAs (see Table 3). The main effect was highly significant for all vignettes except the break and enter and abused child situations. *Post hoc* (Newman-Keuls) comparisons for all significant effects showed perceived peer approval to be significantly higher than public and managerial approval in all but one situation (the exception was the traffic ticket vignette in which perceived managerial and peer approval ratings were essentially the same). These results are a clear indication of police solidarity and may, at first glance, support an ethnocentrism hypothesis. Although not indicative of what action was being approved of (i.e. making or not making an arrest), the findings show a general trend where the sample of officers perceive their greatest source of support as coming from their colleagues.

In terms of perceived peer approval, the traffic ticket call received the lowest absolute rating (although several other vignettes received only marginally higher ratings). In spite of the relatively low perceived peer approval rating for this call, it was also the call with the highest perceived police approval-public approval discrepancy. This finding is consistent with the low rating the ticket call received on the social significance scale. In sum, it appears that the sample of officers do not believe this activity to be significant and perceive a relatively low level of public support for this type of police action. Clearly, conventional wisdom holds that traffic enforcement is a friendless endeavor which holds little favor
from the public at large. It appears that the individual officer is well aware of this absence of common purpose, and carries over this belief of low perceived public approval in his or her assessment of what behavior garners respect from police colleagues. Interestingly, perceived managerial support for traffic enforcement duty is perceived to be not significantly less than that of police peers. Given the greater managerial-peer discrepancy observed in most other instances, one might speculate that this finding reflects a commonly-held perception that police managers place a disproportionate emphasis on the enforcement of traffic laws.

Public approval for the possession of marijuana situation was also relatively low. In spite of the recent emphasis on drug enforcement by many police agencies, this sample of police officers share a perception that the public is not desirable of aggressive enforcement at least in terms of simple possession of “soft” drugs. Perhaps more surprising was the even lower approval rating assigned to police managers for this drug.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vignette Type</th>
<th>Public Approval</th>
<th>Manager Approval</th>
<th>Peer Approval</th>
<th>F Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Crime Fighting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abused Child</td>
<td>7.8a*</td>
<td>7.8a</td>
<td>8.0a</td>
<td>1.69 (2,188) ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Break and Enter</td>
<td>8.3a</td>
<td>8.5a</td>
<td>8.6a</td>
<td>2.76 (2,192) ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law Enforcement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impaired Driver</td>
<td>5.8a</td>
<td>5.1b</td>
<td>6.4c</td>
<td>12.67 (2,192)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traffic Ticket</td>
<td>4.1a</td>
<td>6.1b</td>
<td>6.1b</td>
<td>36.19 (2,190)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possession of Marijuana</td>
<td>4.9a</td>
<td>4.7a</td>
<td>6.2b</td>
<td>21.74 (2,192)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Disturbance</td>
<td>5.5a</td>
<td>5.4a</td>
<td>6.8b</td>
<td>24.68 (2,190)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loud Party</td>
<td>5.3a</td>
<td>5.8b</td>
<td>6.6c</td>
<td>16.52 (2,188)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Violence</td>
<td>5.6a</td>
<td>5.8a</td>
<td>6.4b</td>
<td>6.80 (2,188)**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* a,b,c Means followed by a common letter are not significantly different at the 0.05 level of significance (Newman-Keuls post hoc tests).
** p < 0.01.
*** p < 0.001.
ns: not significant
enforcement situation. In the perception of the officers surveyed, police management shares the public view that line officers not be overly concerned with pursuing offenders guilty of simple possession of “soft drugs”. It is rather interesting that, given present levels of public concern about the carnage on our highways resulting from impaired drivers, the officers did not perceive the public to be at least as approving as peers when judging a response to an impaired driving situation. It is possible that this somewhat surprising result reflects a perception of what the public assessment of the actual markedly ambivalent police response would be in this situation more than a perception of the public’s absolute level of concern with impaired drivers.

At the other end of the spectrum are the break and enter and abused child situations. In these cases, the differences between perceived public, managerial and peer approval were nonsignificant and these calls also received the highest absolute approval values overall. It seems likely that these calls evoke an impression of time spent “fighting crime,” which the police find role congruent, meaningful and highly supported by both managers and the public at large. This interpretation is supported by the fact that officers rated these two calls as being clearly the most socially significant of all situations.

Although the officers tended to perceive the greatest level of support for their actions from their peer group, it is clear from the ratings that they also perceived generally high levels of support for their activities from police managers and the public at large. Therefore, there does not seem to be the sort of outgroup alienation present in this sample that one would expect with an ethnocentric, or “us versus them,” identity pattern. This notion of “extra” support from peers co-existing with a sense of shared purpose with the other two groups was supported by an inspection of the uniformly positive correlation coefficients between the approval ratings for all three groups. It could be argued that a truly ethnocentric pattern would be reflected by negative correlations where increasing levels of peer support would be accompanied by drops in perceived managerial and public support.

**Behavioral Intentions**

Although the preceding discussion was concerned with approval ratings, the nature of just what behavior was being approved of remains unknown. The correlations between approval and the “likelihood not to arrest” measures can shed some light on this issue. Table 4 reports the
correlations between the measures of perceived peer, managerial and public approval and the likelihood of not arresting. Hence, positive correlations represent increasing approval of not making arrests, and negative correlations represent increasing approval of making an arrest.

The most striking feature in these results is the number of nonsignificant correlations. Although the relatively weak correlations may in part be attributable to low variability on the measure of behavioral intention, these results may also suggest that the respondents surveyed believe that approval of police intervention is often independent of the actual actions taken by the individual officer. Again, it was the crime fighting calls (abused child and break and enter) that merit special attention. Although the coefficients reported here demonstrated the strongest link between arrest and approval, it is somewhat surprising that the correlations were not even higher especially in terms of perceived public approval. Perhaps the police feel that the public does not want to become enmeshed in police duties, but rather is desirous that the police be able to utilize autonomy in exercising discretionary powers. Interestingly, the possession of marijuana situation showed a weak relationship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vignette Type</th>
<th>Public Approval</th>
<th>Manager Approval</th>
<th>Peer Approval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Crime Fighting</td>
<td>-0.32**</td>
<td>-0.29**</td>
<td>-0.29**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abused Child</td>
<td>-0.46***</td>
<td>-0.43***</td>
<td>-0.34**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Break and Enter</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law Enforcement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impaired Driver</td>
<td>-0.01 ns</td>
<td>-0.35***</td>
<td>-0.20 ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traffic Ticket</td>
<td>-0.04 ns</td>
<td>-0.05 ns</td>
<td>0.19 ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possession of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marijuana</td>
<td>0.24*</td>
<td>-0.12 ns</td>
<td>0.00 ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Disturbance</td>
<td>0.19 ns</td>
<td>0.12 ns</td>
<td>0.24*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loud Party</td>
<td>-0.12 ns</td>
<td>0.12 ns</td>
<td>0.15 ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Violence</td>
<td>0.17 ns</td>
<td>-0.28**</td>
<td>-0.11 ns</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < 0.05  
** p < 0.01  
*** p < 0.001. Two-tailed significance  
ns: not significant
between perceived peer approval and not arresting the suspect (perceived public and managerial approval was independent of what action was taken). In conjunction with a relatively low probability of making an arrest in this type of situation the police may again be reflecting a more widespread attitude that possession of soft drugs is relatively acceptable in today’s society.

Of considerable interest is the correlation associated with the domestic assault call where the sample of officers indicated that the level of perceived colleague and public approval was independent of whether or not they chose to arrest. Even if the coefficient in this case was somewhat constrained by low variability in the measure of behavioral intention, this result nonetheless again suggests that the sample of officers may well be out of touch with the wishes of the public in this regard. It is interesting to note that the one significant correlation for arrest in this situation was with perceived managerial approval which perhaps reflects recognition that an arrest response is the official “company” policy.

Ethnic Group Distinctions

One-way ANOVAs with the four levels of ethnic group as the independent variable were conducted with the domestic assault vignette on each of the eight outcome measures. In all cases the differences between the groups were nonsignificant. As the comparisons of greatest interest were those between blacks and whites, further analyses comparing these two groups more directly were conducted. Again, there was no evidence that race or ethnicity was a variable used by these primarily front line officers in their assessment of the domestic assault situation.

Although the lack of differences across all the outcome measures associated with this vignette are noteworthy, the absence of a difference on the “likelihood not to arrest” variable is of greatest interest. In view of overt police-black tensions in many Canadian, British and American centers, the present results are positive and reassuring in suggesting that police arrest behavior is not mediated by ethnicity. It must be emphasized that these findings were restricted to just one action scenario and to one police force in a relatively small urban area. Additionally, the procedure by which the data were collected was not tightly controlled and there was no way to assess the salience of the manipulation within the vignette. Finally, this measure was one of behavioral intention assessed by means
of a questionnaire, in no way assuring that this self-report would extend to actual behavior. Given the number of possible challenges to both internal and external validity, these results should be considered exploratory and in need of more broad-based investigation. Nonetheless, these results indicate that this sample of officers showed no proclivity to arrest black offenders over white offenders and stand in contrast to the previously cited findings of Powell (1981, 1990).

**SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

This study elicited attitudinal responses from a sample of urban police constables to a number of hypothetical situations encountered by front line officers. Any conclusions drawn from the results must be tempered by several clear methodological limitations. First, although a response rate of 55 percent is not exceedingly lower than might be expected for such a study, it is nonetheless sufficiently low to give rise to concerns about the representativeness of the sample. One might assume that the nonrespondent group was either more secretive or at least more disinclined to value results generated by academic researchers. Should either of these hypotheses in fact be correct, the views of the nonrespondents might have detracted somewhat from conclusions about the openness and flexibility of the police force in question. However, in the absence of any evidence these hypotheses must remain completely speculative. Second, although the rationale for not eliciting the gender and ethnicity of respondents may be viewed as justifiable, the failure to advance beyond such a monocultural view of police attitudes is a limitation which must be addressed in future studies. Finally, although we have argued for the value of our methodological approach, this nonetheless remains an analogue study which does not address all concerns about capturing real police attitudes as they are invoked in real police situations.

With these caveats in place, we turn to a summary of results and a brief discussion of implications. The results demonstrated that, as predicted, respondents found their crime fighting activities to be clearly more socially significant and personally satisfying than other activities, and they perceived the highest degree of support from their peers, superiors and the public at large to be associated with these activities. Mean perceived public, managerial and police peer approval ratings were examined to determine the extent of support the officers believe they have from these groups. As hypothesized, officers did perceive most support as being extended by their
peers. However, this high level of perceived peer support was not accompanied by outgroup alienation, as the sample of officers also reported a relatively high degree of support from the public and their superiors across a wide variety of situations. The officers also reported a sense of autonomy as the support they perceived appeared to be independent of the actual actions they took to resolve situations. These findings suggest that these police officers are not as defensive in their assessment of public and managerial mood as an “us versus them” pattern might suggest. Overall, the results in the present study tend to suggest a perception of shared purpose between the police and the public and therefore tend to refute the presence of an ethnocentric mind set in this sample of officers.

Of some concern are the findings that police officers prefer to see themselves as crime fighters rather than service providers (at least in terms of perceived societal significance and support). As suggested above, a rigid adherence to the crime fighting role may tend to keep officers alienated from the community and may contribute to an ethnocentric style on their part. Additionally, a continuing rigidity in terms of seeing oneself only as a crime fighter would suggest that officers will increasingly experience ambiguity and role conflict as the policing institution embraces more fully the service delivery model throughout Canada and the US.

However, it is important not to overstate the implications of this apparent crime fighting orientation for at least four reasons. First, the types of “service” and “crime fighting” situations provided to the respondents were too limited in nature and scope to be able to generalize to the sample’s “philosophy” of policing. Second, there is nothing intrinsically problematic with a relative emphasis on crime fighting. As a society we will continue, even in a community-based era, to require our police to place considerable importance on reactive policing and the apprehension of criminals. Our concerns will instead remain in whether or not police officers see crime fighting as their only role and in how they define which crimes are important to fight. Third, this sample of officers was surveyed some four years after the implementation of the CBP model in their department. Therefore, without a base line measure there is no way to conclude that relative emphasis between service and crime fighting duties has not shifted significantly. Finally, the relative emphasis on crime fighting was accompanied by a more general perception of shared purpose between the police and the public at large, which in itself augurs well for the future of the service model.

In addition to the more general findings, responses to the domestic assault vignette provided several more narrowly-focused results of
considerable interest. Although the officers reported some variability in the likelihood to arrest a domestic assault suspect, results suggested that their reticence was not based solely on insensitivity regarding violence towards women. This vignette also provided the opportunity to test the potential for discriminatory arrest action by varying the ethnicity of the suspect. Results failed to demonstrate ethnically-based differences across the eight outcome measures, including the proclivity to arrest. Although there are several reasons why these results cannot be considered firm evidence of a lack of ethnic bias on the part of this sample of officers, the results should serve as a caution against automatically presupposing such a bias.

Policing as an institution will continue to face major challenges which, for the foreseeable future, will be dealt with by means of the service model in many jurisdictions. It is noteworthy that President Clinton called for an even greater community-based policing presence in his 1994 US State of the Union address. Should this call reflect more than political rhetoric on the part of the President (and more than a convenient “buzzword” to police administrators), researchers on both sides of the US-Canadian border will be provided with a protracted period in which to study how well, if at all, policing as an institution copes with this dramatic shift in philosophy and practice.

NOTES

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1. The first author composed the eight vignettes based on ten years personal experience as a uniformed police officer. Similarly, the designation of the vignettes into the three categories was based on the experience of the first author. The authors recognize that this classification scheme is both highly subjective and imperfect, and may not even meet a test of “face validity” with some readers.

2. The major disturbance call may represent an exception in this category because even though it is a frequently encountered situation and not a “crime fighting” activity per se, it is unlikely to be viewed as mundane.

3. Although spousal assault is clearly a criminal offense and the police have increasingly been required to treat their interventions as such, the history of police response to family violence suggests that it is likely to still be perceived as more of a “service” than “crime fighting” intervention (see Homant, 1985).

4. It is important to emphasize that higher scores on this measure reflect a greater probability of releasing the suspect without making an arrest. Although the terms “arresting” and “laying charges” are not necessarily synonymous by definition in Canada, it seems likely that most respondents would equate “arrest” with “laying charges”.

REFERENCES


APPENDIX:

Crime Fighting Vignettes

Break and Enter

In response to a burglar alarm, two officers arrive at a private home to discover that illegal entry has been gained. With the assistance of backup units, the house is sealed off and the two officers begin a search of the premises. Two culprits are located; one in a second floor closet and the other in a corner in the basement. A search reveals a large buck knife concealed on the body of one of the suspects. Both suspects are handcuffed and escorted to waiting police cars.
Abused Child

An officer meets with a female complainant who claims that her four year old daughter has been sexually molested by her common-law husband. The child reported to her mother that her step-father had fondled her genital area on at least one occasion. However, the little girl was quite shy and would not relate the incident to the officer. It is quite clear that there would be problems in having the child testify in court. Nonetheless, the officer locates the suspect and questions him at the police station. After a prolonged interview, the suspect breaks down crying and admits to sexually assaulting his step-daughter two separate times. He claims to be remorseful for his behaviour, and assures the officer that he intends to seek out professional counselling.

Law Enforcement Vignettes

Impaired Driver

A lone officer has occasion to pull over a car on a routine check. The driver, a young male, is by himself and has been drinking. While the driver is not intoxicated, the officer believes he is likely to marginally fail a breath test. The driver acknowledges his present condition, and cites personal problems as the cause of his behavior. He states that this instance of drinking and driving is an isolated incident, and pleads with the officer to allow him to take a taxi home. A computer check reveals no previous record.

Traffic Ticket

An officer on routine patrol pulls a car over due to expired registration. A check of the appropriate papers reveal no other violations, but confirms that the plates have been expired for just over a month. The driver reports that he has been out of the province for a couple of months, and consequently was not able to renew his registration. He assured the officer that he will renew his registration as soon as possible. The driver is quite indignant about being stopped, and wonders aloud whether the officer might better spend his time in the pursuit of criminals.

Possession of Marijuana

While on night patrol, an officer checks behind some buildings in response to a suspicious person complaint. The suspicious person turns out to be a young man who had apparently gone behind the buildings looking for a private place to smoke some marijuana. In addition to the marijuana he is smoking, a body search reveals two more joints in his pocket. A computer search indicates that he has no previous criminal record.
Major Disturbance

Two officers are dispatched to a local nightclub in response to a report of a major disturbance on the sidewalk in front of the club. The dispatcher alerts the officers, as well as a backup unit, to the possibility of the use of knives at the scene of the fracas. On arrival, the officers encounter a crowd of approximately 100 people surrounding two men engaged in a fist fight. There is also some jostling occurring between several people in the crowd. The officers are able to wrestle the fighters apart without serious mishap. Neither of the combatants wish to lay complaints, and both advise of their wish to go home peacefully.

Service Vignettes

Loud Party

Two officers arrive at an apartment building in response to a complaint of a loud party. They are successful in locating the tenant from the problem apartment who assures the officers that she will take steps to quiet the party down. At this point one of the party goers, who is obviously intoxicated, comes to the door and begins to loudly challenge the authority of the two officers. The officers, as well as the apartment tenant, politely but firmly encourage this person to go back inside. He refuses to go inside, asserting his “right” to do what he wants in a “free country”. The officers inform him that he liable to be arrested for being drunk and disturbing the peace. This man appears not to heed the warning, and instead continues to argue with the two officers.

Domestic Violence

Two officers are dispatched to the scene of a domestic disturbance following a complaint of assault by the female occupant. The married couple at this address are known to the police as frequent combatants who have on several occasions summoned the police to intervene in their spousal disputes. On at least two occasions, the wife has failed to follow through on assault charges that she laid against her husband. On arrival, the officers find the household in a state of disarray and the couple, who have both been drinking, are screaming at each other. A small child cries in the background. Some redness below the woman’s eye is visible, but she is otherwise unmarked from the dispute. She demands that the officers arrest her husband for assault, and maintains that she will be certain to testify in court against him. She is generally abusive towards the officers, repeatedly berating them for their inaction. Her husband, a young white man, is somewhat calmer and assures the officers that the couple’s differences can be resolved without police intervention.