

Community-Oriented Policing: A Theoretical Exploration and its Implications for Building Safer Communities

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ABSTRACT

Community-oriented policing (COP) has emerged as a paradigm shift in law enforcement, emphasizing community collaboration, trust-building, and proactive problem-solving. This concept strives to foster more collaboration and confidence between police officers and community residents, with the ultimate objective of reducing crime and enhancing public safety. This research investigates the theoretical foundations of COP through an extensive literature review, a secondary data analysis. This essay aims to present a thorough analysis of the theoretical frameworks supporting COP while shedding light on its theoretical foundation and real-world applications. The study delves into theoretical frameworks including Normative Sponsorship Theory, Critical Social Theory, Broken Windows Theory, and Social Resource Theory, highlighting their relevance to COP and the implications for building safer communities.

Normative Sponsorship Theory advocates for community involvement in shaping policing norms, fostering trust, and enhancing effectiveness. Critical Social Theory offers a critical lens to analyze COP in the context of broader societal structures and inequalities, emphasizing the need for systemic transformation. The Broken Windows Theory underscores the importance of addressing visible signs of disorder to deter crime, aligning with COP's proactive engagement with communities. Social Resource Theory underscores the role of social capital and community engagement in crime prevention and public safety. The integration of these theories into COP underscores the importance of trust, collaboration, and proactive problem-solving in law enforcement. Understanding and incorporating these theoretical underpinnings into COP practices can significantly contribute to building safer and more harmonious communities. This study enriches the discourse on COP and provides valuable insights for policymakers, law enforcement agencies, and communities striving to enhance public safety and community well-being through collaborative policing strategies.

Keywords: Community-Oriented Policing, Theoretical Foundations, Safer Communities, Crime Prevention

INTRODUCTION

The term “Community Oriented Policing” is used to describe the friendly and mutually beneficial collaboration between police and the general public (James B. Hunt Jr., 1997). Community Oriented Policing involves,

- identifying issues in the community,
- discussing possible solutions that can be implemented to address those issues, and
- take the necessary steps to resolve the identified issues by effectively implementing the solutions (Chamara, 2020).

As indicated by Ferreira, “Community policing is a philosophy of full-service personalized policing in which the same officer patrols and works in the same area permanently, from a decentralized location, engaging in a proactive collaboration with residents to identify and address problems” (Ferreira, 1996).

This concept originated in the United Kingdom and was pioneered by Sir Robert Peel, who is considered the father of modern democratic policing. He observed that the people of the community can play a significant role in crime prevention. As a result, for the first time in history, he sent officers from the police station to the community to establish a relationship between the community and the police to prevent crime in the relevant society. He didn't call his approach "community policing". Anyhow, it has been recognized that this Peelian approach was the world's first community policing paradigm. As a result, in the late 1970s, the United Kingdom and the United States of America identified the need for a community-oriented police force and implemented new strategies.

According to the US Justice Department's Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS), Community Oriented Policing consists of three main components:

1. Community partnerships (collaborative partnerships between law enforcement agencies and the individuals and organizations they serve to develop solutions to problems),
2. Organizational transformation (alignment of organizational management, structure, personnel, and information systems to improve trust in the police),
3. Problem Solving (the process of engaging in the proactive and systematic examination of identified problems to develop and evaluate effective responses) (COPS, 2014).

According to the COPS, Community policing may entail forming partnerships with a variety of groups, such as service providers, non-profit organizations, commercial enterprises, and the media, in addition to the general public (COPS, 2014).

The following diagram, presented by COPS, clearly mentions the primary elements of community policing.

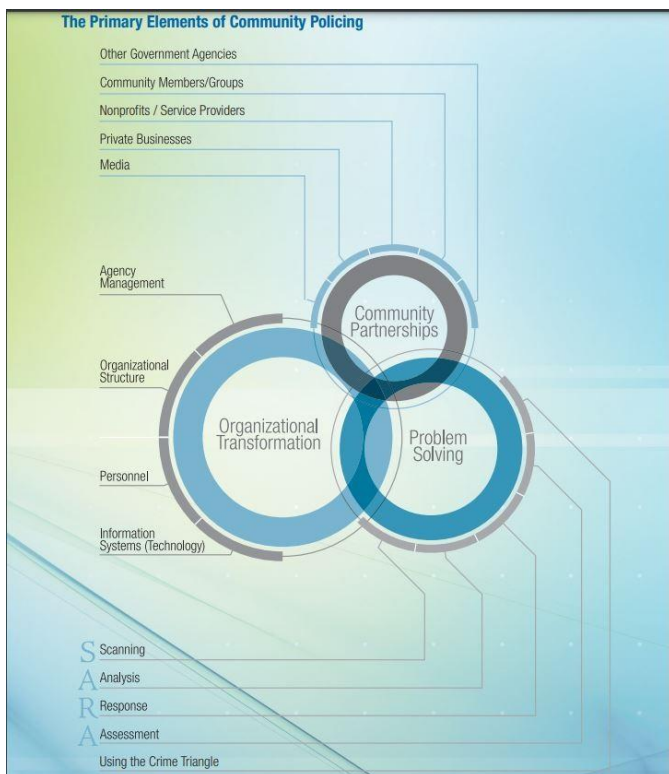


Figure 1 Primary elements of community policing (COPS, 2014).

This article aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the theoretical frameworks that underpin COP, offering insights into its theoretical background and practical applications.

Normative Sponsorship Theory

The ultimate objective of COP is to make a community safer and more secure by including locals in the process of detecting and resolving issues with crime and disorder (Cordner G. W., 2005). In the context of community-oriented policing, the normative sponsorship theory posits that people and communities actively shape the norms and values that direct their conduct (Greene, 2000). This idea holds that people in the community can serve as normative sponsors, influencing and supporting proper police behavior that is consistent with community norms (Gill et al, 2014). According to the Normative Sponsorship Theory, when community people and police officers work together to define and promote positive norms and behaviors, it increases public trust, police legitimacy, and legal compliance (Sunshine, 2003).

Incorporating Normative Sponsorship Theory into the framework of community-oriented policing implies a fundamental shift from a traditional top-down policing model to a more inclusive and participatory approach (Trojanowicz, R., & Bucqueroux, B., 1990). Police officers, as well as community members, need to work together to co-create norms and guidelines for policing activities that are acceptable and beneficial for the community. This collaboration helps in developing a shared understanding of the desired policing behaviors and practices within the community (Braga, A. A., & Weisburd, D., 2010).

The theoretical integration of Normative Sponsorship Theory into community-oriented policing offers a promising avenue for building safer communities. By involving community members as normative sponsors, the police can align their practices with community values, enhance legitimacy, and foster trust. This collaborative approach promotes a more inclusive and accountable policing model, ultimately contributing to the creation of safer and more secure communities. The Normative Sponsorship Theory posits that effective community policing relies on community support and collaboration.

Critical Social Theory

The critical social theory provides a lens to analyze and critique policing strategies like COP within broader social, economic, and political contexts. This theoretical exploration examines how critical social theory can shed light on the implementation and implications of community-oriented policing for building safer communities.

Critical social theory, rooted in the works of critical theorists such as Karl Marx, Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, and Herbert Marcuse, seeks to understand and critique societal structures and power dynamics. It emphasizes the role of power, inequality, and social injustices in shaping and perpetuating societal norms and structures. Critical social theorists argue that the prevailing social order often serves the interests of the powerful and that social change should address these inequalities to create a more just and equitable society.

When applied to community-oriented policing, critical social theory allows for a critical analysis of how this policing strategy intersects with societal power structures. It raises important questions about how COP addresses or perpetuates existing social inequalities, power imbalances, and systemic injustices within communities.

To build safer communities, COP must be critically examined and integrated with a broader societal transformation that addresses the root causes of crime and insecurity. Critical social theory emphasizes the importance of dismantling systemic inequalities and power imbalances as a foundational step toward creating safer and more just communities.

Critical Social Theory, as exemplified in Stephen R. Schneider's (2014) research, addresses communication barriers between the police and socially disadvantaged neighborhoods. This theory underscores the need to

overcome these barriers by promoting communicative action that dismantles unequal power relations, fostering more responsive and democratic policing practices.

Broken Windows Theory

The Broken Window Theory and Community Policing are two distinct concepts in the field of law enforcement that have gained significant attention for their potential to enhance community safety and reduce crime rates.

The Broken Window Theory was introduced by Wilson and Kelling in 1982, suggesting that visible signs of disorder and neglect in a community, such as broken windows, graffiti, and antisocial behavior, can contribute to an environment conducive to further crime and social disorder. This theory has been instrumental in shaping law enforcement strategies and policies, particularly within the framework of Community-Oriented Policing (Kelling, G. L., & Moore, M. H., 1988).

The Broken Window Theory can be integrated into the framework of community policing as a strategy to target minor offenses that contribute to the deterioration of neighborhoods. By utilizing proactive approaches to address visible signs of disorder in collaboration with the community, law enforcement can uphold order and create an environment where criminal activities are less likely to thrive.

Community policing provides the platform to implement the principles of the Broken Window Theory effectively. Engaging with the community, problem-solving collaboratively, and focusing on prevention align with the proactive, community-oriented approach advocated by the Broken Window Theory. By working in tandem, these approaches can contribute to safer and more cohesive communities.

Social Resource Theory

The Social Resource Theory, proposed by Lin (2001), reimagines the role of the police as social resources meant to address public concerns. It views crime from the perspective of the community, recognizing that it often arises from unmet expectations, resource deficiencies, and police inefficiency. As such, this theory underscores the police's role in solving community problems and enhancing police-community relationships. Social Resource Theory posits that communities possess valuable social resources such as social cohesion, trust, and collective efficacy, which significantly influence their ability to effectively address crime and maintain public safety. COP aligns with this theory by recognizing the role of social resources in crime prevention and community well-being.

In COP, law enforcement officers actively engage with community members to understand their unique concerns, values, and needs. By building trust and fostering positive relationships, police officers can tap into the social capital of the community, encouraging collaborative efforts to address crime and social disorder effectively (Justice, 1994). Through COP, law enforcement agencies can facilitate community-building activities that enhance social cohesion and trust among residents. By promoting open communication and fostering partnerships between police and community members, a sense of collective responsibility for public safety is cultivated (Skogan, 2006). This heightened social cohesion can contribute to a safer community environment.

Community-oriented policing encourages active community involvement in identifying issues and designing strategies to address them. By involving residents in problem-solving and decision-making processes related to crime prevention, COP promotes a shared sense of ownership and empowerment (Rosenbaum, 1994). This engagement helps create a proactive approach to safety, ultimately leading to a safer community. COP aims to improve the perception of law enforcement agencies within communities by emphasizing fair and respectful interactions. As a result, community members are more likely to perceive the police as legitimate

authorities, increasing their willingness to cooperate and collaborate (Tyler, 2006). This heightened legitimacy can enhance compliance with the law and foster a safer community environment.

CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY

Community-oriented policing (COP) is a philosophy of law enforcement that emphasizes collaboration, trust-building, and proactive problem-solving to enhance public safety and build safer communities. This study delved into the theoretical foundations of COP, examining frameworks such as Normative Sponsorship Theory, Critical Social Theory, Broken Windows Theory, and Social Resource Theory.

Normative Sponsorship Theory highlights the role of community involvement in shaping policing norms and fostering trust. Critical Social Theory provides a critical analysis of COP within broader societal contexts, emphasizing the need for systemic transformation. The integration of the Broken Windows Theory into COP emphasizes proactive engagement with communities to address visible signs of disorder. Social Resource Theory underscores the importance of social capital and community engagement in crime prevention and public safety.

By incorporating these theoretical underpinnings into COP practices, stakeholders can contribute to building safer and more harmonious communities. COP promotes collaborative partnerships, organizational change, and proactive problem-solving, aligning with the core components identified by the US Department of Justice's Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS). Through community partnerships, organizational transformation, and problem-solving strategies, COP aims to create a more responsive, accountable, and inclusive approach to policing, ultimately enhancing public safety and community well-being.

Implications for Community-Oriented Policing

The theoretical frameworks discussed above have profound implications for the practice of community-oriented policing:

Building Trust and Collaboration: The Normative Sponsorship Theory emphasizes the need for trust and collaboration between law enforcement and the community. Community-oriented policing should prioritize building strong relationships with residents to effectively address community issues. The implications of integrating Normative Sponsorship Theory into community-oriented policing are substantial. By involving community members as normative sponsors, police agencies can enhance legitimacy, foster trust, and improve the overall effectiveness of law enforcement efforts (Tyler, 2004). Ultimately, the community becomes an active partner in the process of defining and maintaining a safe and secure environment.

Addressing Communication Barriers: Critical Social Theory highlights the importance of overcoming communication barriers, particularly in disadvantaged neighborhoods. Effective communication strategies and community engagement are crucial for successful COP implementation (Schneider, 2014).

Fostering Order and Preventing Crime: The Broken Window Theory highlights the importance of addressing minor signs of disorder to prevent the escalation of crime, while community policing emphasizes collaboration and proactive measures to enhance public safety. Integrating these two approaches can provide a comprehensive strategy for law enforcement to maintain order, build community trust, and create a safer and more vibrant living environment.

Providing Responsive Policing: The Social Resource Theory underscores the importance of police responsiveness to community concerns. COP should focus on meeting the needs and expectations of the public to enhance community well-being.

Community-oriented policing is grounded in various theoretical frameworks, each offering unique insights into how law enforcement can work collaboratively with communities to create safer and more vibrant neighborhoods. By integrating these theories into practice, law enforcement agencies can effectively address the complex challenges faced by communities while building trust and partnerships that foster lasting positive change.

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