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PERCEPTIONS OF BLACK LIVES MATTER: AN ANALYSIS OF THE MOVEMENT AND
ITS IMPACT ON THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE LINCOLN POLICE
DEPARTMENT, THE MEDIA AND THE PUBLIC

An Undergraduate Honors Thesis
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Abstract

This study examines the relationships between the Lincoln Police Department (LPD), the *Lincoln Journal Star* (LJS), and the public as they interacted during the Black Lives Matter protests in Lincoln, Nebraska, during June 2020. In order to analyze the relationships between the three actors, I utilized previous research that examined the role of the media on perceptions of police, how media framing of police brutality influences perceptions, and how the four models of public relations function in communities. This led me to pose the following research question: How do the relationships between the Lincoln Police Department, the media, and the public reflect symmetrical communication? In this study, I conducted an analysis of both LJS articles and tweets from members of the public, as well as an interview with LPD's Public Information Officer. Ultimately, the relationships between the three actors more closely reflect asymmetric communication as opposed to the two-way symmetrical model.

Key Words: Public perception, Black Lives Matter, media framing, police-civilian relations, public relations

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Perceptions of Black Lives Matter: An Analysis of the Movement and Its Impact on the Relationship Between the Lincoln Police Department, the Media and the Public

Although it is not a new problem in our society, the issue of police brutality has been brought up in mainstream media time and time again, especially in recent years. In the past year, society saw massive demonstrations across the country calling for social change after the deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd in quick succession. Echoing the cries that were first brought to light in 2013, the Black Lives Matter movement broke out into mainstream media coverage with a vengeance.

In 2012, George Zimmerman was acquitted for the shooting death of Trayvon Martin (“Herstory,” 2019). While this was not the first instance of an unarmed black man’s death at the hands of a white man, it certainly would also not be the last. After the deaths of Michael Brown and Eric Garner in 2014 – both unarmed black men killed by police – #BlackLivesMatter started trending nationwide, calling for changes to the institution of policing (“Herstory,” 2019).

In May 2020, George Floyd was choked and killed by police in Minneapolis. Though appalling, it was not the first time the nation had witnessed an atrocity of that magnitude. The death of George Floyd was the breaking point; national unrest spurred by the pandemic, not to mention testy race relations spurred on by the past administration, caused Black Lives Matter protesters across the nation to demand justice and to demand better. Lincoln was no exception. Like many cities across the nation, and even across the world, Lincoln saw organized protests and heard cries for justice from many of its residents.

As of July 28, 2020, the Lincoln Police Department (LPD) consisted of 359 police officers. Of the 272 male officers, only 1.6% are Black, 3.8% are Hispanic or Latino, .2% are

Native American, 1.6% are Asian, and .5% are two or more races (Lincoln Police Department, 2020). The representation among the 56 female police officers is even less; .2% are Black, and another .2% are Hispanic or Latino. The other 54 female officers are white. The estimated population of Lincoln, Neb., as of July 1, 2019, is 289,102 (“United States Census Bureau,” n.d.). Of those residents, 85.2% identify as white alone, and 4.4% as Black or African American alone. A mere 0.1% identify as Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone, 0.6% as American Indian or Alaska Native alone, 4.7% as Asian alone, 7.4% as Hispanic or Latino, and 3.6% identified as two or more races (“United States Census Bureau,” n.d.).

The diversity of Lincoln is not reflected in the officers of LPD, which is a possible aspect to consider when it comes to the misunderstandings between police and civilians. One of the main determining factors that influences attitudes towards police are media portrayals of police (Choi & Giles, 2012). In this study, I will examine how the Black Lives Matter protests in Lincoln influenced the relationships between three key actors: the organization, being the Lincoln Police Department, the media, namely the *Lincoln Journal Star*, and the public. This focus is necessary because with respect to certain beliefs about the police, such as police militarization, the news and social media form a substantial amount of the public’s exposure (Ilchi & Frank, 2019).

Previous research has explored how the media influences civilian perceptions of the police, and the current research will provide a case study for how the relationship between the three actors was exhibited during the month of June 2020. This study will specifically explore how the Black Lives Matter protests in Lincoln spurred each of the actors to movement, and in turn how those movements impacted the others. In the following section, I will summarize existing research on the media and its role in influencing perceptions, the importance of media

framing regarding race and police brutality, and how these relationships are examples of two-way symmetrical communication as described in the four models of public relations.

The Role of the Media in Influencing Perception

Specific media depictions of police have the power to influence people's perceptions, such as in news broadcasts, fictionalized police dramas and police reality shows (Choi & Giles, 2012). The police-civilian model demonstrates numerous ways in which people's expectations and attitudes towards the police can be affected. While there are several variables to consider when analyzing what affects perceptions, media portrayals of police are a particularly prominent source (Choi & Giles, 2012). As echoed in other studies, media has the power to dramatically influence the attitudes toward and the perceptions of police, especially when an individual has had no personal police contact, which is particularly noticeable when considering the prevalence and expansion of crime-related media in recent years (Choi & Giles, 2012; Callanan & Rosenberger, 2011).

Chermak and colleagues' (2006) research examined how the coverage around a particular case involving police influenced public attitudes toward police and found that the more exposure an individual had to the media reporting the incident, the more likely they were to assume the police were guilty. This suggests that media coverage of police misconduct has the power to influence public opinion, either negatively or positively. While news consumption did not affect general attitudes toward the police substantially, it affected attitudes concerning the guilt of the officers involved in the case (Chermak, Mcgarrell, & Gruenewald, 2006). As seen throughout the past year, social media enables the average person to play juror as video evidence circulates online, such as in the case of George Floyd. This is especially significant when considering

Campbell and Valera's (2020) study with 85% of participants reporting they learned of police misconduct incidents from social media platforms.

Oftentimes, the media determines how events are covered, especially considering the diverse nature of the media landscape. Callanan and Rosenberger (2011) found that police news coverage on television was overly positive; television news representations consequently had a positive effect on trust in police. The research also found that news stories of police brutality and misconduct are frequently presented as 'bad apple' scenarios rather than larger, systematic problems (Callanan & Rosenberger, 2011). Different mediums have the power to impact a number of things, be it confidence in the police or public opinion.

The Importance of Media Framing in Police-Civilian Relationships

News media has historically been considered the primary source of impartial, accurate and truthful information in society; because of this, the knowledge they circulate is given a substantial degree of authority (Banks, 2018). However, a common misconception of traditional journalism is the overarching idea of objectivity without bias. It is important to consider how reporters are subject to their own implicit biases and that all words carry a variety of connotations. Whether it means to or not, how the media chooses to tell stories or portray certain groups affects how the public perceives the information at hand; for example, how the media frames the police or civilian unrest during social movements could delegitimize protestors' concerns (Banks, 2018).

When it comes to the media and the power of framing, it is important to note the implications certain frames can have for public priorities. Fridkin and colleagues (2017) explored how the use of specific media frames were able to influence support for either victim or law

enforcement when present in news coverage. Two main frames they identified were the police brutality frame and the law-and-order frame. The first uses language that depicts the described encounter as violent at the hands of the police officer, therefore increasing support for victims of police misconduct. The latter paints the picture that law enforcement officers in the story were doing their job to maintain public safety, which influences attitudes to align more with the law enforcement perspective (Fridkin, et. al, 2017). Each of these two frames has the potential to uniquely influence the public's perception of the same event.

Applying the Four Models of Public Relations

The four models of public relations are press agency/publicity, public information, two-way asymmetric, and two-way symmetric (Grunig, 1983). The purpose of each model is propaganda, dissemination of information, scientific persuasion and mutual understanding, respectively. For this study, I will look specifically at the two-way models of both asymmetric and symmetric communication. The two-way asymmetric model holds that “manipulating publics to behave as organizations would want them to behave” (Grunig, 1983).

In symmetrical terms, Cutlip and Center (1952) described public relations as “the communication and interpretation of information, ideas, and opinion...from publics to the institution in an effort to bring the two into harmonious adjustment.” As symmetric communication represents both groups to the other, this model promotes a dialogue rather than an unequal inundation of information from one side. Asymmetric models help the organization to dominate the environment, whereas symmetric models help the organization to maintain its interdependence with the environment (Grunig, 1983). While the two-way symmetrical model is the most conducive model for creating dialogue, I argue the Lincoln Police Department, the

Lincoln Journal Star, and the public function within the two-way asymmetrical model of public relations and communication. The goal of the three actors may very well be to achieve a mutual understanding, and that model is certainly attainable in the future; however, it is not the model currently operating between the three actors.

The current research will consider how the Lincoln Police Department perceives community sentiment particularly based on data received from surveys conducted by the department. This study will also analyze how the *Lincoln Journal Star* covered the BLM protests in Lincoln involving LPD. Additionally, this research will take into account how members of the public expressed their opinions of LPD following the initial Black Lives Matter protests in Lincoln via tweets sent on Twitter throughout the month of June 2020. This snapshot case study will allow for exploration of how the actors' relationships fit into the two-way asymmetrical communication model. Therefore, I pose the following research question:

RQ: How do the relationships between the Lincoln Police Department, the media, and the public reflect symmetrical communication?

Interview with LPD's Public Information Officer

In order to understand the organization's perspective, I interviewed Lincoln Police Department's Public Information Officer on July 29, 2020. The list of questions asked included: *(1) Do you think the Lincoln Journal Star consistently depicted LPD accurately and fairly in the month of June?; (2) Prior to the death of George Floyd and the subsequent protests nationwide, what do you think the general overall sentiment towards police in Lincoln was?; (3) Circling back to my original thesis, do you think LPD's perceived public perception is accurate of how the public actually feels; (4) Over the past month, have you noticed a difference in the way the*

community reacts to a police presence?; (5) Have there been calls for diversifying LPD? Are there any statistics available about the diversity of the department in terms of age, gender, race, years of experience, etc.?; (6) Has LPD's relationship changed any with the media, particularly during the media briefings?; and (7) Do you think LPD's obvious effort and compassion for the community (ex: the viral dance at the Malone Center, the viral Facebook post featuring you and Sebastian) have impacted community sentiment?

The Lincoln Police Department is one of only a handful of departments nationwide that conducts a daily media briefing. Public Information Officer Spilker noted, “We give them all of our reports, we let them look at everything we do, we let them ask questions, every single day,” (E. Spilker, personal communication, July 29, 2020). Ofc. Spilker explained LPD has attempted to maintain this positive working relationship with members of the media so in these tense, controversial situations, LPD is given the benefit of the doubt. Ofc. Spilker noted that in the past, LPD has a “track history” of removing officers guilty of misconduct (full interview transcript is presented in Appendix 1). Essentially, the transparency LPD is willing to provide is a testament to their positive collaboration with the *Lincoln Journal Star*.

In response to the interview question asking if she felt the *Lincoln Journal Star* portrayed the department accurately and fairly across its coverage, Ofc. Spilker replied she felt it “almost impossible” to accurately portray LPD. “Our job...is to follow the laws, policies, and regulations...to protect victims, to protect the judicial process, and investigate” (E. Spilker, personal communication, July 29, 2020). Due to legal obligations surrounding ongoing criminal investigations, LPD is bound by Nebraska bar standards to withhold investigative information.

Overall, Ofc. Spilker says LPD has good reason to believe the general sentiment in Lincoln toward the department has been mostly positive. Based on Quality of Service survey

results, respondents usually replied favorably after being surveyed about their interaction with LPD. These surveys have helped the department keep a pulse on community sentiment since 1994. Survey participants are routinely called after experiencing some form of police contact, such as being involved in an accident, receiving a citation, or being a victim (E. Spilker, personal communication, July 29, 2020). In 2019, 4,123 civilians participated in the survey. In response to the question regarding overall performance, 51.5% indicated outstanding performance, 24.3% above average, 14.8% average, 4.2% below average, and 2.8% unsatisfactory (Quality Service Audit Results, 2019).

Ofc. Spilker felt the question, “Do you feel safe in your neighborhood?” was also particularly indicative of positive community perception. She noted that even if a person is personally afraid of the police, the community’s overall trust in the police to keep their neighborhood safe is reflected in their results. 47.7% of respondents indicated always feeling safe, 32.4% usually safe, 11.4% sometimes safe, 3.3% usually not safe, and 1.5% never feeling safe or secure (Quality Service Audit Results). Regardless of the numbers from these surveys, Ofc. Spilker says that there have been and will probably always be outliers who “have a bone to pick” with law enforcement. “We don’t genuinely think people are bad. A lot of times it’s a mutual understanding of a job that needs to be done,” (E. Spilker, personal communication, July 29, 2020).

Thematic Analysis of *Lincoln Journal Star* Articles

In order to determine which articles from the *Lincoln Journal Star* to analyze, I used the advanced search function on the paper’s website and searched for articles containing the keywords “LPD,” “BLM,” “Black Lives Matter,” “riots,” or “protests.” I identified 13 relevant

articles. Many of the articles covered the protests or the reactions toward the earliest nights of protesting that escalated into riots. Others detailed the injuries protestors sustained from tear gas and rubber bullets discharged from police clad in riot gear, or how a Nebraska State Patrol Major kneeled alongside protesters.

Among the relevant articles, I identified two major frames used throughout the reporting: police brutality and law-and-order. The articles reflecting a police brutality frame used language that invoked feelings of hostility and uncertainty toward LPD and law enforcement in general. Articles using a law-and-order frame emphasized how the police presence was necessary to maintain safety and that they were just doing their job, insinuating protesters were the root cause of the unrest, both in Lincoln and across the country.

One article in particular – “Protestors describe being shot, gassed during Black Lives Matter protests in Lincoln” – exhibits both media frames. In the interview, Ofc. Spilker referenced this same article as one that was a bit one-sided and not as neutral as some of the other coverage. The article immediately features direct quotes from injured protestors, which gives readers the impression that LPD was the instigator of much of the violence resulting from the clashes with protesters several nights early in June. The author of the article quoted a protestor as saying law enforcement was “roughing people up” and he was retreating from officers and the conflict when he was struck in the back of the head with a rubber bullet (Dunker, 2020).

Ofc. Spilker sat in on the interview the reporter conducted with Captain Stille, commander of the LPD SWAT team, who is quoted in the article. Ofc. Spilker noted she felt “the quotes were taken out of context and they were made to make us look bad” (E. Spilker, personal communication, July 29, 2020). One quote Ofc. Spilker refers to is the last line in the article

which reads, “‘I thought we were doing a good job in the community,’ he said. ‘It certainly has been eye-opening for me and maybe we haven't done as good of a job as I think we have done,’” (Dunker, 2020). The placement and phrasing of this quote gives readers the impression that LPD was oblivious to prior inconsistencies with community perception.

Toward the end of the article, the frame shifted to adopt more of a law-and-order stance. Many of the quotes that fit this framework were taken directly from the protesters. The article notes, “Several of those injured said they understand most law enforcement officers are good at their jobs and trying to serve their communities,” (Dunker, 2020). The article also identifies “individuals determined to sow chaos” as the cause for many of the problems surrounding the protests (Dunker, 2020). An associate professor of criminology and criminal justice at the University of Nebraska at Omaha who studies policing, Justin Nix mentioned LPD is generally viewed favorably for “its progressive policing strategies that use best practices,” which furthers the law-and-order stance of the police doing only what was absolutely necessary to maintain the safety of its citizens.

Analysis of Public Perception via Twitter

For the social media analysis component of my research, I used the advanced search function on Twitter to find tweets sent from June 1 to June 30, 2020, containing the terms “LPD” AND “riots” or were sent as replies to tweets containing those terms. I also searched for tweets containing “LPD” AND “media” or replies to tweets containing those terms. I collected a total of 21 tweets. I chose to limit search results to the month of June because that time period was when the city of Lincoln saw the most engagement between the three actors.

A topic many tweets focused on was the Lincoln Police Department's "Hold Cops Accountable" initiative in partnership with the Malone Center; the video of officers dancing alongside members of the community accumulated 5.9 million views (Schammert, 2020). This was met with both support and opposition from members of the public. Comments ranged from, "THIS. Is the America we dream of" to "I do not trust this for a second" (TheDover, 2020; James, 2020). The general sentiments reflected in tweets expressed both opinions. Some referred to the protests as "riots," while others called for reform and expressed a dislike and distrust of LPD.

Though there were significantly less tweets focusing on the media's involvement or coverage of the events, those that mentioned it did not speak favorably of how the media tends to cover these types of events. In response to the officers dancing at the Malone Center, one user reacted with, "[In] 2016 we supported the Black UNL football players. Black fist, BLM sign in our window. Our shop was set on fire and vandalized!! Small article in the paper. Media didn't really cover it" (Eyeball, 2020). Though this is not an outwardly negative expression toward the *Lincoln Journal Star*, it implies that the media has not fully covered Black Lives Matter initiatives both in the past and in recent developments.

Discussion

The relationships between the Lincoln Police Department, the Lincoln Journal Star and the public do not operate within the model of two-way symmetrical communication. Though there may be opportunities for dialogue, they do not always promote or allow for equal participation. These relationships are influenced by one another, but they do not necessarily interact with one another. As they currently operate, the relationships resemble a two-way asymmetrical model of communication. The purpose of two-way asymmetrical communication

is scientific persuasion (Grunig, 1983). In this instance, although both senders and receivers have the ability to exchange thoughts and opinions among themselves, the end goal is more about convincing the other institutions of their positioning rather than creating mutual understanding.

Lincoln Police Department

Regarding LPD's relationship with the *Lincoln Journal Star*, LPD perceives this as a mostly positive, mutually beneficial relationship. The established partnership between the two institutions has benefited from the ongoing media briefings and the access to information LPD provides. LPD believes they have been conducive to requests from the media and have maintained transparency even in contentious situations. This positive relationship allows for the department to be given the benefit of the doubt in situations of controversy, allowing for favorable coverage that would not prematurely condemn the organization.

However, this relationship is not without its flaws; articles such as "Protesters describe being shot, gassed during Black Lives Matter rallies in Lincoln" test the boundaries between the organization and the media. Though LPD did not find the coverage in that article to be neutral, Ofc. Spilker noted, "I don't know that media outlets would have another option than to report like they did. Even if we wanted to get something out, we're not going to get it out," (E. Spilker, personal communication, July 29, 2020). This exemplifies the mutual understanding between the two entities: although LPD would have preferred a more neutral report, they are not in a position to be able to counter the claims with thoughts of their own.

The Lincoln Police Department's perception of their relationship with the public is twofold: they believe a majority of the public generally has a positive attitude toward them and believes they do their job correctly and fairly, but LPD is also aware there are people who do not

share that view. Using Quality of Service Audit numbers as a main reference point, Ofc. Spilker noted LPD has felt generally positive sentiments from the community.

Ofc. Spilker also credits LPD's proactive measures of building community relationships as a reason for positive public perceptions. "The Lincoln Police Department...became a community-based police agency far before the rest of the country...when there's bad things happening, we can make an impact for the better, so our community is always doing a good job," (E. Spilker, personal communication, July 29, 2020). With the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement in Lincoln, the Hold Cops Accountable initiative was designed to create a designated time and place for community members to air their grievances with LPD. Former LPD Chief Jeff Bliemeister said he "thinks the black community and his department have talked through issues in the past, which makes him optimistic it can happen again," (McConnell, 2020).

Finally, third-party sources who directly share perceptions with LPD help inform the department of existing opinions in the community. "We have our government agency...supporting us and telling us the amount of support they're getting from the community, and that's very, very helpful," (E. Spilker, personal communication, July 29, 2020). Ofc. Spilker noted this greatly helps with getting a sense of how people are feeling in the community, either positively or negatively. "Does that mean that there are people that don't like us? Absolutely. We know there's people that don't like us" (E. Spilker, personal communication, July 29, 2020).

The Lincoln Journal Star

The *Lincoln Journal Star* perceives its relationship with the Lincoln Police Department to be mutually beneficial. Thanks to the working relationship the media has with LPD, the LJS has been able to obtain necessary information and insights necessary for successfully reporting crime

related stories. As a media organization, the LJS holds a considerable amount of power when it comes to influencing community perception, and LPD knows that. While the *Lincoln Journal Star* needs the accessibility offered by LPD and would not do anything to seriously jeopardize that, the paper holds some leverage over the department. How the media chooses to frame a story and its subjects influences the community's understanding of that event; essentially, the *Lincoln Journal Star* knows LPD relies on the positive relations with the paper to secure fair and accurate reporting.

The *Lincoln Journal Star's* relationship dynamic and the public from the newspaper's perspective is easily the hardest one to measure. Presumably, as a media organization, members of the public would look to the *Lincoln Journal Star* to function as a government watchdog and report objectively as issues arise. Unless expressed through an op-ed piece, it is difficult to gauge how a news organization perceives itself in the eyes of its stakeholders.

The Public

The public opinion of LPD is split between wholehearted support, strong distrust bordering on contempt, or being caught somewhere in the middle. Some attempt to engage in two-way symmetrical communication by interacting directly with LPD while others hold opinions and share them online, but not necessarily with the people their opinions are directed toward.

Some Twitter users were very adamant about their support of LPD:

@jeffpeterson01: They risk their lives to keep us safe, and I'm thankful for that. The next time you seen an officer. Thank them for putting their lives on the line each time they go on duty. (June 24, 2020, 9:35 a.m.)

@armok1d90: This is what we need in ALL states only then will we be able to weed out the bad and maintain the good and avoid these situations. Just reading this made my night honestly.

Thank you LPD for allowing this and for LISTENING! You guys are awesome (June 3, 2020, 11:15 p.m.)

@Heidi76216466: I commend all those in blue for their service and everything they do for us and our community!!! You guys are THE BEST!!! We LOVE YOU!!! XO (June 2, 2020, 9:45 p.m.)

Other users were clear in their opposition to LPD:

@Lunchtime: Everyone praising this is braindead. Read what it says: HCA is basically a box you can put all your issues with the police in, and in turn, nothing substantial happens. This is a meaningless gesture that will hold absolutely 0 cops accountable. (June 4, 2020, 4:26 p.m.)

@masc4macaroni: We don't need to be praising cops right now. (June 4, 2020, 3:25 a.m.)

@SkullGnome: Just a reminder, this is what tyranny looks like. (May 31, 2020, 9:49 p.m.).

In general, sentiments expressed on Twitter are often reactive and are seldom sent out unprovoked. Many of the tweets collected in this study were sent as replies in a Twitter thread, be it for the viral Cupid Shuffle at the Malone or LPD announcing a city-wide curfew.

Additionally, it is likely that not all members of the public feel as strongly one way or the other as those who published the tweets. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge the variety of the individually declared opinions when considering overall public perception.

Not many Twitter users had grievances against the *Lincoln Journal Star* specifically, but one user simultaneously expressed a negative perception of LPD and the LJS in a thread. In reaction to Pilger's (2020) article, the user believed both organizations were inaccurately retelling what happened, referring to the story as a "spin and exaggeration" (Will, 2020). The LJS quoted Lancaster County Sheriff Terry Wagner as saying, "After the curfew was in place in Lincoln, cars of people with hard hats on who brought water and gallons of milk started showing up 'to do battle,' preparing for a riot, not a protest" (Pilger, 2020).

In response to this specific article, a community member who was at the protest felt both LPD and the LJS were in the wrong, stating in a Twitter thread, "As much as the police and LJS

want to make it seem like we WANTED to be there, it is OBVIOUS that the LPD and police all over the nation will use aggression on the folks who are being peaceful while there are white folks standing even behind ME lobbing shit at police” (Will, 2020). This viewpoint assumes the LJS is spinning the story instead of accurately retelling the events as they happened. The *Lincoln Journal Star* likely still upholds its credibility and position as a watchdog in the eyes of the public, though that sentiment had not been explicitly or frequently expressed in my sample of Tweets.

The overall implications of the study are that these relationships do not currently operate within a two-way symmetrical communication model, leaving gaps in communication between the actors. Though opportunities and mediums exist to aid communication, they are not always being utilized to their full capabilities. For example, just because someone tweets their opinion directly at one of the actors, the format is not the most conducive for constructive communication. The goal of two-way symmetrical communication is to create mutual understanding (Grunig, 1983). In order to actually accomplish this and to see actionable change, each of the actors needs to be willing to fully participate in a two-way symmetrical model. Moving forward, the three actors will continue to interact with one another within their relationships. Unless change happens in the communication model, the relationships will be stuck in this cycle and none of the changes that the community is pushing for will materialize.

Limitations

One major limitation of the study is the limited accessibility of public opinion. Not all affected members of the public voiced their opinion on Twitter, or even have access to Twitter at all. Coinciding with this, it can be difficult to gauge the demographics of the users sending the tweets, resulting in a potential lack of diverse representation. Additionally, it is likely many more tweets were sent out relating to this topic than I was able to collect; the advanced search filters on Twitter only showed results that matched my search criteria, though other relevant tweets could have not contained any of the search terms I selected.

Another limitation of the study is the lack of explicit *Lincoln Journal Star* perspective. My interpretations of their perceived relationships with the other actors are based solely off of the stories they reported and how they chose to frame them. Aside from op-ed pieces or letters to the editor that receive some sort of response, it can be difficult to gauge how a news source sees itself in the eyes of their stakeholders. Though their goal is to be as objective as possible within their reporting, it is still beneficial on a community-scale to understand how a media source views itself and its position in a community.

There is an opportunity for future studies to analyze the media's perspective, perhaps through conducting an interview with editors or reporters. Directly surveying members of the public could result in broader, more diverse samples. This would also offer personalization and specific stories to aid in understanding the reasons behind certain perceptions. Additionally, future research could consider a variety of media outlets and conduct a cross comparison as opposed to focusing singularly on a regional newspaper.

Conclusion

Overall, the relationships between the Lincoln Police Department, Lincoln Journal Star, and members of the public do not exhibit two-way symmetrical communication. There is a disconnect between how various actors perceive their relationship with one another compared to how the other actors may perceive that same relationship. Although two-way symmetrical communication may be the ideal model in PR for most effective communication, the current model these actors operate within in the two-way asymmetrical model. With more opportunities for all actors to actively share their perspectives and listen to one another, two-way symmetrical communication is within reach for the city of Lincoln.

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Appendix

Transcript of interview with LPD Public Information Officer Erin Spilker

Q: Do you think the Lincoln Journal Star consistently depicted LPD accurately and fairly in the month of June?

"We have people who are not experts making decisions for entities that are experts and that applies to police work as well...so many people who have zero law enforcement experience are wanting to make decisions for law enforcement and they have no experience, and that same thing goes for the pandemic. Everything is polarizing and we're finding it so hard to come together. This is a very broad stroke...it's almost impossible to get a law enforcement perspective for a lot of reasons, no matter what the scenario. So let's say it's an officer-involved shooting (the climate in the last 5 years has changed to this way so) cellphone footage and all these other things get released that contain a small portion of a police contact that are blasted all over the media with narrative from media outlets saying this is what we got, this is the citizen's account of what happened. when asking law enforcement for their perspective, there's no comment. Why? Because we can't. And sometimes that's a hard pill to swallow for us because we want to speak out, we want to say something, we want to give our perspective, but we can't. We want to give that perspective but we can't. We're bound by so many things. when I put this uniform on, I represent more than myself.

A citizen on the street...can say whatever they want, whenever they want. they're not really held to any standard. If I say something, it absolutely has to be the most accurate information we can give, and if we can't give that, then we're not going to give it. And it's not that we don't want to and don't want to be a part of that, it's also — that's the practice we're always going to have. To be able to accurately or consistently depict — it's never going to happen for us. ... I've had city council people say this and they're like, 'wow, you guys just really are taking it. you're not fighting back. Why are you just taking all this negativity? In 18 years as a police officer, I would say this: when I put this uniform on, when I put this badge on, I chose to carry that burden. People are not going to always like me. I'm not going to win homecoming queen of Lincoln. never. and when you wear that, you understand that that is a commitment you have made for your life. that when someone makes a mistake in Minneapolis, I'm going to have to carry that burden here. but with that, I know that I carry the same burden for 600,000 other law enforcement officers in the United States. a decision I make could impact that many other people as well. and so, I think that's part of it, too. there's so much that goes into why would we just allow the negativity to brew, and I think a lot of cops felt that way. "c'mon, speak up! why aren't we saying anything?" And it's easy to snap back at somebody, right?

We don't genuinely think people are bad. a lot of times it's a mutual understanding of a job that needs to be done. And, are there people out there who genuinely have a bone to pick or some kind of anger deep down inside that they hate people? I absolutely think that. that's going to happen no matter what career you're in.

That's kinda my answer, too: we want defend ourselves and we want to be able to give an answer. One thing the Lincoln Police Department has always done is we became a community based police agency far before the rest of the country. We made that our priority before it was popular, now it's the thing and we've been doing this for 20 years. ... Why do we do that? So that when stuff like this happens, we are able to recover. That's the whole principle behind it. When there's bad things happening, we can make an impact for the better, so our community is always doing a good job."

Same thing with our media contacts. We're one of the few agencies in the entire nation that does a morning briefing every day. We give them all of our reports, we let them look at everything we do, we let them ask questions, every single day. We did all of that in hopes of that positive media relationship, so that when something bad happens, we are given the benefit of the doubt that we're allowed that due process to gather information and do the things we need to do to determine if a) did we do something wrong — and if we did, we have a track history of getting rid of those people, and if we didn't do anything wrong that we have the ability to present it. Media at this stage in the game has taken away all of that for a lot of things, for people but for law enforcement specifically right now...[they] weren't allowed that due process. We need time to be able to investigate things, to collect evidence. You've got to be thorough and you've got to be complete and that just takes time and a lot of people just don't understand that. ...it's hard to communicate at all in this environment, and we're grateful that we've able to get to that point where we're now communicating.

We have gun rights [protests] at the Capital and for everyone that says, 'oh, you let all these people come in with guns and you didn't do anything,' no, we were there, monitoring, doing all of the things we did at the beginning of all of this, too. It's a matter of what we're faced with and we have to look at what we're presented with at the moment and with our best practices, best information make decisions and those aren't always going to be popular.

[LJS article Chris Dunker reported on protesters being injured] I think the intent of this article was obviously steered towards the protestors perspective. He cites a of different experts, one of them was our Capt. Stille (commander of SWAT team)...I sat in on this interview and I witnessed and heard every word that Capt. Stille said and I do not feel that the quotes that were used on our behalf were used in a neutral manner. A lot of the quotes were taken out of context and they were made to make us look bad. The very last quote of the article is from Capt. Stille and he says "I thought we were doing a good job in the community. It certainly has been eye-opening for me and maybe we haven't done as good of a job as I think we have done." The way its placed in this article...They're talking about how one incident can basically ruin law enforcement's trust with the community, which it can, absolutely, and how do you salvage that? And we've always functioned on that concept of a bucket: you keep filling that bucket and you hope that it stays full all the time, but there are going to be times where it has to be emptied out. Something bad happens, a cop does something bad, everyone likes to pick on cops doing something bad, right? Even if someone in another profession does it, it's far less acceptable for cops to make mistakes or whatever they be.

The way it reads to me, and I remember when he said this, a lot of it didn't feel like it was in the right place in the article for how the conversation went. That was very disheartening for me because if you had listened and talked to Stille it was a 30, 40 minute conversation and he very nicely explained all these things and also explained that a lot of people want an answer right now and we can't give it because these were very dynamic situations that – how many people were involved? We are trying our best to piece all that together. The other part of it is, in these instances, these are all things we do want answers to: how did this happen? We also had three police agencies working together at one time, so while we're trying to do everything we can to piece it all together, we also are taking the brunt for what any other police agency did that was there because it's the LPD, right? (Sheriff's Office and State Patrol, at some point National Guard) ...but with that, that can be hard to swallow too because you never want to say something about another agency – they may be following their policies and doing the things they're supposed to be doing, and they're not ours. Two officers side by side may have a different course of action, and that's hard. How do you comment on that, and how do you say that?

I was disappointed that this was the only one that the Journal Star did, and they never did one to cover our side, like at all. They never asked us, they never said "hey, can we talk to your officers who were injured?" and we wouldn't have let them to be quite honest.

It just felt like a very one-sided article, and I would say the other reporters at Journal Star that I talked to expressed that, that this was a very one-sided article and they wished they had given a more neutral depiction of what happened instead of being so one-sided ... and this one particular article I think hurt a lot of officers. It made it feel like the sentiment was not positive towards us at all and there was not a lot of support. And I would say, at the very beginning, we didn't feel a lot of support, we didn't know where we stood. and that was something we hadn't heard in quite a while.

...

Like I said, I think it's almost impossible to accurately portray us because you're not going to get information from us, because our job is not to stomp our foot and pout about what's being said. Our job is to do our job and to follow the laws, policies, regulations that we've always followed to protect victims, to protect the judicial process, and investigate. We're not going to release investigative information as we're also bound by Nebraska bar standards.

I don't think any of it would be considered unbiased because they were only getting one side.

The people speaking up and the loudest people speaking were not speaking on our behalf and we are not really allowed to speak for ourselves. I don't know that media outlets would have another option than to report like they did. Even if we wanted to get something out, we're not going to get it out. Media outlets didn't want to report that side because it was not a well-liked perception. Have we shifted? I think we have shifted and we just needed to wait that out. I hate to put it this way but "stand there and take a beating" I mean is kind of what happened (and I don't mean that to be rude or insensitive either)...That's part of this job. It's not easy; we're criticized a lot, we're threatened and called names all the time at work, so to have this happen so publicly, for us, was nothing different than other people got to hear how we're treated regularly, sadly.

Q: Prior to the death of George Floyd and the subsequent protests nationwide, what do you think the general overall sentiment towards police in Lincoln was? Mostly positive/negative? Do you think the national protests have changed that any, or have they just brought to light sentiments some people may have always felt?

I would say we have thought there's been a positive...I have printed off our quality service audit numbers...quality of service is when someone calls them after police contact. we've done them since 1994. if you are involved in an accident, receive a citation, or you are a victim: those are the three people that we call. so that's a pretty broad range of people, right? and that's the idea: that we're kind of getting a good chunk of the people we're having police contacts with. from 2019, there's some pertinent questions that they ask, they always ask: "did you know what the officer was doing? did the officer listen? were you treated with dignity? were you treated fairly? was there professional behavior? were they considerate of your feelings?" and these are all things that the perception of the person being contacted...

Across the board we are mid 80s to mid 90s for yes and that's out of 34000 people who were surveyed in 2019, which by the way 2019 was our lowest QSA numbers that we ever had. so normally there are much more than this that are questioned with similar results... if you think about that, 85 to 95% of the time, people said that we knew what we were doing, we listened, we treated them with dignity, they were treated fairly, we had professional behavior, we were considerate of their feelings. they are just be called – they can say whatever they want. ...

Do you feel safe? do you feel safe in your neighborhood? I think that's a good indicator of, even if you're afraid of the police or you think the police are going to harm you in some way, are the police doing their job to keep your neighborhood safe? this one...47% of the time they ALWAYS feel safe, I think that's pretty stinking good...that means 50% of the city (in theory) always feels safe. they don't ever feel like they're not safe. I think that's an incredibly high number for a city of almost 300,000 people. usually safe 32%, so we're already up to about 80%, right? and now 11% sometimes safe. the lowest, never feel safe, was 1.5%. so, as far as that goes, it sure does feel like the perception of the city feels safe and that they think we treat people well, right?

The other one that we go over is the performance, so outstanding, average, above average, below average, unsatisfactory... keep in mind these are people that have been cited. we're not just contacting only the people we have helped and have good contacts with. but 51% of the time they said an officer had outstanding performance. With these numbers, 24% of time above average 14% average, and then the lowest unsatisfactory is 2.8% of time that it was unsatisfactory. I think those are pretty telling.

So if we go back to 1994. To date, we have similar numbers. So the only thing I would say is they go down a little bit in the fact that. So, the first tier or the one about being treated with respect. That kind of stuff so treated with dignity, 92% of the time people said that they felt like they were treated with dignity. Since 1994. So you want to talk about public sentiment. How do we feel the public perceives us? we have numbers to show that they do perceive us well. I realize that it's a quality service audit and there's always those outliers.

I think the other thing we have here is we do have a social media culture. I put something on there I'm not accountable for anything that I've said, when you actually put word to fire, you have to testify in court about what you're saying, you have to sign documents saying that what you're reporting is the truth. So, if I'm a victim and I know that I have to go to court, or vice versa, I'm making a complaint against an officer and I know that I have to tell the truth, because this could go to court and I could get arrested if I don't, that's when if I go on social media and I blast the police, it goes nowhere. But how many people see that post? So there's no backing behind it, just like many people that want to cite, you know articles that don't cite resources or research. It's the same kind of concept here. we have the social media culture where maybe before cell phones, it'd be me and you talking and you may go tell one or two people the story but that's about where it'd end where as now I'm at right now as I've stated my story on social media, 1000 people see it. and those people go, "Oh my gosh. The other day I saw on social media that are on Facebook or Instagram or TikTok or whatever that dadadadada had this happen, can you believe that?"

And then pretty soon that story mutates out and so that's where it's hard because that's why we do like the idea of taking people who are actually having contact with us. Yeah, and finding out what their experience is. When we talk about...let's say people they get citations. 75% said we didn't listen. But 91% said they knew what we were doing and 91% of people that were cited said they were treated with dignity. 85% said they were treated fairly and they received a citation. I think those are very telling numbers. They could say, you know, all kinds of terrible things if they wanted to. And again, 50% of our people that were cited always feel safe. You know, I think that's saying a lot and also 42% so that we had an outstanding performance, even though they were cited.

25% saying above average. So I do think there's some stuff that's pretty telling in here too. And when we talk about race and we break it down by race as well and you know if we go to our black respondents. It's very similar, possibly a little bit lower numbers. Again, that's something we need to look at. Is there a reason that this race group feels differently than maybe some of the other ones? And what can we do to impact that? those are things we're always evaluating and that's why we run these reports. you look at them and it's interesting at a minimum to kind of see how that plays out. And then looking at that and evaluating it for what we can do better.

And do I think that they have changed? It's hard. I think that's kind of a hard one to say. I think there are people that are upset, angry and hurt. And they have every right to be. I have things I'm passionate about like you have things you're passionate about and anybody else. so I do not want to deter from someone's passion and trying to make change. Because, that's what our country is based on and I believe that they are entitled and should have every one of those rights. I think sometimes. And I felt. This is my own perception so this is not fact or nobody else's just me personally. And because I monitor social media I monitor the media outlets I monitor all of their commentary. I do all that stuff so I do feel like initially people were very loud and vocal and they were not afraid to be vocal about it they felt very strong and if I put that if I put ACAB all over the police department's website. I'm strong because I'm backed and I have all these people

supporting me. That has shifted. People do not feel quite as comfortable making those very bold statements. they do feel like maybe they're out there a little bit on their own now. So they're finding a little bit of support in gathering for protests and fearing people that have the same belief systems and likes and want the same things as far as change goes. And I do, I don't think that's a bad thing. It's just a matter of... I think the outliers, that maybe weren't as committed to the, to the subject matter but were just upset. Initially, they have kind of fallen away and they're like, oh, maybe I you know I believe in this, but I also support police. That was the other thing is at first. Gosh, if you said you support a police you were really in a bad place, you're a bad person. Right now it's like okay so I can do both, you believe in, and doing the best and making sure that our community and police should be policed. Yes, just like any other field, medical field, they should be policed too. everybody should have a checks and balances in whatever field they're working in. teachers etc. Bankers, you name it right like so. We all believe in that we all believe in reform to, we want to be the best we can be and I think that's the other thing that's really amazing is that if you look at, I just want to look at Child Sexual Assault investigations. How they were performed or done? When I started as to how they're done now. Do you think they look the same? Not at all.

And, or before I started have cops in uniform asking little kids about being raped. Can you imagine how that went? And what did they find? Hey, we should do something different. Yeah, who pushed for that change? The police officers. This isn't working. We need to do something different. So then little by little, all the time we're constantly changing, changing our approach changing our investigative tools changing everything to get to the point where we are now and we're probably gonna still improve on that down the road. Kids are interviewed by non uniformed non police personnel in a child Advocacy Center. we try and get the best possible information we can in order to pursue justice for a child victim, there are support systems advocacy groups, all these things that backup those kids so they feel safe, not to mention aftercare counseling and all these kinds of things. So I look at the way, just that has progressed and if we've been stubborn or something and said no, you know, we're not changing anything. But we're not that way where I was like you know what... domestic violence, right, we have changed the way we investigate domestic violence drastically. So, with that being said legislation gets passed, and that usually comes from and stems from law enforcement, that sees there's a problem. So, police reform is exactly what we're about all the time we always want to do even better.

And just like lots of things, you know, have you ever been to the doctor and they're like well there's this new medication coming out. It's not approved yet it might be. Yeah, well that's just it there's always people trying to make it better. Yeah, and law enforcement we're not exactly a money making venture. to be better is because we want to be better to serve our community and that's where, again we agree with reform, we're constantly reforming and we're constantly refining. Yeah, so that we can do the best we can be and doing best practices so none of that's against it but it's kind of finding that balance of, you can support us, and you can say Black Lives Matter. Absolutely. Guess what? we feel the same way. We think black lives matter too you

believe in fact that, and it's a matter of, we know how that is education training and getting better because why is there a discrepancy sometimes?

And how do we how do we bridge that gap, and it has it been so damaged that we can't, or is it something we can somehow get through to right and so we're gonna keep working at that, that's not something we're ever going to stop.

And have people always hated us by the way? Yeah, absolutely. I can tell you that.

But again, some people were really mad at this concept. You know, the the Minnesota thing, they're very mad at that and they should be. so are we. And that's the hard part too is like well we're on your side here, like that's how we felt, like wait.

There again it's not our practice to insert ourselves into a criminal investigation that happened somewhere else.

There's got to be a statement. that was that argument I had. I said we need to make a statement and the reason we don't normally is 100% is that's a criminal investigation and who are we to put our two cents into this criminal investigation. Plus, we have been and seen over years and years and years, officers being convicted before there even is a grand jury trial. now that the community convicts them before there's a grand jury trial.

And case in point Atlanta man they fired that cop his poor mother in law got fired. They didn't even - that was before they arrested him before the investigation was even complete. So a lot of that stuff is like okay this is, there is a process that we go through and that's part of not answering too is, it's not our place. that's not our jurisdiction. This is how we respect other agencies to do their job. Do we all agree when we see these videos? that's not the first video we've all opposed, there's a ton of them and we watch all of them, we go oh my gosh this is terrible. This is awful. That is, oh no that's really bad. That guy should go away for a really long time. And we say that, but we also know we can't publicly go out and make a statement on behalf of the police department because that's only part of the story. And in this instance, I think we all could say, we got the story, which we can't make a comment on every single police shooting.

And here's one thing I would, I would bring up that's unique, depending on where you work. Here in Lincoln currently, we're small enough we do know a lot of our citizens right. And let's say I have a negative encounter with you, because the last time I encountered you you spit on me and threatened my family. So, I get called and I find out you're the person I have to arrest. And the last time I arrested you you spit on me and threatened my family. I still have to treat you right with the same level of respect I would anybody else. And that is a hard thing to do sometimes because we are human. And I'm sorry I don't like being spit on.

So, sometimes we take a step back and go hey, I need someone else to take this because I had a bad experience last time, but sometimes you don't have the ability to do that.

And that comes with it too. I don't know enough about that scenario to say that they'd had prior interaction. I'm gonna guess no, I think that would have come out at some point. But, you know, that is always a possibility in those scenarios too. last time, this guy choked me out in an alley. And I got assaulted by him, so that's why I was so scared and shot him with a taser, but you know, what the video would show is something else. So there's always historical data that we do

take into account. But just because he's a bad man or a criminal or he's made mistakes, I don't think that's a precursor for like you just get to be treated like garbage, and in my experience that's not how people are treated here. Does that happen? do we get a little nitpicky sometimes? get a little, you know, like I'm not perfect. I've had bad days. there was a day that I was up with my baby the whole night before and I come to work and I'm exhausted and tired and this guy's yelling and screaming at me, and I'm probably not the most pleasant officer to talk to. But generally, I'd say the majority of the time we're doing the best we can to treat everybody fairly. So, I think we kind of already answered the third one. [Q: Circling back to my original thesis, do you think LPD's perceived public perception is accurate of how the public actually feels? In other words, do you think LPD and the community are on the same page in terms of public perception?]

Oh and I would say this as we are just inundated with support. We really really are. we have not made it public at all. But, the number of calls, emails, donations and things are overwhelmingly heartwarming. And I think once we got to that point, we realize we do have a lot of support. We also know we have support because of our city council. We have our government agency, people in our government supporting us and telling us the amount of support they're getting from the community as well. And that's very, very helpful. And that helps us know what the perception is. Now does that mean that there are people that don't like us? Absolutely. We know there's people that don't like us but generally speaking, I thought that was that stuff was really helpful.

Yes, I would say there is a difference in how people perceive police presence. I think that is changing. I think initially we felt weird. Yeah, like why do I feel so guilty about something I didn't do. And why do I feel like I need to overcompensate because there's some bad stuff going on. It's that awkwardness after a breakup, and you run into your ex right, so we're all getting along and we feel like we have this great community and then we break up. And then we have to go back out there the next day and we work together. So it's that awkwardness of that breakup. Like, I still have to see this person but I don't know what to do when I'm like I've got to act a certain way and I don't want to piss him off anymore and kind of walking on eggshells type of thing. And again, that's a fact of life, you just have to live with it

That's kind of the perception. I know there's been a lot of pushback of like people don't feel like they have to listen to us, or they don't have to stop on traffic stops, or they're more assaultive or more just, kind of, argumentative during the arrest, things like that. I do think those things are happening. As for a quantitative number I can put on that, like, Oh, it's a 50% increase. I don't know that I can write that, I would say generally speaking about the cops, they do feel like there's a definite change in dynamic, a lot more hostility toward police.

Here's the thing though like, I think it's good. I think the checks and balances are a good thing. That process is a good thing. It's always good if you get yourself thinking about something, especially that's different than you thought about it before. That means you're not stagnant and you are self-checking, and you are going through those processes, and you don't know who that cop is and you don't know who that guy is they're talking to. So it goes both ways. I think sometimes where it can go either way.

Yes, what we've said we've had a lot of instances where people decide to fight with us and citizens stepped in, where they maybe wouldn't have before. We've had instances across the nation of the other way around where a group goes after an officer. And there've been some really scary situations. And when you look at some of the protest coverage of different things where a cop got left behind and people protected that officer and I think the general sentiment, it should always be is, human life is important. And when we get to the point that law enforcement is made not to be a human. That's when the trouble will arise, but I don't think we've gotten there. I think there's people that do feel that way, and I would challenge them to look inside, and go that route of "everybody's a human being." And if we don't feel that way if you really genuinely, look at me and say you hate me, or that I'm evil and we've never had a conversation, only because of this, then they also have work to do with themselves. that's kind of where I'm like, it's good it's fine, I don't think it's a bad thing. I do the same thing, or I look at police encounters I watch the video and I'm waiting for something bad to happen. why am I doing that? I'm a cop, I should be supporting this cop.

But I do it because I know the standard we live to here. And the other statement I've made before is because I work so hard to be here. I have given up – I'm divorced. My children, I've missed activities of theirs, the sacrifices you make to be in law enforcement. The sacrifices you do, going through training and on the street and the amount of times I've been assaulted and yelled at, threatened. It's not an easy job, so I've obviously made sacrifices to continue to wear this uniform. And so when someone else wears the same uniform and they don't do what they're supposed to do, I don't want them to wear it either. Because I know that I worked hard and the sacrifices I made to be here. I think when you talk about the line, yeah we support each other but we also, I support the uniform I wear, not necessarily the person next to me.

Q: Have there been calls for diversifying LPD? Are there any statistics available about the diversity of the department in terms of age, gender, race, years of experience, etc.?

I don't think we're, we're accurate. Definitely not in which I don't think we are, we don't have enough black officers. We want them. And our plea is always send them to us, please. We can only do so much. We need people to apply. It's not that they're not welcome here. And we've made pleas to the community. Please help us. This is something we want to reflect our community we want to, so please, help us out.

But as far as percentage... So if we go all employees... black male officers is 1.1% of the department. I think the city might be at like five or 6%, something pretty close to that. so female point .1% (black female officer).

Total females make up 11.5% of the department which is pretty standard across the nation. And we're actually higher with 11, it's usually right about 10% would be the national average. So, if we do total department. We're 11.5 if we do of law enforcement at 16% I think that's how I'm reading that. Let me make sure.

So, yeah, so 359 total 58 are female. And then, male, total 301 men 359 total. So, that I would say, we are a higher than most departments, yeah do a pretty good job with our women. And if you go back, if you want to get some really good numbers that I don't have on me right now, the

joint county commission city council meeting, and they talked about hiring, and he gives an entire breakdown of promotions, where we sit for race as far as how many, you know, sit in a supervisory position too. It's, it's a very good if you can get to it and through it, it's very long and there's lots of statistics in it but it's maybe the second question that he answers in that meeting is about the diversity and hiring process.

It's hard because our numbers are dropping drastically. We're not getting more applicants, so we're getting less and less applicants, and then with that we're not going to hire. So even if the mayor says you can hire 12 officers, but we can only find six that meet our qualifications, we're only hiring six. Yeah. So, there's still six seats that are empty. And that's the hard part is filling the 12 seats, alone, let alone, getting people in the door that can that have diversity.

So, if we took a picture of the room of the people that are applying. Is it gonna match the city's diversity? we're not getting enough people in the door, and that's why we are making pleas. I don't think everyone that goes into law enforcement wants to be a cop since the time they were born. And a lot of people that want to be cops, it's something that happens down the road. I think I want to. I want to make a difference and I want to have an impact and do this.

Or, I'm a teacher. And you know what I'm really good at teaching, we have a lot of people who come from the education field to become cops and wow, and they're great. And that's it is like that's what we need. we need people to go kind of outside that box and say, Yeah, those people that go through their whole life and want to be a cop? Great. Awesome. We got those people hooked in, they're gonna apply regardless. It's the people who are the, the professions or the students. Let's say you go to school to be a teacher. But then, when push comes to shove you're like, you know what, I don't really want to be a teacher. We need to get those people to apply here and give it a shot. You know, and ultimately, if they pass all the stuff and they make that commitment and they go through the Academy, they're probably going to be a great cop, if they have more experience than just this small circle. We want people to have a more diverse background in general, the music majors the art majors the educators, who knows, the journalists.

The intensity of the, of the training we do in no way would match the intensity of haircutting school. And so, and there's a reason why we are specifically selected to do the training and do these things because it is so intensive, and we have to be able to survive that intensive training. Why? because if you can't survive this, you're not going to survive being a police officer in the street. So, you cannot put apples to apples saying that haircutting school is the same as going through the police academy. At all.

It is not the same type of training. It's not the same. You can't say oh, I learned five things today in hair cutting school, and I learned five things in law enforcement school and say that they're the same, or there's a quantity, you can put on what it is. And the other thing about it is, every class we take, we're not teaching one thing in that class. So if we're going through law, and it's a law week...we're also talking about unbiased policing, equity, ethics, we're talking about, fair and equal treatment of everybody, investigative purposes, what do you need to meet the criteria of

this statute, different things like that so it's not an all-inclusive one, you know, or it is all inclusive it's not just a one single course.

And that's the only way I can really equate that is, I'll tell you I went to college. Most of our people here have a college degree and if not master's degrees, if not more. And the intensity of what we're expected to consume or sponge up is way more than you're ever going to cover in a week of college classes.

So in one week of the police academy, what we are expected to retain absorb, learn, and then be tested on in an acting scenario, which I don't know if in any college course, someone comes at you with a knife, that if you get touched you're, you get shocked, and you have to act on it.

Those are the kind of tests that we're under so there's no way you can equate that to any other college course or school that somebody goes to that's going to equate at all, so when I'm sitting in a classroom and they're like at the end of this week you're going to be tested and someone's going to come at you with a knife and you have to you have to test out of this. And that's just one of the testing scenarios.

Are you going to pay attention that week? And that's super intense and in both of these exercises you do physical things you do...it's such a broad stroke of what we're expected to do. The other thing I would say is this: we need people to be police officers. Good people to be police officers. but the community, in the sense of nationwide, is that they have put tasks on police officers, that we didn't ask for, we didn't sign up or we didn't say you know what, we want that task. it's things that were put on us because they couldn't afford to give them to anybody else.

So the mental health, the domestic, all of the child stuff. It isn't that we were jumping up and down saying we're good at this, but it was given to us as a task and we try and be the best we can be at it. and we've gotten to a point where there are so many tasks that are put on us that are so diverse. And if you said we need to add another six months of Academy training... We would never get people out on the street to train and not to mention we're not just Academy, we do five months of street training.

And the thing is is being a police officer... We trained for this, but we have training prior to this too. And the majority have a four year degree right and then they get specialized training in this. I don't know that any of those decisions were being made by the Lincoln police department, and they made on a government level, and we would accommodate and, and follow whatever we were asked to do just like we would any other scenario you know what I mean, right, like you throw anything at us we're gonna we're gonna figure it out, we're gonna do it and that's adaptability that's part of law enforcement. But as far as is are there calls for that are loud enough to be heard? I think that most of our government understands that they do not have the money to make that happen and that's why we're in the position, they wanted to fund us to give the money to mental health professionals, and they want to have them respond, well that that's fine. But the bottom line is, how are you going to keep them staffed. if you can't keep us staffed doing it, how are you going to keep them staffed? And who are you getting to be social workers and why do they think social workers immediately have more training or experience than law enforcement?

It's interesting to me those those equalities... I understand having a psychiatrist. What psychiatrist is going to be on call 24 hours a day to respond to all suicidal people in Lincoln. And how will you keep them on staff right could have an office they work out of Monday through Friday daytime hours with holidays off, because people don't stop trying to kill themselves on Christmas Day. People don't stop trying to kill themselves after four o'clock. And so the other aspect is we're happy to take the help we know we can. I mean, we want to help people. and if that'll help we want them here. It's just how do you logistically keep that going because it'd be interesting to see how that plays out.

And for what they're going to get paid too. there's no way you're gonna get paid in a government position better than you're going to get in the private sector. And the other part too that we see a lot of is, there's high turnover in those fields too, so how do you keep them trained for that specific job too, and keep them around.

So I think we're always open for training we're always trying to get training, a big part of that was money. we have the money to do training and same thing for the academy. if we extended the academy longer and longer and longer ultimately that's money. there's a reason we've come to these conclusions at this point too, you know, me an officer of 18 years experience compared to officer with eight days experience. I would say, I'm more of a benefit there, I have that experience. but you can't get to 18 years unless you put the eight days in. I was at eight days once too, and so that's where it's like it's difficult because...we have average years of experience is 12, and average age for officers 38. And I think that says a lot too.

Page one is most experienced. I'm on page five with 18 years experience so all these cops have more years experience than me. And so, and there's obviously more more that have less than me. But, you know, even if we go into page... You have to start somewhere.

So...about a full page of one year experience. And then it goes up to two, three, you know, there's a full page. That's one year experience. And we can't do this job without those one year experience but here's the other thing I would tell you as much as one year experience guys they're working with people who have many years experience and are working with them and training them and there's sergeants overlooking them that are answering questions and making sure they're doing a good job.

When it comes to life and death situations where use of force could be used, I back those guys up, they do a great job, they usually are better than we are because they just came out of the academy and have the best information. I hear all the time how come this new guy has all this new information and we're sitting back here we don't know any of it? you see it all the time you know it's like those, you know, but they do. they have the best information, they have the best practices they're learning them and then we're the ones missing out because we don't have it. We will get it eventually. they're getting it because that's the freshest. They're right out of the Academy, you know, and then we'll go to in service and they'll teach us about it, but you know that's, that's a process too is getting everybody into a classroom to do the training and making sure we have staffing to cover the street. And it's all, it's all definitely a process.

Q: Has LPD's relationship changed any with the media, particularly during the media briefings?

I don't think we've done, we have changed a whole lot. there's been some stuff that we've had to change out of necessity. So, and some of that started with pandemic. we can't be doing interviews all the time now. We also have restrictions from the mayor's office. You know when speaking about things that have to do with COVID. The mayor's office says it has to come through their office first.

So, I have to run that story through the mayor's office first for approval. Sometimes I've been given restrictions on what I can and can't do. And as you know, the media culture is very fast. So, that may take a week. This story got requested last Monday. So it's a week and a half later, before we're able to do a story. So, it's much slower for that reason.

The other thing is we can't do in person interviews we have to do it over zoom. I had to run out to remote stations to try and get officers to be interviewed by media. Here's a learning curve of some of that, like what kind of footage we get. It's not good enough, the sound cut out, the internet was bad, and you know, who knows. There's all those things that factor into it, so some of that stuff is changed by necessity.

The other part of it is, when we did have the riots happening, and of calls for change in policy, change in how we operate, they wanted all of our statistics. They want all this information. there was a big pull on us for resources. We didn't have the resources to fulfill all the needs of everybody. So when media comes in and asks for information, they're the last priority at that point because we have government entities asking for the information.

And at the same time we're getting flooded by tons of different media outlets for information, and we didn't have the staff to cover it. And there were a lot of media outlets frustrated that we weren't getting back to them as fast as they wanted us to, or they felt we should have. And it just was a necessity thing. we didn't have the people. we were all working overtime like crazy trying to fulfill these requests. The chief speaking daily, weekly, all over the place, you know 12 hour shifts, or he's working 12 hour days, minimum, you know, usually in here before we get in, leaving far after we leave. having meetings all night long, but each one of those meetings required preparatory so that he has the information, going forward.

And so, you know, that was a huge strain on us. And we also felt some of the stuff, like the quotes and misquotes and things that we'd catch on articles or the coverage or not coverage of things that were going on... We felt a little like, why should we go out of our way to do something for you? like they were asking some of the requests were we want the names of every officer and how many uses of force, and every officers name, and every complaint they've ever had. So that's very like coming at us like that. so imagine if I've had 10 people complain on me in the last year, and the media is asking for my name, and every single one of those complaints. And that's quite threatening even though I've never had a sustained complaint in 18 years I've never had a sustained complaint from a citizen.

when you have the media saying that and then the next day they're calling you up on the phone and they're like, "Hey, can you give me information on this?" and I'm like you just asked for every one of our cops names in a FOIA request, and why would I want to do that? There was

some amount of where we were kind of tugging and pulling at each other. but we're getting back to, and the media was feeling so much pressure to get stuff out.

And so luckily we all kind of understand that but that was part of it too is I'm like, I don't think this is coming from this person, I think it's coming from editors or, you know, bosses. It's not necessarily that specific reporter. And so, we worked through a lot of that and I think we've kind of come to a better understanding, plus they started covering our stuff in a positive manner.

Again, that was just a shift that happened naturally and we knew it would. It's just, growing pains, we were like breaking up and getting back together all over the place.

Q: Do you think LPD's obvious effort and compassion for the community (ex: the viral dance at the Malone Center, the viral Facebook post featuring you and Sebastian) have impacted community sentiment?

Compassion for the community. Um, I do. and I take that back to earlier we're talking about how we are community-based policing and that this is what we do. And one thing I would say is this is: We are so fortunate in Lincoln, because I don't know that I would fit as a cop anywhere else. The person I am, the experience I have, my jobs going through high school and college were all child based. I worked in a daycare childcare stuff forever. I did summer camps and everything I did led up to being a teacher. My parents were teachers, so then coming into this field. And I was a music major. I don't like labeling myself politically.

Yeah, this is a perfect example of advocacy. And that I fall on the liberal side. I am not the general perception of police, but I fit here. And there's a reason I fit here, and not to say there aren't bumps along the way that we all have and conversations we have and things that we different opinions on, but that's like when we talk about those positive interactions [Sebastian]. I am grateful that those things got picked up, and that they went and they took off. but do we do them because we expect them to? you never know what's going to get picked up what stories are going to get out there, and that's part of our job, too. In our social media climate too is We intentionally were kind of quiet. Again, what's the point of starting a conversation that's not going to be listened to? And that goes both ways. Absolutely.

But that was part of it we don't want to start a conversation that's not going to be received both ways. So, we waited the storm out a little bit and we're kind of getting back into where we feel like we can do more community based. But I think that is a really really hard thing because so much good happens out there and it never gets picked up. And so are we grateful that the things that did get picked up? Absolutely. I think it helped us out tremendously.

[cupid shuffle on Jimmy Kimmel]

And you can't tell me that's not a supportive community, and there's always going to be people that are upset about anything. And our job is to continue working so they feel comfortable enough to come to us and that we can bridge that gap, not saying that one's right or one's wrong. but so that we can listen and hear it out. And I think that's the biggest thing I've learned in law enforcement is I have two things I would abide by in all things but law enforcement I've seen it, the strongest: justify their feelings. You need to be justified, even if they're wrong. If you make someone feel like their feelings are justified. That immediately breaks the wall down.

You're doing this you can see why I would be mad at this. Hey, I got hidden in the face with something. And I'm completely injured now. I have to have reconstructive surgery to do this, and if I do that, and I go to them and go oh my gosh, you are completely justified that's not okay, that shouldn't happen. that's a great way we break the wall down. now what do we do?

And then they get their perception, and you hear them out. Can we do all the things they ask? no of course not, but we can take things back from that conversation to make our policies better so we don't have the same thing happen again. I want to see anyone hurt, ever. I don't ever like seeing anyone hurt. no police officer does. no one walks away like, yeah, Take that. I mean like it's just not the core of what we do. But the other thing is to make them feel special. And I know that sounds really corny and cheesy and super like I just snowflake, the heck out of this but but it is if you make people feel special...

So, not to put a downplay on things but if I walk into a dirty nasty trailer home. And I make that person feel special, like they have my attention, they have my time, and I appreciate what they're bringing to the table, we are going to walk away from that and I will get more information from them, they'll be more cooperative in the future, and in other contacts I have with them. So that building, and that relationship building and that community building is always what we're trying to strive for so that down the road, maybe you would have been really mad at me and now you're just a little bit mad at me or whatever that that case is.

And so I think those things are always where we're building on. And if people really genuinely have contacts with us on a regular basis, they'll tell you either they're gonna call us back, and that they appreciated that time that you took, even if we couldn't give them the outcome they wanted. So, those are the two things I've taken away and I tried to apply that in all aspects of my life as if you make people feel special and you justify their feelings. They don't have to be accurate, you don't have to agree with them to justify them.

They might not want to admit it right, they might not want to go, Oh yeah, that have treated me so nice yeah great like they don't want to go and admit it but the bottom line is, I don't, we don't need that either. So when we have these instances where there's these awesome public displays that happen. And what happened that day with me and Sebastian was, I decided to go into one of the demonstrations and, and introduce myself, and talk to people and it wasn't something that was going on at the time because there was some violence that happened the night before and people were scared. And they didn't know where to start. And I wasn't at the protest of the things that went night I felt like I was in a good position to be able to go out there and take it. If you want to yell at me yell at me if you want to do is that the bottom line is, I have a straight line to the chief. So if you want anything to be heard. I'm here to hear it. And it was a great experience and I brought a new cop with me along for the ride. And he at the end of it walked away and said, I learned more about policing in this two hours I spent with you today than I probably have leading up to this point. And I was so grateful for that because I'm like I really hope he listens. And I really hope he takes us, because, and he goes, that was not easy. No, it's not. it is not easy. So, I was just I was happy. I was very happy with the way the day turned out I was completely exhausted. So that day I think I'd been there, like, by the time I went there and already been there

like 12 hours or something at work. The whole weekend we were here. It was pretty crazy. And it was hot. But not only that, I got done with that day, and I was so emotionally drained just from that interaction alone, just from being in that. But I also took away a lot. And I think that growth for me. And one thing, there's several things that were sent to me that I'd never heard before. That was the first time I heard the defunding police sentiment. And this is very early on and right yeah and how they should get rid of cops just all together I heard a lot of that, and I was just like, and that was my response, because they'll say if it's broken system, why don't you quit and my argument is I'm not here to fix the system. I have to believe in it in one way, shape or form that the other part of that too is. I have to.

This is our call for service, I'm just giving you that number. These are the number of traffic citations and warnings that were given out this isn't a great number to give you but this seems to be an idea of the general amount of contacts we have.

our IA complaints. What trouble there okay or any officer complaints complaints from the officers or complaints on the officer,

It'll say like how many complaints were filed by the Chief of Police. These were the ones filed by, you know, and we're all these dates here so like there are 11 IA complaints. These are.

Wait. Oh, I'm on the wrong thing. Okay, so the demographics for where they come from, and then like how many came from the chief of police. This is the total number of investigations here, and this is how many employees were involved. Okay, there were 35, IA investigations last year 65 employees involved.