COMMUNITY POLICING, LOOSE COUPLING, AND SENSEMAKING IN AMERICAN POLICE AGENCIES*

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This study examines the community policing movement in the United States using two concepts from organization theory—loose coupling and sensemaking—to frame the analysis and discussion. In particular, we focus on the degree of coupling between police agencies' general and specific community policing claims. Because community policing may be considered a fairly ambiguous (or broad) reform movement, police agencies must engage in interpretive processes to define, make sense of, and enact it at the local level. While we did not observe these interpretive processes, our analyses enable us to observe the products of these processes.

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According to police reformers and politicians, community polic-
ing is sweeping the country at an unprecedented rate (Office of
Community Oriented Policing Services, 1997). Backed by such pow-
erful constituencies as the U.S. Congress, the past three U.S. presi-
dents, every major policing organization, the media, and the public
(Mastrofski & Uchida, 1993; U.S. Congress, 1994), the future of
community policing appears bright. Yet despite its popularity, com-
munity policing has also attracted its fair share of detractors. Crit-
ics have argued that community policing represents a slogan
without action, style without substance, and rhetoric without real-
ity (Bayley, 1988; Klockars, 1988; Manning, 1989; Weatheritt,
1988). For some, community policing is an empty reform effort
characterized by nothing but "BS and buzzwords" (Hunter &
Barker, 1993). Evaluating the substantive depth of the community
policing movement is difficult, since there is little national-level
empirical evidence to suggest whether it is the bright new star of
police reform or just old wine in new bottles (Bayley, 1988).

We examine the community policing movement in the United
States through a conceptual lens forged from the study of complex
organizations. We find two concepts from organizational theory—
loose coupling and sensemaking—to be compelling tools for under-
standing how the community policing movement is taking root in
American police agencies. In particular, we show how both concepts
can be used to illuminate patterns in the diffusion of community
policing in the United States. We begin by describing loose coupling
and how it has been applied to organizations outside policing. Next,
we introduce the sensemaking perspective and provide some exam-
ples of how it has been used. We then combine these perspectives to
explore their utility for understanding the diffusion of community
policing.

LOOSE COUPLING

In 1976, social psychologist Karl Weick introduced the concept
of loose coupling in organizations.[1] Coupling is the degree to which
organizational elements are linked, connected, related, or interde-
pendent. Loose coupling, then, implies that organizational elements
are only loosely or minimally connected. The imagery of loose coup-
ling has been used frequently by neo-institutional theorists (e.g., J.
W. Meyer and Rowan, 1977), although the concept has also been
applied to other strands of organization theory (Aldrich, 1979). The-
oretical examinations of the police have discussed loose coupling in

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[1] Although Weick was the first to our knowledge to apply loose coupling to
organizations in the literature, he cited some earlier works by other authors, includ-
ing Glassman (1973), March and Olson (1975), and Salancik (1975).

the context of institutional theory (Crank, 1994, 1998; Crank & Langworthy, 1992; Maguire & Mastrofski, 2000; Mastrofski, 1998; Mastrofski & Ritti, 2000) and semiotics (Manning, 1982). Suffice it to say that although the concept of loose coupling frequently appears in discussions of institutional theory, it is not limited or tied to any single theoretical arena (Maguire, 2002).

Complex organizations contain many potential pairs of elements whose coupling properties can be investigated (Weick, 1976). Organizations exhibit loose coupling in many areas, such as between subunits, between hierarchical levels, between goals and actions, between structure and technology, and between policy and practice (Orton & Weick, 1990; Weick, 1979). According to Orton and Weick (1990, p. 203), because loose coupling provides researchers with such an elegant and succinct phrase to describe the simultaneous presence of rationality and indeterminacy in organizations, it has been:

> widely used and diversely understood. The concept has a rare combination of face validity, metaphorical salience, and cutting edge mysticism, all of which encourage researchers to adopt the concept but do not help them to examine its underlying structure, themes, and implications. Like a linguistic Trojan horse, the loose coupling concept has preceded loose coupling theory into the various strongholds of organizational studies.

Orton and Weick distilled into a series of homogeneous subcategories approximately 300 works that have used the concept of loose coupling, providing researchers with a formal framework for expanding knowledge about loose coupling. In particular, they used five predominant "voices" to frame their review of past research on loose coupling. This study uses what they called "the voice of typology" in exploring loose coupling in American police agencies. We focus on exploring and describing the concept, rather than on isolating and explaining its causes or effects or making prescriptive or judgmental statements about its potential strengths and weaknesses as a structural feature or a management tool. In other words, we rely on the literature on loose coupling as an analytical tool to help us understand the dialectical discussion that has surrounded community policing, a complex and ambiguous concept.

We are primarily concerned with understanding the degree of coupling between police agencies' general claims about practicing community policing and the specific activities in which they claim to participate. The concept of loose coupling allows us to move in a more subtle and judicious direction toward understanding what it means when an agency says that it is doing community policing. As

such, we use the loose-coupling perspective not only as an organizing model to understand the degree to which organizational elements are linked, but as a cognitive model to understand how police organizations interpret, label, enact, or otherwise make sense of innovations and reforms in their environments.

SENSEMAKING

In addition to loose coupling, the study also relies on a burgeoning body of literature on strategic and organizational sensemaking. The sensemaking perspective, implicitly derived from Weick's (1979) loose-coupling model, is based on the notion that organizations are loosely coupled systems comprised of actors with a great deal of freedom to interpret and implement organizational change (Manning, 1997). According to Weick (1993, p. 635), the sensemaking paradigm is founded on the principle that "reality is an ongoing accomplishment that emerges from efforts to create order and make retrospective sense of what occurs."

While the literature on organizational sensemaking remains in its infancy, the most in-depth theoretical treatment of the matter is contained in Weick's (1995) book, *Sensemaking in Organizations*. Sensemaking, Weick explained, occurs whenever individuals, subunits, or organizations within an industry are presented with an ambiguous phenomenon and continually try to understand it. Choo (1996) further stated that the sensemaking process is characterized by actors sensing the existence of "data" in their organizational environment and attaching meaning to the data. Actors must identify pieces of information that they believe to be significant. They do so by using their past experiences to interpret the data and using exchanges and negotiations with other actors to create common interpretations and labels. Thus, the sensemaking process is not necessarily constrained by bounded rationality, but rather is the result of organizational actors enacting their environment and constructing their own reality.

Sensemaking is just one strand of the interpretivist paradigm in studies of organizations (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1997; Daft & Weick, 1984; Gioia & Pitre, 1990). Daft and Weick (1984, p. 286) summarized the interpretivist approach eloquently:

> Organizations must make interpretations. Managers literally must wade into the ocean of events that surround the organization and actively try to make sense of them. Organization participants physically act on these events, attending to some of them, ignoring most of them, and talking to other people to see what they are doing. . . . Interpretation is the process of translating these events, of developing models for understanding, of bringing out

meaning, and of assembling conceptual schemes among
key managers.

Weick (1995) was careful to emphasize that sensemaking is much
more than just interpreting.[2] "To engage in sensemaking is to con-
struct, filter, frame, construct facticity, and render the subjective
into something more tangible" (Weick, 1995, p. 14).

Another distinctive feature of sensemaking is that it can be un-
dertaken by both individuals and social systems. Particularly im-
portant for this study is the notion that organizations are social
systems whose members *collectively* engage in sensemaking activi-
ties. Thus, despite the social psychological roots of the interpretivist
paradigm, in general, and the sensemaking perspective, in particu-
lar, it is not incorrect to speak of *collective or organizational* sen-
semaking. Daft and Weick (1984, p. 285), for example, viewed
organizations as interpretative systems in which the critical issue
is that "information about the external world must be obtained,
filtered, and processed into a central nervous system of sorts, in
which choices are made. The organization must find ways to know
the environment. Interpretation is a critical element that distin-
guishes human organizations from lower level systems." Similarly,
Weick (1995, pp. 180-181) suggested that a key issue for the future
of the sensemaking perspective is the exploration of the "collective
mind" or organizations as sensemaking systems. He noted that
"further investigation of collective sensemaking is important to off-
set the tendency to frame issues of organizational sensemaking as
micro issues best understood through a heavy dose of individual-
level analysis backstopped by concepts from psychology." Clearly,
Weick supported the notion of more macrolevel analyses of sen-
semaking in organizations (see also Weick & Roberts, 1993).[3]

Police organizations and the actors within them must engage
in these same sensemaking processes to organize and react to vast
pools of information in their policy environments. This article re-
ports on a study that examined (albeit in a limited way) how police
organizations, at the "industry" level, make sense of the community
policing movement.

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[2] Clearly, there are a number of parallels between the interpretevist perspec-
tive and Weick's notion of sensemaking. However, there are fine shades of meaning
that separate its various strands, including labeling theory (Ashforth & Humphrey,
1997), semiotics (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1997; Manning, 1988), and sensemaking.

[3] This strain between macro- and microlevel perspectives is evident through-
out much of the organizational literature. Sociologists and organization theorists
have demonstrated repeatedly that organizations exhibit patterned regularities and
that organizations can (and, indeed, should) be studied apart from the people within
them (Blau, Heyderbrand, & Stauffer, 1966; Blau & Schoenherr, 1971; Maguire,
2002).

THE STUDY

The study did not "test" a theory of loose coupling or sensemaking. Rather, we relied on these two concepts to frame our examination of how local police agencies interpret, define, and react to community policing. We should note that we used these concepts not simply as metaphors, but as conceptual guideposts to structure our analysis and interpret our findings. Weick (1995; see also Orton & Weick, 1990) cautioned scholars that despite the overwhelming appeal to use loose coupling and sensemaking simplistically or metaphorically, it is important to treat each as the subtly complex concept that he intended.

Like many organizations, police agencies are not fully efficient information systems and suffer from the same problems of bounded rationality described in nearly every other type of organization (Manning, 1992; March & Simon, 1958; Skogan & Antunes, 1979). Community policing has been described repeatedly as an amorphous, ambiguous concept that is difficult to define (Seagrave, 1996). Because the community policing movement is not a neatly packaged and explicitly defined set of reform prescriptions, it is likely that local police agencies have a great deal of room for interpreting what it means and how to implement it (Maguire & Mastrofski, 2000).

Using 1993 survey data from approximately 1,600 police and sheriffs' agencies in the United States, we examined how American police agencies have interpreted and enacted community policing at the local level. For the purposes of this study, the survey contained two key sections. In the first, police agencies were asked whether they had implemented community policing (and were given a number of different response options). We treated their responses to this question as their "general claim" regarding community policing. In the second section, the respondents were asked a number of questions about whether they participated in specific activities that are typically regarded as community policing activities. We treated their responses to these questions as their "specific claims" regarding community policing.

The aim of our study was to examine the degree of association or coupling between police agencies' general and specific community policing claims. As Weick (1976, p. 4) observed, "there is no shortage of potential coupling elements" in organizations. A rational goal-oriented model of organizations would suggest that an organization's general and specific claims about its participation in an innovative activity should be tightly (if not perfectly) coupled. Other perspectives, such as the institutional model, may provide

many reasons to expect such claims to be loosely coupled. For instance, general claims may serve as nothing other than empty "signals" (M. W. Meyer, 1979) or "presentational strategies" (Manning, 1977) that symbolize the agency's devotion to the community in an era when such an appearance is useful to attain legitimacy and resources (Crank & Langworthy, 1992; Maguire & Mastrofski, 2000). This study is the first, to our knowledge, that empirically assessed the concept of loose coupling in a large sample of police organizations.[4]

Focusing on these coupling properties will provide some evidence about how local police agencies have "made sense" of the community policing movement. Although prior research on community policing has been useful for identifying which specific community policing activities seem to be the most popular, no study has examined these activities in the context of police agencies' general community policing claims. By examining general and specific claims together, it is possible to see which specific activities police agencies associate with the more general claim that they do community policing.

Most research on sensemaking has relied on qualitative methods to observe sensemaking processes as they unfold.[5] Although organizational survey methodology is not particularly appropriate for observing sensemaking *processes* within social systems, it can be useful for observing the *products* of such processes. In other words, the survey data used in this study provide little detail about the process by which police agencies grapple with, interpret, and react to the community policing movement. However, the data are useful for showing the types of community policing programs and policies that police agencies say they have enacted at the local level. Thus, agencies' responses to the survey data used in this study provide a helpful (though imperfect) snapshot of how local police agencies make sense of the broad community policing movement in their jurisdictions. In addition, the patterns uncovered in this study will lay the groundwork for applying the sensemaking perspective more fully in future analyses of community policing.

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[4] See Mastrofski, Ritti, and Hoffmaster (1987) for an application of the loose-coupling model at the local level. To our knowledge, it is one of the few empirical studies that has applied loose coupling to police organizational behavior.

[5] Weick (1995, p. 172) argued that social surveys and "casually acquired data sets" are less useful for tracking sensemaking than are other methods, such as naturalistic inquiry, grounded theory, analysis of critical incidents, case studies, interviews, exploration of work diaries, semiotic or dialectical analysis, and field observations.

COMMUNITY POLICING: A BRIEF REVIEW

While community policing is being ushered into police departments across the nation, studies have illustrated that few really understand its meaning.[6] For example, in a national survey of 1,606 law enforcement agencies, Wycoff (1994) found that nearly 50% of the responding police chiefs and sheriffs did not have a clear understanding of what community policing means. Therefore, it should not be surprising that community policing is seen by some as an amorphous concept that means different things to different people. Popular strategies include instituting foot or bicycle patrols, establishing neighborhood police substations, identifying neighborhood problems, dealing with disorder, organizing community meetings, or conducting community surveys (Rosenbaum, 1994). In fact, because the label community policing has been attached to such a diversity of activities and programs, some influential reformers have expressed concern that community policing has come to mean *anything* that is new and innovative in American policing (Goldstein, 1994; Skolnick & Bayley, 1988).

Despite this confusion, there does appear to be a consensus about some of the basic elements of community policing and how community policing differs from previous policing strategies. Community policing efforts that are described in the scholarly and reform literatures focus on changing the activities of several key constituents, including citizens, street-level police officers, police managers, and police organizations as a whole (Bayley, 1994; Wycoff, 1994). In our study, we focused on the community policing activities that are performed by each of these four entities.

The Targets of Community Policing Reform

Citizens. In the community policing reform literature, community members are urged to become more involved in the coproduction of police services, assisting the police by forming Neighborhood Watch groups, serving on advisory councils for the police, and serving as volunteers within the police agency (Friedman, 1994). Bayley (1994) argued that there are really two distinct dimensions of citizen involvement in community policing. The first is consultation between the police and the public, which serves four functions: (1) it provides a forum for citizens to express their problems and needs, (2) it allows the police to educate citizens about crime and disorder

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[6] Because there is now a burgeoning body of literature on community policing, space does not permit a thorough review of the literature. For those who are interested in such a review, see Moore (1992) or Rosenbaum (1994).

in their community, (3) it allows citizens to express complaints involving the police, and (4) it provides a forum for the police to inform the community of their successful efforts. In the second form of citizen participation, the police mobilize citizens to take part in crime prevention activities. Mobilization strategies actively engage citizens as partners with the police. What all these citizen activities have in common is their focus on the "community" side of community policing. However, some critics have contended that other than a few enthusiastic citizens, most community members do not really want to become involved in police activities (Buerger, 1994).

Patrol officers. The core element of community policing for most reformers involves changing the types of activities that patrol officers perform daily. Under community policing, police officers are urged to work more closely with the community in solving local problems, rather than simply to react to incidents that have already occurred (Goldstein, 1990). Problem solving is based on the assumption that "crime and disorder can be reduced in small geographic areas by carefully studying the characteristics of problems in the area, and then applying the appropriate resources" (Eck & Spelman, 1987, pp. xvi-xvii). The idea behind problem solving is to understand and identify the problems that generate a disproportionate number of calls to the police and then focus the necessary resources on solving these problems (Bayley, 1994; Goldstein, 1979; Moore, 1992). Thus, problem-solving strategies maintain their focus on the maintenance of order, but they rely on the notion that police resources will become more plentiful when solving, rather than simply reacting to, community problems (Skolnick & Bayley, 1988). Again, critics have suggested that such changes are difficult, if not impossible, to make for a number of reasons, including the omnipresent need for patrol officers to continue answering calls for service.

Police managers. Community policing also requires new managerial approaches; it coincides with and incorporates many contemporary management reforms, such as reinventing government and total quality management (Mastrofski, 1998; Osborne & Gaebler, 1992). A common theme among many of the management approaches that have been endorsed by advocates of community policing has been emphasizing the role of middle management in facilitating the activities of line-level officers (Wycoff & Skogan, 1994). Managers in community policing organizations are no longer simply expected to "control their employees" (Moore & Stephens, 1992). Instead, they are expected to provide freedom, flexibility, and resources to police officers who are attempting to engage in community policing activities. While the reform literature seems to

endorse the need for managerial changes in policing wholeheart-
edly, critics have suggested that such strategies have unanticipated
consequences that may not be apparent in the reform rhetoric
(Manning, 1995).

Police organizations. Finally, as reformers have energetically
pointed out, it is integral to the survival of the community policing
movement that police agencies implement organization-wide
changes in such areas as formal structure, policies, training pro-
grams, hiring and promotion strategies, and numerous other areas
(Community Policing Consortium, 1994; see also Maguire, 2002;
Mastrofski, 1998). Bayley (1994) termed this realm of change "ad-
aptation." Some examples of organizational adaptation to commu-
nity policing include decreasing the number of management levels,
reducing specialization, eliminating unnecessary formal policies,
and thinning out the administrative components of the organiza-
tion (Community Policing Consortium, 1994; Maguire, 1997, 2002;
Mastrofski, 1998; Mastrofski & Ritti, 2000). In addition, the com-
munity policing literature contains dozens of programmatic and
policy-oriented changes at the organizational level. Some of these
changes may be considered fundamental changes in the operation
of the police organization, and others may be considered as more
tangential appendages that can be grafted onto a police organiza-
tion without changing its core values or functions.

Nearly all the activities that fall within the realm of the com-
munity policing movement are expected to be performed by citizens,
patrol officers, police managers, or police organizations as a whole.
As illustrated in this brief review, community policing reformers
have set their sights on many different targets. Although some view
this breadth as a sign of conceptual ambiguity, others view it as a
sign of flexibility, allowing local leaders to customize policing strat-
egies that apply to the unique circumstances of each community.
Some critics have suggested that politicians and police administra-
tors may take advantage of the concept's breadth or ambiguity to
improve public relations, curry political favor, or enhance the insti-
tutional image of their agencies, with little thought to investing in
the actual concept (Bayley, 1988; Goldstein, 1994; Klockars, 1988;
Weatheritt, 1988). As a result, many critics, including police of-
ficers, have come to believe that community policing is simply an-
other "trendy phrase" in policing (Bayley, 1988, p. 225). Empirical
research has not yet clearly established the extent to which general
community policing claims correspond with specific community po-
licing claims or examined how the policing industry has "made
sense" of the community policing movement.

DATA AND METHODS

Survey methodology is particularly ill suited to evaluate whether agencies do what they claim to be doing. To do so, one would need to use some sort of field research technique, such as systematic social observation of police officers on patrol (Mastrofski & Parks, 1990). However, when an organization provides a response to a survey item about its internal practices, it is making a series of "claims" about what it does. These claims may suffer from a variety of errors, which is why it is important to differentiate an organization's *claims* about what it does from what it *actually* does.[7] With this constraint in mind, it is possible to explore relationships among the various claims that a police agency makes in a survey. In our study, we investigated the degree of coupling between police agencies' general and specific community policing claims. Our measure of general claims was based on their response to a single question about whether they engaged in community policing. Our measures of specific community policing claims are composites of their responses to questions in each of four target areas: citizens, patrol officers, police managers, and police organizations. We began by developing indices to measure each dimension and then examined the association between each specific dimension of community policing activity and the general community policing claims made by police agencies.

Data for this study were obtained from a national survey of police organizations conducted by the Police Foundation. In March 1993, the Police Foundation surveyed a stratified random sample of 2,314 U.S. police and sheriffs' agencies about their community policing practices (Annan, 1994, p. 5; Wycoff, 1994).[8] More than 1,600 departments (71%) submitted usable responses to the survey.[9] The

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[7] The individual who provides the survey response may respond carelessly, may exaggerate responses in an effort to present the organization in a more positive light, or may simply lie about what the organization is doing. In addition, the responses may suffer from measurement error because of the well-known problem of measuring "dosage" in organizational research. For instance, when an organization responds that it engages in the Neighborhood Watch program, we do not know whether it experimented with the program briefly in one district or implemented it in a wholesale fashion throughout the jurisdiction.

[8] For a thorough description of the methods, see Annan (1994). For a written summary of the findings, see Wycoff (1994).

[9] Research has suggested that nonresponses to a survey by large organizations may be systematic (Tomaskovic-Devey et al., 1994). To the extent that this is true, it may contribute selection bias to the multivariate models we describe later in the article. Little information is available about the nonrespondents in this study. According to the methodology report produced by Annan (1994, p. 17), 125 agencies refused to complete the survey because they had inadequate resources, and 42 refused because they had no interest in the subject of the survey. This limited information about nonrespondents is clearly not enough to determine the degree of sample selection bias.

introductory section of the survey instrument contained a brief definition of community policing:

> Community policing is a philosophy that has received considerable attention during the last few years. In its most general sense, community policing seeks to increase interaction between police and citizens for the purpose of improving public safety and the quality of life in the community.

The survey asked all the respondents[10] to answer the following question:

> Which of the following statements best describes your agency's current situation with respect to the adoption of a community policing approach?
>
> A. We have not considered adopting a community policing approach.
>
> B. We considered adopting a community policing approach but rejected the idea because it was not the appropriate approach for this agency.
>
> C. We considered adopting a community policing approach, and liked the idea, but it is not practical here at this time.
>
> D. We are now in the process of planning or implementing a community policing approach.
>
> E. We have implemented community policing.

We recoded the first three response categories to this question so that three categories remained: (1) the agency does not currently practice community policing (629 agencies), (2) the agency is planning to implement community policing (569 agencies), and (3) the agency has already implemented community policing (406 agencies). The responses to this question represent an agency's "general claims" about practicing community policing.

Later in the survey, *all* the respondents were given a number of lists of police activities and were asked to check the activities in which they participate.[11] Items in these lists corresponded to the target areas described earlier: citizens, police officers, midlevel

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[10] Surveys were sent to the chief executive of each police agency, who was asked to complete Section 1 of the instrument, entitled "Executive Views." The executive was then given the option of delegating the remaining questions to someone else in the agency. No information is available about the individuals who completed the survey. Although we cannot be certain that the respondents had the requisite knowledge to answer the questions accurately, we view it as unlikely that executives would assign the completion of the survey to people without such knowledge. Nonetheless, there is substantial evidence in organizational studies that organization-level data collected from individual informants routinely suffer from measurement error (Knoke, Marsden, & Kalleberg, 2001; Weiss, 1997). As we argue later, some of this error can be dissipated by using multiple informants.

[11] These items were not explicitly identified as community policing activities, although the respondents probably assumed that they were, since they were in a survey of community policing.

managers, and police organizations.[12] We combined items in each list into additive indices representing each locus of community policing activity. These indices represent four separate clusters of departments' "specific claims" about practicing community policing.[13] We now introduce these indices and the items they contain.

Citizens

The responding agencies were asked to indicate, from a list of 15 activities, those that were currently being performed by citizens in their jurisdiction. These activities are listed in Table 1. Each item was coded 0 if the activity was not currently being performed by citizens and 1 if it was currently being performed. The 15 items were then combined into an additive index. The index appears reliable, with an alpha value of .75. Scores for the citizen-activities index range from 0 to 15, with a mean of 4.07.

Patrol officers

The responding agencies were asked to indicate, from a list of 11 activities, those that were currently expected of patrol officers in their jurisdiction. These activities are listed in Table 2. Each item was coded 0 if the activity was not a current responsibility of patrol officers in the agency, 1 if either "some patrol officers" or a special unit were responsible for performing the activity, and 2 if most patrol officers were responsible for performing the activity. The 11 items were then combined into an additive index. The index appears reliable, with an alpha value of .85. Scores for this index range from 0 to 22, with a mean of 10.5.

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[12] These lists contain activities and functions that the Police Foundation deemed to constitute community policing at the time the survey was fielded. This study was limited to exploring the domain of community policing activities contained in the survey. The domain is neither comprehensive nor represents a consensus among experts about the components of community policing. As many previous researchers have pointed out, the definition of community policing varies, even among experts in the area (Maguire and Mastrofski, 2000; Seagrave, 1996).

[13] As one effort to create a more explicit definition of community policing, researchers have begun to investigate methods for measuring community policing at the agency level (Maguire & Mastrofski, 2000). There is little theoretical foundation to guide these efforts, and different methods continue to produce different results. This state of affairs is common during the early stages of developing measures for theoretically ambiguous concepts. Our study made no explicit claim either to have measured community policing in its entirety or to have developed composite measures that represent a latent community policing variable. The composite indices we used represent one theoretically meaningful method for disaggregating the large domain of community policing activities into more useful summary measures. Measuring community policing at the agency or subagency levels is a fruitful area for future research, but one that will be difficult to accomplish, given the existing data sources (Maguire & Mastrofski, 2000).

Table 1. Agencies Performing Certain Citizens' Activities

Type of Activity	Number of Agencies	Percentage of Agencies
Citizens participate in Neighborhood Watch Program.	1,327	83
Citizens serve as volunteers in the police agency.	844	53
Citizens attend citizen police academy.	238	15
Citizens serve in patrols coordinated by police agency.	275	17
Citizens serve on advisory councils at the neighborhood level to provide input/feedback on departmental policies and practices.	490	31
Citizens serve on advisory councils at the citywide level.	489	31
Citizens participate in court watch program.	187	12
Citizens serve on advisory group for the chief or other agency managers.	416	26
Citizens prepare agreements specifying work to be done on problems by citizens and the police.	203	13
Citizens work with the police to identify and resolve community or neighborhood problems.	981	61
Citizens help develop policing policies.	212	13
Citizens help evaluate officers' performance.	165	10
Citizens help review complaints against the police.	180	11
Citizens participate in the selection process for new officers.	254	16
Citizens participate in the promotional process.	255	16

Table 2. Agencies Performing Certain Patrol Officers' Activities

Type of Activity	No Patrol Officers Responsible for Task	Some Patrol Officers (or Special Unit) Responsible for Task	Most Patrol Officers Responsible for Task	Mean Response (0 = None, 1 = Some, 2 = Most)
Make door-to-door contacts in neighborhoods	32.4	37.7	29.9	.98
Develop familiarity with community leaders in area of assignment	18.9	42.4	38.7	1.20
Work with citizens to identify and resolve area problems	13.6	46.4	40.0	1.26
Assist in organizing community	30.3	56.3	13.4	.83
Teach residents how to address community problems	28.0	57.3	14.7	.87
Work regularly with detectives on cases in area of assignment	18.3	36.5	45.2	1.27
Conduct crime analysis for area of assignment	47.4	42.0	10.6	.63
Meet regularly with community groups	22.5	66.2	11.2	.89
Enforce civil and code violations in area	39.1	27.5	33.4	.94
Work with other city agencies to solve neighborhood problems	22.4	48.3	29.3	1.07
Conduct surveys in area of assignment	50.3	40.5	9.2	.59

Midlevel managers

The responding agencies were asked to indicate, from a list of 8 activities, those that were currently the authority and responsibility of midlevel managers assigned to field operations. These activities are listed in Table 3. Each item was coded 0 if the activity was not a current responsibility of midlevel managers in field operations and 1 if it was. The 15 items were then combined into an additive index. The index appears reliable, with an alpha value of .81. Scores for this index range from 0 to 8, with a mean of 4.18.

Table 3. Agencies Performing Certain Midlevel Managers' Activities[a]

Type of Activity	Number of Agencies	Percentage of Agencies
Midlevel managers redesign organization to support problem-solving efforts.	561	36
Midlevel managers maintain regular contact with community leaders.	905	57
Midlevel managers establish interagency relationships.	1,076	68
Midlevel managers make the final decision about which problems are to be addressed in a geographic area of responsibility.	847	54
Midlevel managers make the final decision about how to handle most community problems.	754	48
Midlevel managers make the final decision about the application of agency resources to solve problem in a geographic area of responsibility.	664	42
Midlevel managers elicit input from officers/deputies about solutions to community problems.	1,186	75
Midlevel managers manage the crime-analysis function for a geographic area of responsibility.	617	39

[a] For this series of questions, the respondents were asked to focus only on the functions of midlevel managers working in field operations.

Organization

The responding agencies were asked to indicate, from a list of 31 activities and functions, those that were currently being performed by the organization. These functions and activities are listed in Table 4. Each item was coded 0 if the activity was not currently being performed by the agency and 1 if it was. The 31 items were then combined into an additive index. The index appears reliable, with an alpha value of .87. Scores for the index range from 0 to 31, with a mean of 13.03.

Table 4. Agencies Performing Certain Organizational Activities

Type of Activity	Number of Agencies	Percentage of Agencies
Classification and prioritization of calls to increase officers' time for other activities	832	52.0
Alternative response methods for calls (e.g., telephone or mail-in reports, scheduled appointments for some calls)	708	44.0
Citizen surveys to determine community needs and priorities	549	34.0
Citizen surveys to evaluate police service	547	34.0
Victim assistance program	961	60.0
Permanent neighborhood-based offices or stations	494	31.0
Mobile neighborhood-based offices or stations	156	10.0
Drug-free zones around schools, parks, or churches	950	59.0
Police/youth programs (e.g., PAL program, school liaison program, mentoring program)	1,052	66.0
Drug education program in schools	1,455	91.0
Drug-tip hotline or Crime Stoppers program	1,156	72.1
Designation of some officers as "community" or "neighborhood" officers, each of whom is responsible for working in areas identified as having special problems or needs	591	37.0
Foot patrol as a specific assignment	570	36.0
Foot patrol as a periodic expectation for officers assigned to cars	717	45.0
Regularly scheduled meetings with community groups	966	60.0
Specific training for identifying and resolving problems	516	32.0
Training for citizens in identifying and resolving problems	302	19.0
Regular radio or television programs or "spots" to inform community about crime, criminals, and police activities	528	33.0
Landlord/manager training programs for maintaining order and reducing drugs	245	15.0
Enforcement of the building code as a means of helping to eliminate the potential for crime (e.g., drug dealing or prostitution) from an area	678	42.0
Use of other regulatory codes to combat drugs and crime.	840	52.0
Geographically based crime analysis available to officers at the beat level	764	48.0
Interagency involvement in the identification and resolution of crime	943	59.0
Integration with community corrections programs	359	23.0
Integration with Alternative Dispute Resolution	220	14.0
Command or decision-making responsibility tied to neighborhoods or geographically defined areas of the jurisdiction	501	31.0
Beat or patrol boundaries that coincide with neighborhood boundaries	712	45.0
Physical decentralization of field services	315	20.0
Means of accessing other city or county databases to analyze community or neighborhood conditions (e.g., school data, health data, parole/probation records, tax records, licensing data).	579	36.0
Interagency drug task force.	1,299	81.0
Interagency code enforcement.	409	26.0

Each of these four indices represents a specific arena of community policing activity. Some departments may focus more heavily on changing management styles or organizational practices, whereas others may focus on mobilizing the community or altering the daily activities of street-level police officers. The four indices represent the specific claims that police agencies make about their

involvement in community policing.[14] In the following section, we examine the degree of coupling between the agencies' general and specific community claims about policing.

GENERAL AND SPECIFIC CLAIMS

The study addressed two primary questions. First, are police agencies' general claims about community policing loosely coupled with their specific claims, as measured by the four indices? In other words, do agencies that claim to practice community policing also claim to engage in more community policing activities? Although this question may appear banal, there are plausible theoretical reasons to expect loose coupling between general and specific claims. For instance, agencies that use community policing merely as a presentational style or as a signal to external constituents that they are doing the "right things" may exhibit pronounced discrepancies between general and specific claims. Second, is the degree of coupling between general and specific claims equivalent across the four separate dimensions of community policing activities? For example, are agencies that implement citizen- or officer-oriented strategies more likely to identify themselves as community policing agencies than are those who implement managerial or organization-wide changes? The answers to both these questions will reveal whether there are distinctive patterns to how local police agencies have made sense of the community policing movement, translating it into a set of concrete activities, and enacting it at the local level.

The first step in the analysis was to compare mean scores on the four indices according to the general community policing claims made by the agency. Table 5 presents the mean score for each index within each community policing category. The results demonstrate that within each individual index, the agencies that did not claim to practice community policing had the lowest scores, those that claimed to practice community policing had the highest scores, and those that were planning to implement community policing were in the middle. Thus, it appears from this simple analysis that there is some concordance between the general claims that the police agencies made about community policing and the specific activities that they claimed to perform. On the other hand, even agencies that did not claim to practice community policing claimed to have implemented a number of specific community policing activities. The volume of activities and practices falling under the banner of

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[14] The survey questions did not enable us to know precisely how much an agency was invested in a particular community policing activity. To truly measure variations in police activity, we would need to rely on observational research techniques (Mastrofski & Parks, 1990).

community policing is large and diverse enough that even the agencies that did not claim to do community policing reported that they engaged in some of its activities. The data in this table are somewhat consistent with a well-worn lament of many police officials that some of what is now called community policing represents things they have been doing all along. At the same time, agencies that claimed to practice community policing reported doing more of these activities than did agencies that did not make such claims.

Table 5.   Mean Scores on the Activity Indexes in Community Policing (CP) Categories

Activity Index	Agency Has Not Implemented CP	Agency is Planning to Implement CP	Agency Has Implemented CP	All Agencies
Citizens' activities	3.07	4.17	5.50	4.07
Patrol officers' activities	8.30	11.74	12.16	10.50
Midlevel managers' activities	3.61	4.05	5.27	4.18
Organizational activities	9.87	13.19	17.71	13.03

Next, to determine the relative influence of each specific dimension of community policing activity on the departments' general claims of community policing, we estimated a multivariate model with police agencies' general claims as the dependent variable.[15] Previous research by Maguire, Kuhns, Uchida, and Cox (1997); Maguire and Mastrofski (2002); Wycoff (1994); and Zhao (1996) has consistently demonstrated that region of the country[16] and size of the agency[17] are both strong correlates of community policing, so

[15] We operated on the assumption that an agency's specific community policing claims may shape its general claims, not vice versa. For instance, an agency that was seeking to implement community policing would probably first initiate a set of specific activities, and once these activities were in place, the agency would be able to claim that it did community policing. At the same time, it is not implausible that some agencies would first claim to do community policing and then implement specific activities to support that general claim. The first is much more plausible to us, and in the absence of research that addresses this issue, we determined the causal order of the model on the basis of this assumption. Of course, both assumptions ignore the possibility of a simultaneous causal order between general and specific claims of community policing. The only way to resolve this debate is to analyze longitudinal data on community policing.

[16] Region was measured using three dummy variables. We used Northeast as the reference category, with the first dummy variable representing the Midwest, the second representing the South, and the third representing the West.

[17] Organizational size was measured as the number of full-time civilian and sworn employees. Consistent with dozens of prior studies on organizational sociology, we took the natural logarithm of this variable to reduce excessive skewness and kurtosis. Kimberly (1976, p. 583) summarized the three primary reasons reported in the literature for using a log transformation: "reducing the variance in the distribution of values of size across observations, testing a hypothesis of curvilinearity between size and one or more structural variables, and testing a theory in which size is hypothesized to be related with other variables in a multiplicative fashion." For an

we included these contextual variables as controls in the model.[18] It appears at first glance that the dependent variable in this study— general community policing claims—is an ordinal variable. Planning to implement is greater than no implementation, and have already implemented is greater than planning to implement. Normally, estimating a model with an ordinal dependent variable requires ordered logit or probit (Clogg & Shihadeh, 1994; McKelvey & Zavoina, 1975). We first estimated the model using ordered logit, but the model violated the parallel lines or proportional odds assumption that is integral to the use of ordinal logit (Liao, 1994). Essentially, this assumption states that the effects of the independent variables must be constant across response categories of the dependent variable. Because the model violated an integral assumption of the ordinal logit procedure, we turned to multinomial logit. Multinomial logit treats the dependent variable as measured at the nominal level.

In multinomial logit, the analyst contrasts the response categories with one another. In this case, there are three response categories in the dependent variable, and thus three possible contrasts. This model results in three sets of coefficients: the first set compares agencies that claimed not to practice community policing with those that claimed to practice community policing; the second set contrasts agencies that claimed not to practice community policing with those that claimed they were in the planning or implementation process; and the third set compares agencies that claimed they were in the planning or implementation process with those that claimed they were practicing community policing. Table 6 lists the parameter estimates for all three contrasts. A likelihood ratio chi-square test confirmed that the full model fits the data significantly better than a restricted model containing only a vector of ones.[19]

We used two methods to interpret the results of the multinomial logit. First, we examined the sign and statistical significance levels of the estimated coefficients. These coefficients have little intuitive meaning because their metric is the log of odds ratios. For

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exhaustive theoretical and methodological review of this issue as applied to police organizations, see Maguire (2002).

[18] Multicollinearity was not a problem, since no variance inflation factor was greater than 4 (Fisher & Mason, 1981).

[19] The -2 log likelihood for the restricted model is 3381.43, and the -2 log likelihood for the full model is 2748.84. The difference is approximately distributed as a chi-square with degrees of freedom equal to the difference in the number of parameters estimated in the two models. The resulting likelihood ratio statistic ($\chi^2 = 632.59$, $df = 16$, $p < .005$) confirms that at least one independent variable in the model has a significant impact on general community policing claims. We are grateful to Dennis Roncek for suggesting this method.

Table 6. Multinomial Logit Results

Independent Variable	Has Implemented CP vs. Has Not Implemented CP	Planning to Implement CP vs. Has Not Implemented CP	Has Implemented CP vs. Planning to Implement CP
Intercept	−5.31****	−3.46****	−1.85****
	(.421)	(.343)	(.387)
Citizens' index	.082*	.031	.050
	(.034)	(.031)	(.031)
Police officers' index	.113****	.160****	−.047**
	(.019)	(.016)	(.018)
Midlevel managers' index	.007	−.111***	.118***
	(.036)	(.030)	(.034)
Organizational index	.199****	.045**	.155****
	(.020)	(.017)	(.018)
Organizational size (Log)	.090	.377****	−.287****
	(.072)	(.062)	(.066)
Midwestern region	.320**	.180	.140
	(.113)	(.093)	(.111)
Western region	−.005	.257*	.263*
	(.128)	(.110)	(.111)
Southern region	.177	.117	−.060
	(.105)	(.090)	(.100)

Note: CP = community policing. Unstandardized logit coefficients are in the first row, and standard errors are in parentheses in the second row.
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$, **** $p < .0001$.

ease of interpretation, we converted the model parameters into estimated probabilities that police organizations will claim (1) not to have implemented community policing, (2) to be in the process of planning or implementing community policing, or (3) to have implemented community policing (Liao, 1994, pp. 52–55). These probabilities, shown in Table 7, are estimated by setting the value for each independent variable at a fixed level while holding all others at their means.

Tables 6 and 7 are used to interpret the results of the multinomial logit. Examining the signs and statistical significance levels in Table 6, it is easy to see why these data did not meet the parallel-lines assumption in the original ordinal logit model. For some explanatory variables, the coefficient estimates are significant in one contrast but not in another. Some are negative in one contrast but positive in another. In other words, the effects of the explanatory variables are not consistent across the three categories of the dependent variable. This inconsistency makes interpretation of the coefficients complex. For instance, a unit increase in the patrol officer-activities index (controlling for all other variables in the model) *increases* the log-odds that an agency will claim either to

**Table 7. Predicted Probabilities of Being in Each
Community Policing Category on the Basis of
Selected Values of the Independent Variables**

Independent Variables	Value	Has Not Implemented CP	Planning or Implementing CP	Has Already Implemented CP
Citizens' activities	0	.386	.462	.152
	5	.335	.467	.198
	10	.284	.463	.253
	15	.236	.448	.316
Patrol officers' activities	0	.706	.176	.118
	7	.468	.359	.172
	14	.240	.565	.195
	22	.087	.738	.175
Midlevel managers' activities	0	.271	.585	.144
	4	.340	.473	.187
	8	.408	.363	.229
Organizational activities	0	.559	.419	.022
	10	.404	.477	.119
	20	.200	.369	.431
	31	.050	.153	.797
Organizational size	25	.442	.373	.183
	75	.354	.454	.192
	150	.309	.513	.178
	500	.236	.613	.151
Midwestern region	0	.357	.463	.180
	1	.308	.478	.214
Western region	0	.352	.454	.193
	1	.311	.519	.170
Southern region	0	.355	.462	.183
	1	.324	.476	.200
All cases		.344	.467	.189

have implemented or to be in the midst of planning or implementing community policing (relative to having not implemented community policing). But a unit increase in that index *decreases* the log-odds that an agency will claim to have implemented community policing (relative to planning or implementing community policing). Examining the predicted probabilities in Table 7 simplifies interpretation of the results of the model.

Citizens

With all the other explanatory variables in the model held at their means, the probability that an agency will claim that it has not implemented community policing decreases as the number of community policing activities practiced by citizens increases. Similarly, increases in community policing activities by citizens increase the probability that an agency will claim to have implemented community policing. Changes in the citizen activities index do not appear to affect the probability that an agency will claim that it is planning or implementing a community policing strategy.

Patrol Officers

Increases in the patrol officer-activity index decrease the probability that an agency will claim it does not practice community policing. The probabilities are dramatic. With all other variables in the model held at their means, the probability that an agency will claim it does not practice community policing is 70.6% for a minimum score (0) on this index and 8.7% for a maximum score (22). Similarly, as this index increases from 0 to 22, the probability that the agency will claim it is in the process of planning or implementing community policing rises from 17.6% to 73.8%. Changes in the index do not appear to be associated with the probability that an agency will claim to have implemented community policing. Thus, high levels of community policing activity by patrol officers appear to (1) lower the probability that an agency will claim not to have implemented community policing, (2) increase the probability that an agency will claim that it is planning or implementing community policing, and (3) have little effect on the probability that an agency will claim to have already implemented community policing.

Midlevel Managers

Some of the probabilities for the midlevel manager-activities index are counterintuitive. On the one hand, increases in managerial community policing activity *increase* the probability that an agency will claim not to have implemented community policing and decrease the probability that it will claim to be planning or implementing community policing. On the other hand, increases in managerial community policing activity increase the probability that an agency will claim to have implemented community policing. It is difficult to understand why increases in managerial community policing activity simultaneously increase the probability that an agency will claim *to have* implemented community policing and *not to* have implemented community policing.

Police Organizations

Increases in the organizational activities index decrease the probability that an agency will claim not to have implemented community policing and increase the probability that an agency will claim to have implemented community policing. The probabilities here, like those for patrol officers' activities, are dramatic. With all other variables held at their means, the probability that an agency with a minimum score on the organizational activities index will claim to have implemented community policing is only 2.2%, whereas the probability for agencies with a maximum score is

79.7%. Clearly, these organizational-level activities are associated with police agencies' general claims of community policing.

Organizational Size

If police agencies' general claims of community policing are shaped by, and tightly coupled with, their specific claims, then other variables should not be able to explain variation in general claims once specific claims have been controlled. The probabilities in Table 7 show that this is not the case. Increases in organizational size[20] (1) decrease the probability that an agency will claim not to have implemented community policing, (2) increase the probability that an agency will claim to be in the process of planning or implementing community policing, and (3) have no effect on the probability that an agency will claim to have implemented community policing. Thus, although larger organizations are not any more likely to claim that they have implemented community policing, they are less likely to claim that they *have not* implemented community policing and more likely to claim that they are in the process of planning or implementing community policing. One possibility for this finding, though it is mere speculation, is that larger agencies may experience a higher cost for claiming not to do community policing. Research has not examined this question.

Region

As with organizational size, if police agencies' general claims of community policing are tightly coupled with their specific claims, once we control for specific claims, region should not affect general claims. Again, the probabilities in Table 7 show that this is not the case. Numerous comparisons could be made among regions. For example, Midwestern agencies are less likely to claim that they have not implemented community policing and more likely to claim that they have. The regional differences are not dramatic, and, indeed, only 3 of the 9 logit coefficients for region are statistically significant (see Table 6). Nevertheless, there appear to be some regional variations in police agencies' general claims of community policing, even after specific dimensions of community policing activity are controlled.

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[20] When estimating the multinomial logit model, we used the natural log of organizational size. Similarly, to estimate the probabilities in this table, we used the natural log equivalents for each organization-size level. However, because the actual size of the organization is more intuitive than the natural log, we present the actual size in the table.

Summary

The various analyses discussed in this section show that police agencies' general claims of community policing are reasonably consistent with the specific community policing activities that they claim to perform. Because the specific dimensions of community policing activity tend not to have consistent effects on all three categories of the dependent variable, it is difficult to argue that some types of activities play a lesser or greater role in shaping the general claims. Judging from the estimated probabilities and the statistical significance levels of the logit coefficients, patrol officers' activities and organizational activities appear to play an important role in shaping police agencies' general claims of community policing. The findings for the activities of midlevel managers were the most ambiguous. They suggest that these activities may not play an important role in shaping police agencies' claims of community policing. Perhaps one of the most important findings in this section is that contextual variables like organizational size and region, even after various levels of specific community policing activity are controlled, still play a role in shaping police agencies' general claims of community policing. In other words, the degree of coupling between general and specific claims of community policing varies by both region and size of department. Other factors like political instability may influence the coupling properties of community policing claims, but we do not have the data to test these hypotheses.

DISCUSSION

In this study, we examined the degree of coupling between police agencies' general and specific claims of community policing using data from a national survey of police organizations. In general, we found that specific dimensions of community policing activity are moderately coupled with organizations' general claims of community policing. The effects of each sphere of activity are not constant across the three categories of the dependent variable.[21] For this reason, it is difficult to argue that any one dimension of community policing activity is more tightly coupled with general claims than another. However, overall, it appears that patrol officers' and organization-level activities have a stronger and more significant relationship with general claims of community policing, followed by citizens' activities. The findings for midlevel managers' activities are not clear.

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[21] The three categories are (1) the agency has not implemented community policing, (2) the agency is currently planning or implementing community policing, and (3) the agency has implemented community policing.

The notion that the activities of police officers and police organizations are more important than citizens' activities in shaping claims of community policing is not surprising. While a great deal of attention has been paid to the role of the police in community policing, much less attention has been paid to the education and involvement of citizens. Friedman (1994, p. 263) illustrated this point, stating that while academics and professionals have been busy meeting at conferences, discussing the philosophy of community policing in academic journals, and hiring one another as consultants, citizens have actually been given little opportunity to participate in the community policing process. One possible explanation may be that when this survey was conducted, community policing was in an early stage of its evolution. Police agencies have historically excluded the public from participating in crime control services; a cornerstone of the police professionalism movement in this country was the need for police officers to maintain a neutral and distant relationship with the public (Kelling & Moore, 1988). While the community policing movement may have evolved to the point that agencies have been able to implement patrol officers' and organization-level activities (those that they are more readily able to change), community engagement activities may be lagging behind. Police agencies may simply need more time to reeducate the public about their role in community policing or to restructure themselves so that community members play an *active* role in crime control and prevention activities. Systematic, empirical research is needed to determine whether communities have been systematically left out of the community policing equation or whether their role is still evolving. Fortunately, such research is now beginning to take place (Duffee, Fluellen, & Renauer, 1999; Duffee, Fluellen, & Roscoe, 1999).

The findings with respect to midlevel managers' activities are not as straightforward. Increases in midlevel management activity increased both the probability that an agency will claim not to have implemented community policing and the probability that an agency will claim to have implemented community policing and decreased the probability that an agency will claim to be planning or implementing community policing. Such findings are counterintuitive and difficult to interpret. They suggest that midlevel management activities may not play a strong role in shaping police agencies' community policing claims. However, additional research is needed to examine the degree of coupling between midlevel management practices and police agencies' general claims of community policing.

Organizational size was also found to affect police agencies' general community policing claims, controlling for the specific spheres of community policing activities that agencies claim to have implemented. Although similar findings have been reported by Zhao (1996) and Maguire et al. (1997), there has been little explanation for this finding. It may be that large agencies operate in a more turbulent political and social environment, and thus it is more difficult for them to claim that they do not engage in community policing (Maguire et al., 1997; Zhao, 1996). The costs of rejecting this popular reform movement may be too high in large cities. On the other hand, given that large organizations are typically more complex and perform more complex tasks, it may be that the community policing planning and implementation process is more difficult in these agencies. Clearly, more research is needed to learn why general claims of community policing are affected by the size of an organization after specific community policing activities are controlled.

Similarly, region had a significant impact on police agencies' general claims of community policing, even after specific community policing activities were controlled. There may be many reasons for such a finding. For example, Wilson (1968) argued that political structures vary by region, with local governments in the western states being more "progressive." Therefore, it may be that agencies that are located in the West face more pressure from local governments to be "innovative" and, as a result, may be more likely to implement community policing (Maguire et al., 1997). Others, such as Langworthy and Travis (1994), have attributed regional differences among police agencies to the historical development of the police in different regions. Police agencies in different regions have evolved in different ways, which may have produced regional differences in the way policing is practiced today. Although a number of studies have found regional variations in community policing practices (Wycoff, 1994; Zhao, 1996; Maguire et al., 1997), no research to date has examined the reasons for a causal relationship between region and community policing. Additional research is needed to explain why region has an effect on police agencies' general claims of community policing.

The finding that some dimensions of community policing are more tightly coupled with general claims of community policing than are others illustrates that police agencies in the United States tend to associate certain specific practices with community policing more than they do others. This pattern of relationships provides at least some insight into how local police agencies have interpreted, made sense of, and reacted to the community policing movement.

Community policing is an inherently ambiguous concept, and local police agencies must engage in some sort of sensemaking process to decide whether it should be implemented and, if so, how it should be done. While these sensemaking activities undoubtedly occur in vastly different contexts throughout the nation, the products of these activities are observable in the patterns uncovered in this research. In other words, given the popularity of the community policing movement, police agencies in various areas of the country have engaged in a variety of sensemaking processes. The collective product of these processes is evident here. Police agencies associate patrol officers' and organizational activities with community policing more than they do citizens' and midlevel managers' activities. Thus, although we were not able to observe the sensemaking process, we do have some idea of the product of these processes.

Why may midlevel managers' and citizens' activities be more loosely coupled with general claims of community policing? One possibility, though it is mere speculation on our part, may be that both sets of reforms threaten the internal power structure of police organizations. For instance, among the citizens' activities are several items that ask about citizens' roles in selecting, evaluating, and promoting officers; reviewing complaints against officers; and setting departmental policy. Among the midlevel managers' activities are several items that ask whether midlevel managers can "make final decisions" in a variety of areas. Changing the roles of citizens and managers threatens to upset the balance of power in police organizations. Furthermore, the findings demonstrate that citizens' activities are more loosely coupled than midlevel managers' activities with general claims of community policing (as evidenced by the number of statistically significant logit coefficients). If it is true that police executives weight the degree of threat to the internal balance of power when they decide what kinds of reforms to implement, then this is the pattern we would expect. Enhancing the authority of midlevel managers is much less threatening than enhancing the authority of citizens. As local police executives struggle to make sense of the community policing movement and how it applies to their circumstances, they may not view either change as necessary or attractive. Attempting to implement programs like those found in the organizational activities measure or changing the work of patrol officers in the various ways that are reflected in the police officers' activities measure may both appear less daunting.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study have implications for several audiences. For policy makers and reformers, they provide cause for doubt about the role of citizens and midlevel managers in community policing as it has been enacted in American police agencies. Because citizens' activities play a smaller role in shaping police agencies' claims of community policing than do police officers' or police organizations' activities, reformers may need to explore alternative mechanisms for altering the relationship between the police and the public so that community members play a more central role in crime control and prevention. In addition, although midlevel managers are frequently discussed as obstacles to long-term change, some researchers have found them to be an integral component of the change process (see, e.g., Geller & Swanger, 1995). Changes in the role of midlevel managers and citizens in community policing may be particularly difficult to implement because they require police agencies to make real and substantial changes in the way they do business.

Although this research was unable to address the "legitimacy" of community policing claims directly, it did uncover some evidence of loose coupling between general and specific claims of community policing. We did not attempt to explain the variation in the degree of coupling, but many scholars and practitioners have commented on this issue. One explanation, for instance, is that the involvement of the federal government in community policing reform may profoundly alter the nature of claims of community policing in the United States. Because local agencies must certify that they are either planning or doing community policing to receive federal grants under the 1994 Crime Act, it is possible that more agencies are now making illegitimate claims about their involvement in community policing. In other words, in the past (when the data in this study were collected), there may have been fewer incentives for police executives to make false claims that they were doing community policing, but in the face of rich federal funding opportunities, there are good reasons to make such claims. Some have even suggested that the community policing requirement attached to some Crime Act funds may be contributing to a new era of police circumlocution (Cowper, 1997). The data used in this study were collected in 1992–93, prior to the passage of the 1994 Crime Act. If some agencies are falsely claiming to practice community policing to become eligible for federal funding, then the Crime Act may have fundamentally altered the relationship between police agencies' general and specific claims after these data were collected. Our interactions with police practitioners at conferences and during site visits have

provided anecdotal evidence that police agencies sometimes exaggerate or make false claims about their community policing efforts. Although this is an admittedly weak form of evidence, it does suggest a plausible hypothesis that is worthy of further inquiry.

Federal funding is only one reason why police and governmental executives may make false claims of community policing. Theoretical perspectives drawn from the study of complex organizations suggest at least two other reasons why executives may make such claims. First, resource-dependence theorists would argue that since most local agencies exist in fiercely competitive funding environments, the appearance of newly available resources (from any source) may be sufficient to prompt agency administrators to bend the truth (Donaldson, 1995; Katz, Maguire, & Roncek, in press). Second, institutional theorists would suggest that police organizations strive to achieve the "appearance" of legitimacy, but attempt to do so only in ways that do not disrupt the day-to-day work of their organizations' technical core. In other words, a police executive may be able to enhance the legitimacy of the organization by claiming to practice community policing and implementing a handful of token changes that appear to support such claims without actually making fundamental changes in task or structure (Crank & Langworthy, 1992; J. W. Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Secondary research, such as this, is incapable of confirming either theoretical explanation for why some agencies may make false claims about community policing. New field research at the local level is needed to document the process by which claims of community policing are generated.

The findings of our study, combined with other recent research on police organizations, suggest some fairly concrete steps that future researchers may take in examining police agencies' claims of community policing. First, survey research on community policing can be improved in several fundamental ways. One way is to develop methods for measuring the "dosage" of community policing practices (Maguire & Mastrofski, 2000). Merely knowing that a police agency does foot patrol is not enough. What proportion of the jurisdiction is covered? How many officers participate? How often do officers patrol on foot? After more than a dozen national surveys of community policing, it is time to take the dosage issue seriously. In the wake of recent research on sample selection bias and organizations' nonresponse to surveys, a second way is to make a bold effort to compare survey respondents and nonrespondents (Archbold & Maguire, in press; Tomaskovic-Devey, Leiter, & Thompson, 1994). A third way, based on research on policing (Weiss, 1997) and other organizational types (Gupta, Shaw, & Delery, 2000), is for

agency-level surveys to rely on multiple informants in each organization. Evidence shows that individual ratings of organizational attributes contain a certain degree of measurement error; to reduce this error, researchers can combine multiple responses into a single agency "score" using methods like confirmatory factor analysis.[22] Finally, alternative methods should be established to assess the reliability of police agencies' claims of community policing. One such method, though intensive for both researchers and respondents, is to draw repeated measures over a short term from a sample of police agencies. These measures could be used to examine the stability of the responses. All these suggestions would improve survey evidence on how local police agencies are responding to the community policing movement.

Survey research is valuable for sketching a picture of community policing practices across the United States, but other methodologies are needed to add color and depth. The sensemaking perspective that we introduced in this article will be useful for understanding how local police officials learn about, interpret, react to, and make sense of community policing in their communities. However, a number of field research methods need to be used to uncover the intimate details of the sensemaking process. Field research methods could also be useful in describing and explaining how various patterns of loose and tight coupling emerge in local police agencies. Natural histories and detailed case studies, if compiled for a number of agencies, could detect patterns in how local police agencies heard about, interpreted, made sense of, and enacted community policing at the local level. Although comparative ethnographies of this sort can contribute a great deal of insight about sensemaking efforts in local police departments, they are rare. The cross-site analysis of community policing in 10 cities by Moore, Thacher, Hartmann, Coles, and Sheingold (1999) is an important step in the right direction.

Throughout Weick's (1976, 1995) work is the consistent message that organizations are active organisms that never stand still. Weick has been careful to emphasize that concepts, such as loose coupling and sensemaking, represent dynamic actions, rather than

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[22] Weiss (1997) reported that individual actors in an organization may respond in different ways to surveys asking about organizational attributes, thus producing a combination of both random and systematic error. Weiss suggested using a "key informant" method, in which organizational surveys (or interviews) are completed by multiple respondents in an agency, and the responses are then treated as separate indicators of the same phenomenon in a confirmatory factor analysis. Using this method, Weiss found a relationship between an informant's location in an organization and the degree of bias in the informant's response. Similarly, in his survey of large police organizations, Maguire (2002) serendipitously found that when agencies were sent duplicate surveys by mistake, the surveys were sometimes returned by different respondents in the same agency, with conflicting responses.

static properties. To truly understand these concepts, it is necessary to observe them as they unfold in their dynamic environments. We have provided a snapshot of loose coupling and collective sensemaking activities in local police agencies. One way to expand our knowledge of community policing is to experiment with creative methodologies that allow us to bring this snapshot to life.

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