

1972

Community Relations Training--An Alternate View

John F. Heaphy

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/jclc>

 Part of the [Criminal Law Commons](#), [Criminology Commons](#), and the [Criminology and Criminal Justice Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

John F. Heaphy, Community Relations Training--An Alternate View, 62 J. Crim. L. Criminology & Police Sci. 570 (1971)

This Criminology is brought to you for free and open access by Northwestern University School of Law Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology by an authorized editor of Northwestern University School of Law Scholarly Commons.

COMMUNITY RELATIONS TRAINING—AN ALTERNATE VIEW

JOHN F. HEAPHY

The author is presently employed as a Special Assistant to the Police Commissioner Patrick Murphy in the New York City Police Department. He was employed by the New Haven, Connecticut Police Department as a civilian Director of Training and Personnel. He holds a M.A. degree from Fordham University in the field of Psychology.

Much has been said recently about the problem of the relationship between the police and the community they serve. Members of both the community and the police profession are well aware of the problems of understanding and appreciation that exist. Many attempts are being made to solve this problem in every part of the country. These attempts range from the conduct of "Madison Avenue" type public relations campaigns to special police-community co-operation projects and finally to various police-community relations training programs. In spite of this serious and intensive effort, much remains to be done. The objective of this paper is to offer some stimulation to those involved daily with the operational difficulties of the problem, by stating an alternate view of the problem rather than prescribing another program solution.

AN ALTERNATE VIEW

A simplified look at the concept of "relationship" indicates that in any relationship (between two or more persons or groups), three distinct elements can be identified. In all situations involving human interaction, there is always Individual (or Group) A, Individual (or Group) B, and the context in which the two interact. To begin to analyze them, any specific relationship, it should make sense to be certain that we have covered each of the relevant elements to an adequate degree. Further, if one is not uncomfortable using a relatively unsophisticated "model" of the concept of relationship, we might suggest that the three elements be used as the organizing concepts in the development of the entire study unit pertaining to that relationship.

To put the above in the context of the problem of police-community relations, we could say that the problem involves an understanding of the police, an understanding of the community, and an understanding of the context in which the two

interact. Training in this area then must involve study of each of the above to an appropriate extent. Obviously, a good deal of our present training falls into some of the above areas. However, we must recognize this training in the context of the relationship model in order to assess its real impact on the problem of police-community relations. Further, we must give some serious thought how best to train in the areas that at present we are not covering at all.

To state this basic thesis another way, we must begin to realize that we are now, and have been for quite some time, doing a great deal of "police-community relations" training under various different headings. The manner in which we teach any of the traditional units of police training has a significant effect on the problem of police-community relations. We must carefully rethink our present approach to the teaching of all aspects of the curriculum, as well as begin the introduction of new units of training to cover the gaps which might exist.

THE COMMUNITY

The community, the police, and the context in which the two interact are the three elements that must be considered as the major content areas of the "police-community relations" training program. Thinking first of the community, it is apparent that police academies have been dealing with various facets of this area for quite some time. Many of the traditional police academy subjects relate specifically to the recruits understanding of the community in which he must function.

Police academies deal with the relevant criminal statutes, which are certainly reflections of the thoughts and feelings of the community in which the policeman has to function. Furthermore, most police academies deal to some degree with the values that underlie the Bill of Rights, and the specific application of these values in the study of

criminal procedure. The American system of criminal justice is another topic usually included in police training curricula which relates to this broad area of community understanding. Some police academies have recently introduced units on social problems where such things as poverty, juvenile delinquency, black militancy, civil liberties, and other contemporary community problems are studied in some detail.

In this writer's opinion it is a valid criticism to say that the treatment of legal and other areas mentioned earlier as related to the recruits study of the community in which he must function, has, to some extent, been sterile and unrealistic. It paints a picture of what the community theoretically thinks and feels—theoretically which values it holds as a body in its organization of a system of criminal justice. Usually the recruit gets only this sterile, theoretical orientation to how his community sees things. Never is he let in on the realities of the situation. Realities such as the shortcomings in our system of criminal justice, and the differences in perception of how the substantive criminal law should be enforced by police held by the different segments of the community. The law is generally presented as a concrete formula unanimously supported by the "Community" because of the fact that it was enacted by community representatives. Not enough attention is paid to a recruit's understanding of the spirit behind a legislator's enactment of a criminal statute, and too much emphasis is placed on knowing the letter of the law and enforcing it rigidly. On this foundation, he is expected to exercise wise, mature discretion in his enforcement of those laws.

Legal statutes certainly must be enforced by the police officer, and he of course must work with the system. However, he could do this job more effectively if he were given a realistic, accurate picture in the legal portion of his curriculum—a picture that recognizes and brings to the surface questions of legitimate dissent and disagreement with statutes and accepted contemporary practices in the system of criminal justice. For these are facts of life, and it is with the facts of life that the patrolman must deal. To keep these facts of life from him ties his hands in his fully understanding the community which he is trying to serve.

What has been said centers on legal training and how it gives to the new policeman in very subtle ways some picture of the community he is serving. All too often, this is the only picture that he gets, and, while it is certainly a valid part of the total

impression of the community that he should get in his training program, it is certainly not the whole story.

The introduction of social problems units into the police training curriculum is a relatively recent phenomenon and one to be encouraged. Considerable time must be spent trying to build a greater appreciation in the policeman for those social problems which are of greatest concern in his community. These will, in many areas, include such things as delinquency, poverty, black militancy, crime and violence, the breakdown of marriage and family systems, and many others. These units can be taught on two levels, one being a general theoretical approach, and the other a more close to home approach using people from the community who can best illustrate these social problems and talk about the approach that other professions take to them. Maybe in this manner the police profession will be able to evolve for itself a role which is supportive or complimentary in some way of the roles that other community agencies play. For it is again a fact of life that the policeman is thrown squarely into the middle of almost every social problem in the community, and too often is unable to see his work in this context. Methods and instructors must be carefully chosen, and methods should be experiential as well as cognitive.

Another aspect of the community that is seldom considered in police training curricula is how the community perceives the policeman. What does the community expect of the policeman? What role do they want him to play? The role of the police is typically handled by the police academy very superficially, with some treatment of the law enforcement code of ethics, or by the quick and easy definition of "... community helper, law enforcer, and crime preventer." This is totally inadequate and must be replaced with units of study which will give, to the new policeman especially, an accurate picture of just what his role is in the community. He is certainly perceived differently by different segments of the community, and he should be thoroughly familiar with those perceptions. Businessmen perceive him and his role in a much different way than does the teenager, the housewife, or the innercity dweller. Police academies can, in very subtle ways, communicate significant messages about the role of the police in various situations that will have an important effect on the attitude of the patrolman towards various aspects of his job. Units of this sort should

involve many things, among which might be whatever relevant data is available on community attitudes, community perceptions of and reactions to the police department, and whatever statistical information is available on the actual operations of the department.

THE POLICEMAN

Probably the most neglected of all three areas is the policeman's study of himself. Typically, he is given two to four hours on the ethics of police conduct, some variable number of hours of his departmental policies, and usually very little else. This is totally useless as it presents a sterile, theoretical picture of what police behavior really is. Basically, the problem is that policemen must learn more about themselves as persons and as members of police groups. This is no easy task. It is probably the most difficult study any human being could undertake. But because of the especially sensitive role the community places on the policeman, it is essential that he attend to this. The policeman plays a vital role in innumerable situations of human interaction in the community. It is a *must* that he be better than the average man in relating to other people. He must be better in touch with himself, his own feelings and his own reactions, and, hopefully, then better able to control his reactions. Simply describing a code of ethics or rules of conduct that he must obey in handling various types of calls will not do the job because it denies the policeman's essential humanness.

The study of this area must be approached realistically from the point of view of a sincere but fallible human being trying to get as effective control of himself as possible for the purpose of making himself better able to help others. The specific design for training in this area can vary considerably. It should encompass two major types of training activities. One is a certain amount of content work in the behavioral sciences, specifically content work in the area of the psychology of human behavior. Second, and absolutely essential, is some form of more basic learning about oneself such as that attempted in various laboratory designs or group conference models. This is essential because of the basic principle that learning does not "set" until the learner has had some opportunity to practice the learning which he is incorporating cognitively. When the approach is only cognitive, it remains just a theoretical abstract mass of knowledge that gets tucked away some

place in the back of the brain and never reaches the level of the gut, which is the level from which he will react when put in a work situation. Therefore, the training must take this into account and not only put the content into his head, but give him some opportunity to practice the application of it so that it will truly set and be of some use to him when he gets into various work situations.

THE CONTEXT

The final element that should be considered is the context in which the policeman and the community interact. Traditionally, police training has dealt only with situational variables in this context. Especially important has been such things as physical factors, safety factors, department policies, etc. While these are certainly important and should not at all be minimized, it must be recognized that they are only a very small part of the real context in which the policeman does his job. The context, for instance, of a policeman responding to a domestic complaint in a fourth floor walk-up includes much more than the physical factors of the situation. The number of people, the position of people in the apartment, types of physical objects that are available as potential weapons, location of doors and other avenues of escape, etc., are all, certainly, important parts of the context, but they are not the whole context. Equally as important as these factors is the emotional, psychological context into which the policeman is walking. Specifically, in a domestic situation he is walking into a conflict situation—one loaded with stress, where he is supposed to be of some help.

These three elements—conflict, stress, and the helping role—are all essential aspects of the context of the policeman's job with which he must be familiarized. Most situations of human interaction into which the policeman is thrown include something of these elements. It is usually some kind of a crisis some type of conflict, and almost always involves people under stress. He is always expected to be of some help in these situations. Equipping him only with an appreciation of the physical factors of the situation equips him only half-way to really understand the context into which he is walking. This is not only unfair to the policeman, but it is wasteful, because it is possible to train in these areas.

It is possible to better prepare people to function as mediators of crisis. Crisis in itself can be a topic for study. Resolution of conflict can be a worthwhile topic of study. The handling of stress and the

art of helping are in themselves legitimate topics for study and essential in the preparation for the police service because so much of the policeman's role involves these variables. Specific training design in these areas is extremely complicated. It is a very new area, little is known about how best to proceed, but there are many ideas on how one might proceed. The procedure at this point must involve carefully controlled experimentation with various training designs to try and reach these objectives. Professional psychological opinion will vary on the sophistication of the behavioral sciences to deal effectively with training in this area. This is healthy state of affairs. Many psychologists will say that we cannot deal with it at all effectively with our present methods, and some will say that they have all the answers to training of this type. While the truth is probably somewhere in the middle, it is really irrelevant whether we have all the answers or none of the answers. The fact is that we cannot live any longer without at least trying to find some of these answers, and thus we must proceed carefully, experimentally, with what we have.

CONCLUSION

To summarize, then, police-community relations training should proceed on the basis of a clear understanding of the three elements involved in the relationship between the police and the community. These elements, again, are the community, the police, and the context in which the two interact. We must begin preparing our approach to police-community relations training with the

realization that much of the training we are doing now in all content areas of the police academy curriculum in fact contributes to the message on police-community relations that the trainee receives. The way we approach legal training, patrol techniques, investigative techniques, defensive tactics, or almost any other content area is going to have a great effect, at least indirectly by omission, on the message the patrolman receives about police-community relations.

We must begin improving our police-community relations training programs with the realization that we must first look into what we are doing now and make sure that it fits into a proper scheme in the model of relationship presented here. In addition to this a number of areas of outstanding need have been noted—areas fitting into the context of the above model which are presently not dealt with satisfactorily or at all in current training activities. Very careful attention must be paid to the development of training design in these areas and to the evaluation of that newly developed design.

This is not a simple process. In fact it is a quite difficult process, because it will inevitably involve a great deal of very careful self-criticism on the part of directors of police academies and other policy personnel in police organizations. In the end, however, we will be able to provide a more truly professional police service to our communities, and, in the process, lessen the risk of wasting our resources on "special" community relations training programs that might in fact give us little permanent benefit.