DEFINING COMMUNITY POLICING

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INTRODUCTION

Although the issue of community policing has been a subject of academic interest for almost 20 years, there is debate and confusion over what exactly community policing is. Both academics and practitioners have been content to treat it as an intangible, fluid and nebulous concept, and consequently have failed to devise a common definition.

There are advantages to leaving the term within this arena of imprecision, in that by doing so any renamed or add-on program that a police agency wishes to adopt can be introduced under the banner of community policing, even if, on closer examination, it proves not to be. However, there are also considerable advantages in trying to understand how academics, police officers and the community define and delineate the community policing concept. This may help to determine how community policing is being operationalized, interpreted and enacted.

The aim of this paper is to provide a discussion of the various definitions and interpretations of community policing that have been advanced in the academic literature. These descriptions provide a theoretical framework in which to analyze the responses of a group of 31 police leaders and 144 police officers from one Canadian province who were asked to offer their own interpretations of community policing. Initially, however, the paper discusses the wider concept of “community” by considering the problems and issues that surround this term. This will provide an enhanced understanding of the definitional and interpretational debates which shadow the concept of community policing.
COMMUNITY DEFINED

It is understandable why most writers on the police-community relations neglect an in-depth discussion of the ‘community’: it is a difficult and elusive subject that perplexes even the experts (Trojanowicz and Dixon, 1974:6).

Although the term “community” seemed unclear and was described as unfashionable during the 1960s (Trojanowicz and Bucqueroux, 1990), it has gained favor since the 1970s as a label for new and reforming policies. This has led to an increasing number of community labeled policies: community care, community architecture, community education; community radio, and community policing (Friedmann, 1992; Willmott, 1987).

Despite the increased use of the term, there is genuine confusion over what is actually meant by the word community (Buerger, 1994; Duffee, 1980) and as with community policing, calls for clarification have been made (Marenin, 1989; Mastrofski, 1989). The term community is not static but open to numerous definitions and within the field of criminology has been employed in an uncritical fashion which has promoted cries for “substantial reexamination and refinement” (Leighton, 1988). In the 1940s Sorokin (1947) suggested that the term be discarded, while a few years later Hillery (1982) identified 94 different meanings of the concept, promoting some commentators to argue that such a vast array of meanings renders the term almost meaningless (Cohen, 1985).

Despite critical observations the concept of community has a long history in the social sciences, as it is one of the oldest concerns of the discipline (Hillery, 1982). Notable sociological discussions of the concept have been undertaken: by Stein (1960) who sought to place the issue within the historical, political and sociological context of North America by showing how communities had become “eclipsed” by the growth of metropolitan areas; by Nisbet (1953) who addressed the moral, social and political influences that aided the expansion of power and fed what he termed “the quest for community”; and by Hillery (1982) in probably the most comprehensive work addressing the concept and its many dimensions.

In addition to social scientists who specifically addressed the concept of community, sociologists have been keen to discuss related issues such as the demise of community and its consequences (Wilson
and Kelling, 1982; Wirth, 1928) and the existence of community (Dennis, et al., 1969; Young and Willmott, 1962). Criminologists have taken the more contemporary sociological literature on communities and applied it to policing (Friedmann, 1992). The link between police and community is complex involving the association of two sociologically dissimilar entities: with the police being a unitary, manageable occupational group, and the community being an amorphous elusive concept (Radelet, 1977).

It would therefore appear that despite definitional problems and frequent criticism, the concept of community has received and continues to promote (see Leighton, 1986; 1988) considerable attention and discussion in the sociological and policing literature.

Certain words can be sources of power for guidance and justification for policy changes and for insulating the system against criticism (Cohen, 1985). By repetitive use some words have symbolic values which succeed in exerting great influence on the nature and direction of an individual’s thinking (Nisbet, 1953). The word “community” can be seen in this light, having been described as “warmly persuasive”, never used unfavorably and always intended to encourage public support (Shapland and Vagg, 1988). Community is associated with warm positive ideas, its appendage to another word implying similar sentiments that are subsequently transferred to whatever term it is married with.

Cohen (1985) argues that it would be impossible to exaggerate how the term community has come to dominate western crime control discourse during the last two decades. He suggests that the symbolic power of the term is that it lacks any negative connotations. It is not a neutral concept but rather a moral quest and therefore can be used to justify forms of policy change. Support for “community” has come from four directions: first, from the pragmatic and utilitarian camp who saw that the system simply was not working; second, humanitarian and civil libertarians argued that institutions were brutal and inhumane and therefore required community input; third, social scientists, specifically labeling theorists, saw the community as a new form of social control operated by social workers; and, finally, from the conservative lobby who were concerned with costs.

Cohen’s categories draw attention to the fact that the term has political credibility for both the political left and right. The right sees the involvement of the community as a way in which individuals can help the forces of law and order (at a cheaper cost) and shift legal and moral responsibilities on to the elusive community, so rationalizing expenditure
cuts or alternatively transferring costs. The left sees that the mobilization of the community will help empower the disenfranchised to be able to affect existing institutions and hierarchies (Nelken, 1985). Both political camps employ a vague term to justify policy reform, which can also be supported by the political centre. As such, the term “community” is applied by all political persuasions to give criminal justice policies credibility. As the sentiments can be supported by any political position so can they also be criticized (Manning, 1984).

Smith (1987) has suggested that three broad themes can be indentured in thinking about why the idea of community has become acceptable in directing social policy. Each of these themes can be evidenced within the broad policy development of community policing. The first is a reaction against what may be deemed as large scale and remote: Community policing is in many respects a reaction against bureaucratic policing. Second, the suggestion that people should come together to share their common needs and tackle common problems: Community policing seeks the cooperation and organization of the public in helping to prioritize and address issues of crime and disorder. Third, public policy and practice should act to strengthen voluntary and informal structures and work with them: Community policing advocates a multiagency approach to deal with issues. While Smith’s interpretation is valid and applicable to policing, he offers little by way of in-depth theoretical or political interpretation.

The term “community”, therefore, while receiving criticism on the one hand for being imprecise, nebulous and lacking in meaning, has nevertheless been awarded considerable attention by social scientists including criminologists. This is borne out by a cursory examination of the policing literature. Police managers and academics have actively taken up the word and utilized it in naming initiatives (e.g. community relations, community policing, community police officers) without being cognizant of the definitional problems it encompasses.

This brief review of the term “community” sought to illustrate how the concept has been developed and criticized by social scientists. It shows that community can not be precisely defined because it exists as a grouping of related concepts tied loosely only by a general association. As no explicit interpretation exists it becomes a motherhood expression remaining all things to all people with its definitional characteristics being in part dependent on the characteristics and purposes of the interpreter. The concept of community denies exact definition but, in analyzing the sociological discussions that surround it and sorting
through the rhetoric, certain features can be derived giving it utility and pertinence to a discussion of community policing. These features can be listed as follows:

(1) It has a long history of use within the social sciences and has been criticized for its imprecision. There is no clear definition or understanding of it. Both the terms community and community policing do not lend themselves to precise definitions. A concept that is difficult to define has problems establishing goals and objectives and in being evaluated.

(2) Despite being vague, the term community is used because of its positive connotations. Likewise community policing conjures up warm romantic images of policing from the past when police officers were viewed in a positive light.

(3) It is frequently applied to give credibility to new policy initiatives. Community policing is a relatively new reforming policy.

(4) It is theoretically undeveloped. It has been argued that community policing has been constructed along the lines of a theoretically underdeveloped set of policy principles and practices (Leighton, 1991).

(5) It can be used by both the left and the right to justify new policies. Both Conservative and Liberal Prime Ministers in Canada and Republican and Democrat Presidents in the United States have sanctioned the movement towards community policing.

COMMUNITY POLICING DEFINED

What is possibly so fascinating about community policing is that it is not easily amenable to a particular definition ... but it is clearly a highly appealing concept (Friedmann, 1992:3).

Community policing is most broadly regarded as a philosophy requiring significant and fundamental organizational change. It has been defined as a recognition and acceptance of the community in influencing the philosophy, management and delivery of police services (Murphy and Muir, 1985). While the definitions of “influencing” and “community”
vary, some believe that community policing represents a paradigmatic shift (Bayley, 1989) and an entirely new philosophy of policing (Goldstein, 1987), rather than a specific program. This philosophy incorporates an expanded police role in society, internal organizational change and a greater linkage between the police and the community (Clairmont, 1991). Most commentators agree that it involves not only increased police involvement with the public but a complete overhaul of police management and structure to create this change in policing philosophy. It is therefore quite distinct from policing initiatives in the past such as crime prevention and community relations which argued for a more limited approach, implying a narrow bureaucratic response to a particular problem and not a fundamental philosophical change in the overall missions and expectations of a police department (Trojanowicz, 1990). However, as found in the case for the word “community”, a review of the term community policing illustrates that confusion exists over how this concept is being interpreted and defined.

There are a wide array of options offering themselves as definitions, redefinitions, potential definitions, and interpretations of community policing, which is quite understandable when two such commonly acceptable terms as community and police are linked (Friedmann, 1992). This has led one commentator (Murphy, 1994) to propose that the term be abandoned and another be introduced which does not become confused with community relations, connotes the structural changes involved, emphasizes the collaborative relationship between the police and community and delineates these developments from previous policing philosophies. (As stated above, the same cries for clarification or abandonment are made for the word community.)

Although they are fluid categories, definitions or ways in which the community policing concept has been interpreted can be derived from police literature. The study of definitions is not critical or evaluative but rather descriptive. Definitions given by others in text comprise the information to be worked with by the social scientist (Hillery, 1982). Definitions must be developed in order to have effective communication and so that evaluations can take place.

Definitions and interpretations of community policing highlight different policies, components and principles and do not yield themselves easily to a single description. In discussing this issue, Cordner (1995) has cited three major dimensions of community policing, the philosophical dimension which addresses a broader interpretation of policing incorporating citizen input and policing tailored to local needs, the
strategic dimension which incorporates the operational aspects and translates the philosophy to action, and the programmatic dimension which translates philosophies and strategies into programs, tactics, and behaviors. Cordner shows that despite the preponderance of studies on the issue it is only within the programmatic dimension that we have empirical evidence illustrating beneficial effects for both police and community. His deconstruction of community policing provides a useful insight into areas that have not been explored by the academic community and illustrate that at both the philosophical and strategic levels, knowledge of community policing is restricted.

In furthering the debate Friedmann (1992) argues that to understand the new philosophy, community policing should be examined from three perspectives:

1. the police;
2. the community; and
3. the police and the community.

This recommendation must be further clarified as neither the police nor the community exist as homogeneous entities. Research on community perceptions needs to recognize the differences that exist between communities (Shapland and Vagg, 1988). Likewise, police perceptions should be examined from the perspective of individuals working at different levels within the organization (the rank and file, middle management and leaders). In addition, insights gained from one police agency should not be generalized to others but rather compared and contrasted to the results of similar studies in other police departments.

In order to provide an understanding of the term “community policing”, this study sought interpretations by reading and rereading the community policing literature, from which five interpretations or ways of seeing community policing were derived. By becoming fully immersed in the literature, categories were developed. It should be noted that these categories represent the primary meanings discussed by the referenced source and are mutually exclusive, representing the clearest articulation of that cited interpretation of community policing. They therefore represent content areas under which definitions or interpretations of community policing advanced by others can be placed.
In reviewing the literature, five categories were developed that saw community policing as:

1. a meaningless rhetorical term including any and every initiative;
2. a philosophy focussing on the police and community working together to influence the management and delivery of police services;
3. a particular crime prevention program;
4. a form of increased social control; and
5. an imprecise notion, impossible to define.

**Rhetorical**

Some have suggested that community policing is no more than a consensus rallying cry used to convey a sense of nostalgia, with the word community encapsulating considerable emotive appeal (Mawby, 1990). Community policing evokes powerful metaphors that play to contemporary cultural concerns and is therefore appealing (Manning, 1984) but does little more than summon up images of a world we have lost, standing for inspiration for a better future (Weatheritt, 1987). Community policing is therefore seen to be a new legitimating mandate which evokes powerful metaphors of democracy, small town morality and local autonomy (Crank, 1994) but in many respects lacks substance and may be little more than rhetorical.

**Philosophy**

The philosophy definition of community policing is the one most commonly discussed in the academic literature. The community policing philosophy frequently advocates a partnership between the police and the community to address numerous social issues. Often the key elements or ingredients or definitions of community policing are listed and have been condensed to three (Clairmont, 1991; Goldstein, 1987), four (Kelling and Moore, 1989; Manning, 1984; Skolnick and Bayley, 1988; Wycoff, 1989), six (Murphy, 1988), eight (Loree, 1988) and, more recently 16 points (Leighton, 1991) by various commentators.
In their publication for the Canadian Solicitor General, Normandeau and Leighton (1990) argue that community policing involves a police community partnership to deal with crime and disorder problems, while Skogan (1990) cites four broad principles to the community policing movement:

1. a commitment to a broader problem-oriented policing philosophy and a move away from a focus on crime fighting;
2. decentralization, new patrol tactics and a two-way communication between police and citizens;
3. police respond to the citizens’ definitions of their problems; and
4. police help neighborhoods help themselves by serving as catalysts.

Broderick (1991) has noted that these last two principles are not very different from those proposed by Shaw and McKay (1945) at the Chicago School and put into practice by Saul Alinsky and his colleagues, supporting the conclusion by some that community policing is really just old wine in new bottles.

In practice, the community policing philosophy advocates not only listening to (elusive) community input, but creating the opportunities for the community to have a say in policing policy. It therefore promotes the need for structural change within police departments. This is a big step for most police agencies who, throughout their existence, have seen themselves as professionals who know better than anyone else what needs to be done to maintain social order and enforce the law (Skolnick and Bayley, 1988).

The philosophical definition of community policing therefore advocates that the police and the community work together to identify issues of concern. This definition also implies the need for internal organizational change.

Program

From philosophical definitions one can go to much more focused interpretations which see community policing as requiring only three demands: community policing councils, inter-agency co-operation, and
community constables (Alderson, 1982). Some believe community policing can be added to the existing organizational structure.

A number of programs and policies which include community involvement or facilitate increased contacts between the police and the community are frequently cited as community policing. These include foot patrols, police store fronts, community consultative groups, Neighbourhood watch and crime prevention initiatives. Community policing in operational terms is a program which in its most facile interpretation requires only a deployment decision.

To a certain extent the program category represents elements from the era of crime prevention and community relations initiatives such as team policing which preceded community policing and which sought to facilitate police and community contacts by add-on policies, not structural organizational change.

**Control**

Critical interpretation of the development toward community policing has been given by Klockars (1989), who claims that the movement from bureaucratic to community policing is best understood as the latest edition in a long tradition of “circumlocutions” whose purpose is to conceal, mystify and legitimate police distribution of nonnegotiable coercive force. Other circumlocutions were legalization, militarization and professionalism of policing. He regards the progression toward community policing not as a radical shift but as a cumulative process. Community policing is therefore a more covert way to penetrate communities to acquire information, or a confidence trick where a velvet glove hides the iron fist and is in reality a mechanism for state control (Kinsey et al., 1986; Taylor, 1981). The control definition therefore interprets community policing as a form of social control.

**Imprecise**

Various authors have noted that although the term “community policing” has been readily adopted, the words “community”, “policing” and “community policing” are open to numerous definitions (Mawby, 1990). Consequently, there is confusion over what exactly community policing is, so some have suggested there are no standard definitions at this point in time (Hunt and Magenau, 1993) and that it is
indistinguishable from traditional policing (Broderick, 1991). Definitions that do exist range from those which describe it as a variety of forms of social control involving community effort (Alderson, 1982) to any initiative which includes the police and the community (again undefined) working together (Leighton, 1991; Murphy, 1988; Skolnick and Bayley, 1988). More cynically it has been called a term “used to describe virtually any policing activity which its proponents approve” (Weatheritt, 1987:7), and described as any form of policing so long as it gains the support of the community (Mawby, 1990). A recent survey of chief constables in England and Wales found 45 percent believing it to be a meaningless expression (Reiner, 1991). The imprecise category recognizes the term as a catch-all contradictory phrase incorporating a wide range of policing strategies.

This review of the definitions of community policing found them assignable to five categories. Table 1 provides a summary of these definitions.

As mentioned above, these categories represent ways in which community policing has been interpreted in the academic literature by various individuals. In undertaking empirical research this study looked at police leaders’ and police officers’ views of community policing and analyzed these responses by applying them to the five categories derived from the literature.

**THE RESEARCH**

During the Summer of 1992, all 31 municipal police leaders (who comprise 19 RCMP Officers in Charge (OIC) of municipal police detachments and 12 Chief Constables of independent police departments) in the province of British Columbia, Canada were approached and asked if they would agree to be interviewed and questioned on the broad themes of community policing, management and administration and organizational change. All agreed to be interviewed. These interviews, lasting between one and two hours, were conducted during the fall of 1992. All interviews were tape recorded and subsequently transcribed. One of the questions asked was: “There are lots of different ways to interpret community policing. What does the term mean to you?”

To gain access to this élite group, the British Columbian Association of Chiefs of Police (BCACP) was initially contacted. The membership of this body includes all chief constables and OICs in the
province, augmented by individual representatives of agencies which have an active responsibility for policing, such as the Ministry of the Attorney General, the BC Police Commission and the Justice Institute. The BCACP meets on a regular basis to discuss issues which are pertinent to policing. The group agreed to endorse the research but stipulated that the agreement to be interviewed was to be the decision of each individual chief/OIC. After receiving this endorsement every chief/OIC was first sent a letter outlining the aims and objectives of the research and then

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a While there are few recent academic commentators that suggest community policing is a program, when the concept was first discussed it was confused with crime prevention initiatives (see Trojanowicz, 1990 for a review of this confusion).
subsequently telephoned and asked to take part in the study. None refused. Thirty-one interviews were conducted during the fall of 1992 with the 12 chief constables and 19 OICs responsible for policing municipal towns and cities in the province.

The following year a self completion survey was administered to 200 (5 percent of the total number of police officers in British Columbia RCMP and independent police officers attending training courses at the two main training academies in the province of British Columbia. One-hundred-and-forty-four surveys were returned, illustrating a 72 percent response rate. The same open ended question that had been posed verbally to the police leaders was presented in a written format to police officers.

The five categories defining community policing derived from the literature review were used to position the responses received from the police leaders and police officers. To assure reliability and consistency in analysis, three doctoral candidates at Simon Fraser University School of Criminology were asked to code four of the police leaders’ survey questions and four of the police officers’ open ended responses. Random number tables were used to select these questions, and coders were given written and verbal instructions about classifying the data. An 88.9 percent reliability rate was found. A coefficient of 0.80 or above is usually considered reliable (Frey et al., 1991).

The information presented below records the findings from the question asking leaders and police officers what the term community policing meant to them: full details of all aspects of the study are available elsewhere (Seagrave, 1995).

Police Leaders’ Interpretations of Community Policing

To understand how police leaders interpreted community policing, respondents were asked what the term meant to them. By drawing on the categories developed in the literature review it was apparent that none of the respondents interpreted community policing as rhetorical, a program, a form of social control or imprecise. Instead all 31 responses involved linking the police and the community together to address issues of crime and therefore only fall into one of the five categories identified: the philosophy category. The following two quotes are representative of the types of answers received:
Ideally, and I’m not suggesting we’ve reached that yet, but ideally it’s having the community tell us what kinds of police services they want and having them work with us to, I guess, achieve a community standard that’s acceptable in relation to law enforcement and social good and all that stuff.

I think in a broad statement it means sharing our activities with the public and involving them in some part of our decision making. That might not be clear to you other than to say that from coming up to where I am now we used to be a very closed shop, we did all sorts of things really without caring about discussing it outside our police organization and that has changed.

A number of responses stressed the word “partnership” as a way to interpret community policing. The mission statement of the RCMP defines community policing as “a partnership between the police and the community, sharing in the delivery of police services,” and therefore the emphasis on the word partnership in these definitions can be attributed to this mission statement:

Generally community policing is a partnership, a partnership between the police and the community to try to address the problems that occur and that exist particularly where those problems center on criminal activity. The willingness for them to be part of the solution and go back to the Peel days and all that other baloney.

Community based policing means that you involve the community in problem solving and you bond or form a partnership with the community and the community can be the community at large, or a segment of the community or an area of the community and you bond there a partnership, make a partnership and get them to assist you in the detection of or enforcement of unruly behavior.

The replies showed a high level of consistency. Although some respondents gave quite brief definitions, 11 (35 percent) built on their replies by defining community policing as a philosophy and then proceeded to draw on examples of the programs their
department/detachment had introduced to illustrate the way that community policing was being introduced (e.g. bike patrols, blockwatch and consultative groups). To use Cordner’s (1995) analysis cited above, they identified the philosophical and programmatic dimensions of community policing, but not the strategic dimension.

The philosophy category of community policing had two components: increased community involvement and organizational change in the structure of policing. While all the police leaders in this study stressed increased community involvement, none mentioned changing the structure of their organizations. (However, a number did discuss structural organizational changes subsequently in the interview process.) Therefore, while their definitions fall into the “philosophy” category, they failed to mention, when asked what the term meant to them, that community policing involves organizational change and thus stressed only one component of the philosophy definition. Respondents were cognizant of the need to change the delivery of service that community policing advocates, but were unaware of the organizational changes which the “ideal” philosophy definition of community policing implies: While their definitions of community policing can be placed in the philosophy category, the “fit” is far from perfect. This finding reconfirms one detailed in the recent Commission of Inquiry on Policing in BC (Oppal, 1994) which found that although chief constables generally equate community policing with crime prevention and community relations initiatives, they do not cite organizational change.

Police Officers’ Interpretations of Community Policing

The five categories derived from the analysis of the community policing literature were again applied to the interpretations advanced by police officers in the survey. Table 1 presents a summary of this analysis and provides the theoretical framework to analyze the responses given by police officers when they were asked what community policing meant to them.

One-hundred-and-nine (76 percent) respondents provided an interpretation which accords with the philosophy category. Like police leaders, a number mentioned the word partnership in defining their answers but did not stress organizational change, preferring to see it as a philosophy which enhances and promotes a relationship between the police and the community. These findings are slightly more optimistic than those of The Commission of Inquiry of Policing in BC (Oppal,
1994), which found both RCMP and independent municipal officers were unfamiliar with the basic principles of community policing. Nonetheless, 11 (8 percent) saw community policing as a program or crime prevention initiative, a factor which has been identified in similar research (Murphy, 1994). In addition, 16 (11 percent) saw community policing as just a “fad” and gave more cynical views when asked to provide an interpretation of the term, views which could be placed in the first category recognizing community policing as a rhetorical notion, but which also had elements of the last category which sees community policing as an imprecise theory. Examples of these rhetorical/imprecise definitions are:

- Getting back to the public – useless!!!
- More paperwork.
- More work and not getting credit for the job you’re doing.
- Spend more time with contributing, non-offending segments of society to improve their poor perceptions of police. This will then decrease crime
- Absolutely nothing (what is it?)
- Waste of time! We should concentrate on keeping the rats off the streets with all available members. Blockwatch can be done with a handout!

During the course of the survey respondents expressed concern that they did not know and had not been informed of what community policing is:

I’m unsure since I always hear the term but nobody is able to say exactly what it means.

Involving the community in taking responsibility for crime and participating in preventing crime. Not sure of the program.

I could better answer this question if I was aware of the system proposed.
Note. This survey seems to assume that I know something about community policing. I do not.

Tell me the philosophy of it and what my expected role will be and maybe I’ll be in a position to answer.

The responses are particularly surprising as many RCMP officers daily walk past declarations endorsing community policing; all RCMP detachments display the mission statement of the RCMP - which stresses community policing - in their reception areas. In addition, the Vancouver police, the largest independent police department with over 1,100 members, (and whose officers made up 23 percent of the sample), also have a mission statement and corporate plan defining and outlining their commitment to community policing. Other police departments have corporate planning documents describing how the philosophy will be introduced.

While the majority of police officers (76 percent) therefore provided a philosophy definition, 8 percent saw it as a program and 11 percent as a rhetorical or imprecise theory. (Four percent did not answer the question.)

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Both the police officers and the police leaders articulated similar interpretations of community policing by seeing it as a philosophy and by mentioning the establishment of a partnership between the police and the community. Their definitions, however, were more limited than those advanced in the philosophy category derived from the literature review in that they focused on the police and the community forming closer ties, not structural organizational change. Therefore, while their understanding of community policing may accord with the definition most prevalent in the literature, on closer examination they are ignoring the fundamental component of internal organizational change.

Nineteen percent of police officers did not hold this view and saw community policing as a program or expressed a cynicism toward the community policing philosophy. Furthermore, a number stated that they had problems understanding what community policing is. This is obviously a worrying finding as the community policing rhetoric has been evident within police organizations for a number of years. It is clearly not successfully being conveyed to all elements of the rank and file.
CONCLUSIONS

By initially reviewing the problems and issues that surround the term “community”, this paper illustrated that the application of the word community to a new policing philosophy has meant the community policing movement has been subject to many of the problems endemic in the term. These problems specifically relate to definitional issues.

While there exists no single definition or interpretation of community policing nor any mandatory set of program elements (Cordner, 1995) police agencies have seized the concept and will continue to do so irrespective of academic criticism and debate. This discussion has shown that interpretations of community policing are available from the literature and can provide a theoretical framework in which to assess how it is seen by police leaders and police officers and, subsequently, how it is being interpreted, enacted and implemented.

The theoretical and empirical data presented here illustrate that interpretations of community policing do exist, but must be teased out of the literature. In developing categories and ways in which community policing is seen, a theoretical framework was developed in which to analyze the responses of police leaders and police officers to the question: “What is community policing?” This framework illustrated that the police leaders’ and police officers’ interpretations of community policing are limited in that they focused on police and community adopting closer ties, but did not identify organizational change as a vehicle by which this should be achieved. In striving to make recommendations for the successful implementation of community policing, efforts have to be made to inform both police leaders and police officers of the broader comprehensive philosophical interpretation incorporating structural and organizational change. In addition, in British Columbia (and probably elsewhere) there are a number of police officers who need to be better informed of what community policing actually entails.

Community policing is in many respects still a rhetorical reform. As shown by the empirical analysis it is not regarded by those tasked with policing as a comprehensive organizational change that includes altering reward systems, changing organizational structure, reassessing promotional criteria and adopting new leadership philosophies. While community policing programs may be introduced and encouraged, significant alterations to organizational structures are not evident. The police leaders in this study overlooked many of the organizational aspects of community policing.
In looking at two distinct operational levels of police organizations occupied by police leaders and police officers, this study identified interpretative differences in the concept of community policing. The findings suggest research on police perceptions of community policing should be conducted at every level of the hierarchy and analyzed not only in light of the social, political, cultural and organizational structure in which the officer is employed but also with regard to the different operational roles officers are assigned. This would ensure a more comprehensive appreciation and aid accuracy in comparing, contrasting and understanding how the community policing concept and its interpretation is being operationalized throughout police organizations.

NOTE

1. In commenting that the community policing concept is rhetorical it should be noted that many other terms used in the social sciences (e.g. power, justice, economy) suffer from the same criticisms and yet are extensively utilized and applied.

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