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Community Members' Motivations when Deciding to Attend a Police-Sponsored Public Meetings and Events

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Walden University
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Abstract

Community Members' Motivations when Deciding to Attend a Police-Sponsored Public

Meetings and Events

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MA, Boston University, 2013

BS, Fresno Pacific University, 2011

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Community events sponsored by police organizations intend to promote communication and support for the police, but there is limited information on what would attract participants to these events. The current study explored what conditions were needed for community members to make their decision to attend. Social exchange theory was used in this research as the conceptual framework to understand participant behavior, positing that the rewards and the benefits affect an individual's decisions. Situational theory of publics also elucidates the understanding of the results, pointing out the differences between groups within a community when planning an event. Open-ended interview questions explored ten community members' motivations when deciding on attendance. The data were then coded and analyzed, finding that trust in the police, police legitimacy, or the police use of procedural justice did not influence attendance. The ultimate decision to attend a police-sponsored event was the location, purpose, convenience, and any activities involved, so long as attendance did not interfere with anything else.

Communication is vital to positive social change. The research findings can assist law enforcement with planning events to present a more comprehensive message to the groups within the community they want to interact, which can attract better attendance. The results of this research can improve communication and lead to positive social change by connecting people with common interests not only in community safety but in their hobbies and daily lives.

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Dedication

This study is dedicated to my daughter Destiny for her support during the long and rigorous process of reaching my educational goals. She was always there to encourage me. Thank you, and I love you.

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study.....	1
Problem Statement	3
Purpose of the Study	4
Research Questions.....	5
Theoretical Framework.....	5
Nature of Study	6
Definitions.....	7
Assumptions.....	8
Scope and Delimitations	9
Limitations	10
Significance.....	11
Summary	13
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	15
Literature Search Strategy.....	15
Theoretical Foundation	16
Conceptual Framework.....	19
Literature Review Related to Key Variables and Concepts.....	20
Summary and Conclusions	34
Chapter 3: Research Method.....	37
Research Design and Rationale	37
Role of the Researcher	39

Methodology	41
Data Analysis	45
Trustworthiness, Transferability, and Dependability.....	46
Ethical Procedures	48
Summary	48
Chapter 4: Results	50
Setting	50
Demographics	50
Data Collection	51
Data Analysis	52
Evidence of Trustworthiness.....	55
Results.....	56
Summary	61
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations	64
Interpretation of Findings	64
Limitations of the Study.....	67
Recommendations.....	68
Implications.....	68
Conclusions.....	70
References.....	72
Interview Questions	83

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

In this study, I investigated whether community members' opinions about trusting the police, police legitimacy, or procedural justice influenced their decision to attend police-sponsored events or whether other motivations were more critical for their ultimate decision to attend an event. It has been debated whether procedural justice is part of trust and legitimacy that affects cooperation with the police (Schaap & Saarikkomaki, 2022). However, trust in the police can be affected by a variety of factors, such as how a person is treated by individual police officers, perceived corruption in police organizations, or observing how others are treated by law enforcement (Alalehto & Larsson, 2016; Bradford & Myhill, 2015).

Little evidence-based research specifically addresses whether attending any sponsored event contributes, in some way, to the decision to trust the police or if it improves the perception of the police's procedural justice or legitimacy. It is not known if community members view the events as legitimate demonstrations of the police officers' or the organizations' values, beliefs, and emotional connections to community members. Police-sponsored events or public gatherings are where police organizations provide sponsorship and support to others and encourage community members to participate (Gill et al., 2014). Many programs have been developed to increase trust in the police, such as hosting community events, inviting community members to meet law enforcement officers, or doing other activities to build relationships with community members (Gill et al., 2014). These events are open to the public, and the participants can meet law enforcement officials, including patrol officers, to obtain information or discuss concerns

they have in their neighborhoods. Various activities are sometimes preplanned to encourage participation (Pressgrove & Besley, 2014).

The idea of community members meeting and working with law enforcement officers to solve problems is not a new idea or concept. The National Sheriffs Association promoted community participation with the police when that organization created Neighborhood Watch in 1972 (National Sheriffs Association, 2012). The National Night Out Program's origins are credited to Matt Peskin, who volunteered in a Neighborhood Watch program (National Association of Town Watch, 2020). Peskin's idea was to promote the idea that community members, cities, and neighborhoods could come out once a year to meet their neighbors and police officers to stand up against crime (National night out, 2020). National Night Out (2020) later stated its goals as working with community leaders, law enforcement, and other local officials to support crime and illegal drug prevention programs.

Community-oriented policing is a concept that promotes the idea that officers in police organizations can work with members of the neighborhoods where they are employed to solve problems, including crime and blight (Gill et al., 2014). Title I of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 created a grant program and Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) program (103rd Congress 1993-1994). Encouraged by the funding available through the U.S government to develop COPS programs within their jurisdictions, law enforcement agencies established various models to achieve citizen participation and cooperation (Burke, 2010). Law enforcement agencies were able to hire officers who would work COPS programs within the

community (Burke, 2010). Despite these incentives, COPS programs at law enforcement agencies were not the same, and measurements of the success of the programs were not feasible (Gill et al., 2014). Since COPS holds the philosophy that law enforcement responds to the unique problems of each community, the types of responses and programs within each department may differ significantly, providing mixed results (Gill et al., 2014). The widely differing programs and the difficulty in measuring success suggests that community meetings providing information had little effect on crime (Gill et al. 2014).

Conversely, there does not appear to be any evidence that suggests public meetings to discuss crime prevention created a negative response among community members (Gill et al., 2014). There is no clear evidence that these police-sponsored events improve procedural justice, trust, or police legitimacy within the community for law enforcement officers and organizations. I considered these factors in this study when investigating why people might attend an event.

Problem Statement

A literature review offered limited information to suggest that police-sponsored public events like National Night Out or Neighborhood Watch yield any positive outcomes related to the trust in police officers or their organizations. However, it has been shown that trust in the police, legitimacy, and procedural justice can support police efforts to solve crime with citizens assisting the police (Reisig & Lloyd, 2009). Various community events have been developed and sponsored by police organizations that intend to promote the trust of the police, with meetings that inform the public and

encourage community members to meet the department officers (Gill et al., 2014). Officers and citizens meet in a noncriminal situation to facilitate the sharing of information and build trust between them (Gill et al., 2014). Law enforcement organizations cannot control who attends the events, and this can be a limiting factor when determining whether public meetings of this kind have any beneficial effect on improving the trust of the police. Prior research has already shown that age, gender, race, and ethnicity have little or no influence on the decision to attend these types of events (Pressgrove & Besley, 2014; Williamson & Scicchitano, 2013). Knowing the motivations for those attending police events or deciding not to participate can provide insight for law enforcement organizations to improve communication with a more significant segment of their communities, improving positive social change.

Purpose of the Study

I conducted this qualitative research to determine why some community members attend police-sponsored public events while others do not, exploring the possibility that it was related to trusting law enforcement, legitimacy, or how they treat community members. This research advances the understanding of this use of public meetings and develops a theory as to what extent the public meetings sponsored by the police provide meaningful interaction with those who attend the meetings compared to the community members who do not participate. Interviewing these community members about the events and their attendance decisions expands the understanding of this interaction with police organizations and their officers.

Research Questions

There is a lack of recent evidence-based research about public meetings conducted or sponsored by law enforcement organizations having any meaningful impact on the community's trust in the police officer or their organizations. This research provided insights into why community members do not attend police-sponsored meetings compared to those who do attend. I explored if community members' trust in the police, procedural justice, and legitimacy are associated with their participation in these events. The research built upon prior research on involving more community members in public meetings and improving positive interactions between community members and police organizations and officers. The following research question guided this study:

What are community members' motivations in deciding whether to attend a police-sponsored public meeting or event?

Theoretical Framework

When considering this research, the idea that government-sponsored meetings should be perceived to be beneficial for both the sponsors of the event and those who attend directed my framework design to consider social exchange theory. Social exchange theory provided a framework to elucidate this concept as part of the social structure theory. Emerson, Blau, Durkheim, Homans, and others developed the social exchange theory to include individual interactions as well as organizational interactions (Cook & Whitmeyer, 1992). Social exchange theory is a highly respected and influential conceptual theory for understanding human behavior (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Social exchange theory posits that an individual will participate in a state of affairs with

another party or organization if there is a motivation for a reward or benefit that outweighs the cost or risk of engaging in the relationship (Cook & Whitmeyer, 1992).

Using this proposition, attending police-sponsored public events would need a benefit that rewards the individual for attendance (see Emerson, 1976). If the person values the reward and feels the benefit is worth the effort to attend, this is their motivation to exchange attendance for the reward. Conversely, if an individual sees no benefit in attending a police-sponsored event, there is no motivation to exchange their time and effort to support the event (see Emerson, 1976).

I also used the Situational theory of publics as part of the theoretical framework to complement the social exchange theory because of its proposition that individuals and groups of people evaluate an event or meeting and base their attendance decision on both the information provided by that organization if a problem or issue affects them, and whether attendance would be beneficial or practical (Bravo, 2015).

Nature of Study

Choosing to attend a public meeting sponsored by the police involves personal choices made by the individual with varying factors that motivate or influence that choice (Bravo, 2015). Social exchange theory provided a framework to address this aspect by allowing me to consider the individual's decision to attend and the message they understood from the agency to participate (see Emerson, 1976). The message provided by the agency or government entity to attract attendance to the meeting is the incentive to convince community members to participate. In this research, I investigated whether the meeting announcement influenced the participants or if a pre-conceived idea had more of

an impact on their decision. A qualitative research approach with open-ended questions was used to explore the factors that influenced the participants and identify the critical factors in their decisions. Using the grounded theory methodology to analyze the data from participant interviews allowed me to explore this approach (see Glaser, 2020). With the grounded theory design, the researcher works with each participant to gain knowledge in the area of inquiry (Rieger, 2019).

Participants in this research were adults over 18 years of age who decided to attend a police-sponsored public event or not attend based on their personal beliefs. I transcribed the interviews by making a line-by-line comparison with the audio recording. The transcribed interviews were then analyzed using a grounded theory approach.

Definitions

Community events: Gatherings of people for the purpose of achieving political, economic, social, and cultural goals through interaction with the organizers and the participants (Romero & Harris, 2019).

Community members: A group of people who identify with and live within a political jurisdiction and may have shared experiences within that area and share similar interests (Cobigo et al., 2016).

Grounded Theory: A research methodology used to explain or reveal social processes and the causes or consequences, emphasizing the covariances within the data (Coskun, 2020).

Police Legitimacy: This concept combines several aspects and can be determined using the following criteria: (a) Are the police acting within the law while enforcing the laws. (b) Are officers treating others equally and with respect during their investigations.

(c) Are the police making informed decisions. (d) Are the police effective (Ewanation et al., 2019).

Procedural justice: When an officer acknowledges a citizen's contribution to their conversation during investigations, the officer makes decisions based on the law and not personal feelings or biases, the officer treats the person with respectfulness, and the citizen can see the officer is trustworthy (Pryce & Wilson, 2020).

Police-sponsored events: Community events where law enforcement agencies sponsor, participate and contribute to the event.

Public: A group of people who are affected by a specific action or idea. The public recognizes the action or idea, as do others in that group or public. The problem creates the public (Grunig, 1978).

Publics: The different groups of people who are affected by various issues and who, either in a group or individually, either act or do not act in concert with others about the idea or action.

Trust: A state of mind where a person consents to the susceptibility of placing their safety and well-being in control of others, expecting that it serves their best interest (Yang, 2006).

Assumptions

I conducted this research based on the assumption that identifiable attendance explanations would be provided by people who attended and those that did not participate in police-sponsored meetings. These explanations provided context to understanding if they related to procedural justice, legitimacy, and trust of the police. The participants'

descriptions offered more precise insights that led to the development of a theory that can contribute to the existing research about community participation in these types of public meetings. I also presumed that police or law enforcement-sponsored events are government meetings and represent the interests of the officials organizing the events. In this study, I considered the prior research that indicated no statistical difference between those choosing to attend a meeting when race, age, ethnicity, gender, or education, were considered. (Williamson & Scicchitano, 2013).

Scope and Delimitations

In this study, I focused on public meetings sponsored by law enforcement organizations, why some people do not attend sponsored events while others attend, the reasons for their decisions, and whether they relate to trusting the police, police legitimacy, or procedural justice. To conduct this grounded study research, a random sample population of adults was asked about attending a police-sponsored public event. A standard set of interview questions centered around why they would participate in attending the meeting or not attend. After five interviews, the questions were revised for clarification purposes due to having to explain some questions to the participants. The revised questions did not noticeably influence the other participants' answers.

Using initial coding and in vivo coding methods, I analyzed and categorized the participants' interview responses, which led to developing themes of informative data that were further analyzed, compared, and triangulated with other interviews. During analysis, these comparisons went through this theoretical process, developing themes and relationships and establishing a theory about the research question (see Saldana, 2016).

Public relations rely on several theories that address attendance or lack of attendance at public meetings. One such theory is social exchange theory which addresses some aspects of the decision-making process when considering a relationship with an individual, group, or organization (Powers, 1985). Situational theory of publics also addresses some reasons people attend meetings and engage organizations demanding change (Grunig, 1978). Although public relations is an element of this research, the focus was on the participants' decision and not on the message sent by the organization.

The trustworthiness of this qualitative research is established by a detailed and thorough explanation of the processes used when collecting and analyzing the data (Morse et al., 2002). By detailing these processes, other researchers can repeat the study on different populations, although the exact results may vary in qualitative research (Morse, 2015).

Limitations

The use of the grounded theory design starts with an area of interest. Research is conducted to learn more from studying the subject matter (Glaser, 2020). Charmaz (2014) indicated that the researcher brings with them some idea of the prior research done in the area to be researched. Prior research on public meetings has not addressed this particular area, and the question remains how to motivate these people to attend public meetings (Williamson & Scicchitano, 2013). Situational theory of publics posits that people respond to the information provided by the organization or the lack of an organization's intent to act on a perceived problem (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). This study focused on these ideas by questioning why some attend police-sponsored events and others do not. The

purpose of this research was to discover any underlying theory to explain this phenomenon. Social exchange theory may help to explain some of the underlying considerations people make. In this research, I intended to investigate the possibility that trust in the police, the perception of procedural justice, or the legitimacy of the police might influence participation in a police-sponsored event.

A general limitation of this research was attracting a diverse cross-section of participants who met the minimal inclusion criteria for the interviews. The goal was to attract 10 to 12 qualified participants, dependent on when data saturation was reached (see Saldana, 2016).

Significance

Public relations is a planned communication process used to facilitate the development of beneficial relationships between individuals and organizations (Public Relations Society of America, 2021). Why people attend public meetings is still contested, and various theories have been used to try to explain it. What is known is that sexual identity, gender, race, ethnicity, or age have little significant impact on attendance at public meetings (Pressgrove & Besley, 2014). The current research expanded these previous findings and gathered data regarding what motivates individuals to attend police-sponsored public events. In the current research, I provide participants' explanations of why they would participate or not participate in public meetings sponsored by the police and as well as exploring ways to improve participation.

Social change can be precipitated by further understanding political and social conditions that influence attendance at police-sponsored public meetings. There are

various ways in which social change can be advanced. Political motivation through elected representatives can lead to social change at national, regional, and local levels and influence a large segment of society. Technological advances, such as the internet and social media, can lead to social change. The natural environment, such as drought, can change peoples' behavior and attitudes about water usage, bringing about social change. In these examples, social change is either positive or negative, depending on your perspective or paradigm.

Determining the individuals' reasons for their lack of attendance at these public meetings advances positive social change by giving organizers of police-sponsored public events some indication of what information is needed to attract community members. At these events or meetings, the police organizations may not be providing the information that is important to citizens of the community. The result of this research provides information that could encourage police departments to change the methods used to attract community members to their public meetings. Ultimately this research informs police departments about what influences the motivations for community members to attend these law enforcement events. Having more community members interested in law enforcement activities could also provide a rostrum that encourages an open dialogue about what type of policing is expected in their neighborhoods. The increased participation of community members in these meetings may also benefit the overall collective efficacy of the service population where the meetings are held, leading to positive social change.

Social movements, economic changes, and demographic changes in a population can create tensions that are ultimately resolved through adaptations and social changes within the societal or business structures (Sarta et al., 2020). Law enforcement events and meetings can bring different population segments together in a relatively safe environment that may promote positive social changes. In this sense, I examined to what extent trust, legitimacy, and procedural justice influenced attendance at police-sponsored public meetings. Law enforcement officials achieve positive social change by seeking to influence the public by reducing the obstructions for opportunities to effect social change rather than attempting to improve individual conditions (Wood, 2016). Law enforcement officials' motivations to promote social change without consideration of community-focused concerns and input could ultimately conflict with long-range societal change (Wood, 2016).

In this research, I explored the use of public-sponsored events as an avenue to generate positive social change in the community and whether these events are hosted and promoted in a manner that encourages attendance. Although trust in the police, their legitimacy, and the use of procedural justice were important for community members' overall trust in the police, these elements were not the primary reasons individuals would attend a police-sponsored public event.

Summary

The trust of the police, their legitimacy, and their use of procedural justice can support police efforts to solve crimes by having citizens who are willing to assist law enforcement (Reisig & Lloyd 2008). Public meetings sponsored by the police, such as

National Night Out or Neighborhood Watch, are examples of events that allow police officers to meet residents from the community and develop partnerships and trust (National Association of Town Watch, 2020). There is little empirical evidence that these goals are accomplished through police-sponsored public events. One problem is that not all community residents attend the events, and the motives for community members attending or not attending are unclear. In this research, social exchange theory is used to investigate the reasons for those who have not participated in public events and those who have. The study developed theories concerning whether participation was related to trust, legitimacy, and procedural justice. The research can lead to positive social change by addressing the concerns of more community members and fostering situations where community members interact with law enforcement personnel in a non-enforcement environment.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Extant research offers limited information indicating that police-sponsored public events like National Night Out or Neighborhood Watch generate any positive outcomes related to the trust of police officers or their organizations. Trust of the police, along with their legitimacy and the perception of procedural justice, encourage community members to cooperate with and support law enforcement efforts to solve crime (Reisig & Lloyd 2008).

This chapter includes a description of the literature search strategy and a detailed review the literature on law enforcement-sponsored public events or meetings, theory related to public meetings; and theory related to procedural justice, trust, and the legitimacy of law enforcement officers and organizations. I collected the extant literature through the Walden University Library, internet access, online searches, and selected books.

Literature Search Strategy

Peer-reviewed journals with empirical studies, books concerning the topic, conferences, and interviews with subject matter experts provided the source material for this literature. Some key search terms used were *public meeting attendance*, *police-sponsored meetings*, *government meetings*, *public relations theory*, *public meeting attendance*, *government guidelines for public meetings*, and *national night out*. Articles from peer-reviewed journals on the topics of procedural justice, legitimacy, and trust further supplemented the literature review. Other critical search phrases were *why people do not attend public meetings* and *public meeting participation*. Neighborhood watch programs, public

meeting participation, and why people do not go to public meetings are all interrelated to meetings orchestrated by the government and private organizations. Previous studies and articles pertaining to private sector meetings provided insight into the differences between privately sponsored and governmental meeting attendance. Empirical studies involving community-oriented policing, trust building, police legitimacy, citizen cooperation, procedural justice, and the use of grounded theory all provided context for the current study. Journal articles, interviews, conference videos, and recorded panel discussions provided perspectives on the research topic, the theoretical foundation, and the conceptual framework.

Theoretical Foundation

Social exchange theory is a broad theory used to explain relationships between individuals or organizations and others (Lioukas & Reuer, 2015). When examining the phenomenon of attending or not attending police-sponsored events, this theory posits that individuals will determine if they want or should attend based on some benefit or reward for attending and the possibilities or risks they need to consider for not attending (Emerson, 1976). The theory explains that the individual will participate as long as the benefit or reward is more than the effort or cost to attend (Emerson, 1976). Attendance is unlikely if the individual does not see a benefit for attending the police-sponsored event and or the effort exceeds that value.

The police organization and others must consider whom they are trying to attract to attend the event and put in place some benefits that would attract those individuals (Grunig, 1978). Social exchange theory emphasizes that individuals engage in

relationships with others to maximize personal benefits they cannot accomplish independently (Johnson et al., 2020). While the benefit could be physical or psychological, it is reciprocal in that both parties, whether individual or organizational, gain from the relationship (Emerson, 1976). In much the same way that cost-benefit analysis assists in economic decisions, social exchange theory coincides more with many types of perceived benefits (Ma et al., 2019). This research essentially wanted to understand the values or benefits participants considered essential when deciding to attend police-sponsored events. The research also considered if those benefits might be related to procedural justice, police legitimacy, and or trust.

In social exchange theory, the mutual exchange of information can be a way to develop a beneficial relationship with all parties involved (Waters, 2020). In the case of journalists and whistleblowers, the parties involved should trust each other's intentions for revealing the information and how the information will be used. The person disclosing the information benefits by divulging the secrets, and the journalist gains a potential story to report. Social exchange theory explains this relationship by pointing out that each party derives a benefit (Waters, 2020).

Used as an incentive to improve job performance and loyalty to the company, offering stock options to employees is a form of social exchange from the employer (Cappelli et al., 2019). The benefit for the employer is better job performance, and the employee may feel an obligation to the company in this form of social exchange theory (Cappelli et al., 2019)

In Pakistan, arranged marriages have a long-standing tradition (Zaman, 2013). In the traditional endogamous arrangement, the families decide if the bride and groom meet the standards of race, religion, social status, and other conditions necessary for a harmonious marriage (Zaman, 2013). This form of social exchange theory is practiced today; however, modernization has brought about new ways by which men and women can meet (Zaman, 2013). There is some stress put on the social exchange of arranged marriage, and may, in time, force this system to change.

Social exchange theory was used to explain how self-estranged employees' interactions with co-workers can have a negative effect on their job performance and the other employees. As the social exchange relationships erode, employees view the estranged co-worker with less trust, accessibility, and citizenship-type behavioral exchanges (Golden & Veiga, 2015). The reciprocal exchanges between the estranged worker and co-workers decline over time due to increased distrust, damaging work relationships and adversely impacting job performance (Golden & Veiga, 2015).

Similar to Social exchange theory, the situational theory of publics explains that the message generated by the organization may not be of interest to everyone or the message does not address the issues that concern them (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Similar to social exchange theory, the situational theory of publics considers that the message from the organization to attend an event must offer a benefit that is of interest to the individual or a specific group of people (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). The individuals then determine if it is beneficial to them and whether the detriments outweigh the benefit to attend or not participate (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). In other words, in social exchange theory, the benefit

of attending compared to the effort or convivence to participate or go to an event must be perceived to be worth the effort.

In this research, the connection between the messages given by law enforcement agencies to encourage participation in the meetings was weighed with whether or not the individual chose to participate. As other research has suggested, underlying circumstances or beliefs influence the individual's decision to attend (Gruning & Hunt, 1984). Social exchange theory uncovers the extent that individuals perceive a potential issue or problem by attending an event or other issues related to their decision to participate.

Conceptual Framework

Social structure is an influential concept that is a fundamental part of social exchange theory (Cook & Whitmeyer, 1992). Among others, Peter Blau, George Homans, and Robert Emerson were major contributors who shaped the exchange perspective of social structure (Cook & Whitmeyer, 1992). Each researcher contributed to the theory by applying that theory to the behavioral characteristics of individual actors, groups, or organizations and even to macro groups such as nation-states (Cook & Whitmeyer, 1992).

When considering entering into a relationship, the social exchange theory proposes that the person or actor decides what value, benefit, or reward to be received and then determines the cost or risk of that exchange (Emerson, 1976). If the person or an organization determines the benefit outweighs the cost, then they will enter into the relationship (Cook & Whitmeyer, 1992).

Many studies have used social exchange theory to examine relationships between individual interactions, online communities, and organizational interactions. This research uses social exchange theory to develop theories about the motivations to attend police-sponsored public events.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and Concepts

When searching for relevant literature regarding trust in the police, several factors that influence public opinion outcomes became apparent. Research has shown that citizen or police-initiated contacts are one explanation of dissatisfaction with police (Hinds, 2009). Still, more importantly, public views of the polices' performance, legitimacy, and the use of procedural justice are just as significant in shaping public opinion (Hinds, 2009). Law enforcement agencies are part of the executive branch of the government and, as such, are social institutions that serve the public by enforcing laws enacted by the legislators (Garduno & Keeling, 2021). Depending on a community member's point of view, law enforcement authority and the use of the power entrusted to them by law can be oppressive or supportive of the community (Garduno & Keeling, 2021). The media can play a role in shaping the opinion of police legitimacy and procedural justice by what they display or report to the broader public.

Police citizen encounters are a fluid event that involves the officer following department guidelines, the citizen's prior experiences with the police, the knowledge, and skills each party brings to the encounter, the number of witnesses that are on the scene, and the type of situation that brought about the contact (Nix et al., 2014). Procedural justice, trust, and legitimacy are not predetermined variables in these situations but are an

outcome of how the officer perceives the situation and the skills the officer utilizes during the encounter (Nix et al., 2014). How the citizen acts or reacts can obviously influence the situation too.

In their study, Garduno and Keeling (2021) researched if neighborhood crimes affected police legitimacy. The general idea is that when the police successfully "fight crime," they gain the confidence and trust of community members, who then support policing efforts. This view is the basis of the broken-widows model of policing, which centers on the police solving neighborhood problems with strict enforcement of lower-level crimes (Tyler, 2005). According to the crime control model of policing, the public perception of law enforcement agencies improves when evidence of effective crime control is provided (Tyler, 2005). There are diverse opinions regarding the accuracy of this assessment, and research has suggested that this model is less important than the process-based policing model or procedural justice perspective (Garduno & Keeling, 2021; Tyler, 2005). It is worth noting that transparency, trustworthiness, and respect were more critical in establishing police legitimacy, although more serious crimes could influence a citizen to view law enforcement as less legitimate (Garduno & Keeling, 2021).

The procedural justice perspective connects public support and trust in law enforcement by the way people evaluate how fairly the authorities make decisions (Tyler, 2005). Tyler (2005) indicated that citizens more commonly used procedural justice to evaluate police effectiveness rather than the crime-fighting practices and policies of the agency. Whether or not the outcome was favorable to the citizen should not be the

measure of procedural justice but rather how the parties involved interacted to reach the result (Mastrofski, 2015). Procedural justice, then, is a tool to assist the officer when contacting citizens either casually or during the line of duty. (Mastrofski, 2015). When measuring the effects of procedural justice on legitimacy and trust, research has shown that some community members dismiss the authority of law enforcement as illegitimate actions of deceitful and insincere people (Madon et al., 2017). Past practices of law enforcement policies that promoted aggressive crime control tactics have been shown to discourage the public's cooperation with the authorities and are counterproductive (Hamm et al., 2017). When community members trust the police and regard their activities as legitimate exercises of authority, it reinforces the perception of procedural justice and fair treatment by law enforcement (Fox et al., 2020).

An influential factor of collective efficacy may be procedural justice and citizen trust in the police (Nix et al., 2014). Citizens in high-crime areas tend to have more fear of crime, are willing to cooperate more with law enforcement, and have higher collective efficacy than those in areas of lower criminal activity (Lee & Zhao, 2016). However, neighborhoods with low collective efficacy tend to view police actions less favorably and have low trust and less confidence in the perceived procedural justice of their engagements (Nix et al., 2015). Citizen's views could attribute to the policing methods used in the neighborhood or the way law enforcement treats citizens could ultimately affect the confidence in the police (Nix et al., 2015)

Trust in the police can then be affected by different factors. Considering the parties involved, procedural fairness, impartiality, and recognition of those affected also

contribute to the evaluation process regarding the amount of trust granted to law enforcement authorities (Nix et al., 2014). When first-hand knowledge of an event or other experience is lacking, people tend to act on their emotional response to the incident (Yesberg & Bradford, 2018). If community members feel they can trust the police in a given situation, they will more likely feel the actions taken were a legitimate use of authority (Yesberg & Bradford, 2018). Legitimacy is another predictor of trust, procedural justice, and emotional responses (Yesberg & Bradford, 2018). An unpleasant encounter or contact with a law enforcement officer could result in the person's opinion of police use of procedural justice as lacking when evaluating other events.

Collective efficacy in neighborhoods is closely associated with police presence which relates to trust in the police and the perception of procedural justice (Yesberg et al., 2021). The visibility of the police in the community has a strong effect on trust (Yesberg & Bradford, 2018). When considering other variables, such as law enforcement meetings with business owners and other community groups, visibility has a more substantial effect on trust and confidence in the police (Yesberg et al., 2021). Police effectiveness was not associated with collective efficacy as much as the visibility of the police in the community, thus questioning the emphasis on community meetings and crime prevention programs (Yesberg et al., 2021). Different aspects of police performance may affect perceptions of legitimacy and confidence in the police, but procedural justice is a central tenet leading to the trust of the police (Tyler, 2005).

In contrast to Western countries, Chinese communities view police effectiveness as closely linked to the perception of police legitimacy, although procedural justice is

also an essential aspect of the legitimacy and trust of the police but not as important (Sun et al., 2017). Culture or the types of government policies in that society may contribute to this difference but was not a subject of this research.

When comparing them in communities, the gender, age, race, ethnicity, prior police contacts, and fear of crime are analogous (Fox et al., 2020; Wolfe et al., 2015). Considering that police legitimacy and the related elements transcend many demographic areas, supporting ways to improve police legitimacy is essential for fostering support with all community members (Fox et al., 2020). Wolfe (2015) suggested that one of the best ways to improve trust and legitimacy in the community is for police to practice procedural justice during citizen contact, especially with crime victims.

Trust is not a static concept in human behavior and can influence the many variables contributing to an individual's self-interests (Van Der Werff et al., 2019). Crime may contribute to an individual's trust in others, including the police. To address public demands and the changing times, police agency administrators have used many different crime control and prevention approaches, including the professional model of fighting crime, visible and approachable officers on the street, and community-oriented policing (Schaap, 2018). Some of the determinants of trust in the police were procedural justice and proximity policing, where officers are visible and approachable (Schaap, 2018). Procedural justice appears to be a determining variable in the trust of the police and the legitimacy of their individual and collective actions. Procedural justice is a significant factor in the public view of the legitimacy of the police and an essential ingredient for building and maintaining trust in the community (Wolfe et al., 2015).

In this research, I explored if public meetings sponsored by police organizations contribute to the perception of procedural justice, legitimacy, and trust in the community or if these meetings are just pointless demonstrations of ineffective grandeur on the part of law enforcement organizations. The social exchange theory is a broad theory used to explain relationships between individuals or organizations and others (Lioucas & Reuer, 2015). When applied to the phenomenon of attending or not attending police-sponsored events, social exchange theory holds that individuals determine if they want or should attend based on the benefit or reward for attending and the possibilities or risks they need to consider for not attending (Emerson, 1976). According to the social exchange theory, the individual will participate if the benefit or reward is more than the effort or cost to attend (Emerson, 1976). Attendance is unlikely if the individual does not see a benefit for attending the police-sponsored event or if the effort exceeds that value.

The police organization and others must consider whom they are trying to attract to attend the event and put in place some benefits that would attract those individuals (Grunig, 1978). The social exchange theory emphasizes that individuals engage in relationships with others to maximize personal benefits they cannot accomplish independently (Johnson et al., 2020). While the benefit could be physical or psychological, it is reciprocal in that both parties, whether individual or organizational, gain from the relationship (Emerson, 1976). In much the same way that cost-benefit analysis assists in economic decisions, the social exchange theory coincides more with intangible benefits (Ma et al., 2019). In this research, I considered the idea of trust in the

police, police legitimacy, and procedural justice as a benefit of attendance at police-sponsored events.

Jansson (2017) conducted a study to determine if school grades were connected with the social exchange between students. The students' county of origin, sex, and socioeconomic background were considered in the research, and Jansson found that higher-performing students were clustering around other high-performing students, and lower-performing students were with other lower-performing students. The lower-performing students' grades improved when placed with higher performers (Jansson, 2017). Other community members' attendance at police-sponsored events could influence their decision to attend or not participate.

Guanxi is a Chinese cultural tradition with similar attributes to social exchange theory in that gifts are given to others to form relationships, social esteem, and obligations (Barbalet, 2017). Explaining social exchange theory by developing the idea of an emotional response each person has in the relationship to their present and future needs brings a better understanding of how Guanxi compares with social exchange theory (Barbalet, 2017).

Generalized exchange and productive exchange build stronger social bonds by producing generalized reciprocity (Whitham, 2021). Generalized reciprocity is connected with indirect reciprocity and strengthens the social bonds of trust, commitment, and identification with groups (Whitham, 2021). When generalized reciprocity is weak, social bonds and forms of social exchange are not as strong. (Whitham, 2021).

The economically disadvantaged in Mexico have increased as unemployment has placed individuals and families in difficult situations (De La Roacha, 2020). With the scarcity of income, individuals are not helping others without being paid (De La Roacha, 2020). Family members who traditionally assisted with childcare and support for other family members are not able to offer this assistance for free (De La Roacha, 2020) This breakdown in social exchange is considered a breakdown of moral principles and family values that further erode society (De La Roacha, 2020). This study indicates that economic conditions could influence attendance at police-sponsored events.

In this research, I considered how much influence messages given by law enforcement agencies to encourage participation in police-sponsored public events contributed to an individual's decision whether to participate in the meetings. Underlying circumstances or beliefs can influence an individual's decision to attend such an event (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Social exchange theory can be used to uncover the extent individuals perceive there is a potential issue or problem with attending an event or what other issues are related to their decision whether to attend\participate.

McNamara (2018) found that investment in public communication worldwide is at its highest. McNamara also found that public trust in government and big businesses is deteriorating. Generally, trust in the U.S. government has been at its lowest since the measurements began in the 1960s (MacNamara, 2018). Social exchange theory would propose that perhaps the message that government organizations are promoting does not resonate with the general public in a way that illustrates a benefit for them.

Post communication is the intentional use of communication to convince others to act, think, and feel the way the communicator desires (MacNamara, 2018). Government officials, politicians, the news media, and other organizations use post communication to persuade others to act or think in a particular manner contributes to mistrust in those organizations (MacNamara, 2018). With this lack of trust prevalent in U.S. culture, the police-sponsored public events may not be conveying a message community members want to hear. Discovering what is lacking to motivate more community members to participate or encourage those not participating to attend the meetings is critical for more involvement.

A key element in community meetings is who is attending. Gill et al. (2014) indicated that studies have shown that the definition of a community is not exactly clear. Many communities within a large jurisdiction, like a city, may not associate themselves with other members of the same city. To reach a larger audience, the message of the organization should resonate with a large segment of the community and not just a select few who would typically participate in events or meetings.

Gill et al. (2014) did point out that there were positive outcomes of trust and satisfaction when the police used community-oriented policing. What is not clear is who is reporting the positive outcomes and what segment of the community was reporting. Without a clear understanding of who is attending the meetings, the significance of non-crime control outcomes related to community relations, trust in the police, and satisfaction with law enforcement is lacking. The people who do not necessarily participate in community meetings, others who do not generally support the police,

community members that have had negative contact with law enforcement, and those who are not interested could provide better insight into whether or not the events offered have any influence on their decisions to participate.

Public meetings are a staple of government organizations that generate strategies to garner interested parties to participate in organized events (Environmental Protection Agency, 2020). Government organizations usually plan the activities or agenda for the public meeting and announce the planned date along with the purpose of the meeting (Pressgrove & Besley, 2014). Depending upon the type of meeting, the attendees can participate in discussions with public officials concerning the issues or agenda (Pressgrove & Besley, 2014). Participants may also be part of a committee to provide input into an event that concerns them (Pressgrove & Besley, 2014). In some instances, the participants are selected from stakeholders with a special or specific interest in the meeting topic to represent others in the community (Williamson & Scicchitano, 2013). In the case of National Night Out, the law enforcement agency engages others in the community to participate and plan the event and invites everyone in the community to participate (National night out, 2020). Although there are other aspects of National Night Out, such as street parties, law enforcement is usually involved in some capacity, whether approving a street party permit or attending the event. Do such events actually contribute to the reduction of crime or crime prevention within the community, and to what extent do these events support the public view of law enforcement. Why do members of the community not attend or participate in these planned events.

The outcome of the events is of particular interest to law enforcement agencies due to the issue of presenting a positive image to members of the public (Environmental Protection Agency, 2020). Government agencies tend to orchestrate events and public meeting strategies to depict themselves in the most positive way (Beck et al., 2012). In planning an event, the shaping of the specific methods to exhibit transparency and the impression that attendance benefits those who attend is essential to the organizers (Beck et al., 2012). When a planned meeting lacks attendance, the organizers may not achieve the goals and objectives as expected. The organizers may not take into consideration that community members are not interested in the same issues or perceived problems as law enforcement officials (Beck et al., 2012). As discussed in their study, Beck et al. (2012) argues that public officials may present an orchestrated and practiced message to portray a specific message without consideration of the community's interests. This tactic would be a form of manipulation for the meeting or the planned event and would not be transparent to those participating in the meeting or event. The officials' presentation may be similar to a theatrical performance by the event planners (Beck et al., 2012). Although having meetings with a specific goal or message is generally the whole idea of having the meeting in the first place, determining an event's success solely on those sponsoring the forum is, in my opinion, a questionable practice.

Grunig (1978) explained that organizations need to recognize that they do business with more than one public or group of community members. Whether internal or external, each of these publics wants to secure what they perceive is necessary from the organization. For this reason, an organization's public relations needs to format its

messages to meet the questions or challenges of a particular public or community, whether internal or external (Grunig & Hunt, 1984).

Evidence concluding which citizens in the community attend public meetings or why some do not attend is lacking (Williamson & Scicchitano, 2013). Several theories address the issues involving public meetings. Some public meetings can be viewed as a form of public relations. The organization crafts the type of message it wants the targeted people or publics within the community to hear (Grunig, 1978). Sallot (2002) identifies impression management theory as regulating others' behavior by controlling what type of information the organization wants to present to the public to meet the organization's goals. Messages are crafted for the audience that it intends to influence and may not include all the information known on the topic (Sallot, 2002). The organization can manipulate the message to present to various participants of the meetings to influence their understanding and to further the organization's attempt to meet the desired goals or the target audience's understanding of the meeting (Sallot, 2002). Brunner and Smallwood (2019) contend that present-day public relations practice emphasizes organizational goals and interests instead of the more essential views of the public's interests. This type of message delivery is not considered deceptive by the organization since the information is accurate, but not all data is presented in the facts (Sallot, 2002). When addressing different publics within a community, the information provided to the audience would center on what the organization believes that group would be interested in knowing, leaving out other known information about the topic (Sallot, 2002).

While preparing for a public meeting, the organizers undoubtedly want to attract participants to attend the meeting. Specific empirical evidence is lacking or conflicting on who is likely to participate in any public meeting (Williamson & Scicchitano, 2013). The standard socioeconomic model would explain that the more affluent individuals are, the more likely they would attend a public meeting compared to those in a lower socioeconomic position (Williamson & Scicchitano, 2013). Political efficacy explains that if an individual believes they can change or influence government decisions by participation, it is more likely they would attend a government public meeting (Williamson & Scicchitano, 2013). Williamson and Scicchitano (2013) found no statistical evidence that one demographic group attended public meetings more than any other group. However, those individuals who possessed a higher level of understanding of the processes of public meetings would feel more comfortable going to the meetings (Williamson & Scicchitano, 2013). The people interested in attending may change as the information disseminated by the organization transforms the context of the meeting, changing the demographic of active participation in the groups (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). In any meeting, the organization must recognize when its message is not addressing the current composition of the groups (Grunig & Hunt, 1984).

The situational theory of publics developed by Grunig (1978) describes how people develop into publics or groups when a problem is recognized. These publics are various groups dealing with a shared problem or situation (Chung et al., 2015). Bravo (2015) theorized three areas that are identified, the first is problem recognition which generally means the person or persons see the situation as a problem, the second is

constraint recognition, or does the person(s) believe they have some control over the situation; the third is the level of involvement.

It appears that some police-sponsored public events seem to focus on trying to improve communication with the public they serve. Using Grunig's theory, the public that the police organization wants to communicate with should recognize that a problem or need exists and requires some attention (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). The public would then want to become involved in improving communication by participating in the events or communicating with the organization (Bravo, 2015). Those interested would assess whether external factors would prevent them from participating (Bravo, 2015). The final aspect is if the person believes their participation would be beneficial or can influence communication with the organization (Bravo, 2015). If the person believes their involvement would not have any consequence if they attended any event, then participation would not occur. This concept is in line with social exchange theory.

This research focuses on why people choose not to attend or want to participate in police-sponsored events. There is no clear understanding of this phenomenon concerning these events. The messages generated by law enforcement organizations to attract various groups may not be meaningful to the people they want to influence. Social exchange theory contends that if the public does not perceive a benefit, attendance would be unlikely (Emerson, 1976).

This study uses grounded theory to understand what influences participation in police-sponsored meetings and what factors are most important in attracting attendance.

Summary and Conclusions

According to the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), public relations is a planned communication process used to facilitate the development of beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics (Public Relations Society of America, 2021). As in the past, today, public meetings remain a staple of government organizations that generate strategies to garner interested parties to participate in organized events (Environmental Protection Agency, 2020). Law enforcement organizations have used meetings to attract community members to communicate with them about crime prevention and problems within the community to build partnerships or relationships (Gill et al., 2014)

Investment in public communication is at an all-time high in this country and throughout the world despite studies that show trust in government and big businesses is at its lowest since measurements began in the 1960s (MacNamara, 2018). This disparity is attributed to different factors, including strategies that do not provide all the facts to those attending public meetings and not sending the right message to the intended audiences (Beck et al., 2012). When strategizing how to attract participants to planned events, law enforcement agencies want to present a positive image to the public (Environmental Protection Agency, 2020) The agency plans the event to exhibit transparency and the impression that attendance benefits those attending (Beck et al., 2012). This strategy may include a practiced or orchestrated message important to the organization without considering community interests (Beck et al., 2012). Although not regarded as unethical, these strategies may not attract the largest participation for the event (Sallot, 2002). There

have not been recent studies that clearly identify which community members attend a public meeting or why some do not attend (Williamson & Scicchitano, 2013).

Grunig (1978) developed the situational theory of publics, arguing that there are several reasons groups of people or publics become involved in public relations issues. One of the critical reasons for involvement is problem recognition (Bravo, 2015). Generally, this means the person or persons see the situation as a shared problem (Bravo, 2015). Another factor would be what Grunig called constraint recognition or does the person(s) believe they have some control over the situation. The third factor is the level of involvement the person(s) wants to contribute to the issue (Bravo, 2015). The participant would want to become active in improving communication by involvement in the events or communication with the organization (Bravo, 2015). Those interested would assess whether external factors would prevent them from participating (Bravo, 2015). The final aspect is if the person believes their participation would be beneficial or influence communication with the organization (Bravo, 2015). If the person believes their involvement would not have any consequence or benefit if they attended any event, then participation would not be expected since the outcome of attendance would not be beneficial (Bravo, 2015).

One aspect of the Situational theory of publics is that the organization may not believe a problem actually exists and is unwilling to listen to participants who express dissatisfaction or voice a call for change (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). The organization leaders may consider garnering support from other groups or individuals to dissuade those who are pointing out the perceived problem. Applying this to police-sponsored public events,

the event's theme, or strategies the organization uses to encourage participation may only address the marginal views of special interest groups or individuals instead of focusing on the majority of the community (Grunig, 1978).

Social exchange theory is used to identify and develop any theoretical explanations that would explain the lack of interest by some of the community to attend police-sponsored events. Understanding any perceived problems that may influence the decision to attend or not participate in the events can lead to a theory that would benefit public relations strategies within police organizations for organized events.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Research has offered limited evidence suggesting that police-sponsored public events produce any positive outcomes or are related to trust in the police officers or their organizations. Trust in the police, their legitimacy, and their use of procedural justice are important factors since they can support police efforts to solve crime with citizens assisting the police (Reisig & Lloyd, 2009).

Trust has been identified as a part of police legitimacy, and the idea of procedural justice affects the public's cooperation with the police (Nix et al., 2015). Trust in the police can be affected by a variety of factors, such as how a person is treated by individual police officers, perceived corruption in police organizations, or an individual observing how others are treated by law enforcement (Alalehto & Larsson, 2016; Bradford & Myhill, 2014). It was not known if attending police-sponsored events is affected by these factors or if these factors are important to those who attend or choose not to go to the events.

Research Design and Rationale

In this qualitative research, I explored why community members attend law enforcement public meetings and whether their trust in the police, the police's use of procedural justice, the police's legitimacy contributed to the community members' attendance or nonattendance of police-sponsored public meetings. Patterns and themes emerged from the participants' interview responses. Understanding the influences that participants attributed to their decisions on whether to attend such meetings provided data for theory development in the study. The findings of this research add to prior research on

involving more community members in public meetings and improving positive interactions with police organizations and officers. The following research question was used during the research to guide the study. What are community members' motivations in deciding to attend or not attend police-sponsored public meetings and events?

In qualitative research, interviews with individuals are a primary way data are collected on the subject studied (Saldana, 2016). I used open-ended interview questions as the method of collecting data.

In this qualitative research, I used grounded theory as the methodology. The underlying concept of this methodology is that everyone's learning experiences build upon each other, giving a person a unique understanding of what they learn (Rieger, 2019). Grounded theory methodology acknowledges that learning is a social activity directly impacted by those around us, such as parents, teachers, siblings, and acquaintances (Rieger, 2019). Attending a police-sponsored event would be a decision based on prior experiences and knowledge that influences the person's views and perceptions of such a meeting. Grounded theory researchers are interested in how the participant understands and responds to the subject in their own social context (Charmaz, 2016).

Grounded theory is a methodical approach for conducting and analyzing research (Charmaz, 2016). Grounded theory is used to create a new theory based on the data collected that explains the data (Charmaz, 2014). Grounded theory is used in various types of research, developing concepts by analyzing patterns and relationships in the data (Rieger, 2019). Collecting the data, coding, and analyzing the material collected can lead

the researcher to discover a different paradigm when looking at a given situation. When using grounded theory, the researcher is not trying to describe the phenomenon but construct new concepts that apply but have not been considered in previous research (Charmaz, 2014). Using grounded theory allows this qualitative research to be approachable and open to interpretations of in-depth interviews with which to develop a theoretical understanding of the data. Grounded theory is an investigative tool for understanding the data and facilitated the development of a theory on why community members do or do not participate in events sponsored by law enforcement. Questions related to trust in the police, police use of procedural justice, or legitimacy of the police provide a contextual background related to the subject matter. Other attendance categories became apparent depending on the participants' answers adding to unidentified explanations (see Charmaz, 2016).

Role of the Researcher

Grounded theory is an inductive inquiry using qualitative methods (Charmaz, 2016). In Grounded theory, the researcher works with each participant to gain knowledge in the area of inquiry (Rieger, 2019). The researcher interprets the data collected from the participant, reflecting on their own experiences and knowledge to avoid imposing preconceived ideas on the collected data (Charmaz, 2016). Using the qualitative grounded theory methodology, the researcher systematically develops questions that define emergent questions (Charmaz, 2016). Each participants' answers reflect their perceptions of reality, and the researcher tries to identify the most probable theoretical explanation that may also be a new theory (Charmaz, 2016). Whether a new theory or

another perspective of preexisting phenomena, grounded theory can be used to elucidate the central ideas of the participants.

When conducting qualitative research, the design of the study should be set up in a way that answers the research question. Using valid methods in collecting data and reporting the results plays a substantial role in analyzing and reporting the data. The researcher must follow the study's design so others can see how the research was conducted and how the results and conclusions were established (National Institute of Health, 2016)

In this research, I used established selection criteria that identified persons who met the requirements to participate and who understood the informed consent form. I did not force the participants to answer questions or expect explanations they did not want to offer, thus limiting any persuasive power I had over the participant. Only individuals who volunteered to participate were used during this research..

A gift card for \$ 25.00 was offered to each person who participated in the interview process. This incentive was not used to achieve a power position over the participant but to thank them for participating in the research.

I kept each participant's identity and personal information (other than information that was meaningful to the data analysis and could not be used to identify the participant) confidential. The person's identity and personal information other than something meaningful to the data analysis is confidential. The participants were reassured that their personal information was not being used or shared in any way that was not explained verbally and in writing, and they signed and acknowledged the informed consent form

accepting this condition (see Walden University, 2020). To ensure the participant's identities remain confidential, I will not release the audio tapes of the interviews for further research but saved per Walden University policy and the law. The names of the participants associated with this research were not relevant, so the participants were identified by the number of their interviews (e.g., Participant #1, #2, # 3, etc.).

When conducting research of this type, data collection, coding, and analysis must be done on the merits of the data to limit bias on the researcher's part (Glaser, 2002). When collecting the data for this research, no personal opinions were forced on the data to slant the outcomes toward any particular beliefs. According to Charmaz (2016), honestly assessing the data and writing personal memos that address how the data is being evaluated can be useful when evaluating your own involvement in the research and protecting against personal bias in the process.

Methodology

The potential participants for this research could be from any location within the United States. In this qualitative research, I conducted semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions. Interviewing methods were over the phone, in person, and on the internet.

Participants for this research had to be 18 years old or older to take part in this study. Participants in this study communicated their opinions verbally in English. All inclusion conditions were met, and agreements signed before the interviews took place. Due to a potential conflict of interest, law enforcement employees or their families were excluded from the study. There was no discrimination on the basis of the participants'

age, sex, gender identity, race, religion, ethnic identity, or political beliefs. None of the participants were incarcerated, on active parole, or on probation. In the case of persons on active probation or parole, additional approvals would have been required from government officials for their participation as outlined in the Code of Federal Regulations Title 45 Public Welfare Department of Health and Human Services Part 46 Protection of Human Subjects (U. S. Department of Human Health Services, n.d.).

When selecting the potential participants, I preferred but did not require that they heard of a police-sponsored event such as National Night Out, Coffee with a Cop, or other meetings. In the study, I tried to understand why the participant would choose not to attend a public event or why they would attend. Having both types of Participants contributed to the balance of the research.

The research's selection criteria and general purpose provided me with an in-depth approach to gathering data. Those interested in participation first self-assessed whether they met the general inclusion criteria stated in the advertisement, then a follow-up interview with me to verify their eligibility. A consent form copy was available to the participant before the interview. All the participants acknowledged they knew the interview would be audio recorded.

I anticipated 10 to 12 participants to reach the saturation point in the data collection (Saldana, 2016). Saldana indicated that when coding, data saturation is attained when no new information from the participants can be identified. The Walden University participant pool did not provide any participants for the research. Participants with varying backgrounds provided their personal experiences and opinions along with in-

depth explanations pertaining to the interview questions. This variety of participants contributed to meeting data saturation with 10 participants. The Participants for the research came from local businesses and referrals from acquaintances.

The interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, coded, and analyzed. Written notes taken during and after the interviews helped to identify key phrases or ideas. They also assisted when transcribing the interviews. The use of an interview guide helped address each aspect of the research question without biasing the participants' responses to the interview questions. All interview questions were based on the overarching research question. Emergent questions occurred during the interview, and I provided clarification to the participants as needed. This did not change the interview guide as the primary data collection source but only simplified the interview questions. No follow-up interviews with participants were necessary for this study. The data analysis process allowed me to compare the participants' interview responses to find patterns and themes.

I considered grounded theory as the best approach to assess this qualitative study's overarching research question. Glaser and Strauss (1999) introduced this methodology to show how they conducted their earlier research. Charmaz (2014) explained that grounded theory is a method for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories from that data. The researcher develops a theory grounded in the data collected through the interview process (Charmaz, 2014). Different variations of grounded theory are used by researchers, although all the variations have similar approaches. The three major versions of grounded theory are classic Glaser grounded theory, constructivist grounded theory, and Straussian grounded theory.

Classic Glaser grounded theory is based on the idea that the researched area will yield relevant explanations when collecting, coding, and analyzing the data (Glaser, 2002). In this type of grounded theory, data collection continues until saturation occurs, and the research problem will develop as the collected data are analyzed and will resolve itself through this process (Glaser, 2020). However, research in the area of interest should not start by identifying an issue but simply be an area of interest where the researcher discovers what is occurring (Glaser, 2020). Constant evaluation of the data by the researcher dissipates personal bias (Rieger, 2019).

In the constructivist grounded theory, the researcher approaches the study with some knowledge that may identify various theoretical explanations of the problem and uses that experience to arrive at the most credible explanation (Rieger, 2019).

The Straussian grounded theory expands on the classic Glaser grounded theory by describing detailed coding techniques for the collected data (Rieger, 2019). Using this type of grounded theory, the researcher interprets the data collected and, as a tool, improves the generation of theory through the constant comparison of the data (Rieger, 2019).

In this research, I explored whether the messages or advertisements provided by law enforcement agencies to encourage participation in police-sponsored public events and/or meetings were considered a factor in whether a participant decided to attend and builds upon the ideas presented through social exchange theory to determine through grounded theory methodology if these applications can reveal how individuals make

decisions concerning attendance at police-sponsored events and explore whether trust in the police, police legitimacy, and use of procedural justice were factors in their decision.

In this research, the relationships between the messages given by law enforcement agencies to encourage participation in the events or meetings might be of interest if the participant considered it a factor of whether or not they attended. Underlying circumstances or beliefs could just as well have influenced the individuals' decision to attend. The extent that individuals perceive a potential issue or problem as a factor in attending an event or other issues related to their decision to participate, such as trust in the police policy, the police, police legitimacy, and the police use of procedural justice, were considered in the interviews but was not the only consideration.

The interviews were recorded and used for coding the responses. Written notes taken during and after the interviews helped to identify key phrases or ideas. They also assisted when transcribing the interviews. An interview guide addressed each aspect of the research question without biasing the participant's response to the questions.

Data Analysis

I completed the transcriptions by listening to the interviews and transcribing them sentence by sentence. The transcription and the audio recording were then compared to each other for accuracy.

The initial coding process was done by breaking down the data into coded segments (Saldana, 2016). The second coding stage was axial and theoretical coding, which categorizes and prioritizes codes to find patterns and relationships between categories to discover an emergent theory (Saldana, 2016). When analyzing the data,

inconsistent or discrepant data were included in the overall assessment. Variations in the data should be expected and may be relevant. When data was discrepant from other data, it was analyzed with sensitivity to understand the critical differences to increase the reliability and validity of the research (Morse, 2015).

Trustworthiness, Transferability, and Dependability

Reliability and validity were the standards for research until Lincoln and Guba (1985) challenged this for qualitative research with the construct of Trustworthiness can be broken down into the categories of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Morse, 2015).

Credibility is established when the results of the data analysis are reliable and consistent with the research methods (Plamondon et al., 2015). One way to create credibility is to reach saturation of the themes found in the data (Malterud et al., 2016).

Saturation can be explained as having collected enough data to show that all attributes of an issue have been found, and no further data collection will reveal any new phenomenon (Morse, 2015). To ensure saturation has been met in the research, the codes and themes created during the interviews can be cross-checked or triangulated with each other in different orders (Malterud et al., 2016). When it has been determined that the saturation of the themes is met, no further interviews would be needed in the research (Malterud et al., 2016). With these techniques, the constant comparison of interviews takes more time but would indicate that the researcher met saturation.

Dependability refers to the researcher's process and steps in conceptualizing the study, selecting the participants, using interview techniques, analyzing the results, and

reporting the findings (Morse, 2015). Providing a thick description of the steps and processes taken during the research offers a better understanding of how the researcher approached and conducted the study (Morse, 2015). Explaining the aspects of the interview process, the codes, and the themes developed gives context to the researcher's thought progress toward the analysis and findings (Malterud et al., 2016). Providing this background of the research development can provide dependability of the research and contribute to transferability and confirmability (Morse et al., 2002).

Transferability is more challenging in qualitative research since conducting the same research on a different population may not provide the same results as the first study (Morse, 2015). In grounded theory providing a detailed description of the methods and process to reach the findings and possibly a new theory as evidence that transferability may be applicable in future research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Instead of trying to achieve transferability for others, the researcher is transparent in the research process (Morse, 2015). Providing your rationale for the decisions made during the research process and the description of the research supports confirmability and the criterion that leads to the overarching goal of trustworthiness (Morse, 2015).

Confirmability is a process achieved through careful examination of the research process and the methods of inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Carefully describing the rationalization of the steps taken during the research and the process of the collection of data, the analysis, and the coding of the data shows other researchers how the findings and conclusions were reached (Nassaji, 2020). Determining that the collected data, the interpretations of the data, and the findings support the conclusions validate the research's

dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). One way to establish confirmability is by comparing the data sources with each other and triangulating the data to provide contextual validation of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Ethical Procedures

This research was conducted in accordance with Walden University Institutional Review Board's recommendations and requirements. The regulations and guidelines were followed to ensure the participants were at minimal risk of harm during and after the research interview process.

The informed consent forms were explained to the participants along with any risks of participation in the study. In this research, no known risks were associated with participation. All information collected from the participants has remained confidential and in the researcher's possession for the specified time required by law or institutional policies. Participants were recruited on a voluntary basis. Only consenting adults were accepted into the study. All participants were told about the nature of the research and that there was no obligation to answer any questions or make any statements that they were uncomfortable with or did not want to answer. The interviews were in private locations, on the phone, and over the internet. When done in person, the location was agreed upon before the interview. No special accommodations were requested or needed for the interviews.

Summary

Qualitative methodology was used in this research to accommodate the use of semi-structured interviews. Participant recruitment was with adults who would have had

an opportunity to attend a police-sponsored event. The research was centered around the participant's decisions concerning attending an event and the specific reasons they had for the choice they made or will make. Grounded theory was used to find any emergent theory about the participant's decision not to attend or participate in an event. While conducting the research, triangulation of the data and reflection on themes that emerged from the data was recorded to support the trustworthiness of the research and the findings.

This research had no video recording. Before any interview, the Walden University consent form was explained to the participant, and clarification was provided as needed. The participants were provided or sent an informed consent form; no information to later identify the participant was collected.

Data were coded as soon as possible after the interview. Data were broken down into segments (Saldana, 2016). Theoretical coding was conducted to search for categories where relationships and themes could lead to an emergent theory (Saldana, 2016).

Careful attention and documentation were given when collecting and analyzing the data to establish the credibility of the methodology and the findings (Morse, 2015).

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to identify the reasons why some community members attend public meetings sponsored by law enforcement agencies while others do not participate. The interview questions centered around their views on police organizations, police officers, and whether attendance at police-sponsored public events had anything to do with trusting the police, police legitimacy, or their perception of police fairness. The research question that guided this study was What are community members' motivations in deciding whether to attend a police-sponsored public meeting or event?

In this chapter, I provide the contextual background of the research setting, the participant demographics, and data collection and data analysis and present the results.

Setting

I conducted semi-structured individual interviews with the participants either in-person, on the phone, or over the internet. The interview conducted over the internet was done through email and did not need transcription, whereas the other audio recorded interviews were transcribed. The interview locations were a private area in a local business where the participants were comfortable, at a residence where the participant was staying, and by calling the participant's home phone. I conducted the phone and internet interviews from my office.

Demographics

Ten volunteers participated in this research and provided sufficient data to achieve saturation. Inquiry into the participant's age, gender identification, or other

demographic particulars was not deemed necessary for this research because prior studies found that attendance at government meetings indicated that it was not a relevant factor for attendance (see Williamson & Scicchitano, 2013). The participants were all employed at the time of the interviews and represented a variety of professions. This information provides some context to the backgrounds of the participants because it relates to their ability to attend police events.

The participants provided demographic information on where they generally resided. Of the 10 participants, three were from smaller communities with 15,000 or less, with two coming from a community of less than 1000, while the remaining participants resided in cities with a population of 90,000 or more. The participants came from several states, including California, Louisiana, and Mississippi.

Data Collection

I conducted seven face-to-face interviews, and two interviews over-the-phone interviews were conducted. One participant answered the questions via the internet by email and did not require transcription or follow-up interviewing. All other interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed. Before the interviews, the participants signed or initialed a copy of the consent waiver indicating they had read and understood it. I sent the participants taking part in the phone interviews and the internet interview consent forms by email and asked them to reply by indicating "I consent". The participants had an opportunity to review the interview questions prior to participating. In the interviews, I asked open-ended questions to determine the participants' feelings about attending law enforcement events and what could influence their decisions about whether to attend.

Data Analysis

I conducted one interview with each participant, and no follow-up interviews were necessary. All the in-person and phone interviews were audio-recorded for later transcription. I manually transcribed these interviews and reviewed them several times to ensure their accuracy.

I completed initial in vivo coding by reviewing each sentence of the participants' interview responses for vital phrases or words used to describe how they felt about a particular aspect of the interview question asked. In vivo coding was used to primarily subject the data to objective observation noting any connections to other data collected from other participants (Saldana, 2016).

Axial coding was used to identify critical characteristics and the narrowing of broad categories into subcategories that would relate to each other and allow for inferential codes to emerge (see Saldana, 2016). I, again, cross-referenced the interviews with each other to note any similarities in words or phrases. Trust, motivation to attend, location, and meeting content were identified as consistent codes.

Themes emerged as further data coding unfolded, and I identified several vital areas that influenced participants to attend law enforcement-sponsored events. These codes established a solid foundation for participants' motivation or lack of interest in attending police-sponsored public events.

The emergent codes identified location, purpose, convenience, content, activity, and advertisement as crucial factors. These consistent codes emerged to assign meaning to the participant's ideas brought up during the interview process. These codes were

consistent within all participant interviews and developed the overarching context contributing to their attendance or nonattendance of a law enforcement-sponsored public event.

I coded each participants' data separately but cross-checked them individually with data from all the other participants. Notes were taken to keep track of similarities, differences, and frequency of similar words or ideas the participants expressed during the interviews. I also took memos to document how the data were developing and tracked my ideas about the developing patterns recognized in the data. Categories were developed through this analysis of the participants' responses in describing how they felt about police officers and law enforcement organizations as well as if or why they would or would not attend a police-sponsored event.

Codes identified through constant analysis and comparison of the data identified emergent themes that further identified other central themes (see Saldana, 2016). These themes were ideas about the motives of the organizations and officers in law enforcement, if the participants trusted officers to treat themselves and others fairly, the purpose of community events, and what was needed to have them attend. Two participants had already attended these types of events in the past, and their reasons for attending in the past but not attending recently added context to the data. The participants responded with the following phrases when asked whether they trusted law enforcement officers.

Asked about trusting police officers:

- “Put your faith in them, it's all we got”

- “I put my trust in them”
- “There are good apples and bad apples in every walk of life”
- “I don't fully trust all of them”
- “The majority are good”
- “I trust most police officers”
- “Hold them in high regard”
- “I do like police officers, just not all of them”
- “I don't think there are many that are really unlawful”
- “I guess as much trust as you would trust anyone else”

When asked if they would go to a police-sponsored event, the participants responded:

- “I would go if I had one in my neighborhood”
- “I wouldn't go out of my way to attend one”
- “If I lived in that neighborhood (I) would go”
- “I didn't know they had meetings; I like having the sign there”
- “I never hear about events in my area”
- “Depends on what they talk about”
- “If it wasn't during working hours”
- “If they had a fishing tournament, I would go”
- “If time permits, I would be happy to be involved with my communities law enforcement”

Theoretical Coding helped me condense and develop these subcategories into the core categories that identified the central meaning of the data. Location was categorized

into the participant's preferred location, which was their neighborhood or essentially the area they lived. I categorized content to include activities for children and adults, and some purpose other than just talking to law enforcement officers or eating food. Advertisement pertained to the participant's complaints that they were rarely notified of an event in a timely manner or did not know one actually occurred until it was over. Convenience included having the event after work hours, on a non-workday, and at a time that was not conflicting with other events. These were the key variables that influenced the participant's decision to attend or not attend a law enforcement-sponsored event. The interrelationship between the key categories influenced the decisions of these participants whether to attend or participate in the events.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

After interviewing seven participants and coding each interview, the data indicated that all of the attributes of the research question were addressed in strikingly similar ways, and additional interviews would probably not reveal any new phenomenon. However, I conducted three additional interviews, and cross-checked the codes and themes in the data to confirm that saturation had been achieved. The interview questions supported the research question and provided in-depth data that met all the elements sought in this study.

The inclusion criteria for this research required the participants to be adults and not related, working for, or in a personal relationship with a law enforcement officer or organization. None of the participants could be on active parole or probation. This criterion offered a wide variety of possible participants. The participants were from

several states and lived in various small and large communities. This diversity in the participants provided context to the research through the variety of personal experiences they had with law enforcement officials and organizations. Although not directly asked, some participants provided prior personal experiences with law enforcement. Some of the experiences were enforcement related, while others were not.

With the interview questions, I inquired whether the participants had attended any police-sponsored meetings. The participants were also asked about trusting law enforcement officers or their organizations, and if an officer stopped them, did they believe the officer would treat them fairly. This approach was used to explore if the participants' trust in the police, the use of procedural justice, or the legitimacy of the police had any connection with their attendance at a police-sponsored meeting. The participants reported that they generally trusted law enforcement. When asked about being stopped by an officer, the participants' trust was dependent upon the individual officer's behavior and experience. After the first few interviews, the interview questions were re-worded for clarity. This change did not affect the answers the participants gave during the interviews. In some ways, the participant's answers were unexpected because trust was seen as being dependent on an officer's personal behavior and was not an indication of trust towards law enforcement as a whole.

Results

To research this issue, I used several possible concepts to explore what could influence a participant's decision of whether to attend police-sponsored public meeting including trust in the police, police legitimacy, and the concept of procedural justice. The

interview questions assessed these areas while relating to the responses participants provided about the attendance of police-sponsored events.

The interrelationship between the key themes influenced the decisions of these participants' to attend or participate in the events. However, supporting these key themes were the participants' underlying beliefs that law enforcement officers and organizations were, for the most part, working to keep the community safe. The results showed that participants thought that the law enforcement officers were trustworthy but could not always be trusted. Participants viewed the officers as people whose job is to make the community a safe place to live.

Some participant considerations about inexperienced officers were that they might be trying to prove themselves, they could make poor decisions and might abuse their authority. Identifying this human frailty did not diminish the overall trust the participants in the officers or the departments.

Department operational planning may limit discretionary considerations by putting political pressure on the department administrators and officers to encourage quotas or other questionable behaviors. The participants believed this practice was not common. One participant thought that in smaller communities, there was more of a chance that political pressure could influence police decisions rather than in larger cities.

In the initial coding, data on trusting law enforcement officers presented itself in several ways. After the first initial interviews, I rewrote the interview questions to make them more straightforward for the participants. All of the participants provided responses consistent with those from the earlier interviews.

The participants identified several factors influencing their decision to attend a police-sponsored public event. All participants indicated they had attended or would attend an event if specific prerequisites supported their attendance. Five major themes were consistent across the data. Advanced knowledge about the event, the event's purpose, planned activities during the event, the location, and the convenience of attending all played a crucial role in the participants' decision of whether to attend an event.

The participants trusted law enforcement officers as community safety advocates, even if some were untrustworthy. The participants' answers indicated they expected to be fairly treated during contact with law enforcement, even though some participants had unpleasant encounters with some officers. Trust in the police, legitimacy of the police, and use of procedural justice were not significant factors for the participants when deciding whether to attend the police-sponsored event.

Hearing about an event or meeting was a primary consideration in the participants' decision of whether to attend such an event. Not all the participants knew when and where these events occurred. The theme of advance notification occurred across all participants' responses, indicating that whatever the means of communication used in the participant's geographical area were not a successful strategy for attracting interested parties to attend. Law enforcement agencies may need to modify their advertisement methods to attract those who would potentially attend such events. Participants offered several suggestions to improve communication about these events to the community, such as having local churches and religious centers announce the events

when they meet to garner better attendance and reaching out to these organizations where notifications of upcoming events to their membership may increase attendance at a police-sponsored event. Civic organizations within the community could also announce the upcoming event to their membership. These types of organizations may also want to partner with the law enforcement agency to support the event, influencing community members who support their organization to attend the event.

The theme of purpose theme was influential in the data. Participants wanted to know if the event concerned their neighborhood or safety in their area. Just meeting officers or others in their neighborhood was not incentive enough for participants to attend such events. Other objectives needed to be met to encourage attendance, such as improving their neighborhood safety or providing information about personal safety issues.

In most cases, the theme of activities during the event was necessary if the participant had children. The activities would be an incentive to attend an event for parents with children if the officers interacted with the children and had the equipment or demonstrations that could stimulate learning. Another activity suggested by participants was having a fishing tournament where officers would interact with the participants during the event. Having something interesting to do or talking with law enforcement officers about problems was also consistent in the data.

The theme of the location of an event had two interconnected meanings in the data. The location had to be convenient for the participants to attend and preferably in or near their neighborhood. The participants reported that having officers who actually

worked in their area or neighborhood would have more meaning since these officers would more likely have information about their area, and the participants would be more likely to have contact with these officers if they encountered an issue that needed law enforcement intervention. The events' location was a significant factor in participants' decisions about whether to attend the meeting/event. They would be less likely to attend if the location is inconvenient or in a place they did not know. They reported that they would be more likely to attend the event in their neighborhood. If the location was one where they did not feel safe, or their children may not be safe, then they would not attend.

The purpose of the meeting would also influence their decision to attend. If the police-sponsored meeting or event was in their neighborhood and the information was relevant to them, they would be more likely to attend.

Activities during the planned police-sponsored event were less important than the purpose but would influence those with children to attend. Participants thought it would be helpful if the activities were educational and fun for the children while interacting with local law enforcement officers.

Another consideration the participants expressed by participants was how convenient it would be for them to attend. If the event was during working hours, then they would not be likely to attend the event. If the event were during a time when they would be busy doing other things, they would not be likely to attend. If the event was during a weekend or when they were not working, they would consider going to the event taking into account the other contributing factors.

Summary

I conducted this research to investigate and understand why some community members attend police-sponsored public events while others do not. To facilitate this endeavor, the interview questions centered on trust of the police, police legitimacy, and the use of procedural justice. Considering these three areas might expose potentially negative attitudes toward the police that might influence their decisions. The interview questions sought the participants' feelings about the purpose of the meetings and what might influence them to attend a meeting/event.

Semi-structured interviews over the phone, in person, and through internet correspondence provided the source data for this research. Transcribed participant interviews were coded several times to identify and understand the emerging characteristics and themes in the data.

Ten adult volunteers participated in the study that met the requirements outlined in the consent form and approved by the Internal Review Board. Eight of the 10 participants had not attended a police-sponsored event, while two had gone in the past. Participants lived in a variety of states and small and large communities.

The participants discussed in the interview what would influence their decision to attend a police-sponsored public meeting/event. Trust in the police, police legitimacy and the use of procedural justice were explored as underlying reasons for attendance at the events but were dismissed as significant contributors. The term trust was used in the questions, and procedural justice was replaced with being treated fairly. Legitimacy was established by asking participants about law enforcement organizations and officers'

intent when conducting their duties. Participants reported a sense of general trust in the officers and organizations, which may influence their decisions on attending police-sponsored events.

The event's location was critical in the participants' decision to attend the event. Participants were less likely to attend if it was not in their neighborhood. If the event location were not convenient, they probably would not attend. If the event were in a location the participants' did not feel safe or it was not safe for their children, they would probably not attend.

The purpose of the event was essential to the participants as well. Meeting police officers was not a motivation to attend a police-sponsored public event. They would attend if the purpose were to inform the community of safety issues in their neighborhood, provide information they could use, or other participation activities they were interested.

Participants indicated that activities for children would be an excellent way to have them interact with police officers. Educational and entertaining features during the event could provide some motivation for the participants' attendance.

Convenience was a factor that directly influences the participants' decision to attend a police-sponsored event. It would negatively impact the participant's decision if the event were during working hours or even on a workday. Even if scheduled after working hours, the participants would be less likely to attend the police-sponsored event. An event on a nonworking day and at a convenient time would make it more likely for participants' to attend.

Advertising the event was crucial to the participant's decision to attend. Early announcements about the event would make it easier for the participant to schedule attendance. Better advertising distribution methods are needed so more community members are aware of an upcoming event. Participants suggested announcements at church services and other social or fraternal organizations in the community.

The five main participation factors for police-sponsored public events emerged from the data: the event's location, convenience to attend, the purpose of the event, advance advertisement, and activities at the event, and are the primary considerations that would influence the participants' decision to attend. Although participants have similar feelings about trusting the police and how they conduct their duties, it was not a determining factor of whether they would attend a police-sponsored event.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

In this qualitative research, I investigated why some community members attend police-sponsored public events while others do not, as well as whether attending or choosing to go was related to community support for law enforcement by taking into account their trust in the police, police legitimacy, and the perception of procedural justice. The findings of the research advanced the understanding of community members' attendance at police-sponsored public meetings and led to the development of a theory of the necessary conditions for participants to attend an event. In the current research, I also determined to what extent the public meetings sponsored by the police provide meaningful interactions for those who attended the meetings versus those community members who did not participate. Interviewing the participants' about the events and their attendance decisions expanded the understanding of this interaction with police organizations and their officers.

The findings of this research reveal that the critical factors in decision making of whether to attend a police-sponsored meeting: knowing when an event is to take place, the events' purpose, the planned activities, the location, and how convenient it is to attend. These findings are consistent with those of prior research. Prior contact with law enforcement, whether positive or negative, did not have a significant influence on the decision to attend a meeting.

Interpretation of Findings

The findings of the research are consistent with the social exchange theory that participants reported they would attend an event if they perceived a benefit and had little

risk in attending (see Emerson, 1976). The findings also support the tenets of the situational theory of publics in that if the message generated by the organization is not of interest or does not address the issues that concern the participants, they would be less likely to attend (see Grunig & Hunt, 1984). When considering location, the findings of this research also support the situational theory of publics in that participants recognized internal and external constraints for attending an event (see Bravo, 2015). If the events were not close to their neighborhood or were inconvenient to attend, the participants would probably not go.

Five major themes emerged from the data analysis: advanced knowledge about the event, the event's purpose, planned activities during the event, the location, and the convenience of attending. All of these factors played a crucial role in the participants' decision whether to attend a police-sponsored public event. The data did not support the idea that trust, legitimacy, or procedural justice had an influence on a community members' attendance at a police-sponsored event.

Notification of an upcoming event was a theme in the data indicating that whatever the means of communication police organizations used in the participant's geographical area were not a successful strategy for attracting interested parties to attend police-sponsored public events. Most of the participants in the current research knew that public events by the police took place but were unaware of any other details. The lack of knowledge of the event suggests that the advertising of the events is not inclusive enough to notify everyone in the community.

Advertisement of events is an essential aspect of attendance. The participants suggested several ways to communicate the message to more community members. One suggestion was to have local churches and religious centers announce the events to get better attendance. Reaching out to other organizations within the community who can notify their membership of an event or partner with the law enforcement organization to sponsor the event may be another way to bolster attendance.

The purpose of the event was also an important theme in the data. Participants reported wanting to know if the event concern their neighborhood or safety in their area. Just meeting officers or others in their neighborhood was not an incentive for the participants to attend such an event.

The participants conveyed that, in most cases the theme of activities during the event was necessary for their attendance, especially if they had young children. Having activities available would be an incentive to attend an event for parents with children if the officers interacted with them and had equipment to play on or with. Another activity suggested was having a fishing tournament where officers would interact with the participants during the event. Having something interesting to do or talk with law enforcement officers about was a constant in the data.

The location of the event had two interconnected meanings in the data. The location had to be convenient to attend. The participants reported that they would be less likely to attend an event in another neighborhood or an area that was not considered safe. There is more incentive to go to an event if it is in the neighborhood where the participants live. Having officers who are assigned to work in their neighborhood would

also be beneficial because the officers would be familiar with the particular issues related to that area.

The convenience of attending as a theme was also multifaceted. The event could not be held during working hours; scheduling an event at a time when they were off work was essential for the participants' attendance. Even if it were during a lunch break, the participants stated that they would be less likely to attend. If the scheduled event was after hours on a workday, it might interfere with other activities. Having the event on a day off from work would be more of an incentive for the participants to attend. Considering the time of day, the event would commence was also influential in the participants' decision making of whether to attend.

These primary themes in the data supported the prior research in that people assess the rewards for attending an event with the difficulties involved in achieving that benefit (see Emerson, 1976). Letting people know when there is a planned event, the events' purpose, the location, the time, and the planned activities are essential for community members' decision of whether they are interested in attending. The data does not support the idea that trust in the police, police legitimacy, or the perceived use of procedural justice by the police significantly influences a person's decision to attend a police-sponsored event.

Limitations of the Study

The particulars of the types of neighborhoods the participants lived in were not part of the current study, such as crime in the neighborhoods where the participants lived.

The participants came from several geographical areas in the United States but did not include participants from inner-city populations. Despite the diversity of this study, participants from urban inner-city neighborhoods were absent from this research and the inclusion of this population might improve the study. A larger population size might improve the transferability of the findings and improve the study.

Recommendations

The neighborhood where the participant lives, as it relates to high crime as opposed to a lower crime rate, could be included in future research. The crime assessment can be from the participant's perspective and not official records because these may differ.

The area and not the neighborhood they live in may contribute to the consideration of attendance at an event. The inclusion of these ideas into future studies may not change the conditions for the participants to attend police-sponsored events but add additional perspectives with which to interpret the findings.

Implications

The findings of this research show that trusting law enforcement officers, their use of procedural justice, or the perceived legitimacy of the officer or organization are not significant factors for participants when deciding to attend a police-sponsored public event. The significance of this study lies in the findings that putting a message out in as many ways as possible to attract attendance, promoting the time and location of the police-sponsored event, and advertising the purpose and activities during the scheduled events are the conditions that participants' use when deciding to attend such an event.

Participants of this study wanted events in or near their neighborhoods with officers who work in those areas in attendance. In larger jurisdictions having more than one event location may encourage more residents to participate.

Positive social change could result from law enforcement authorities recognizing some of the deficiencies in their current strategy to encourage participation at their events. With more community members attending events, the lines of communication and information sharing between the police and the communities they serve can inspire positive social change within that community structure.

Reaching out to other community organizations for help in advertising and possibly co-sponsoring an event could also lead to positive social change through partnership and cooperation to organize and achieve a successful event meeting the expectations of those who attend. A police-sponsored event where officers and community members have a shared interest, such as a fishing tournament, could cultivate an environment where those attending can interact with the officers and other community members building positive relationships.

As indicated in the social exchange theory and the situational theory of publics, attending a police-sponsored public event depends on several factors that provide the community member with enough information to consider attendance as beneficial for them. The event should be held at a location the potential participants' are comfortable or familiar with, scheduled at a time that does not interfere with other events or activities, convenient to attend, have activities or information that interests the participant, and advertised in as broad a way as possible. Police organizations should keep in mind that

some community members may not attend the event for reasons the sponsors cannot anticipate or control.

Conclusions

Police-sponsored public meetings can be a beneficial way for police organizations to connect to the community and surrounding neighborhoods. In this study, I focused on the conditions community members factor in when deciding whether to attend such an event. I investigated the idea that trust in the police, police legitimacy, and procedural justice would influence a community member's choice of whether to attend a police-sponsored event because this was suggested in prior research; however, these factors were found to not be of particular importance to the participants of this study. What was more important for the participants of the current study was where the meeting was taking place, what information or activities at the event pertained to them or their families, if the event was convenient to attend, and that the event did not interfere with other plans or activities such as work. These elements were more important in their decision-making process than if an officer was not trustworthy, or they had had an issue with how an officer had treated them, or they believed an officer did not necessarily need to act in the manner they had done. Even those who had experienced unpleasant encounters with law enforcement personnel did not indicate that those experiences would affect their decision to attend a meeting.

The participants' focus was the event in and of itself and the benefit of attendance. This finding supports the tenets of the social exchange theory in that the benefit is considered in relation to the effort cost or risk to attend to the participant. The situational

theory of publics also supports this finding by indicating that the issues must be relevant to the participant, and the participant must believe their participation will make some difference.

Understanding that the participants in the current study did not consider individual officers' actions, whether negative or positive, when deciding to attend a police-sponsored public event should alert personnel who are planning these functions to explore more areas of interest for the people whose neighborhoods they wish to engage. As indicated by one participant, going to a fishing tournament sponsored by law enforcement personnel would be a definite incentive for them to attend. Not all community members would be attracted to this type of event, but this finding should encourage law enforcement departments to explore the interests of their staff and the communities they serve to connect in positive ways that are not always enforcement related. This type of interaction, I believe, would lead to positive social change by connecting people with common interests not only in community safety but in their hobbies and daily lives.

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Interview Questions

1. Describe the police (law enforcement) public event(s) you heard about and what your thoughts were about attending.
2. What do you think the purpose is for police-sponsored events?
3. Do the events show the community they really care about the community members?
4. At the events, do officers or the departments show how they actually feel about the community, or is it a show?
5. Describe how you feel about law enforcement officers?
6. Do you trust law enforcement officers?
7. If you were pulled over by an officer for reasons unknown to you, would you trust the officer to treat you fairly?
8. Explain how you feel about the law enforcement organization's events?
9. Do you feel law enforcement officers act out of their own or the community's interests when making decisions?
10. Do you feel you share the same values with law enforcement officials?
11. Do you believe that the officers treat members of the public differently at the events than at other times?
12. Describe what convinced you (not to go) (to go to) the police-sponsored event.
13. Do you feel that police-sponsored events change how you see law enforcement officers or police organizations?
14. What, if anything, would convince you to attend a public police-sponsored event.