Perception of Police and the Role of Media (SB003)

Media influence has been documented in a variety of issues. Living in the greater Los Angeles & Las Vegas areas, it seems as if there is a new Police scandal every week. Although most people realize the news is sensationalized to attract viewers, this researcher wonders what affect this has on the perception of police. The community’s perception of law enforcement personnel is shaped by a multiplicity of factors ranging from personal experiences to vicarious experiences through media exposure. Is there truly more negative coverage, or is this a “bad is stronger then good” phenomenon? Current literature is lacking in understanding the extent to which media coverage impacts the public’s perception of law enforcement personnel (LEP).

Using a convenient sample of the public in the greater Las Vegas area, perceptions of police personnel were compared with the amount and type of area media coverage of police. Preliminary analysis does not support the hypothesis that news coverage of police officers is negatively biased. It appears that indeed the old adage, “bad is stronger than good” may be at work here! Also, preliminarily, the perception of police appears to be more racially motivated than influenced by media coverage in Las Vegas. The perception of police in the greater Los Angeles area is forthcoming.