POLICING MEDIA: 
CONTROLLING REPRESENTATIONS OF THE 
NEW SOUTH WALES POLICE FORCE

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Statement of Authentication

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

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(Signed A. McGovern)
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AAP</td>
<td>Australian Associated Press</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>Australian Broadcasting Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIDS</td>
<td>Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AJA</td>
<td>Australian Journalists Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APEC</td>
<td>Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPRO</td>
<td>Association of Police Public Relations Officers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIB</td>
<td>Criminal Investigations Bureau</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DNA</td>
<td>Deoxyribonucleic Acid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DPP</td>
<td>Department of Public Prosecutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FBI</td>
<td>Federal Bureau of Investigation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICAC</td>
<td>Independent Commission Against Corruption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>New South Wales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSWPF</td>
<td>New South Wales Police Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PIC</td>
<td>Police Integrity Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PIO</td>
<td>Public Information Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PMU</td>
<td>Police Media Unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PR</td>
<td>Public Relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIO</td>
<td>Senior Investigating Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US/USA</td>
<td>United States (of America)</td>
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<tr>
<td>UWS</td>
<td>University of Western Sydney</td>
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Abstract

In recent decades the way in which the police communicate with the media, and in turn the public, has become increasingly important. Media relations offices, and police media units, have become a prominent feature of police departments both in Australia and internationally, as a formal means by which police can manage their interface with the media. This thesis, consequently, aims to uncover the role of Police Media Units within policing departments in Australia, specifically examining the New South Wales Police Media Unit (NSW PMU), focusing on two broad research questions. Firstly, the thesis aims to explore how, and under what conditions, the NSW PMU came into formation. The second question pertains to what role the NSW PMU plays in mediating the police-media relationship and the processes creating public perceptions of policing. Within these two overarching questions, there are a number of other questions the thesis asks around the shifts in function and practices of the NSW PMU, the role of the NSW PMU in the police-media relationship and how the PMU may have altered these relations, and the broader social and political context overall.

Taking a critical constructivist approach, the thesis presents a critical qualitative enquiry of police media relations and the growth of PMUs in NSW through the use of semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders and a documentary analysis of the background of the NSW PMU. The research indicates that police-media relationships are complex, multidimensional and symbiotic; and even more so since the introduction of PMUs within policing agencies. Furthermore, these PMUs have changed the scope of these relationships, as well as the ways in which information is dealt with in the police-media interface. PMUs are thus not only representative of a
‘culture of control’ (Garland 2001) that exists within policing organisations, but they are also indicative of a broader system of governance operating throughout the public sector. This culture manifests in a number of ways. The thesis explores this in relation to the police-media relationship and the place of PMUs within this relationship, looking at both the micro and macro level of theorising.
INTRODUCTION

The impetus for this research stemmed from an article written by Ian Freckelton (1988). Freckelton’s article, ‘Sensation and Symbiosis’ explored the nature of police-media relationships, and the implications such relationships have on issues of policing and media reportage. It was Freckelton’s belief that close relationships exist between specific police and media representatives, one that is not conducive to high quality, critical, investigative journalism on issues of criminal justice or policing (Freckelton 1988: 78). Commonly, as Freckelton sees it, there is an “unnecessary and improper reliance upon unnamed police sources” and an unwillingness to seek out ‘independent’, ‘alternative’ viewpoints (Freckelton 1988: 78). After engaging with this article, I felt that the analysis offered by Freckelton, and the questions that he raised in regards to police-media relations, provided a platform for further investigation.

For as long as both institutions have existed, the police and the media have interacted within one another in the course of their duties. For the police, communication with the media is important in disseminating information to the public about various crime matters, amongst other things. Media involvement in the publication of information about crime has on more than one occasion led to the apprehension of suspects, for example. For the media, policing and crime news have always contributed key

1 Goldsmith, Israel and Daly (2003: 380) define the police as “an organised, trained body of persons dedicated to the prevention of crime, enforcing the law, and the maintenance of order”. For the purposes of this thesis the police refer to the institutions established by the state in order to carry out the act of policing, and those individuals who carry out the task of policing
2 For this thesis, media refers to different forms of communication, including television, radio and newspapers, which broadcast information to large audiences (see Jewkes 2004).
material to the compilation of news reportage. As noted by Jiggins (2004: 7), “[t]he first edition of the Melbourne Age newspaper (No. I – Vol. 1, 17 October, 1854) devoted nearly half a page of its scant 8-page first edition to the proceedings of the Criminal Sessions, the City Court and the Police Court”. Not surprisingly then the police and the media have developed upon their relationship with one another, given their mutual interest in matters of crime.

This relationship has gone through a number of developments and changes since early police-media interactions. In recent years the way the police communicate with the media, and in turn the public, has taken a new turn. As Lovell (2002: 2) notes:

Police are now beginning to maintain media-relations offices staffed by public information officers trained in media communication and journalism whose primary responsibility is to engage the news media to advance the goals of the police organisation.

In Australian jurisdictions, as in many parts of the world, the establishment of police information services has become a regular feature of law enforcement (Wilson 1992). With more and more demands upon policing organisations from the media, police have gradually developed more formal means to manage these requests. Finnane (2002) suggests that police are in a position whereby the degree of control they are able to exercise over information is verging on monopolistic, and as such they have developed a number of routines in an attempt to manage the flow of this information. It has become apparent that interactions between the police and the media, and the exchange of information between the two, have become increasingly central to policing priorities in Australia.
Despite this increase in the importance of police-media interactions, and the corresponding growth in professionalised media relations units within policing organisations, there is little research focused upon the role of these units and how they have changed the ways police communicate with the media and consequently the public. According to Motschall and Cao (2002: 153), only recently has research begun to be conducted into PMUs and the “historical, organisational and theoretical bases for public information in law enforcement”. This raises a number of important questions about PMUs in Australia.

Indeed, very little has been written about the condition of the police media relationship in Australia in the last ten to twenty years. Much of the existing literature dealing with Australian police media relations, whilst giving excellent descriptions of the nuances in the relationship, does not attempt to offer any kind of detailed theoretical analysis. Since the time when most of the existing research was written, there has also been an extraordinary growth in the size, presence and influence of professionalised police media relations units within policing organisations, not just in Australia but throughout industrialised Western nations. Past research has only touched upon the existence of these types of Units in Australian policing agencies. There has been no thorough analysis, however, of the exact role they play in mediating police-media relationships, and the effects of their intervention on these relationships. Additionally, on a broader level, the theoretical underpinnings of such Units and their operation have not been considered in detail.

This thesis, consequently, aims to explore the role of PMUs within policing departments in Australia, specifically examining the NSW PMU. Two broad research
questions underpin this thesis. Firstly, the thesis aims to explore how, and under what conditions, the NSW PMU came into formation. The second question pertains to what role the NSW PMU plays in mediating police-media relationships and the processes creating public perceptions of policing. Within these two overarching questions, there are a number of other questions the thesis asks about the shifts in function and practices of the NSW PMU; the role of the NSW PMU in the police-media relationship; how the PMU may have altered these relations; and the broader social and political context of the PMU.

Chapter One of this thesis reviews the literature in the field of police-media relations. The chapter is split into two sections; the first section deals with literature on the subject by Australian authors and with an Australian emphasis. The second section of the chapter deals with the literature on an international level, most of which discusses various aspects of the police-media relationship in the United States of America (USA) and the United Kingdom (UK). Whilst the Australian literature is quite broad in nature, discussing the overarching issues faced by police and media representatives in their dealings with one another, the international literature addresses both the nuances of these broader relationships, as well as quite specific issues, such as police tactics for dealing with the media, and the history, characteristics and personnel of professionalised police media relations units. In the chapter I summarise this literature, assessing the value of the data, as well as any theoretical reflections that the authors may apply to the subject. Considering the existing literature and research on the field of police-media relations, particularly in an age of media relations units, is useful in positioning my own research. It also helps identify gaps in the field that this project addresses.
Chapter Two outlines the research design of this project. I begin by stating the research questions of the thesis before going on to establish my epistemological framework: a constructivist approach exploring knowledge, truth and reality as constructed through the key sites of police-media relations, and the development of media relations units in policing organisations. The chapter then explores the methodological approach of the thesis, which is a critical qualitative enquiry, and the theoretical underpinnings of the data analysis, based on the work of David Garland (2001). This discussion leads into the details of the methods being used in the research: semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, and a documentary analysis of the background of the NSW PMU. The advantages and disadvantages of each of the methods employed are discussed, and the conclusion of the chapter looks at the problems associated with researching the police.

Chapter Three is the first of the fieldwork chapters, dealing specifically with the background of the NSW PMU. This chapter sets the social and political scene contextualising the emergence and development of the NSW PMU. The start of the chapter briefly outlines the development of the NSW Police Force, highlighting the unique history behind the Force and the ways in which this has influenced the role of the Force today. Following this, the chapter looks at key periods in time in relation to the emergence of the NSW PMU. The chapter explores the tensions around matters of policing in the community, and the growing interest of police in communicating proactively with the media that took place from the 1940s until the 1960s. The chapter then identifies the establishment of what is today known as the NSW PMU, exploring the roles of this unit within the challenging social and political context of
the 1960s. The chapter then monitors the growing association between the police and
the media, particularly around matters of safety and security, and documents some of
the tensions between the two parties in the late 1960s. These associations are further
explored in regards to the growing political interest in matters of policing during the
1970s and 1980s, the impact of this interest on police interactions with the media,
and the move towards the professionalising of police-media communications. This
background chapter concludes by positioning the NSW PMU of today, and the scope
of activities encompassed by the Unit in its current day format.

Chapters Four, Five and Six detail the results of field interviews, incorporating
discussion, analysis and a critical constructivist approach to interpreting and
assessing the results of these interviews on a macro and micro level. Chapter Four
explores the politicisation of policing in NSW. In this chapter the theme of law and
order politics, as it emerged from the interviews, will be explored, detailing the ways
in which politics have come to play a significant role in policing organisations. Part
of this exploration involves looking at how PMUs, such as the NSW PMU, find
themselves located in this nexus between serving the police and public, and
answering to their political masters. The chapter begins by broadly addressing the
nexus between police and politics, and the role that ‘fear’ has to play in the
politicisation of policing, and goes on to identify the condition in NSW, drawing
from interview data. The chapter also draws on a number of theoretical perspectives
to analyse the data, examining concepts such as the ‘public relations state’, new
public managerialism, and administrative oversight of the police, situating the police-
politics relationship within a broader project of governance.
Chapter Five continues on this theme of governance and explores the ways in which the NSW PMU can be seen as one of potentially a number of sites within the NSW Police Force\textsuperscript{3} that are indicative of and contribute towards a ‘taming’ of the system. Using Garland’s (2001) ‘culture of control’ thesis as a framework for this analysis, the chapter traces the increasing influence of new forms of monitoring and management on police-media interactions. Interviews with journalists and NSW PMU staff were revealing and gave insight into the many levels of the police-media relationship and the existence and operation of the Unit. As the chapter argues, the NSW PMU has become a form of information filter, siphon, and a guardian where sensitive stories can be ‘managed’ and ‘good news’ stories fostered and disseminated.

Chapter Six explores the issues of power along with resistances to the exercise of power. Drawing on the work of Michel Foucault and Garland the chapter explores the diffusion of power between the police and the media in their relationship with one another, and the role that knowledge plays in determining how, and by whom, power is exercised in any given situation. The chapter also looks at how each party; the PMU, journalists, as well as ‘rank and file’ police; resist attempts at control. Whilst there are policies, procedures, techniques, and administrative and managerial mechanisms of control in place, each of the groups identified actively try to resist these mechanisms of control at various points in time. This, in turn impacts on the police-media relationship.

\textsuperscript{3} Throughout the thesis the NSW Police Force is also referred to as the NSW Police Service and NSW Police, due to various name changes across the history of the Force. This is explained in more detail in Chapter Three.
The thesis concludes by revisiting the initial aims and research questions of the thesis, highlighting the ways in which the research has addressed these imperatives. The conclusion gives an overview of the main themes to emerge from the thesis: law and order and crime control; increased politicization and the fear of crime; administrative imperatives and managerialism; dynamics; taming; power and resistance, and; governance. These themes are discussed in terms of the broader research questions, on the macro and micro level of theorising. The thesis is brought to a close with a discussion on possible directions for future research, highlighting the possibility for comparative work in the field, as well as an exploration of the possible impact of new legislation and technological advances on the police-media relationship.

**Theoretical Context**

In 2001 David Garland published his seminal work, The Culture of Control, in which he examined the shifts in contemporary crime control by looking towards seemingly unconnected conditions of social, economic and cultural life in late modernity. Whilst Garland’s work specifically deals with the field of punishment, his thesis is broad and his method for the analysis of historical conditions is a useful way to examine the development of the NSW PMU as changes within this field cannot simply be understood in terms of the internal developments made within NSW Police Force. As Garland outlines, by using a genealogical account to identify the historical and social conditions of any given field, we can uncover how the field came to acquire its current characteristics and practices, and understand the assumptions,
discourses and strategies that gave rise to these practices (Garland 2001: 2). As adapted from Garland (2001: 2), a genealogical enquiry of PMUs may ask:

What are the social and historical processes that gave rise to our present ways of [police media communications] and upon what historical conditions do these institutions [police media units] depend?

As such, Garland argues that the developments and shifts occurring within a certain site, such as the PMU, could resonate with some of the broader changes and ideologies of the society within which such an institution operates. Consequently, to understand an organisation such as NSW Police Force, and specifically the PMU operating within it, examining the wider societal conditions enables the researcher to develop a more analytical, rather than purely archival, understanding of the historical conditions of existence upon which such institutions depend (Garland 2001).

Much of Garland’s work in this area is inspired by Foucault, who was also cautious about traditional methods of ‘doing history’ (Garland 2001; Hunt and Wickham 1994). Foucault himself argued that certain assumptions have come to inform orthodox histories, which is problematic for the way in which the present and the past is conceived (Hunt and Wickham 1994: 32). It was Foucault’s notion that to escape the confines of orthodox history, focusing on aspects that contribute to elements of history, whilst ignoring those aspects which are deemed to be insignificant, one must partake in a genealogical account, one that reflects on the subjectivities surrounding events. In this thesis, Foucault’s work is drawn upon not only in Chapter Three, which explores the background of the NSW PMU, but also in the results chapters, particularly Chapter Six, where Foucault’s conceptions of
power, knowledge and resistance are used as a framework for exploring the tensions in the police-media relationship.

In outlining the major focus of the thesis, it is important to clarify what the thesis is not attempting to do. In examining the relationship, the thesis is not intending to observe the outputs of this relationship, such as the ways in which the media frame stories, or portray images of the police. Whilst concerns over police image and other matters will be discussed in relation to the role of the NSW PMU, and the way they interact with the media, news content analysis is not relevant. Furthermore, it is important to note that the theoretical approach being employed in the thesis, whilst possibly applicable to other jurisdictions and localities in terms of examining PMUs and police-media relationships, may not generate the same results as suggested in this study. Each PMU in each police agency operates under its own policies and procedures, and whilst it may be argued that the theoretical model being used to analyse the condition in NSW may be useful in analysing the situation in other jurisdictions, in no way does this suggest that the outcomes will be the same elsewhere. Despite this, however, there may be value in using the methodology of this thesis in exploring conditions elsewhere.
CHAPTER ONE: LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature in the area of crime, policing and the media is prolific and, as Mawby (2007) identifies, quite diverse in terms of the many approaches, perspectives and issues raised in research on these areas. Some academics have focused their research on the impact and influence media messages have on their audience (for example see Dowler and Zawilski 2007); others look at representations of criminal justice officials, such as the police in the media (see for example Jiggins 2004; 2007; Chermak 1995; Chermak and Weiss 2005). This research, however, is purely interested in the police-media relationship. It is looking at the signifier, not what is being signified. That is, the processes of police-media interactions are of interest and the messages these processes produce, not how the public sees the message, much in the same way Mawby (2002a) approached his study on police image management.

The aim of this chapter is to review the existing literature in the field of police-media relationships on a broad level. This will encompass general literature on, and research conducted into, relationships between media and police representatives during various periods of time. Furthermore, the chapter will address more focused research and data dealing with the development of professionalised police media relations units and the personnel staffing these units. From this literature, themes inherent to the police-media relationship will be explored, such as the conflicts, cultures and practices inherent in such relationships.

The chapter will be presented in two parts, with the first part dealing with the literature in an Australian context. The second part of the chapter will focus on the
international literature in the field, which is more expansive, particularly in its accounts of the development of police media relations units in countries such as the UK and the USA, and the influence these units have had on various aspects of police-media interactions. The international literature covers a broader knowledge base concerning police-media relations both within specific circumstances, as well as on a more general level. It also gives an insight into the current literature in this field, with the various theoretical perspectives deployed in the literature helping to contextualise the theoretical direction of this project.

**Literature in the Field of Police-Media Relations:**

**Australian Perspectives**

Associations between policing organisations and the media worldwide can be traced throughout the history of police services, showing a “long fascination of the modern media with all aspects of criminal justice” (Finnane 2002: 134; Kiel 1989: 254). Historian Mark Finnane (2002) is one of the few to have addressed the historical emergence of police-media relations in Australia. With a brief, yet revealing, account Finnane paid particular attention to the role that police management and unions had in early dealings with the media. According to Finnane, it is these early interactions that characterise the ways in which police bureaucracy and the government in Australia have attempted to regulate the police-media relationship. Over time Australian policing organisations have dramatically changed their approach in regards to their dealings with the media. What is clear from Finnane’s account is that early dealings between Australian police agencies and the media were viewed less than positively by police. In short, they did not like, nor trust the media. What also
emerges from Finnane’s description, however, is that during the 1960s the police in Australia came to the realisation that the less they tried to overtly resist and/or manage their relationship with the media, the easier it actually became to communicate with them (Finnane 2002: 141). This revelation has shaped the ways in which police-media interactions operate to this very day, and the overt nature in which this is recognised is even reflected in recent NSW Police Force policy statements, such as:

Providing media with regular information helps to contain them and allows the facts to be reported (NSW Police 2002a).

Finnane’s insight into the early form of police-media relationships establishes a starting point for this research, providing an important frame through which to understand the history that informs police-media relations today. What is missing from Finnane’s work, however, is a more comprehensive, detailed account of the intricacies of police-media relations during this time, taking into account some of the social and political influences of the day. This, of course, was never the central theme of his study. It is hoped, however, that subsequent chapters of this thesis will provide something of this account.

Finnane is not alone in addressing some of the issues and difficulties that have characterised police-media relations in Australia over the past century. Some of the earliest documented research into police-media relations was conducted by Chappell and Wilson (1969) in the late 1960s. Even in those days, Chappell and Wilson recognised the incredible power of the media to influence and potentially change attitudes in the community, and found that this was particularly apparent in relation
to public opinion of the police. In order to explore the condition locally, Chappell and Wilson conducted an Australasian survey on police and public evaluations of press reports on police. Their evaluation showed that:

- Police in South Australia and New Zealand were more likely to describe press reports as fair, compared with police from Tasmania and Queensland;
- Larger percentages of the police compared with the public detected criticisms of the police in press reports;
- Few police considered press reports to be purely descriptive, leading the researchers to conclude that police were more sensitive to praise and/or condemnation in the media than the public were, and;
- Police responses to the fairness of press reporting was generally more positive than similar research conducted in Britain, where half of all respondents evaluated press reports on police to be ‘generally unfair’ (Chappell and Wilson 1969: 129-130).

Chappell and Wilson (1969: 130) went on to further explore some of the problems the survey highlighted about police-press relations and in one of the earliest documented explorations of its type they interviewed twenty Sydney journalists, and another twenty journalists from across Australia about poor police-press relations, particularly in NSW. This study was conducted during the Commissioner-ship of Norm Allan which, as will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Three, was not a particularly positive time for NSW police-media interactions. As Chappell and Wilson (1969: 131) discovered, many of the media police roundsmen interviewed felt that in order to carry out their duties they usually had to foster unofficial contacts from within the NSW Police Force over a few beers, where they could “obtain additional information and ‘hot tips’ on criminal matters”. The actual utility of such
information, however, could prove to be problematic, with many often being unable to report these tips due to fears that their unsanctioned sources may be uncovered by police officials.

As well as gaining inadequate access to official police information, journalists were concerned with changes made at NSW Police Headquarters, which effectively removed them from their allocated space within the Criminal Investigations Branch, presumably a hive of activity for potential news stories. This, coupled with the lack of access to police radios and communication facilities, understandably created some hostilities amongst journalists and senior police (Chappell and Wilson 1969).

Chappell and Wilson (1969) found the situation in Victoria not quite as hostile as that in NSW. Senior police roundsmen in Victoria praised the relationship between the police and the press, with journalists having access to their own office located within Police Headquarters and access to police radios. Furthermore, interviewees stated that detectives were available to discuss particular investigations, and facilities were made available to reporters to take pictures of criminals or weapons used in crimes (Chappell and Wilson 1969: 131). The picture of tranquility here seems far removed from the conditions described by NSW police roundsmen.

In their interviews Chappell and Wilson questioned journalists about the conflicts experienced in the police-press relationship. Despite some of the criticisms raised of the police, particularly in NSW, Chappell and Wilson found that reporters were quick to highlight their own role in many of the conflicts that occurred between the police and press. Most reporters admitted that they had often reported information
given to them in confidence by their sources, published other confidential information about cases, or even misreported police statements on the grounds that the police did not supply them with sufficient information for their stories (Chappell and Wilson 1969: 132).

As a result of their study, Chappell and Wilson (1969: 132-133) went on to recommend a number of actions that they believed would improve police-press relations:

- Police to hold regular press conferences and release more information than they currently do;
- Press conferences to be held by the Commissioner himself when possible, to help promote the Commissioner’s image and give an air of authority to the conferences;
- Public relations policies to be put in the hands of trained public relations men (not necessarily police employees), which could improve the image of police work;
- Police to learn to respect the confidence of the press, that is, to refrain from informing rival journalists of forthcoming news items;
- Police should take care to make news bulletins available to all media agencies and representatives to avoid allegations of favouritism, and;
- Police should release news to the media as soon as possible to ensure it does not lose value as “instant news”.

In addition, Chappell and Wilson (1969: 133) recognised the need for journalists to work towards improving their relationship with police by:

- Refraining from practices such as conducting “witch hunts” to find a basis upon which to unjustly attack police;
• Not emphasising stories that depict dramatic events of police activities, and;
• Attempting to identify the reasons behind police displeasure with media coverage of police activities, and work with police representatives to try and overcome these sources of conflict in ways that will appease both parties.

What Chappell and Wilson have articulated in this study is one of the earliest accounts of the power struggles between the police and the media. The interviews they conducted with journalists, and the surveys they administered to police about their relationship with one another, formed a unique piece of research in Australia. Whilst the theme of police-media relations in Australia has been explored by researchers subsequent to this, the variations and nuances in the relationship have perhaps not been explored as comprehensively. Many of the problems identified by Chappell and Wilson that existed in police-press relations during the 1960s are the very same problems being faced in the modern day police-media relationship, which makes it important to understand why things may or may not have changed since Chappell and Wilson’s work. In fact, it is interesting to note that, at least in part, many of the recommendations and suggestions put forward by Chappell and Wilson have actually come to pass, which will become evident as this thesis progresses. One of the most disappointing aspects of this field is that the research has not been replicated or followed up to see how things may have changed in the last forty years.

Whilst nothing as comprehensive as the aforementioned work has been attempted in Australia in the past few decades, more contemporary studies into police-media relations in Australia have been undertaken. Some of the more recent commentaries on police-media relations in Australia from authors such as Ian Freckelton (1987;
1988), Peter Putnis (1996), Paul Wilson (1992) and Stephen Jiggins (2004; 2007) have all gone on to address the dynamic and symbiotic relations between the police and the media, some also having explored how these relationships are characterised by political and power struggles (Grabosky and Wilson 1989). These authors identify not only the complementary roles of the police and the media, but also their conflicting ideologies, cultures, objectives, and operational practices (see Putnis 1996).

In his overview of the police-media condition in Australia, Putnis articulates a number of propositions, the most pertinent being that the police-media relationship is dynamic, complex and multidimensional (Putnis 1996: 202). He attributes the nature of this relationship to the operational interdependencies and divergent objectives influencing each organisation. With the police controlling the information, and the media the means for distributing that information to the public, Putnis identifies how such an enduring, yet unstable, relationship is unable to be comprehensively controlled by either party. He argues, however, that society attains greater benefits by both organisations recognising and maintaining their independence of function (Putnis 1996).

In breaking down the complexities of the relationship, Putnis (1996) attempts to explore some of the typical situations that he believes demonstrates the various manifestations of the police-media relationship. The categories he identifies include:

- The media depend upon the police;
- The police depend upon the media;
- The media use/exploit the police;
- The police use/exploit the media;
- The media impede the police;
- The police impede the media;
- The media criticise/investigate the police, and;
- The police criticise/investigate the media.

Putnis argues that dependence is a major theme in the relationship between police and media. Because police stories are a “core news topic” for the media, the police are able to “gain power over the media be virtue of the fact that they control most of the readily available information about crime” (Putnis 1996: 203). The power for police goes beyond just holding the information, however. As Putnis argues, journalists are more likely to want to maintain civil relations between themselves and the police because of the access to this information. To get offside with those supplying the information required for journalists to carry out their jobs could have disastrous effects (Putnis 1996: 203). Putnis (1996: 203) posits that the increasing influence and technological range of PMUs within police forces, coupled with public demands for instantaneous news at the same time as new agencies experience “dwindling production budgets”, has increased the dependency of the media on PMUs as an information source and a direct supply of crime information.

Conversely, police are also dependent upon the media, which provides them with one of the main communication resources through which police can publicise information about crime and their own activities (Putnis 1996: 203). The other concern for police is the ability of the media to broadcast information that they perhaps do not want put in the public domain. According to Putnis (1996: 204), the
media are an important tool for the police investigations, where immediacy is key to garnering public information or evidence.

Such police-media interactions, however, can be and often are exploitative, from both sides. Putnis (1996: 204-205) states that some police in Australia believe there is a media conspiracy against them, and that the media are quick to criticise the police, even when good relations do exist between the two parties. In this way, Putnis argues that police can often get caught out by journalists who exploit their relationships with police, warning police to not be too trusting. The example used by Putnis to demonstrate this point is the television documentary, Cop It Sweet\(^4\) (Brockie 1992), where “police seemed to damn themselves from their own mouths” (Putnis 1996: 205) in what police presumably thought would be a favourable portrayal of their routine work.

The relationship police have with the media is also exploited by police, according to Putnis. He describes how police departments and unions use the media to advance their own interests, promote positive images, legitimate their social role, mount campaigns for greater powers and resources, and complain about government decisions and agencies that are seen to disadvantage their organisation (Putnis 1996: 206-207). Such strategies have been used extensively in high profile cases, such as

\(^4\) Cop it Sweet was a television documentary on the NSW Police Service filmed over a six week period in 1992. The series was filmed in the Sydney suburb of Redfern, “one of the most socially disadvantaged areas of inner Sydney, with a high concentration of Aboriginal population” (Chan 1997: 2). Cop it Sweet followed the routine duties of a number of police working in the Redfern area, capturing damning footage on the state of police-Aboriginal relations in the area. Chan (1997: 2) described it as a “real life exposé of police deviance”, where the racist, sexist, and hypocritical words and actions of the police were displayed without remorse. The series drew widespread criticism of the police at a time when police were trying to rebuild their image as a ‘service’ to the community, a vehicle for better police-community relations. What Cop it Sweet showed, however, was a police service that even on film could not demonstrate good police practice.
the Harry Blackburn case (to be explored later in this thesis) and the various Royal Commissions investigating police corruption.

Another potential problem Putnis identifies is the capacity for both the police and the media to obstruct one another. The media can impede police in a number of ways by, for example, releasing information about a case prematurely, or interfering with operations (Putnis 1996: 207). Simultaneously, police have also been accused of impeding the job that journalists are doing by restricting access to crime scenes by ‘black-banning’ or ‘freezing out’ specific journalists, unreasonably restricting information to journalists, and revealing one journalist’s exclusive story to another (Putnis 1996: 208-209). The issues facing both the police and the media consequently feed into the next issue Putnis identifies: police and media criticisms of one another.

Quoting the work of other authors, Putnis discusses the modern day issues surrounding press capabilities to carry out investigative reporting. Given media interests in keeping relations with police positive, and the growing economic considerations of media outlets, Putnis claims that press attempts to criticise police often result in stereotypical and personalised reports on individual behaviour, rather than stories that focus on institutional factors or are investigative in nature (Putnis 1996: 209-210). According to Putnis, the police are often guilty of criticising the media for interfering in the police process or misrepresenting police in their reporting (Putnis 1996: 210-211). Putnis relates how various police media policies encourage police to challenge media whom they think have unfairly represented them, which is often seen as strategically beneficial. One worrying trend identified by Putnis,
however, is police and government watchdog agency attempts to trace information leaks to journalists through the seizing of telephone records, and the raiding of news offices in an attempt to discover journalist sources. Putnis argues that such behaviour detracts from police attempts to actually solve serious crimes, and he finds it rare that such raids are anything more than “fishing expeditions” (Putnis 1996: 211). Since Putnis published this article, such behaviours have only been seen to escalate across Australia. For example, in July 2008 The Australian reported that a Perth journalist was threatened with gaol for refusing to reveal his source for a story stemming from leaked Cabinet documents (O’Brien and Taylor 2008). The threats came following a police raid on the journalist’s news office in a search for evidence in the case. Perhaps even more worrying though are threats of prosecution against police themselves who disclose information to reporters, as a 2007 Police Integrity Commission (PIC) report recommended (Jones and Fife-Yeomans 2007). The recommendation, if taken up, would see police risking criminal prosecution for the unauthorised release of confidential police information (Police Integrity Commission 2007: 85).

The overall assessment Putnis (1996: 211) makes of these varying scenarios in the police-media relationship is that “patterns of mutual dependency coupled with attempts at control, suggest that the relationship is inevitably enduring yet also inevitably unstable”. Putnis sees that police interactions with the media are becoming increasingly proactive, and it is through PMUs that such proactivity is pursued. Using examples from various Australian state police forces, Putnis (1996: 212) explores the ways in which police increasingly attempt to manage their relationship with the media, particularly through the development of guidelines and policies
aimed at responsibilising and restricting police around their interactions with the media. The importance attached to public relations and media management, he argues, is evidenced by the growing status of PMUs and media training within police organisations (Putnis 1996: 214).

Whilst Putnis does not claim to give anything more than an overview of the police-media relationship, its complexities and trends, there is a great deal of scope for further elaboration upon many of the themes and issues he identifies. In particular, the growth and impact of PMUs on the relationship between police and media representatives is open for exploration. Putnis identifies how and why PMUs are becoming more prolific, and the importance they hold within policing organisations, but one aspect he fails to develop is the impact these units are having on traditional police-media interactions, such as the interactions he outlines in the earlier part of his article. This certainly leaves a number of unanswered questions about the relationship.

Reflecting similar themes to the work of Putnis (1996) and Grabosky and Wilson (1989), Freckelton (1988) explores police management of the media, and the promotion of policing agendas through the media. He is concerned with identifying the political sensitivities of policing and relating the ways in which police ideologies and moralities become politicised and enter the political and public arenas. The high public profile of police unions and lobby groups are also highlighted as being instrumental in the soliciting of law and order issues (Freckelton 1988: 58-60). This political economy of policing varies markedly from Putnis’ analysis.
The power-base from which police media campaigns emerge is recognised by Freckelton and used to explain the methods employed by police when mounting and channeling arguments through the media (Freckelton 1988: 61). The ideological function of statistics in police rhetoric is also explored, along with the dangers associated with the media’s blind reliance upon such figures (Freckelton 1988: 66). Freckelton criticises the way in which the media tend to sensationalise police claims, citing enduring critical research from Hall et al (1978) in comparing such reporting styles as “the stuff of moral panic” (Freckelton 1988: 63).

Freckelton is also concerned with the nature and implications of the symbiotic relationship between the police and the media, and the role of the PMU in this interchange. The question of police responsibility is also addressed, in terms of their potential misuse of the media, and an unwillingness to participate in public debates on issues of law and order (Freckelton 1988: 74-76). Freckelton (1988: 77-78) concludes this analysis by making recommendations to redress the imbalance in the relationship.

Helen Kiel (1989) was also concerned about the symbiotic and “parasitic” relationship between the police and the media. Pointing to the publicity surrounding the police shooting of David Gundy in 1989, Kiel (1989: 254) argues that “journalists join with other agents of social control such as the police in defining deviance and maintaining the existing social order”, and that this relationship can

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5 David Gundy was a 29-year-old Indigenous man shot dead by police during an unlawful raid on his home in April 1989 (Wootton 1991). Police conducting the raid were searching for another Aboriginal man, John Porter, in connection with a shooting incident with police some three days prior. An Inquiry into the incident found a number of shortcomings in the training and methods of the police who unlawfully carried out the raid, and criticisms were also forthcoming about the role of the media in their prior knowledge of the raid, and their reporting of the character of David Gundy in the aftermath (Wootton 1991).
result in the censoring of information given to the public. Drawing from the work of Chibnall (1977) and Grabosky and Wilson (1989), Kiel analyses the coverage of the David Gundy shooting in the popular press. Her analysis showed an oversimplification of the issues surrounding the shooting, so as to evoke sympathy for the police, together with the probable leaking of information from the police to the media which she saw as an attempt to justify police actions on the day of the shooting (Kiel 1989: 255). The media preference, Kiel (1989: 256) argues, for opinions of the powerful (i.e. ‘police spokesmen’) results in these spokespeople becoming the primary definers of the news and setting the agenda for debates over policing matters.

Consistent with others who have addressed the state of the police-media relationship, Kiel (1989: 256) believes that the media are dependent upon police tip-offs and leaks for their stories, and that media criticism of police can be costly in future attempts to secure crime information for reporters. Moreover, Kiel expresses concern over the fact that journalists often have prior knowledge of a crime, and the ethical questions and responsibilities such knowledge raises. She believes that this situation is made even more complex because of the media’s role in relation to the police; on the one hand the media are identifying matters of interest both to the police and the public, but on the other hand the media are also there to perform a ‘watchdog’ role over the police on the public’s behalf (Kiel 1989: 256-257).

Kiel’s work again highlights the many complexities in the police-media relationship, and the potential manipulation of the media by the police. Kiel, like others, calls for
objectivity when it comes to media reporting of crime matters, so that there is less manufacturing of stories to fit the police line of events.

In two important, but quite similar pieces, Paul Wilson and Peter Grabosky explore the ‘close, comfortable’ relationship between police and media in Australia (Wilson 1992: 160; Grabosky and Wilson 1989). Like Freckelton (1988), Wilson (1992) and Grabosky and Wilson (1989) believe “there is a power balance in the relationship between the police and the media…so that reporters rely far more on police information than the police rely on reporters’ knowledge of events” (Wilson 1992: 161; Grabosky and Wilson 1989: 27). Although in both articles the authors note that most reporters would not acknowledge this power imbalance, the do say that most would be aware of the delicacy in developing and maintaining the relationship. In fact, Wilson says that:

Even though the press recognise that the police manipulate the news media, reporters and editors often uncritically publish police accounts of crime. It is not that journalists actively promote the interests of the police or that they deliberately ignore other versions of particular crime events. Rather, the fragility of their relationship with law enforcement agencies demands that they acquiesce to the police version (Wilson 1992: 163; see also Grabosky and Wilson 1989).

Using examples taken from interviews with journalists, Wilson explores how journalists endeavour to instigate and maintain contacts with police, whilst also gaining their trust (Wilson 1992: 161-162; Grabosky and Wilson 1989: 27-28). This can often occur through socialising with police over alcohol or coffee. Wilson and Grabosky recognise though that despite the social nature of their interactions, journalists are aware of the need to keep these relationships strictly professional.
given that their objectives are often in conflict with those of the police (Wilson 1992: 163; Grabosky and Wilson 1989: 28). Police too are often reluctant to get too close to journalists, unwilling to compromise their objectives for media demands.

Wilson (1992; see also Grabosky and Wilson 1989: 32-35) argues that the power exercised by police in their relationship with the media can have a number of consequences, from orchestrating what is written and photographed, to withholding information from journalists with whom they have conflict, even as far as to intimidating journalists. The articles from Wilson (1992: 166) and Grabosky and Wilson (1989: 33) propose that although the relationship between police and reporters is symbiotic, the police dominate the relationship in that if the police are not happy with a particular journalist or news agency, they can simply decide not to provide them with information. For experienced journalists, threats of the withholding of information are not taken particularly seriously, for such reporters are aware that “the wheel will turn” (Wilson 1992: 169). For other reporters, the result is they will chase up alternative ways to collate information, bypassing the police, adopting new sources, and taking a more investigative approach to crime and policing matters.

Despite the range of research in Australia that has looked at a broader understanding of police-media relations, there has been relatively little focus placed on those areas and individuals who play the biggest role in these relations, the PMUs. Wilson and Grabosky have been two of the few authors to directly address the existence of PMUs in Australia. Both authors propose that since the beginning of the 1970s the
establishment of police information services have become a regular feature of law enforcement agencies (Wilson 1992: 170; Grabosky and Wilson 1989: 35).

Wilson and Grabosky see PMUs as important features within large policing organisations. The rationale for such services, they argue, is twofold: the police like them because they allow for journalists to be briefed on information that could assist police investigations, and journalists like them because they allow access to a “steady stream of police ‘news’ free from the idiosyncrasies of individual reporter-police contact” (Wilson 1992: 170; Grabosky and Wilson 1989: 35). Even though the police might see these PMUs as minimising the conflicts inherent in their relationship with the media, Wilson and Grabosky argue that they can create new problems in the relationship. For example, media representatives may believe that police are using PMUs to “selectively manipulate” information in an attempt to protect police interests (Wilson 1992: 171; Grabosky and Wilson 1989: 36).

Both Grabosky and Wilson found that journalists often try to overcome the potential problems with PMUs by only using them as a starting point for basic information about matters on which they are reporting, preferring to get more detailed information through their own personal police contacts. This is not to say journalists’ relationships with PMU staff are necessarily negative, but that reporters may be wary of PMUs. In particular, there is a degree of mistrust around former journalists who have changed sides to work within police media bureaus (Wilson 1992: 171; Grabosky and Wilson 1989: 37).
For journalists, the introduction of PMUs within policing agencies has certainly changed the ways in which they carry out their job. For example, critical reports often take longer to reach reporters, and police officers themselves are disinclined to report news to PMUs, which in turn are reluctant to release information to the media (Wilson 1992: 172). Wilson goes on to explore some of the complexities that specialised police reporters face quite separately from the problems PMUs create, ranging from potential conflicts with sources if critical stories are to be presented, down to the problems facing female police reporters (see also Sarre 1992). Journalists are quite aware of the complex role that police play in society, which opens up a degree of respect for them, despite the conflicts reporters may have with police (Wilson 1992: 175-176; see also Grabosky and Wilson 1989: 37-39).

According to both Grabosky and Wilson (1989) and Wilson (1992), however, this respect does not run deep. In fact, they state that more often than not, the relationship between reporters and police is also characterised by “antagonism” and “apathy” (Wilson 1992:176). Sources, however, are still an important feature of the police-media relationship, a feature that is being challenged by the advent of PMUs, which allow the lazy journalist to exist on a diet of easily digestible and available stories.

In concluding, Wilson (1992) and Grabosky and Wilson (1989) make the assessment that police media bureaus are engaging in public relations work, and that this has a number of potential consequences in terms of media independence, and the filtering of police news. In their view, there is no doubt that the fairly recent phenomenon of PMUs have simply strengthened police attempts to ‘manage’ the presentation of crime news (Wilson 1992: 177-178; Grabosky and Wilson 1989: 41-42). Both
authors call for more research to be conducted into the control, presentation and dissemination of crime and police news in Australia so that we can gauge the full extent of the influence police have over media reportage (Wilson 1992: 178-179; Grabosky and Wilson 1989: 42). The chapters by Wilson (1992) and Grabosky and Wilson (1989) certainly reveal a great deal about the condition of the police-media relationship in Australia, and leave a space for discussion not only of the relationship some sixteen years on, but also raise a number of questions about potential theoretical frameworks that could be used to explore and explain police attempts to “manage” crime news presentation through PMUs. Such views are consistent with those of authors such as Davis (2003) and Chan (1997).

It is not only academics however, who have written about the police-media relationship in Australia. A number of journalists have also been vocal not only on the condition of the relationship, but also the ways in which police attempt to manage this relationship. The views explored by Wilson are paralleled by Paul Chadwick, who warns journalists about the methods by which police attempt to manage the media (Chadwick 1988). Chadwick (1988: 86) argues that the police are just like any other powerful organisation in that they want to promote a particular public image. Whilst he states that there is nothing necessarily wrong with the police using public relations tools to manage the “propaganda” they produce, Chadwick (1988: 86-87) cautions journalists to be aware that the information they are receiving is propaganda, and to put structures in place to overcome police attempts to monopolise information.
Because they work similar hours and in similar circles, police and media representatives will have very interdependent and mutually desirable exchanges. Chadwick (1988) argues, however, that it is the responsibility of journalists to distinguish where this interdependence and cooperation fostered between the two may compromise journalistic demands. More importantly though, Chadwick urges that journalists need to remain unmanaged by police because police themselves are quite often accountable to the public through politicians, and this can lead to political manipulation. If journalists were to succumb to police management, then in effect they are succumbing to political manipulation also.

David Salter (1994), a former Executive Producer for television’s Media Watch\(^6\), has also questioned the relationship between the police and the media in his short article Strange Bedfellows. Salter (1994: 11) contends that the relationship between police and journalists was once quite innocuous, consisting of a small community of detectives and journalists with common cultural interests and an understanding that they each looked after one another. Salter (1994: 11) laments, however, that the relationship is now more dangerously dependent, and that the “old ‘mates’ world of police and reporters is gone forever”. According to Salter (1994: 11-12), there are two reasons for this: firstly, the advent of female journalists into this realm of reporting has forced information exchange between the police and the media to become more open and formal, and; secondly, the impact of television has lessened

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\(^6\) Media Watch is a weekly television show that presents commentary and analysis on the media itself. Presented by ABC Television, a free to air and publicly owned station, Media Watch aims to draw attention onto those who make the news, whilst also “keeping an eye on those who try to manipulate the media” (Media Watch 2003). Since 1989 Media Watch has presented a number of stories of media mishaps, misrepresentation and abuses of power. The NSW Police Force and their relationship with the media have been subject to Media Watch’s gaze on more than one occasion, as will be detailed elsewhere in this thesis.
the traditional values and requirements of print reporting, with television (and radio) pressures reducing news items to mere seconds.

At the same time as the nature of the relationship is changing, Salter argues that competitive pressures faced by all facets of the media call into question the potential ethical issues of the police-media relationship. Salter (1994: 12) argues that without the active encouragement and involvement of the police, the media would have nothing on which to report in terms of crime matters. The question, he asks, is whether or not journalists are being “duped” or “manipulated” by police, who feed them stories (Salter 1994: 12). This becomes an even bigger question for Salter, when taking into consideration the role of PMUs, whose job it is to “peddle the most self-serving and optimistic version of events” (Salter 1994: 12). In summing up, Salter argues that the police-media relationship is just as managed as it has always been, but in more subtle ways.

A number of journalists have also gone on to work within PMUs, giving them experience in both roles. Jane Munday (1995: 256), a former police reporter for a Melbourne newspaper, and former Media Director for the Victorian and Northern Territory Police Forces, describes the changes in the police-media relationship, and the need for police to be more “sophisticated” in their dealings with the media. Munday (1995: 257, 259 and 266) believes that fostering more positive relations, and avoiding the traditional fears police have of the media are essential in trying to combat the traditional “media intrusiveness” and “police evasiveness” that has in the past overshadowed the day to day relationship between the two. The author argues that police are facing a whole raft of new challenges in their duties, battling not only
under resource constraints, but also trying to balance this with “reactive calls for service and the more elusive concepts of community policing, customer service, environmental scanning, and ‘partnership’ policing”, themes which will be drawn upon later in this thesis when analysing the broader context within which police-media relationships operate (Munday 1995: 256). These pressures are contrasted by media images of policing, which can sway towards either end of the spectrum, from positive to negative, influencing public opinion over whether police are fulfilling their roles. Munday believes that in order to deal with the media in these times of professionalism, the police require a change in their philosophies and attitudes towards media. In order to do this, Munday (1995) believes that the police must do a number of things, including:

- Overcoming their fear and suspicion and accepting fair criticism;
- Displaying more openness to the media and public and fostering good relationships, and;
- Being understanding of the role of the media and the pressures they face.

Munday’s work highlights a number of key issues that impact on policing agencies as a whole, including their relationships with the media. The observations she makes can be useful in exploring the broader context of the interactions police and the media have with one another.

Recently, Stephen Jiggins, a former Media Director for the Australian Federal Police, analysed relationships between the police and media in Australia. Whilst the main thrust of Jiggins’ (2004; 2007) work pays attention to the ways in which the news media frame information about policing organisations, which is outside the scope of
this research, he still has much to offer about the nature of the relationship between
police and media in Australia. Jiggins (2007: 203) argues that the activities of police
are heavily stereotyped in all media, and that the coverage of crime and police issues
have specific and identifiable characteristics in the ways in which such issues are
presented. The significance of such observations is in the fact that the approach to
coverage taken by the media is often the subject of widespread dissatisfaction
amongst policing organisations.

Jiggins highlights the source of the problem for the police. All across the Western
world, police departments have moved towards a more professionalised model of
communications. Considerable resources are being put towards PMUs and the like,
in an attempt to manage the police relationship with the media and generate positive
publicity for these police departments (Jiggins 2007: 203). In contrast there are the
media, who, under the presumption of honest and pure motivations, take on the role
of the watchdog on behalf of public interest (Jiggins 2007: 204). It is in these two
conflicting goals that Jiggins sees the potential conflict.

Jiggins (2007: 204) argues that it is a mistake, however, to assume that the media are
pure in their motives. He believes the media are far more concerned with maintaining
their power relationship over the police than they are with upholding standards and
pursuing social issues. In reviewing the literature around the role of the press as
watchdogs, Jiggins (2007: 204-205) offers an alternative perception of their role,
likening the media more to lapdogs than watchdogs, particularly when it comes to
reporting matters of crime and policing. Jiggins believes that the media have very
little understanding of the problems that face police, both on the frontline and within
the executive arm, and that entertainment and superficiality, rather than oversight has become the guiding principle of reporting.

Looking at the Australian condition, Jiggins states that the historically close relationship the media have with police is not conducive to independent, critical reporting. In recent times this has only been intensified by the growth of PMUs within police departments which, in a climate of media hunger for scoops and leaks, can be used to advance police interests and disseminate propaganda (Jiggins 2007: 205-206). Further issues Jiggins (2007: 205-206; see also Jiggins 2004) identifies include:

- The decline in specialised police roundsmen;
- The reduced likelihood for reporters to foster ‘close professional relationships’ with the police they speak to;
- Lack of reporter knowledge about the specifics of policing, and;
- Restricted contact between police and journalists because of police media policies.

Jiggins (2007: 206) found in his research interviews that “high levels of mistrust and a lack of appreciation of each other’s roles and problems” characterised modern day police-media relations in Australia. He attributes this breakdown in the relationship to the environment created by the media, an environment where competition and public curiosity overrides any attempts to create quality reporting and opinion on real issues and events in the policing domain (Jiggins 2007: 206-207). Furthermore, media overemphasis on serious, atypical crimes, supplied from deficient sources puts increasing pressure on senior police officials and high profile figures, such as police commissioners (Jiggins 2007: 207, 210-212).
Jiggins (2007: 213-214) suggests that to combat many of the issues in the police-media interface, there are a number of things that should be done:

- Police should become aware of the general orientation of news media reporting and tailor the information they provide to journalists in order to maximise its potential use. For example, providing the media with police footage and holding press conferences and the like will help to overcome many of the problems associated with the media running stories that do not reflect the real issues of a particular case, and;

- In developing media strategies police should be mindful of the media frames in use, making sure that they do a better job of communicating what they want, in ways that correspond with media demands. By being more aware, police will be better able to identify where the media may take a particular angle for a story, and take steps to ensure their public commentary is suitably framed.

Jiggins observes that the relationship between police and journalists is often tense, given the differing roles and hidden agendas each are operating within. These tensions have been exacerbated by the fact that police departments are increasingly attempting to control who in their organisation can speak with the media. The consequence of this is journalists seeking out ‘off the record’ comments from unnamed officers. Jiggins (2007: 213-214) suggests that police should become less secretive and more proactive in providing information in order to combat reporter reliance upon anonymous sources from within policing organisations.

In concluding, Jiggins recognises the significant changes in the media environment, where the growth of the electronic media has meant that to compete, other more
traditional news media outlets have had to alter their approaches to reporting. Additionally, media organisations have to respond to more business and commercial pressures, where profits are held above journalistic ideals (Jiggins 2007: 216-217). Naturally, these pressures have an impact on the ways in which policing matters are reported, with Jiggins (2007: 217) claiming the result is discrepancies between official police accounts of crime, and homogenised, stereotyped media versions of events.

Whilst Jiggins’ account of police-media relations today highlights a number of points that resonate with this research, he may understate the police role in these relationships, particularly given his cursory comments regarding increasing police attempts to control information sources to the media. His point of view is understandable in some respects, given his previous employment within the media office of the Australian Federal Police. Certainly though, Jiggins’ observations offer something different from much of the existing Australian literature, which either takes a neutral stance in addressing the police-media relationship, or is more interested in the watchdog role of media agencies.

The final piece of research I wish to discuss in relation to the Australian condition is a paper written by Mark Pearson (2005), which investigates the now completed inquiry into secure digital radio communications systems in the state of Queensland. Pearson’s work is significant in that it draws attention to a scenario which will quite possibly affect other police agencies across Australia in the coming years. In 2004
the Queensland Crime and Misconduct Commission\textsuperscript{7} was asked by then Queensland Premier Peter Beattie to conduct an inquiry to examine the extent to which the media should be allowed access to police radio communications (Pearson 2005: 105-106). The impetus for this inquiry was the rolling out of digital radios for the police, which effectively put an end to the media’s “de facto privilege” for listening in on the existing analogue system (Pearson 2005: 106). According to Pearson (2005: 106):

All that changed when Brisbane journalists discovered their police radio scanners had gone silent in October 2003 because Queensland Police had introduced encrypted digital communication without consultation (Queensland Television Ltd. 2004. p. 4). The sudden switch to digital radios prompted an outcry from media organisations.

Pearson’s article reviews the submissions to the inquiry, outlining the positions of both the media and the police in the debate, as well as his own views. Pearson (2005: 106-107) summarised that resistance to media access to police radios revolved around a number of issues, including:

- Police had never authorised media in the first place to access their radios, and to formally permit access under the digitalised system would be fraught;
- Police radio digitalisation had occurred in other states without incident;
- There being public and police safety concerns regarding allowing media access and that in order to ensure the effectiveness of police operations, as well as the privacy of suspects and victims, media access should be limited or restricted. This argument was made despite the police only being able to

\textsuperscript{7} The Crime and Misconduct Commission is an independent oversight body for the state of Queensland. The Commission’s website outlines that the role of the Commission is to, amongst other things, fight major crime; raise the standards of integrity and conduct in the public sector; and ensure any complaint about misconduct in the public sector is dealt with appropriately (Queensland Crime and Misconduct Commission 2008).
cite one instance of abuse of access by the media under these circumstances, and;

- Police argued that to give the media exclusive access to their digital radio systems would be a breach of anti-competition legislation because other industries, such as the tow truck and funeral industries would not have the same access rights.

The media, naturally, saw things a little differently than the police. Their key arguments, as highlighted by Pearson (2005: 107-108), were that:

- There was strong public interest and “Fourth Estate arguments” to be made in support of the media being able to retain the right to listen in on police scanners, and it is such outlooks that have allowed this to occur in the past;
- They had a good track record of the responsible use of the previous radio communications system;
- The media should be given access to police radios just as they are provided access to other restricted sites, such as the courts and special seating in Parliament, and;
- It is in the public’s interest for the media to have access to police communications. In the media’s view, relying on police public relations is inadequate and potentially dangerous, with a number of media submissions critical of the time lag and information suppression faced when interacting with such departments.

Upon reviewing some of the arguments around freedom of press, privacy issues and security as they relate to media access to radio communications, Pearson (2005: 117) offers the following assessment:

Media access to police radio communications has been a central tool of newsgathering for media organisations
for at least four decades. While it may have been technically illegal, the police have known about this media practice throughout that period and have condoned it. There is little evidence that media organisations have acted negligently or jeopardized police or public safety in using this technology to report such events. To the contrary, it seems they have almost always acted responsibly and complied with police policies and requests. To take away that privilege by using encrypted technologies represents a de facto form of prior restraint, a censorship of the media's ability to act quickly to be at the scene of a news event while it is happening or soon after it has occurred.

Pearson (2005: 118) goes on to argue that there are “major shortcomings” associated with police channelling all their information through their PMU, especially given that the system as it was appeared to be problematic in the eyes of many. In Pearson’s view, the Queensland PMU should be about transparency, and improving the connections and exchanges between police and media representatives, rather than trying to protect the police or government through delaying tactics or public relations spin. What Pearson’s article highlights is the potential for PMUs to be set up in such a way as to ‘manage’ police-media relations, rather than facilitate them. The main problem with police agencies introducing digitally encrypted radio systems and not allowing media access is that the police are then afforded a great deal of power. Journalists will be forced to obtain all their information through second hand sources, usually the PMUs, and the potential exists for the information provided to journalists to be manipulated in ways that protect police interests. Pearson’s article is an important indicator on the potential problems associated with the restriction of access to information in conjunction with the professionalisation of police media communications. One of Pearson’s (2005: 119) key suggestions to combat some of these potential problems is to set up a Media Communication Tribunal within the
Crime and Misconduct Commission to adjudicate complaints of media abuses of police radio access, as well as performance issues with the PMU (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1:** Pearson’s Media Communication Tribunal Model (Pearson 2005: 119).

For Pearson, this implementation of this model would minimise any potential issues surrounding not only media abuses, but also the performance of the PMU and its transparency, or otherwise. At the time of writing there has been no indication as to whether Pearson’s recommendations have been taken up by the Crime and Misconduct Commission.

**What the Australian Literature Reveals**

As demonstrated above, much of the literature in the field of police-media relations was written over a decade ago, with only a few studies having been conducted since the 1990s. Of the research conducted in the 1990s and earlier, there are a number of common themes running through this work and, apart from the empirical studies by
Chappell and Wilson (1969), much of the literature during this period is quite general in nature, outlining the conditions of the police-media relationship with across-the-board examples. This is hardly surprising given that texts and textbooks were generally the source of such publications, and therefore broader interpretations of the police-media nexus were aimed towards wide-ranging audiences.

Since the 1990s the few pieces of research into the police-media relationship in Australia have tended to focus on specific issues in the relationship; Jiggins (2004; 2007) examined the way in which the media frame information about police matters, whilst considering some of the relevant issues in the relationship that contribute to media reportage; Pearson (2005) looked at the digitalisation of police radios and the impact on journalists and media reporting in Queensland. Although the Australian literature adds to our knowledge on specific interactions, there has not been any deep analysis of the police-media relationship itself, and the broader socio-political context within which it operates. Considering this, I will now explore some of the international literature in the field of police-media relations.

**International Studies: Research into the Field of Police-Media Relations, Media Relations Offices and the People Who Staff Them**

*Police-Media Relationships Internationally*

International literature in the field of police-media relations has a long history, with studies conducted as far back as the 1970s and 1980s on matters around the police
and the media. A few key authors such as Mawby (1997a; 1997b; 1998; 2001a; 2001b; 2001c; 2002a; 2002b; 2003; 2007), Lovell (2001; 2002; 2003; Lovell and Kelling 2000), Ericson (1989; 1991; 1994; Ericson, Baranek and Chan 1987; Ericson, Baranek and Chan 1989; Ericson, Baranek and Chan 1991; Ericson, Baranek and Chan 1995; Ericson and Haggerty 1997; Doyle and Ericson 2004) and Schlesinger and Tumber (1992; 1993a; 1993b; 1994) have written extensively on varying aspects of police-media relationships. This section of the chapter will review their work, as well as a number of other studies conducted on the international stage.

Studies in this field generally fit into one of three areas: research into the police-media relationship, research on PMUs and public relations offices, and; studies into people who work within these offices. Whilst some studies look at one discrete area, others may deal with two or more of these areas.

In one of the earliest studies into the production of crime news, Chibnall (1973: 75-76; 1975: 49) examined the ways in which journalists went about constructing news, and how their routine practices, assumptions and knowledge impacted on the ways in which this was carried out. Criticising previous accounts of the newsmaking process as superficially focusing on reporters as “newsgatherers”, Chibnall (1975: 49-50; 1973: 75-76) calls for a more sophisticated approach to such studies, emphasising the importance of acknowledging the reporter/source relationship in studies on news flow models. Chibnall (1973; 1975) argues that in order to understand the selection and construction of news stories, there needs to be an examination of the processes through which journalists identify and select stories, together with the exchanges that occur between journalists and sources.
In conducting his study, Chibnall (1975: 51; 1973: 77-78) focused on crime reporters, identifying the history of reliance these reporters have on police sources for information and the framing of their stories. He argues that this reliance can be highly problematic for reporters, particularly given the police’s tendency to employ media specialists to interact and deal with media enquiries. In highlighting this, Chibnall goes on to explore the “police’s institutional arrangements for the release of information” (1975: 52), focusing on:

- The inadequacy of official sources and the need for personal contacts;
- Source relationships;
- Informational aid;
- Promotional aid, and;

For this particular project some of these categories are more relevant than others. In relation to the need for personal contacts, Chibnall (1975: 52-53; 1973: 78-80) notes that despite early attempts in England to institutionalise press bureaus, crime reporters were still doubtful of their abilities not only to identify news, and in a timely fashion, but also to provide information which would allow journalists to report ‘exclusives’. These inadequacies often led reporters to directly foster informal contacts with police officers, from whom they could gain the information they were after, ensuring their survival in the crime reporting field.

Of course, the relationships journalists worked on cultivating with police were not one sided. As Chibnall sees it, these relationships are “reinforced by a reciprocation
of help and co-operation” (1975: 54; 1973: 81), where not only is information and advice exchanged, but friendships may also be developed. This, however, is not something that happens overnight, according to Chibnall. Indeed, he believes that crime reporters must first go through a period of “probation” before being accepted by the police, building up trust and a reputation of dependability and trustworthiness (Chibnall 1975: 54-55; 1973: 82-83). Once this trust has been established, a relationship of exchange and reciprocity ensues. It is here that Chibnall believes that the quality and quantity of what a reporter is privy to is affected by the value of what he can exchange with his police source (Chibnall 1975: 55; 1973: 83).

For both parties their exchange relationship can be beneficial. For the police, it can result in information getting into the public domain quickly and effectively, and for the crime reporter, they have the story. Chibnall recognises, however, that there are often strategic reasons why police see value in their relationship with crime reporters. The “strategic leaking of information” (Chibnall 1975: 56) can often be of great assistance in the investigation of crimes. Reporters too can often act as mediators in providing information to police, facilitating anonymous tip-offs from their “underworld contacts” (Chibnall 1975: 56). Another reason articulated by Chibnall as to why the relationship can be so beneficial to police is due the potential public relations outcomes of these interactions. The promotion of police interests through the media, especially on the back of a good police/reporter relationship, can be favourable for the police (Chibnall 1975: 57; 1973: 85). Chibnall surmises that it is the police who have the upper hand in these relationships, because ultimately they are the ones in possession of the information reporters require in getting their stories broadcast (1975: 59; 1973: 88).
Chibnall (1975: 60-62; 1973: 89-91) warns, however, that the relationship between crime reporters and their police sources has its complexities, from police attempts to direct the types of information reporters include in their stories, to reporters publishing stories which are critical of police or detail police deviance, which can be damaging for their relationship with police sources. As an early study into the police-media association Chibnall’s work is quite revealing about many practices and conditions which still prevail in the relationship today. His work did not, however, explore the difficulties that can emerge from the relationship between police and crime reporters when they move beyond the work environment and into their personal lives through the friendships they develop, the nuances of the police-media relationship identified by later authors.

Another frequently quoted author in the field of police-media relations is American Mark Fishman, who in the late 1970s and 1980s examined how the police are instrumental in determining newsmaking agendas for crime reporters (Fishman 1978; 1981; 1987). Fishman (1981: 372; 1987: 98-99), like Chibnall, believes that the stories journalists report on are to some degree pre-determined by the information they are given by police departments. In his studies Fishman is clear that he is not analysing the relationship between crime reporters and their police sources, but how it is that accounts of crime are obtained. Whilst somewhat outside the scope of the present research, many of the idiosyncrasies identified by Fishman give an insight into the interaction processes between police and media representatives.
Fishman’s (1981: 373; 1987: 99) work explores the New York Police Department’s newsroom, which regularly transmits crime events to media outlets. The most important thing to come out of his research was that police in New York judged the unusualness of events in terms of their newsworthiness, anticipating media interest in particular cases (Fishman 1981: 378-380; 1987: 102-103). The implications of this were that police, as the primary definers of news items, were able to control their own images in the press, maintaining perceptions of the department as competent, whilst at the same time perpetuating media dependency on the police for crime news (Fishman 1981: 381, 387; 1987: 106-107, 110). These practices can have a major impact on the reporting styles and perspectives journalists assume in their duties. What Fishman has done in his work is identify the beginnings of police attempts to manage the information distributed to journalists that Fishman (1981: 388; 1987: 111) argues can affect the social construction of crime and law-and-order, giving police newsrooms an inordinate amount of power.

Taking a different approach towards the concept of police-media relations, Selke and Bartoszek in their 1984 study explored the individual attitudes and perceptions of police cadets and journalism students towards their prospective professions, and each other. Through administering surveys to students, examining areas such as their background and perceptions of professionalism, Selke and Bartoszek (1984: 25) aimed to identify any personal characteristics or predispositions that may help explain the animosity between the police and media. The results of their surveys suggested that the animosity between the two professions can be found in the backgrounds and personal orientations of those who choose them (Selke and Bartoszek 1984: 29). Whilst outside the scope of this project, their research does beg
the question as to whether certain types of individuals are drawn to particular professions, and how much of a role training has to play in perpetuating such attitudes.

In 1975 Altschull also published research around the theme of police-media relations. In examining the levels of hostility police held towards journalists, Altschull tested a range of hypotheses, including: that journalists believe unofficial sources are more fruitful in the gathering of news information, and that both journalists and police believe they are hindered by each other in the carrying out of their work (Altschull 1975: 426). In studying a community in Indiana via questionnaires and structured interviews, Altschull discovered some interesting points in relation to his hypotheses. He found that journalists indeed believed that the most valuable information they got came from leaks and tips from individual police officers outside official news channels (Altschull 1975: 431). Overall Altschull also found that there was quite a high level of hostility, from both journalists and police, towards one another. Both parties held very different opinions as to the levels of access journalists should have to information held by the police, with the police being highly supportive of censorship in the media, something journalists were opposed to (Altschull 1975: 432). Altschull’s research was quite prophetic given some of the debates currently ensuing over whether the media should have access to police radios (see Pearson 2005 as discussed earlier in this chapter).

More contemporary studies into police-media relationships have recognised the growing professionalisation of these interactions, particularly on the side of the police, who are increasingly moving towards establishing special purpose media
units within their organisations, staffed by experts in communications and public relations. The growth in professional public relations has been highlighted by Davis (2000; 2003), and Leishman and Mason (2003) in their discussions on police representations in the media. In a study by Simmons (1999), the increasing formalisation of interactions between law enforcement agencies and reporters was examined. Simmons analysed the exchange relationship between officers from two Florida counties and reporters that regularly covered their enforcement agencies. In conducting a series of questionnaires and semi-structured interviews the aim of Simmons’ (1999: 70) research was to determine the nature and degree of exchange in contemporary police-media relationships, and what implications this has on public information. The results from his enquiry led Simmons (1999: 72-74) to identify three primary ways to categorise participants in relation to the way reporters and police perceive one another, their relationships, and the information about crime that reaches the public:

1. Closing ranks: critical of reporters and they way they portray police, but trust could be developed over time;
2. Watchdogs: saw reporters as challengers of the status quo and police officers as having more useful information than public information officers, and;
3. Conciliation: saw the police-media relationship as strongly reciprocal and cooperative.

From his findings Simmons (1999: 75) deduced that an increasing proportion of interactions between reporters and police are being negotiated by Public Information Officers, and as a result trust has diminished. Simmons argues, however, that at least superficially, the relationship was cooperative enough that antagonistic interactions
were calmed. In fact, long before Simmons’ research, Chibnall (1973; 1975) and Fishman (1981) recognised that despite the long standing suspicion and secrecy within police-media relations, increasingly the media are relying upon the police as their primary source of information.

Other authors have taken their analyses further, looking not only at police-media relations, but also at the dynamic ways in which these relationships operate (Boyle 1999a; Boyle 1999b; Feist 1999; Reiner 1997). Innes (1999; 2001), for example, has examined how the police seek to use the media in an instrumental fashion, with a particular focus on the media as an investigative resource in murder enquiries. In previous research (Ericson, Baranek and Chan 1987; 1989; 1991; Reiner 1997; Reiner 2000a; Reiner, Livingstone and Allen 2001), much of the onus seems to have been placed on the media as the primary agency coordinating and projecting particular representations of the police (Innes 1999). Consequently, Innes argues that the media are unable to produce news in isolation from “the events, institutions, and people who act as both sources of and conduits for” the media (Innes 1999: 269; see also Innes 2001).

Innes (1999: 273) analyses these issues further, making the point that the coverage of certain crimes is not always done for the sole benefit of the media. In fact, in many of the circumstances he has examined, “the public awareness generated through media coverage can prove of singular benefit to police objectives”. In particular, the police are aware of the instrumental and expressive functions that images projected by the media can have for them (Innes 1999: 284; Innes 2001). The culmination of Innes’ research is that in particular instances, there is “a natural symbiosis of interest for
both the media and the police in respectively providing and obtaining extensive media coverage” (Innes 1999: 285). Innes' analysis provides an important understanding of the ways in which the police attempt to use and influence the media in ways that benefit them. In addition to this, he also recognises the role the media play in this symbiotic relationship.

Feist (1999: 1) has also examined the ways in which the media can be utilised in investigations as conduits of information from and to the public, as well as how the media can, equally, “sap the resources of an investigation, mislead the public, and interfere with the investigative and legal processes”. Based on data gathered from interviews with Senior Investigating Officers (SIOs) and Media Liaison Officers in the UK, Feist’s (1999) report into the effective use of media in serious crime investigations serves to inform police officials on how much, and what kinds of, information should be provided to the media; how the media can generate information for an investigation; the issue of relations not only between the media and police, but also the media and victims, and; recommendations for handling the media in the event of a serious crime investigation.

Feist (1999: v, 8-9, 12-15) highlights that one of the major issues that will face investigators when dealing with a serious crime will be the overwhelming interest and demand of the media for information about the case, and that in order to deal with such interests, investigators need to consider what and how much information to disclose, together with the possible consequences of revealing such information. Conversely, there may also be very little interest in the case, which can cause a different set of problems for investigators trying to gather evidence and disseminate
information to the public about the crime (Feist 1999: 10-11). In either situation, however, Feist asserts that the media can become a useful investigative tool for investigators, particularly those who have fostered good relationships with key media outlets and representatives.

Important to ensuring all these factors are dealt with, Feist believes that a “central feature of the handling of the press…is the bringing together of the SIO and the force media liaison officer in the early stages of the enquiry” (1999: viii). Interviews with SIOs highlighted the reliance of the police and the media upon one another, and the symbiotic nature of their relationship. As such, they suggested that feeding information to the media via liaison officers whether that information be related directly to a particular case or more broadly concerned with the reasons why certain information is unable to be released assists in maintaining good relations (Feist 1999: 24-28).

Feist (1999: 31) believes that the role of media liaison in pre-empting and addressing some of these issues is wide-ranging, and may include things such as:

- Preparing and disseminating information on the case to the media;
- Liaising with journalists at the scene of the crime;
- Acting as a mediator in arranging interviews between journalists and investigators, and;
- Monitoring press coverage.

Overall, Feist’s (1999: 37) report advocated for the increased presence of media liaison officers in the management teams of crime investigations, allowing for
effective media strategies to be planned and implemented, which in turn can have benefits not only for a particular investigation, but also long term benefits for the relationship police and the media enjoy. Feist’s work is symptomatic of an increased push in all levels of government (and it is important to note Feist’s report emanates from the UK Home Office), to try to organise and manage interactions with the media to ensure the best possible outcome for the department in question.

Boyle (1999a; 1999b) has examined the growing importance of media relations within UK police forces, focusing on Strathclyde Police in Scotland and their attempts to develop proactive media relations strategies. Boyle argues that “thinking strategically about image and media management has become central in the development of operations aspects of policing” (1999b: 231). Using Strathclyde as a case study, Boyle traces how the department developed a more systematic and structured approach to media relations in the wake of policing campaigns aimed at reducing minor crimes (in much the same way as Wilson and Kelling outline in their 1982 ‘broken windows’ thesis) and fear of crime, known as the Spotlight Initiative (Boyle 1999a; 1999b). Boyle (1999a: 93; 199b: 231) argues that it was this campaign that signaled a new phase in police-media relations, not just in Strathclyde, but across the UK.

Prior to the implementation of the Spotlight Initiative, Strathclyde police identified the potentially crucial role that the media may be able to play in attempting to change community perceptions and contribute to the success of the initiative (Boyle 1999a: 94; 1999b: 232-233, 234), which led to the media being prepared and briefed in the lead up to the campaign. This was part of a longer term project within Strathclyde,
which began with the establishment of a professional media relations unit within the force in the early 1990s, staffed by senior police officers and expert civilians (Boyle 1999a: 94-94; 1999b: 235-236). From this point it was established that not only did the police see the utility of the media for promoting successful police initiatives, but that such strategies had changed the police-media relationship in Strathclyde during this period.

For the most part, this was viewed positively by the media, who saw it as the police taking more notice of the important role the media play in influencing public attitudes towards the police and as a significant episode in the development of their relationship with the police (Boyle 1999a: 96; 1999b 237-239). Other journalists dismissed the Spotlight Initiative project as a publicity stunt, expressing concern over the management techniques being used by the police in promoting the initiative. For the Strathclyde Police Force, the result was threefold: they enjoyed improvements to their public image; they also raised awareness of the initiative in the community, and; overall levels of reported crime dropped, signifying a successful attempt at refocusing the crime problems in the area (Boyle 1999a: 96-97).

For Boyle (1999a: 97), the Spotlight Initiative “marks another stage in the professionalising of media relations” within police departments. Whilst he admits that there will continue to be “an uneasy, yet symbiotic relationship” between the police and the media, examples such as Strathclyde demonstrate that the police need to “continually adapt” to the demands and changes within society in order to publicise and enhance their image (Boyle 1999a: 97).
This is a point not lost on Chermak, who has written about the ways in which police can affect the ways in which crime news is presented. Chermak (1995) and Chermak and Weiss (2005) have looked at the ways in which police actively attempt to control the ways in which the police are presented in the news media in the USA. In Chermak’s 1995 article, he argues that both police and media representatives are important in constructing media images of the police, and that the relationship between the two parties is constantly evolving, but is increasingly being shaped by the economic constraints facing the news media. As a result, the news media are relying more heavily upon sources that are readily available, allowing police to have more control of the information that they disseminate to the media (Chermak 1995: 21-22). In reviewing the available literature in the field, Chermak (1995: 22-24) concludes that this literature presents two distinct foci: research that looks at the content of crime news stories in the media and; research that examines the news production process, and the factors that influence the selection of news. Chermak proposes to combine the content analysis approach with an ethnographic approach in order to examine the presentation of the police in the news media, in line with groundbreaking studies by Ericson, Baranek and Chan (1987).

Focusing his analysis in the USA, Chermak’s (1995: 25) content analysis collected data from six print and three electronic media organisations, collating any crime related stories. For the ethnographic part of the study, Chermak (1995: 25) observed the process of news production in one television station and one newspaper outlet in a metropolitan area, examining how police reporters produced their crime stories, who they contacted to obtain information, and the outcomes of these interactions. These studies revealed a number of things to Chermak about the ways in which news
is selected, produced, and presented, and the police involvement in these stages of news production.

The most pertinent discoveries Chermak (1995: 26-37) made were that:

- Due to production demands, reporters established connections with contacts based on their willingness to provide information;
- Police actively furthered their own interests by requesting the presentation of specific events;
- The location of the local newspaper within the police headquarters made it easier for reporters to establish relationships with police sources, and likewise, made it easier for police to check with reporters on what stories were being covered, and provide information on forthcoming issues;
- Reporters obtained information from a number of sources, including official police documents (which were particularly easy to access for those working in close quarters to the police station), police scanners, police telephone contacts, and police spokespeople, such as media officers. These officers were considered to be the ‘gatekeepers’, as they often operated in ways that limited the number of sources reporters could contact and were selective on the information they provided to reporters, setting news agendas for the day;
- The availability of police sources made it less likely that reporters would seek out difficult to reach sources, as their routines and budgetary considerations were limiting in this regard. As such, police dominated as sources for information about crime;
- When reporters are unable to obtain cooperation from official police channels, they have a number of unofficial sources which they are able to draw from;
- The framing of crime news by police is carried out in ways that reinforce their role as crime fighters. This can be of benefit to the news media, as it helps to satiate public desires for crime stories;
• Some stories are promoted by police because of their ability to further police objectives, thus helping them to control their image and legitimate their role in society;

• The police often seek out public assistance in investigations, generating public interest and trying to foster information about particular crimes through the news media;

• Public relations officers within police departments have become a key feature in police attempts to control how their image is presented in the media;

• Reporters will often overlook or downplay instances of police wrongdoing out of the fear that they may lose access to information provided by the police. The reasons for this, however, may be dependent on the experience of the reporter, with junior reporters still establishing their contacts, and more senior reporters reluctant to jeopardise their existing relationships, and;

• News outlets still often present negative stories of the police as it demonstrates their credibility to the public, and allows them to challenge any criticisms that they are a public relations mouthpiece for police departments.

What Chermak’s (1995: 37) study allows for is the juxtaposition of the media as effective monitors, or ‘watchdogs’, of the police with the business and economic restrictions facing news organizations. As Chermak points out, news organisations are limited in their ability to scrutinise the police because of their relationship with them, a relationship that police organisations are increasingly trying to manage and control through the deployment of public relations officers and organisational propaganda (Chermak 1995: 38; see also Crandon 1993; Crandon and Dunne 1997). One thing that Chermak does not explore, however, are the many resistances to such police attempts to control the media. This is an important point to make given the direction of this thesis for, as much as Chermak outlines the ways in which police are
able to dominate the relationship they have with the media, the media are not always so willing to comply.

In contrast to those who have analysed the ways in which police have managed their role in the relationship, there are also those authors who have looked at the media’s position within the relationship. Surette (1998) focused specifically on the media, and the ways in which they interact in their relationship with the police. Surette sees that mass media, crime and criminal justice are “intricately intertwined” (Surette 1998: 22). He asserts that an “understanding of crime and justice cannot be gained without acknowledging and examining the mass media and their effects” (Surette 1998: 22). In demonstrating this, Surette (1998: 3) highlights the soaring level of interaction between the two institutions in recent years, and questions how the mass media may have changed realities of crime and criminal justice. Surette therefore highlights is the need to focus on the role of the media, and their influence on social constructs of crime and criminal justice.

Beyond this, authors such as Robert Reiner (Reiner 1997; 2000a; 2000b) have examined the “pattern and implications of media presentations of the police” and how these images are of “considerable importance in understanding the political significance and role of policing” (Reiner 2000b: 138-140). Reiner (2000b: 139) believes that images of policing constructed in the media are vital in attaining the minimum of ‘consent’ which is essential for the preservation of police authority. It is through the ‘factual’ and fictional presentations of police in the media that, Reiner

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8 The social and political processes by which particular forms of activity and actions are given meaning (Maguire 1997).
9 By ‘factual’ the author (Reiner 2000b) is referring to representations of the police in the news media; ‘fictional’ pertains to the entertainment media.
says, the police role is broadly legitimated, presenting police as “necessary and for the most part effective” (Reiner 2000b: 162). Reiner warns against over-emphasising this legitimising function, however, arguing that the “media image of reality or ideal of policing is not monolithic” (Reiner 2000b: 162). This reflects the dynamics, ideologies and professional imperatives that inform media discourse (Reiner 2000b: 139).

British journalist David Rose has also written of the relationship journalists have with the police from a journalist’s perspective. Whilst it is often the media that are criticised for distorting crime issues, Rose (2001: 8) argues that criminal justice agencies themselves are often less than forthcoming in providing information to journalists. Using examples from his own experiences in dealing with the police, Rose (2001: 9) argues that, like all public bodies, the police profess their commitment to openness, but in actuality they hide from journalists and wheel out their public relations people to make sure the ‘correct’ views are expressed. This, for Rose, is a worrying trend in the way in which policing organisations insist on interacting with enquiries.

Schlesinger, Tumber and Murdock (1991) and Schlesinger and Tumber (1992; 1993a; 1993b; 1994) have been highly critical of the ways in which existing models of research into police-media interactions have inadequately accounted for “the complexity of the relations between sources and media in the crime and criminal justice fields” (Schlesinger and Tumber 1992: 188; see also Schlesinger, Tumber and Murdock 1991). Whilst much of the existing research, they argue, takes the Marxist view of police as “primary definers”, (see Hall et al 1978) or the empirical
sociological perspective about news construction, the authors argue there are many shortcomings to such analyses (Schlesinger and Tumber 1992: 187-188; Schlesinger et al 1991: 397, 398-399; Schlesinger and Tumber 1994). To combat this gap in the field, they investigated the ways in which state institutions, such as the police, organise and develop information strategies towards the media, recognising two important considerations:

1. The degree to which any news source is institutionalised. If the institution has a stable presence, they may already command attention for the release of information, and;
2. The finance available. Budgetary considerations may be restrictive to the effectiveness and expansion of institutional communications strategies (Schlesinger and Tumber 1992: 188 and 190).

In examining the situation of the police, Schlesinger and Tumber (1992: 193) suggest that police in the UK have developed and reorganised their information departments, introducing more open and proactive policies. The authors relate how this mirrored the apparent need for police to improve their image, which went as far as the management of desired material being disseminated to the media (Schlesinger and Tumber 1992: 193-194). Whilst viewed skeptically by many in the media, the growing development of such media strategies has led, Schlesinger and Tumber (1992: 197; see also Schlesinger and Tumber 1994: 7) believe, not only to the specialisation of reporters in policing sub-fields, but also to changes in the ways police and reporters interact. This demonstrates a shift in the organisation of crime reporting that mirrors the shift in the ways policing organisations communicate with the media (Schlesinger and Tumber 1992: 200).
In their 1994 text Reporting Crime: The Media Politics of Criminal Justice, Schlesinger and Tumber expand on many of the ideas discussed in their earlier work. They develop their discussions to further explore the areas of news sources and the media, policy-makers and professionals, the promotion the police, and the field of crime reporting. Importantly, the authors note that the field of crime reporting has evolved, with the changes in law, police and government policy being paralleled by a more competitive media market affecting both the police and the press (Schlesinger and Tumber 1994: 7). This has undoubtedly changed the sphere of police-media interactions.

Schlesinger and Tumber (1994: 23) also recognised the increasingly central role the state plays in the process. They argued that the sociology of journalism should be re-thought, with research moving away from the simplistic notion of the media as “contributing to the maintenance of a dominant ideology or as sustaining a range of contending perspectives” (Schlesinger and Tumber 1994: 15). Rather, they believed more attention should be paid to the resistances to domination. This assertion is an important one given the direction and mode of analysis this thesis takes, and thus can be seen as a further justification for examining the police media relationship through a different theoretical lens from the existing literature.

Doyle and Ericson (2004) have also criticised some of the earlier authors, such as Hall et al (1978), who have attempted to account for police-media relations, claiming they simply make inferences and unsophisticated conclusions, rather than conducting any in depth ethnographic research. Doyle and Ericson (2004: 472; see also Chermak 1995) believe that the relationship is much more complex and diverse, with police
and media sometimes helping each other and sometimes working at cross purposes. Citing the work of Schlesinger and Tumber (1994), the authors agree that the relationship may also be affected by the ‘circles’ reporters work in with relation to police. For example, ‘inner-circle’ reporters, working for populist media outlets may experience a friendlier and more obliging relationship with police than those reporters in the ‘outer-circles’ that are from quality media outlets who are less cosy with police and more likely to report on stories the police do not want published (Doyle and Ericson 2004: 472, 473; Schlesinger and Tumber 1994). The increasing proactivity practiced by police in their dealings with the media also means that the police are better able to limit media knowledge of events in taking the initiative in approaching the media to promote stories, resulting in the promotion of the organisation (Doyle and Ericson 2004: 473; Chermak and Weiss 2005).

Richard V. Ericson (1982; 1991; 1994) has authored and co-authored a number of works primarily concerned with mass media, crime, law and justice (see Ericson, Baranek and Chan 1987; 1989; 1991). In these early series of works, Ericson and his co-authors explored the production of crime news, and the power/knowledge\textsuperscript{10} relationships between news sources and journalists (Davis 1990b: 732-733). Other works from Ericson (1991) further demonstrate the ways in which the mass media participate in and produce discourse about issues of crime, law and justice (see also Osborne 1995). Ericson’s overarching belief is that, as social institutions, mass media and the law work together to constitute realities of crime, justice and social order (Ericson 1991: 223). Therefore, the mass media actually contribute towards the

\textsuperscript{10} Foucault’s concept of the way in which knowledge is productive of relations of power.
articulation of order in ways that help people to arrange their daily lives (Ericson 1991: 242).

In a series of studies conducted in Canada during the 1980s and 1990s, Ericson, Baranek and Chan produced three books: Visualizing Deviance (1987), Negotiating Control (1989) and Representing Order (1991), detailing various aspects of police and media interactions. The first of the three titles, Visualizing Deviance, focuses on the ways in which news organisations and journalists go about constructing commonsense knowledge about deviance, and thus is outside the scope of this research. The second title, Negotiating Control, however, does have something to offer in that it investigates news sources and the power of these sources in influencing organisations trying to control news agendas (Ericson, Baranek and Chan 1989). One particular chapter in the text deals specifically with the police, examining the growth of media interest in matters of policing. As public interest in policing has grown, so too have the budgets of policing organisations, in step with the increased politicisation of the police (Ericson et al 1989: 91-92).

According to Ericson et al (1989: 92) the police, like most organisations, want to control knowledge of their activities so that at least publicly they appear to be operating legitimately, and are thus accountable. Such attempts to control the dissemination of information typically result in enormous increases in the expenditure of activities and resources that legitimise organisational activities. As Ericson et al (1989: 92-92) highlight, where this was once a reactive process for police, increasingly they are engaging in proactive strategies that control knowledge and information about policing activities and their public image. The irony here, as
Ericson et al point out, is that as police organisations become more ‘open’ in their communications with the media, they also become more closed in the sense that they are now proactively feeding their knowledge to reporters, realising that the media can be controlled and used by the police to achieve their goals; they are “a resource to be harnessed” (1989: 93-94). As a result, public relations units have proliferated in police departments as a way of controlling reporters and the stories they have access to.

Ericson et al (1989: 95-96) elaborate on the ways in which police in Canada realised the utility of the media in promoting the police line, where previous misgivings held by police about talking to the media have been superseded by the acknowledgement that building relationships with reporters might not only lead to positive publicity, but also stop reporters from seeking out unofficial sources for information on police issues. Carrying out fieldwork in a particular police department in Canada, the authors were able to observe this process in operation, highlighting immediately the prominent position of the public affairs unit within this particular department. They identified the existence of an “inner circle” of popular press reporters, who used the facilities made available to them within the police department, fostering relationships with a range of police sources, and generally being sympathetic to the police line (Ericson et al 1989: 97). Conversely, the authors also identified an “outer circle” of reporters, generally associated with higher quality news media outlets, which were more interested in issues of police management, efficiency and procedure (Ericson et al 1989: 97-98).
The two circles of reporters according to Ericson et al (1989: 104) were indicative of the different ways in which the police-media relationship played out. For the inner circle, developing cooperative relationships with police representatives was essential for them in reaching their job expectations. For these reporters, many of whom represented radio stations, there was little time for analysis of the various crime stories, and as such their reports were often viewed as ‘sympathetic’ to police perspectives (Ericson et al 1989: 105). Exacerbating this sympathy was the close relationship these reporters had with the police they were reporting on who, according to Ericson et al (1989: 105), often felt they had to reciprocate for the provision of information from police. As a result, these reporters expressed feelings of affinity with the police in the department, being part of the ‘inner circle’ of the department. Similarly, police who had regular contact with these ‘inner circle’ reporters felt that they could trust them, particularly when it came to police requests to omit or refrain from reporting certain facts or information, and they were less likely to report on embarrassing mistakes made by the department (Ericson et al 1989: 107).

Equally, the ‘outer circle’ journalists saw themselves as everything the ‘inner circle’ reporters were not: “professionally and analytically more detached from police sources, with the important mission of policing the police, rather than only policing with them” (Ericson et al 1989: 110). As a result, the experience of the ‘outer circle’ reporter was vastly different from that of the ‘inner circle’ reporter. ‘Outer circle’ reporters were more likely to report ‘run ins’ with the police, who were less than accepting of these reporters’ attempts to uncover mismanagement, wrongdoing or injustices (Ericson et al 1989: 112). ‘Outer circle’ reporters also found themselves
alienated from ‘inner circle’ reporters, because of the outer circle’s unwillingness to collaborate with them on what they would and would not report on (Ericson et al 1989: 112-113).

Like many of the other articles highlighted, Ericson et al’s (1989) work recognised the dual nature of the media’s interest in policing matters. The negative side of this interest could often involve reporters interfering with investigations, harming victims and offenders in their reporting of matters, portraying a negative image of the police, and adding to the pressures of police who do not see media interest as part of their role in an investigation (Ericson et al 1989: 154-158). In contrast, however, the media could often be of assistance to police, helping investigations by broadcasting information to the public and encouraging citizens to come forward with information about crimes, as well as having a deterrent effect by being involved in anti-crime campaigns and strategies (Ericson et al 1989: 161-162). Furthermore, the media could also play a key role in police attempts to pressure management and governments for more resources and powers to carry out their duties.

For Ericson et al (1989), however, there were more difficulties in the police-media relationship. For police, apart from the press, there were other external and internal factors that heavily influenced the importance of their communications with the media. As Ericson et al highlight, policing has become more politicised, both internally and externally. This particularly comes to the fore when police are criticised for issues that seem to be outside their direct control. Ericson et al (1989: 116-117) contrast police attempts to use the media for political gains, in the form of resources and powers, against media interest in the politicisation of the police role, as
it relates to the carrying out of their duties. The internal considerations of the police were also deemed important in relation to the news media. Quite often police faced internal pressures to perform as a result of critical media reportage, leading to calls for greater administrative efficiency and accountability (Ericson et al 1989: 118). In discussing the political aspects that emanate from the police-media relationship, Ericson et al have managed to capture a very important aspect of why the police have increasingly taken more interest in their portrayal in the media, demonstrating the role of appearance and image in police professionalisation. Moreover, Ericson et al (1989) have shown how knowledge is formed in power/knowledge relationships. Whilst in their study Ericson et al used this to demonstrate the impact of this power/knowledge on public knowledge of police issues, I believe this analysis can be taken a step further to examine the very nature of the relationship between the police and the media themselves, a relationship that is characterized by constant battles for power/knowledge.

**Police Media Units and their Staff**

In a 2002 research report for the US Department of Justice, Lovell (2002) researched police organisations and media relations, analysing the degree to which police manage their image via media relations units and Public Information Officers. This research consisted of two stages of investigation: a self report survey of up to two hundred media relations units within police departments across the USA, and; four ethnographic case studies of identified police departments that had participated in the survey.
The survey stage of the project was designed to obtain information regarding “the nature and quality of police media relations” within specific departments, along with the strategies being employed within these departments to enhance their image and promote themselves (Lovell 2002: 53-54). Within the survey, Lovell (2002: 54) solicited answers in regards to the presence and nature of formal media strategies, staffing levels, staff characteristics, training and background, specific goals of media offices and how they may be achieved, and the perceived quality of department interaction with the media and police images being projected. From the information gathered from the surveys, Lovell (2002: 59) discovered that fifty four per cent of respondents reported having a ‘good’ image in the media, with fifty four per cent again stating they had ‘good’ interaction with their local media. Ninety two per cent of departments surveyed identified having a media policy in place, however few of these policies had been incorporated into standard operating procedures (Lovell 2002: 91). Ninety three per cent of departments also reported communicating with the media at least once a day regarding crime events (Lovell 2002: 79). The growing importance of communicating with the media was demonstrated in the high number of departments with officers whose primary duty it was to communicate with the media. Lovell (2002: 105) found that eighty nine per cent of departments surveyed had an employee who was dedicated to such a role.

From this survey data, Lovell (2002: iv) selected four police departments that differed in regards to their media strategies, personnel, training and perceived media image. By conducting ethnographic work within each of the four departments, consisting of a total of one hundred hours of observation, Lovell (2002: iv, 56) hoped to not only understand the political and administrative contexts within which police-
media relations occur, but also to document how each department may incorporate various media strategies into their routine practices (see also Tuchman 1973 for a discussion of the routinising strategies of news work).

Overall, Lovell’s study demonstrated that the quality of a department’s media image had “little to do with the municipality crime rate and more to do with how departments manage crime news and information” (Lovell 2002: iv). Lovell found that those departments more skilled at media communications were similarly more skilled at preventing the appearance of police scandal. Significantly, he also found that with greater practice, police had the power to help determine the news rather than have the news determine them.

Since publishing his 2002 report, Lovell has released a book further detailing this research and other aspects of police-media relations (Lovell 2003). Good Cop/Bad Cop: Mass Media and the Cycle of Police Reform (2003) develops upon Lovell’s earlier study, proposing that the mass media is central in the administrative and strategic reforms of the police, and thus “new forms of media technology generate new forms of information about police practices, giving officials little choice but to alter their law enforcement practices” (Lovell 2003: 4). As such, he argues that many of the technological advances in the media have increased the amount of information available to the public about police and their practices, which in turn has served to destabilise the “political and social legitimacy of police”, which police in turn have attempted to combat (Lovell 2003: 4). Whilst the majority of Lovell’s work focuses on the ways in which the media influence the everyday running of police organisations, image construction and framing, and broader police reforms, which
are outside the interests of this thesis, his study has much to offer in terms of understanding the nature of the police-media relationship and the ways in which both parties attempt to control one another.

Tracing the history of fictional and factual USA police representations in the media, Lovell, like Mawby (2007), demonstrates how the police image as ‘crime fighters’ has become a problematic one. This image, Lovell (2003: 14, 47-49, 79-84) argues, has been challenged by ‘outside influences’, such as the media, which have served not only to open up alternative discourses of policing, both good and bad, but have also contributed to reflexivity within police agencies, and subsequent reform and moves towards professionalisation of the police. This has occurred as police attempted to narrow the “cultural lag” they have experienced with the development of the modern media (Lovell 2003: 84). August Vollmer, the first police chief of Berkeley, California was seen as the “principle author of the professional model of policing” where, amongst other things, he worked towards developing a positive image of policing in the popular press (Lovell 2003: 96-97). His legacy set the pathway for the public relations work of Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) director J. Edgar Hoover in the 1920s (Lovell 2003: 87, 96).

Contemporary police-media relations, according to Lovell, are characterised by an increasingly proactive approach to media interactions. In the past, police organisations have been reluctant to engage proactively with the media, often due to the belief that reporters are “the enemy”, that they do not understand the role of the police, and it is not within the police job description to work with the media (Lovell 2003: 132-133). As a result, police often withheld information from the media, and
restrict access to reporters, resulting in a tense standoff between the two parties over news content (Lovell 2003: 134). This changed during the 1960s, however, when a series of high profile public order events, poorly managed in the media, led USA police departments to recognise the need to improve their relationship with the media, and the ways in which they communicated to the public. Whilst this has gone some way to improving the relationship, Lovell (2003: 135) warns that traditional police suspicion of the media, and the media’s uneasiness in relying solely on the police for information, often leads to situations where tensions erupt, particularly during times of scandal or censure.

In concluding his look into the professionalisation of police, particularly in relation to how they manage their image in the media, Lovell discusses the more contemporary phenomena of media relations units within policing agencies. Like other case studies examining these units, Lovell (2003: 137) identifies that these offices are responsible for handling communications with the media, and news media particularly, and are staffed either by civilians or sworn police, with varying degrees of professional training in public relations. The interests of these units is deemed by Lovell to be twofold: firstly, to foster formal relations with journalists in order that the police can educate them, and therefore the community, on matters of police practice; and secondly, to assist the police in shaping news content and thus exercise what Lovell terms “impression management” (2003: 137). Drawing on the background of such units in the UK (as has been discussed by Mawby 1997 and Schlesinger and Tumber 1994), Lovell outlines how media relations units have become “central to both the police organisational structure and the daily function of routine police work” (2003: 139). Given the role of these units in the development of
the relationship between the police and the media, this point is an important one, particularly since the impact that media related policies within police organisations have had on police media interactions.

For Lovell, “the public information officer has emerged as a key figure in police administration” (2003:143). One of the most important questions he poses is whether the role of the public information officer, as a public relations specialist, threatens police accountability (see Marenin 2003 for a discussion on this). The concern for Lovell (2003: 151-152) here is whether, as police become more proficient at proactive media interactions, they may also be less likely to engage in reactive, reflexive policing.

One of the earliest studies to make mention of public information officers\(^\text{11}\) within policing organisations was published in 1984. In their article, ‘Police Accountability and the Media’, Skolnick and McCoy (1984) address the role of the media in generating an understanding of police organisations and the work that they do. Their article centred specifically on the media’s tendency to focus on ‘crime news’ as opposed to the analysis of policing organisations as a governmental agency (Skolnick and McCoy 1984: 521). This focus was something also used by Chermak (1995: 21) in a later study looking at the ways in which police are presented in print and electronic media.

As part of their research, Skolnick and McCoy (1984) conducted interviews with a range of USA Police Chiefs, asking them about their management of crime news and

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\(^{11}\) Individuals who work within PMUs or Public Relations Offices for police organisations. Also referred to as Police Press Officers or Media Unit Officers within this thesis.
how they did this in such a way as to present their departments in a positive light (Skolnick and McCoy 1984: 544). Most of the interviewees declared a preference for employing public information officers, with several stating that their role was to make the department ‘look good’ (Skolnick and McCoy 1984: 546).

One of the major issues to emerge from Skolnick and McCoy’s work was to do with the relationship between public information officers and journalists. Public information officers were seen to be very experienced and knowledgeable about how media institutions work (Skolnick and McCoy 1984: 546). In contrast, however, their media counterparts were seen often as quite young and inexperienced in relation to the workings of the police (Skolnick and McCoy 1984: 546). Skolnick and McCoy (1984: 547) found that this combination had the potential to raise some problematic issues surrounding the dependence of reporters on policing organisations.

Surette and Richard (1995) have also contributed to the study of public information officers, conducting research in the USA state of Florida on staff of public information units. Surette and Richard (1995) found that, despite their important role, very little was known about public information officers, their training, background and roles. As a partial response to this gap in knowledge, Surette and Richard (1995: 326-327) conducted an ‘exploratory survey’ of two public information organisations within Florida police departments. The survey profiled public information officers with regards to their background, tasks, function, training and attitudes towards the news media and their own occupation.

A number of findings emerged from Surette and Richard’s study. They found the typical Florida public information officer to be a Caucasian Anglo male of
approximately forty years of age, who was a sworn officer, had attended college and held just over five year’s experience in the field (Surette and Richard 1995: 327). Of the public information officers studied, half had previous media experience (Surette and Richard 1995: 327-328). This was especially true for civilian public information officers, who most commonly had worked previously in the mass media.

Among the duties conducted by public information officers were fielding media enquiries, arranging media interviews, conducting press conferences and interviews and distributing press releases, with fielding media enquiries consuming the most amount of time (Surette and Richard 1995: 328). Surette and Richard (1995: 329) also found that these public information officers held a highly positive image of their position, and rated their job satisfaction highly. Nearly all public information officers felt their relationship with the local media was very good, but perceptions were less favourable of the national media (Surette and Richard 1995: 330).

From this exploratory study, Surette and Richard concluded that there were a number of avenues for further research into public information officers. Broadly, these areas of research fell into two areas: civilians versus sworn officers as public information officers, and the organisational role that public information officers serve (Surette and Richard 1995: 333-334). In the first category, Surette and Richard (1995: 333) suggested that the differences between the employment of civilian staff and sworn officers should be explored to determine whether they influenced the functioning of the media unit and its ability to deal with crises (see also Schlesinger and Tumber 2004). Surette and Richard believe further analysis in the area of the organisational role of the public information officer may not only highlight the best traits and
characteristics of public information officers, but may also shed some light on “the unique organisational niches they have carved out and occupy” (1995: 334).

In 2001 Surette followed up this 1995 study with one that looked at the increasing civilianisation of public information officers within criminal justice agencies. Surette found that, demographically, Florida public information officers had not changed significantly since the 1995 study, nor had their job-related attitudes. The most distinctive change occurred in the number of civilian public information officers now working in the field. In contrast to the 1995 findings (Surette and Richard 1995), civilians now numbered two out of every three public information officers (Surette 2001: 112).

One of the main features that Surette added to his 2001 study was an examination of public information officer support of professional association membership. Surette (2001: 113) found that civilian officers who worked in large organisations were most likely to be association members. From this the author concluded that the professionalisation of public information officers was being driven by their civilianisation (Surette 2001: 113). This, however, initiated a number of questions for Surette (2001: 114), such as why there is an increase in civilian public information officers, and whether or not they are more effective than their sworn counterparts. He concluded that this process of civilianisation within public information offices in criminal justice agencies was one of the most important trends due to the potential impact upon the development of the public information officer profession.
Recently Motschall and Cao (2002) conducted a survey of two thousand public information officers from a variety of regions across the USA. The survey itself was designed to gather information about the activities, roles and organisational factors associated with the public information officer position (Motschall and Cao 2002: 163). Demographically, the authors found that the average public information officer was over forty years of age, college educated and a sworn police officer (Motschall and Cao 2002: 165). When questioned on their activities, many public information officers were found to employ techniques traditionally associated with public relations professionals (Motschall and Cao 2002: 166). This was demonstrated in their most common duties, which included writing press releases, making contact with the media, and holding press conferences (Motschall and Cao 2002: 167).

The second research aim of the authors was to identify the principle roles occupied by public information officers. Seventy per cent of survey respondents rated media relations as their primary role (Motschall and Cao 2002: 168). Respondents cited their work as both reactive and proactive in nature. In addition to responding to situations and releasing information as it arose, public information officers were therefore also involved in keeping the media informed of events and disseminating the ‘good stories’ (Motschall and Cao 2002: 173). Motschall and Cao (2002) concluded that their results were generally consistent with past research on public information officers (see Surette 2001; Surette and Richard 1995), and showed a more open and oriented model of public relations within criminal justice agencies (Motschall and Cao 2002: 175).
In their study Chermak and Weiss (2005: 501-502) examined the relationship between the police and media organisations, paying particular attention to the place of public information officers in this exchange. Chermak and Weiss (2005: 502) argue that police, being one of the most visible elements of the criminal justice system, are constantly battling to maintain and increase their legitimacy in a society where they often fail to meet community expectations of their role. One of the ways in which police have attempted to uphold their legitimacy is through the manipulation and management of their external environment, through “strategically disseminating some types of information and blocking inquiries for other types of information” (Chermak and Weiss 2005: 502). One way police organisations can achieve this is by working with the news media, given it is one of the key mediums through which the public acquire knowledge about police.

The relationship that police enjoy with the media is not, however, so straightforward. According to Chermak and Weiss (2005: 503), the relationship is very tenuous, and news organisations do not want to be perceived as being tools of propaganda for the police, at the same time that they do not want to jeopardise the access they have to information by being overly critical of the police. The authors argue that one of the strategies that police organisations have moved towards in an attempt to manage their relationship with the media is employing public information officers, who are trained professionals in media and communications. It is their job to decide on the information that is released to the media and public, as well as to respond to media enquiries and manufacture publicity for the police (Chermak and Weiss 2005: 503).
In reviewing the existing literature on the growth and influence of public information officers in police-media communications, Chermak and Weiss outline their contribution to the field as threefold. Firstly, they examine perspectives on the police-media relationship from both organisations. Secondly, they provide a snapshot of the quality of these relations, and finally they propose to present a better understanding of the interdependent nature of the police-media relationship (Chermak and Weiss 2005: 504-505). Their hypothesis is that the police’s ability to control the media and use media organisations to their advantage will affect their perceptions of the media and conversely media perceptions of the police will be based upon the willingness of the police to give access and information to journalists (Chermak and Weiss 2005: 505).

In testing their hypothesis, Chermak and Weiss (2005: 505) administered questionnaires to police and media organisations across the USA, capturing police departments with public information officers in regular contact with the media, and media organisations with large circulations and audiences. From these questionnaires Chermak and Weiss (2005: 508-509) discovered that:

- Police departments that combined civilian and sworn staff in their public information units found their relationship with the media to be slightly more satisfactory than civilian only units;
- Police departments acknowledged the role of the media in shaping public opinions of the police, something which needed to be harnessed, demonstrating the need for police to “propagandise” certain areas of their work;
- Media organisations recognised the importance of accessing information from police departments, as a matter of public interest;
Newspaper managers viewed their relationship with the police less favourably than reporters from newspaper and television, and television managers;

Media representatives who felt that police public information officers or other staff were not accessible reported their relationship with the police less favourably, and;

When the dominant media image of the police is negative, then the relationship between the police and the media is also likely to be viewed negatively.

From this data Chermak and Weiss (2005: 510) conclude that for police to feel they have some element of control over their external environment, including the media and their portrayals of the police, that police departments must be prepared to be open to scrutiny, and attempt to balance critical reporting with the celebration of good news stories, such as high profile arrests and community initiatives. To do this, police must engage in image work, employing public information officers to assist them in managing their relationship with the media and help police capitalise on publicity opportunities (Chermak and Weiss 2005: 510). This may not only help police maintain an advantage over media outlets, but can also lead to more positive relationships with them, as the more positive the stories are about the police, the more positive the perception of the police-media relationship (Chermak and Weiss 2005: 511). Whilst there is value in the findings of Chermak and Weiss (2005) there is still a lot of scope for the exploration of the nuances in the relationship, particularly in how police react to situations in which they are portrayed negatively in the media.

As noted, one of the most prolific authors in the field of police-media relations in the UK is Rob Mawby. Mawby’s research contributes significantly to the field and
encompasses the three broad areas of focus: police-media relations; PMUs and staff of those units, and; the history of these three realms in the UK context. Given his contribution, this part of the review of international literature will focus on Mawby’s work, and what it reveals about these aspects of police-media interactions.

In his most recent work, Mawby (2007: 146) explores three facets of criminal investigation and the media: historical and contemporary representations by the media of police investigators and their functions, and the seemingly eternal media attraction to these investigations; the extent to which British police have become involved in “overt ‘image work’”, especially in relation to the investigative process, and; the relationships between the police and the media during investigations. Citing the work of other authors in the field (such as Innes 2002; Reiner 2003), Mawby believes that the police, rather problematically, have painted themselves as “crime fighters” (2007: 146-147; see also Reiner 2003: 266 and Ericson and Haggerty 1997: 20-21). The effect of such identification not only results in media reproduction of such claims, but also heightens public expectations about the role of police.

Mawby argues that even though the notion of police as crime fighters has been a longstanding one, particularly in media depictions of the police, such images have become increasingly public and, as a result, have opened policing agencies up for scrutiny. While the police are still idealised through these representations, they are increasingly also exposed for their failures and inadequate practices (Mawby 2007: 146, 147, 165; see also Innes 2001). Exploring a range of fictional and factual media accounts and representations of police throughout British history, Mawby (2007: 148-156) outlines the evolving and dynamic ways in which the police have been
viewed. Whilst early understandings of police and their role were primarily acquired through the print media of pamphlets, newspapers and memoirs, blurring the lines between fact and fiction (Mawby 2007: 147-150), by the 1950s the impact of television dominated. Mawby (2007: 151-156) goes on to explore some of the various television portrayals of police, both fictional and factual, that focus on the area of criminal investigation, and argues that more recent manifestations, such as Crimewatch UK, attempt to involve the public in a partnership role of crime fighting (see also Schlesinger and Tumber 1993a and Schlesinger and Tumber 1994).

What has emerged from these representations of police and their work, especially the more recent portrayals, are criticisms about the level of association between police and the producers of television series that purport to be factual (Mawby 2007: 156). Mawby refers to existing debates about the power balance in such relationships, which often sit at either end of the spectrum. He believes, however, that since the development of such arguments, the police-media relationship has become significantly more complex, and with an explosion not only in the outlets reporting on police matters, but also the formats of such media, it is much more difficult for police to control outright their relationship with the media. Rather, Mawby sees that the relationship between the police and the media as “a series of co-existing relationships that ebb and flow in terms of dominance and control and the balance of power differs over time and location and at national and local levels” (2007: 156). This does not, however, mean that police do not attempt to control their relationship with the media; they do, and most significantly through those whom they employ to ‘protect’ and ‘promote’ the police image, the public relations and marketing specialists. Mawby’s assessment is important for this research project as, like the
work of a number of previously mentioned authors, he enables the debate about the state of police-media relations to be reconsidered, enabling analyses to go beyond simplistic notions of the police as ‘gatekeepers’ and the media as either submissive to, or ‘watchdogs’ of, the police.

As Mawby discussed in a previous study (see Mawby 2002b), since the 1980s in Britain, policing agencies have moved towards professionalising their communications with the media through the establishment of press offices within police services, staffed by police and civilians (Mawby 2007: 157). This mirrors the situation in Australia, as discussed earlier. This professionalisation has been further solidified in Britain by the founding of the Association of Police Public Relations Officers (APPRO), and the development of media strategies and policies within police forces. Furthermore, where once such offices responded reactively to issues, the modern day police press office engages in proactive communications, using strategic and policy driven objectives to guide their work (Mawby 2007: 157).

This is no less evident in the ways in which police agencies nowadays organise their criminal investigations. According to Mawby (2007:157), police often engage the media in the investigative process, in both fictional and factual realms. For example, the police may provide the media with key investigators whom they can question about the details of a case. At the other end of the scale, the police may also act as “collaborators”, or consultants on fictional crime drama series to ensure that the police are portrayed ‘accurately’ (that is, positively) (Mawby 2007: 157-158; see also Reiner 2000b). Such practices have been in place in Australia for many years, with
police dramas such as Wildside\textsuperscript{12}, Blue Heelers and Water Rats\textsuperscript{13} all employing police consultants to oversee their production. At the most basic level, however, Mawby contends that image work is the most basic function of press offices.

Mawby goes on to explore the various news values that help media decide the newsworthiness of particular crime stories, which is outside the scope of this research. What he does then focus on is the role of the media in serious crime investigation. Mawby (2007: 160) relates the difficulties associated with media reporting on serious criminal incidents, and police attempts to manage the media during these events. Mawby believes that the presence of the media can be both positive and negative; positive in that the media can be a useful investigative tool (see also Innes 1999; 2001), can assist police in gaining public attention for the reporting of the offences and generating information from the public, and can also boost the profile of certain cases. Conversely, the media are often accused of interfering with investigations by either being demanding of police time, conducting their own investigations, or meddling with evidence (Mawby 2007: 160-161). Naturally, the conduct displayed by both the media and the police can have an effect on their relationship with one another.

In concluding, Mawby sums up the police-media relationship as one that is "longstanding and complex, with recurring themes of conflict and reciprocity" (2007: 161).

\textsuperscript{12} Wildside is an interesting case, in that NSW Police withdrew their support of the show because they failed to cease depicting police in a ‘negative’ light. The show often portrayed corrupt and improper activity, which was interpreted by NSW Police as an inaccurate representation of their activities, therefore bringing them into disrepute (Public Affairs Branch 1997).

\textsuperscript{13} Wildside, Blue Heelers and Water Rats were all long running Australian television dramas focusing on various aspects of policing. Wildside, which ran for two years, focused on detective activities in inner city Sydney. Blue Heelers, which broadcast on Channel 7 for thirteen seasons, focused on the police station in fictional Mount Thomas, a small country Victorian town, and Water Rats, which ran for six seasons on Channel 9, was based around the activities of the NSW Water Police and the crimes they encountered.
He believes that criminal investigations function as the central focus for the police-media relationship, as both have a vested interest in such investigations. Problematically though, criminal investigations, through their fictional and factual portrayals, have become something of a ‘circus’. Such portrayals display to the public the good and bad sides of the world of policing, and demystify their crime fighting role (Mawby 2007: 165-166).

Mawby’s past research also contributes substantially to knowledge about the police-media relationship in the UK. His 1997 article “Making Sense of Media Representations of British Policing: Implications for the Police Image” reflects on how important television portrayals of police are to policing agencies. Mawby (1997a: 140) argues that television representations of police raise two concerns: the implication such representations have on the police image and how it is managed, and; how reflective such images are of actual policing (see also Mawby 2003). This is potentially problematic because most people obtain their impression of the police through television representation and there is no guarantee that such representations are accurate depictions of how police act, or how they want to be seen to act (see also Mawby and Worthington 2002; Mawby 2003).

In a theme that has been picked up by his subsequent work (Mawby 1997b; 1998; 2001a; 2001b), Mawby (1997a; 1997b: 27; 2001a: 44) explores the trend for police departments to engage in police image management, whereby they employ public relations, communications and marketing strategies to promote, project and protect the image and reputation of the department. Research conducted by Mawby (1997a; 1997b; 1998; 2001a; 2001b) found that police departments in the UK were “adopting
proactive attitudes towards media and public relations”, particularly with the growing role that police press offices had to play in professionalising such strategies (Mawby 1997b: 28; 2001a: 45).

According to Mawby (1998), the first police press office was established in 1919 at Scotland Yard, creating the first official channels of communication with journalists (Mawby 1998: 26). Today the roles of these offices have developed and are:

- Responsible for maintaining media relationships,
- Developing media and communications policies,
- Promoting police good news stories and monitoring and responding to media stories...they also liaise with prospective programme makers and offer advice on media matters to officers (Mawby 1998: 26-27).

There has also been an increase in civilian staffing within these offices, breaking the conventional view that police functions should be managed by the police. This has been followed by more proactive attitudes towards the media, with more open media policies (Mawby 1998: 27).

Mawby has followed up much of his historical analysis with empirical research into police-media relations. In 1999, Mawby detailed two projects he conducted that were aimed at examining how police images were constructed and communicated and how this related to the process of police legitimisation. The first project involved three stages: interviews with police force press officers and senior police officers with an interest in police-media relations; a questionnaire survey of police press offices and; observational research in one police force (Mawby 1999: 265). The second project “focused on the management of serious crime investigations”, examining police...
management of media during both routine and high profile investigations (Mawby 1999: 265-266). The methodology employed consisted of interviews with detectives from a sample of police forces.

Traditionally, Mawby suggests, police are seen to be in a position of dominance in relation to media agencies (see also Ericson 1989; Freckelton 1988; Hall et al 1978). What emerged from his research, however, was that the relationship between the police and the media is ‘multi-layered’, and its complexity prevents police from directing the media’s agenda (Mawby 1999: 281; see also Mawby 2003: 228-230). Furthermore, the relationship is one that is not only a means of acquiring and transferring information about policing, but also one by which the police are scrutinised and held accountable (Mawby 1999: 282). Increasing media pressures for information have forced policing organisations to become more organised in their communications, and as such have resulted in the recruitment of ‘professional communicators’ to help facilitate this development (Mawby 1999: 272).

Likewise, Mawby discovered that the media’s role in the relationship has also shifted. Modern developments have meant that journalists are less likely to have the time or funding to research and investigate their own stories (Mawby 1999). Consequently, police media officers prepare stories they want to promote, offering them to the media, and the journalists then choose whether or not to use them (Mawby 1999: 274). The process is not always that easy or manageable, but this is just one level of interaction which has developed in recent times between police and media representatives.
Using a number of examples from recent cases that damaged the reputation of police in Britain, Mawby contends that research, such as that of Crandon and Dunne (1997)\(^4\), could not be supported. Rather than the police controlling the media, Mawby found that “the police control of the media is not as complete as upholders of the orthodox view would suggest” (1999: 278). In fact, Mawby (1999: 278-279) goes on to argue that the police are not particularly skilled at trying to control the media, despite the increase in professionalisation of police public relations activities and the employment of civilian specialists. Rather than being a simply managed relationship, where one party holds the balance of power over another, the police-media relationship in fact is far more complex and multilayered according to Mawby’s (1999: 279; 281) findings. This makes it difficult for police to successfully manage or control all their dealings with the media, and likewise, media pressures and competition make it harder for journalists to exert total control over the police.

Mawby further explored police-media relations, and the growth of professionalised police communications further in his 2002 publications Policing Images: Policing, Communication and Legitimacy (Mawby 2002b) and Continuity and Change, Convergence and Divergence (Mawby 2002a). Policing Images (Mawby 2002b) was based upon observations of police at work, with a focus on civilian members of press and public relations departments of the South Yorkshire Police in England, as well as district press officers. Mawby (2002b: 131-132) examined the difference in the way each of the subjects approached their role, with a particular focus on how they constructed and communicated their image. Whilst this text has much to offer in terms of a detailed study of police image work in practice, this is somewhat outside

\(^4\) Crandon and Dunne’s (1997) study of media reliance on police information and attitudes towards this information rather simplistically paints the media as complicit in reporting police generated information without critique or investigation.
the focus of this thesis. Needless to say, some of the underlying themes in the text correspond with much of the other work Mawby has produced.

In Continuity and Change Mawby (2002a: 303) argues that “threads of continuity run through police-media relations” including the intentions of police forces to work with media organisations as a sign of openness and accountability. In both of these publications Mawby (2002a; 2002b) attempts to chart the historical characteristics of the police-media relationship, highlighting current trends in police-media relations, including the civilianisation of public relations specialists within police departments (Mawby 2002a).

Drawing on survey based data, Mawby (2002a) explores the dual and often divergent agendas of police communications with the media today. Police agencies are concerned with being open, honest and accountable to media organisations, something that in the early days of the relationship they were not so keen to do (Mawby 2002a: 303, 306, and 307). Conversely, the police are equally as concerned with controlling the information that is given to the media and public, in an effort to protect their reputation and image. Such standards, however, do not always function harmoniously. Rapidly developing technologies, increased visibility, intense scrutiny and commanding political, managerial and media pressures all combine to compel police to be economically and managerially efficient and effective, whilst also satiating media demands and presenting a positive police image (Mawby 2002a: 309; see also Mawby and Worthington 2002). The point Mawby makes is extremely salient for this project, as will be seen in ensuing chapters. In identifying the overarching managerial and economic pressures, and how they contrast with the day
to day imperatives of police communications with the media, Mawby highlights one of the biggest issues facing policing organisations in the Western world today. This in turn impacts upon the relationships police have with media representatives, as conflicts in agendas often arise.

In continuing the discussion, Mawby highlights the divergences and convergences in the practice of police-media relations (2002a: 311-318). In terms of divergence, Mawby (2002a: 311) believes that the identification of ‘press offices’ as sites responsible for media relations is not an entirely accurate depiction of the work such offices carry out. This is further complicated by the fact that at the time of Mawby’s research, the 58 departments in Britain with ‘press offices’ described them by using at least 28 different titles (2002a: 311). These offices also had varying staffing levels and different budgets.

On the matter of convergences, Mawby (2002a: 312) identified three broad areas where the practice of police-media relations met: civilianisation, professionalisation, and core responsibilities. In this sense, the most common feature of the various police press offices in the UK was that they were increasingly being staffed by civilians professionally trained in public relations and journalism, who increasingly are involved in senior managerial and policy making roles (Mawby 2002a: 313-314). These offices are also becoming involved in a wide range of roles, both internal and external to the departments within which they operate. Mawby categorises these media relations activities as pertaining to operational policing matters, reactive and proactive news management, and marketing and public relations communications (2002a: 313-315). He argues that involvement in such activities indicates that there is
“a clear intention [on the part of the police] to inform the public of police force activities and to cooperate with the media to provide information about policing”, but that this is coupled with concerns over presenting a favourable police image and controlling the flow and content of communications (Mawby 2002a: 315).

Mawby’s work has taken the study of police-media relations to a new level, arguing for more sophistication in the understanding of the nuances and complexities inherent in these relationships. Importantly for this research, Mawby has highlighted the utility of media relations as a means of control for the police. Such efforts are only strengthened with the increasing “managerialist government policies” police departments have had to face in recent years (Mawby 2002a: 317). Such trends, Mawby (2002a: 319-320) contends, can have implications for the future of police-media relations, with the interests of the organisation potentially taking priority over the interests of police accountability.

**What the International Literature Reveals**

As mentioned at the start of this chapter, there is a plethora of material that explores all angles of the police media relationship, including how police are portrayed in the media and how the public get their understandings of the police through the media. Particularly when looking at the international literature, what I have attempted to do is focus as much as possible on the police-media relationship, the growing professionalisation of police media contact, and studies examining various aspects of the relationship. Whilst this may have led to the exclusion of interesting literature, to ensure the tight focus of the thesis, literature deemed peripheral to the research was omitted or only briefly referred to. What the literature that was discussed did reveal
however, was just how many different angles of the relationship offer differing
analyses and interpretations of the nuances of the relationship, yet with the same
overarching conclusion that the relationship between police and media
representatives is complex, multidimensional, and contingent. The international
literature has been more revealing about the origins of professional media relations
units within policing organisations in countries such as the USA and UK, further
highlighting the need for similar work to be undertaken in Australia. The
international literature also explores in more depth the various ways in which the
police-media relationship operates, such as in the investigation of serious crimes, and
also gives insight into the place of civilian media specialists within police public
relations departments. Another way in which the international differs from the
Australian literature is in the way different authors have tried to theorise about the
police-media relationship. Whilst there is still a way to go in developing these
theories, the international literature opens up a space for more detailed and macro
level interpretations of the intricacies of police-media relations. In particular, the
literature still does not fully address the resistances in the relationship, particularly on
the part of the media, and there is also scope for discussion around the acceptance of
media relations units within policing agencies, particularly given that the research
shows the high levels of civilian employment within such units. Questions need to be
asked about whether such units are seen as representative of the police voice,
particularly those police working on the beat.

In this chapter I have explored the literature in the field of police-media
relationships, outlining the basis of understanding from which this thesis will
develop. The literature is revealing about the delicate nature of police-media
interactions, but leaves a considerable space for deeper theoretical analysis of the condition of the relationship, especially in the Australian context. In the following chapter the research design of the thesis will be discussed, and the research questions, methodology and method of the thesis will be outlined. The chapter will begin with a discussion of the research problem that has emerged following the review of the literature. This will be followed by a description of the research questions and epistemological framework of the thesis. Methodological concerns will then be discussed, leading into the positioning of the method to be undertaken in order to search for answers to the research questions.
CHAPTER TWO: RESEARCH DESIGN:
EPISTEMOLOGY, METHODOLOGY AND METHOD

In the previous chapter I addressed the breadth of literature in the field of police-media relations, both within Australia and internationally. What became evident from this literature was the growing influence and impact of professionalised media relations units operating within police departments. This raised questions about the nature of the police-media relationship since the inception of such units. This chapter discusses the research questions that have emerged from this review of the existing literature, and links the research design to the aims of the thesis. The chapter goes on to detail the ways in which the thesis will attempt to address these questions through methodology and method. Firstly, the research questions are identified. Following this, the epistemological position of the research(er) is outlined. This is followed by a discussion of the methodological approach being applied to the thesis, together with the rationale for this approach, and its implications. Finally, the methods employed in the research for the thesis will be explained in detail, including the selection of methods, the sample and sites of study, the advantages and limitations of these methods, and the modes of analysis employed in examining the data.
Research Question(s) and Hypothesis

Research Problem

Media play a crucial role in facilitating the communication of information from the police to the public. The information police want to get out to the public can range from general broadcasts of crime events to public warnings of crime risks, to the projection of police images and agendas. In recent years the way the police communicate with the media, and in turn the public, has become increasingly important. According to Lovell (2002: 2):

Police are now beginning to maintain media-relations offices staffed by public information officers trained in media communication and journalism whose primary responsibility is to engage the news media to advance the goals of the police organisation.

In Australia particularly, the establishment of police information services has become a regular feature of law enforcement (Wilson 1992). With more and more demands upon policing organisations from the media, police have had to develop more formal means to manage these requests. As Finnane (2002: 135) states, police are in a position whereby the degree of control they are able to exercise over information is verging on monopolistic, and as such they have developed routines in an attempt to manage the flow of this information. Despite the growing role PMUs play in the overall function of policing, however, there is little research looking at the role of these Units and how they have changed the ways police communicate with the media and public. According to Motschall and Cao (2002: 153), only recently has research begun to be conducted into PMUs and the “historical, organisational and theoretical
bases for public information in law enforcement”. This raises a number of important questions about PMUs in Australia.

**Research Questions**

The existing literature on the areas of police-media relations and the growth of PMUs has opened up a plethora of potential routes for further investigation. For this project my interest is primarily on establishing an understanding of the field in an Australian context, although it will speak somewhat to the international context. The NSW Police Force will act as the main site through which police-media relations and PMUs will be examined in an attempt to understand aspects of the Australian condition. There are two overarching questions that drive this research:

1. How, and under what conditions, did the NSW Police Media Unit come into formation?
2. What role does the Police Media Unit play in mediating police-media relationships and the processes that produce public perceptions of policing?

Within these two overarching questions, there are a number of sub-questions that shed light on the underlying enquiries being made by the two research questions:

1. How have police-media relations in Australia been historically constituted?

Much of what is known about police-media relations through existing literature, particularly in Australia, is twenty or more years out of date. This question seeks to gain an understanding not only of the relationship today, but also its historical development.
2. What is the NSW PMU? How does it function and what are its practices?

No research to date has been carried out on the NSW PMU. This research aims to get a sense of the current form of the NSW PMU and its operations.

3. When and why was the NSW PMU established, and how have its functions shifted and developed over time?

In order to understand the NSW PMU in its current form, it is essential to understand where it has come from. There is no research in Australia that has examined the emergence of a PMU such as the one that exists within the NSW Police Force. By examining the development of the PMU I believe that a richer analysis can be made of the current day Unit, the factors that have contributed to its development, and its role in the police-media relationship.

4. What place does the NSW PMU play within the NSW Police Force?

In getting to know the NSW PMU, it is important to understand the role it plays in relation to the NSW Police Force. As existing research has shown, PMUs are often at the forefront of managing the image of the police, and therefore such units have the potential to influence and impact upon the Police Force as a whole.

5. What role does the NSW PMU play in police-media relationships?

With the increasing prevalence of professional media relations units within policing organisations across the world, it would be almost inevitable that this has had an effect on the ways in which police and the media interact with and relate to one another. This possibility is also something to be explored during the research by
examining how the NSW PMU works within the police-media relationship in the local context.

6. What role does the NSW PMU play in the broader social and political climate of today? What is the socio-political context within which it operates?

One area under-researched in the existing literature is the role professional PMUs play in terms of the broader social and political conditions of the day. Policing does not occur in a vacuum, with numerous studies attesting to the considerable political importance, and social impact, that policing organisations have in their local contexts. These questions seek to examine the social and political contexts in which the NSW PMU has emerged by exploring the history of the PMU, the history of the PMU within the NSW Police Force, the police-media relationship in NSW and broader shifts in these topics overall. It is proposed that such an examination will be extremely useful in examining the overall place of these units within policing organisations and society as a whole.

7. How has the emergence of the PMU within the NSW Police Force changed police-media exchanges and interactions?

As well as examining the role police media relations units play in the police-media relationship, as question six asks, the ways in which such units have changed police and media exchanges and interactions will also be examined. In this sense, this question is concerned with the changes that have occurred in the ways in which police and media representatives communicate with one another since the advent of professional PMUs in NSW.
The following sections will outline the methodology and methods employed in working towards an understanding of the answers to the above research questions.

**Epistemological Framework**

A constructivist approach has being taken in this thesis. As such, the nature of police media relations and the increasing role of police media relations units are understood by exploring the construction of knowledge, truth and reality through the sites of police media relations and the development of media relations units in policing organisations.

**Methodology**

“A methodology is a model which entails theoretical principles as well as a framework that provides guidelines about how research is done in the context of a particular paradigm…” (Saratankos 1993a: 32).

“Methodology is… understanding the social-organisational context, philosophical assumptions, ethical principles, and political issues of the enterprise of social researchers who use methods” (Neuman 2006: 2).

I have chosen to take a qualitative approach towards the fieldwork conducted for this project. This was deemed to be the best approach to the subject area because of the goal to understand a particular aspect of an institution, and the way key stakeholders working within and interacting with this institution interact with one another. The process of carrying this out was largely an investigative one, attempting to give meaning to the everyday workings of the PMU, and the relationships police have with journalists who may interact with the police through this media unit. Rather
than attempting to create any sort of quantifiable or statistical analysis of this field, I wanted to instead explore the ongoing interactions between police and journalists and understand the multiple realities that simply do not lend themselves to quantitative methodologies.

While undertaking this qualitative study, I have also chosen to view the field from a critical perspective. According to Saratankos (1993b), a critical perspective in the social sciences connotes a number of theoretical elements that subsequently influence the nature of the methods employed for research. A critical perspective believes that:

- Reality is created by people, not nature; that is, reality is constructed by “powerful people” to serve their needs;
- “Reality is not in a state of order but of conflict, tension and contradiction, resulting in a constantly changing world”;
- The aim of research is to “expose real structures and present reality as it is” rather than rely on appearances that are often based on illusion and distortion and overlook the inherent complexities, and;
- Power structures dominate and oppress people in society (adapted from Saratankos 1993b: 35-40).

Hudson (2000: 176) believes that within critical criminology, the approach to be taken is one that questions the politics of law and order, rather than an approach that attempts to be evaluative or identify causation. Hudson (2000: 177-178) considers there to be two steps to a critical criminological approach to research:

1. To “be clear about the object of inquiry”. That is, identify the cluster of theories, policies, legislation, media treatment, roles and institutions that
are concerned with crime and the control of crime: the power/knowledge complex, and;
2. “(T)o give specific, theorised, meaning to the idea of ‘critical reflection’”. This involves carefully selecting a theoretical perspective from the several different critical approaches.

For this thesis the object of inquiry is police-media relations and the growth and development of the PMU within the NSW Police Force. Within these lines of inquiry, the overall concern is with the roles of policing institutions, the policies and legislation surrounding police-media relations, and the ways in which these roles and institutions are part of the power/knowledge complex. The theoretical approach being taken towards these sites of study broadly revolve around the work of Michel Foucault (1980; 1982; 1991), who investigated the exercise of power through particular governmental sites, and David Garland (2001), who has explored the changing patterns of control in society. In line with Hudson’s (2000: 188-189) belief, this project aims to draw upon wider social theories in order to understand the politics of law and order, the emerging shifts in discourses about crime and punishment, and the technologies of power and crime control.

As such, this thesis, in the tradition of critical criminology, seeks to examine police-media relations, and the growth of professional media relations units within policing organisations in relation to the production of knowledge and the power/knowledge complex; that is, what institutions are concerned with crime and its control, and with what programs of government do particular strategies align. By utilising a critical perspective the researcher is able to understand the functioning of the PMU (as an apparatus of the criminal justice system) in terms of the role of the state and its
relationship to historical transitions, social structure, power and control (Jupp 1989: 13, 22).

**Theoretical Framework**

The various theoretical underpinnings of research into police-media relationships are another important way of understanding how these relationships have been interpreted and defined. There are myriad different theoretical positions that have been applied both to police-media relations broadly, as well as to the specific operational aspects of PMUs and their staff. The critical approach taken in this thesis is influenced by a number of key theorists and scholars within the field of criminology. Until now, academics researching police-media relations and/or the phenomenon of PMUs within policing organisations have tended to do so in a relatively restricted fashion, looking purely at how the police use the media (e.g. Innes 2001; Feist 1999), how the media and police use each other (e.g. Chermak 1995; Putnis 1996), police images (e.g. Lovell 2002; Jiggins 2004) or who constitute media unit staff (e.g. Surette and Richard 1995; Surette 2001). In this project however, I wanted to move beyond such explanations of police media interactions and police media units. I wish to understand police media relations in relation to the development of professional media units within policing organisations. More broadly, I wish to gain an understanding of where and how such media units had formed, and what role they played not only in police media relations of today, but also policing organisations as a whole. In this sense, I am concerned with the macro level understanding, as well as the micro level analysis, of police-media relations and professional police media units within policing organisations.
In the following section I will briefly outline some of the existing theoretical frameworks that have characterised the field of police-media relations research, and assess the utility of these frameworks in relation to this project. Following this, I will discuss some of the key theorists that I bring to my work and who will influence the theoretical framework for this project.

**Existing Literature: Theory and Analysis**

**Moral Panic Theory**

From its inception in the early 1970s, the term ‘moral panic’ emerged to become one of the most over utilised sociological concepts in the social sciences. Whilst some have branded the concept as “outdated and generally inadequate” (Horsfield 1997: 1), there can be no doubt that it is a still highly influential theory, particularly within media spheres.

In Folk Devils and Moral Panics, Cohen (1972) analysed the part played by the media, together with the police, in developing a spiral of respectable fear about clashes between ‘mods’ and ‘rockers’ (Reiner 1997: 211). Cohen defined moral panic in this way:

Societies appear to be subject, every now and then, to periods of moral panic. A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylised and stereotypical fashion…; moral barricades are manned…; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and becomes more visible (Cohen 1972: 9).
An influential aspect of Cohen’s theory is the view that “the media create deviant behaviour by publicising incidents, amplifying their potency, and triggering off a contagion effect” (Horsfield 1997: 1). Cohen stressed that the media was an especially important carrier and producer of moral panics (Hunt 1997: 631). This is something that has been alluded to by some of those who have studied police-media relationships (Freckelton 1988; Reiner 1997; Wilson 1992; see also Hall et al 1978 for a comprehensive look at moral panic and the media).

In recent times, a number of questions have been asked about the place of moral panic in contemporary society: a risk society (Horsfield 1997; Ungar 2001). Whilst supporters of the term have argued that it is every bit as relevant now as it was in the 1960s (Hunt 1997: 644), others, such as Ungar (2001) believe society has changed significantly and, along with them, the phenomena associated with outbreaks of public concern (Ungar 2001: 271). This is important for the analysis of police-media relations because the creation of moral panics is often associated not only with media commentary, but also police rhetoric. Both are accused of overreacting to certain conditions in society, which can have benefits for both parties: the media in terms of sales, and the police in terms of public policy and political agenda (as discussed by Rowe 2007 in relation to the Melbourne heroin epidemic in the mid-1990s).

Ungar (2001) believes that alongside the classic concept of moral panic, a new field has emerged along with new, scientific social anxieties. The concept is known as the ‘risk society’ (see Beck 1992). With the proliferation of the mass media and the attendant capacity of folk devils to fight back, the potential for moral panics has been
sharply curtailed, according to Ungar (2001: 274). He also states that moral panic has always been conceptualised quite narrowly, thereby only encompassing a small number of social problems (Ungar 2001: 276). In contrast to this, the risk society tends to deal with more diverse issues and interest groups contending over scientific claims (Ungar 2001: 277). This notion of the risk society will be discussed in greater detail in the following pages.

While the concept of ‘moral panic’ has some value in assessing specific aspects of the police-media relationship, as a way of understanding the overall relationship between the police and the media, and the emergence of professionalised media relations units within policing agencies, its applicability is limited. As such, this theory is not seen as being able to provide a comprehensive way of analysing and understanding those areas that are the focus of this thesis.

**Organisational Theory**

In their analysis of police-media relations, Skolnick and McCoy (1984: 521) explore the role that the media play in generating police accountability through reporting. Skolnick and McCoy (1984: 549) argue that the media have the potential to ‘check’ the police, but for a variety of reasons, seem reluctant to report matters beyond the usual ‘crime reporting’. For the authors, this suggested a focus on police productivity that vastly overshadowed the governmental or organisational side of policing in media reportage (Skolnick and McCoy 1984: 522). Consequently, Skolnick and McCoy (1984: 550) propose that the media should supplement their usual style of reporting with explanations of how policing institutions are designed and operate. This in turn is said to educate citizens, who acquire much of their knowledge from
the media, and allow for some self-governing to occur within policing organisations
(Skolnick and McCoy 1984: 551). Skolnick and McCoy posit that organisational
theory therefore offers some forms of analysis for newsgathering and reporting

Similarly, I believe there is some value in looking at the suggestions of Skolnick and
McCoy in analysing the broader impact of police media relations. As a theory on its
own, however, theirs does not allow for the macro level of analysis that this thesis is
seeking. Keeping this in mind, the propositions put forward by Skolnick and McCoy
will be useful in interpreting various aspects of the thesis.

**Image Construction, Impression Management and Legitimisation**

Some of the most frequently deployed theories on police-media relations and PMUs
deal with the ways in which the police manage their image and legitimate their role
through the media. For example Lovell (2002) found in his research that impression
management was one of the key elements to a successful image of policing
organisations. His findings suggested that the quality of a police department’s image
had little to do with crime rates and more to do with how crime news and
information was managed (Lovell 2002: iv). Departments that encouraged more open
communication with reporters within all levels of the organisation detailed a more
favourable media image (Lovell 2002: iv).

Lovell contended that this impression management required police departments to
proactively promote aspects of policing that would enhance a favourable image
(2002: 128). Lovell, employing Goffman’s theoretical model of social performances,
argued that for policing organisations to be successful, they required three skills within routine impression management: dramaturgical loyalty, requiring “actors to maintain character roles at designated times and display a commitment to those responsible for maintaining public appearances” (Lovell 2002: 131); dramaturgical discipline, whereby “social actors must be adept at convincing audiences of the authenticity of their performances” (Lovell 2002: 137), and; circumspective framing, where an ‘actor’ may be required to operate “without the safety net of a script even while staging a routine performance” (Lovell 2002: 141).

In their research, Motschall and Cao (2002) surveyed the communication techniques and functions of public information officers. Their analysis was based upon the public relations techniques employed by public information officers in their daily duties. What emerged from Motschall and Cao’s (2002: 174) study was that Public Information Officers use management-oriented public relations techniques that go beyond basic public relations knowledge. This was found to reflect the educational backgrounds of the public information officers, who quite often had training in such areas. Motschall and Cao (2002: 177) furthermore asserted that a ‘two-way’ model of public relations was employed within PMUs, a signal of a more open system of communication operating within law enforcement agencies.

Other authors to explore similar ideas of image construction and legitimisation in relation to the police are Reiner (1997; 2000b; 2000c), Mawby (1998; 2001a; 2002a; 2002b; 2003), and Chan (1997; 1999), all of whom have alluded to such theoretical constructs in their writings on police-media relations.
These works have much to offer in analysing certain aspects and outcomes of the relationship between the police and the media. There is room, however, for a more sophisticated way of analysing the relationship, in the wake of the growing use of media units, which will allow for these phenomenon to be incorporated into the ‘bigger picture’.

**Risk Society**

More recently, the risk society concept, first articulated by Beck (1992), has been developed by Canadian criminologist, Richard V. Ericson. As previously noted, Ericson has written a number of texts dealing with issues of policing and the media (Ericson 1982, 1989, 1991; 1994; Ericson, Baranek and Chan 1987, 1989, 1991; Ericson and Haggerty 1997). Ericson’s development of the risk society thesis was dealt with in a text co-authored by Kevin Haggerty, known as Policing the Risk Society (Ericson and Haggerty 1997). This body of work offers “a fundamental reassessment of how we think about police” (Ericson and Haggerty 1997: 3) in late modern risk societies. By reflecting critically on previous literature on policing, Ericson and Haggerty (1997) argue that “policing and the society in which it takes place are best understood in terms of a risk model of communication” (Ericson and Haggerty 1997: 3). In this sense, Ericson and Haggerty contend that the administrative apparatus of policing is constituted by communication systems developed to identify and manage risks (Brodeur 1998: 455; Ericson and Haggerty 1997: 3-4).

Police are seen as one of many institutions concerned with the detection and management of risk, which has shifted the traditional police focus on crime control
to one of risk management (Mastrofski 1999: 1539-1540). As such, the core methodology of policing goes beyond coercion into the realms of surveillance and the processing and dissemination of risk knowledge to other institutions. This has implications for policing, as police are held up as pivotal brokers of knowledge in the risk society (Punch 1999: 199). This is evident in the policy documents of NSW Police Force, whereby one of their major roles is to “reduce unnecessary fear” within the community, which is done through the dissemination of information (NSW Police 2002a). Ericson and Haggerty maintain that this ‘risk’ condition, and the transformations this condition has made on police work and organisation, offers a new paradigm for the study of policing (O’Malley 1999: 138). Although the authors do not focus specifically on the media in their work, the logical conclusion to their thesis would be that the media play a pivotal role in the dissemination and communication of risks. The work of Ericson and Haggerty is potentially very fruitful when looking at the police-media relationship and the growth of professional media relations units.

**Governmentality**

Foucault’s model of analysing governmentality, as outlined by O’Malley (1999) is another way of interpreting the relationship between the police and the media. Foucault first addressed the notion of ‘governmentality’ in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Governmentality, for Foucault, referred to the changes in technologies of, and attitudes towards, governing, and the consequences of these changes on society: namely the increasing regulation of citizens by the state and its institutions, and in

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15 In this sense police are seen as collators and distributors of knowledge and information on ‘risks’.
turn, the regulation of individuals in regards to their own behaviour (Danaher, Schirato and Webb 2000).

It has been argued by Stenson (1993; 2001), O’Malley (1992; 2001) and others that contemporary changes in policing and crime control are, in part, due to the “construction of a compact but much stronger state that rules ‘at a distance’ and seeks to autonomise and entrepreneurialise individual citizens” (McLaughlin and Murji 2001: 106). These rationalities are typified by ideals of efficiency, accountability and professionalism, all of which can be seen in the way modern day Australian police organisations imagine themselves. This move has seen police change from ‘autonomous’ organisations, characterised by notions to ‘serve and protect’, to being focused on developing ‘partnerships’ with the ‘community’ and creating ‘responsible’ citizens.

**Culture of Control**

Following in the tradition of the work of Foucault is the work of David Garland. Of particular interest is his thesis on the contemporary cultures of control, which he has used to explore the development of crime control and criminal justice in the UK and USA. While Garland’s text The Culture of Control uses a ‘big picture’ analysis to explore the various principles and ways of thinking that underlie crime control and criminal justice, his analysis is no less useful when looking at a particular element of the criminal justice system: the police. The author himself acknowledges that more focused case studies, whilst obviously not necessarily generalisable to the bigger picture of crime control, are achievable and have much to offer in terms of “empirical specificity and local detail” (Garland 2001: vii). As such, I propose to use
the work of David Garland (2001) and his ‘culture of control’ thesis, as a way of exploring the relationship between the police and the media, and the impact of professional PMUs on this relationship, as outlined in the research questions. Garland’s work allows for many of the perspectives and discourses outlined in the theories above to be included in this analysis, and as such allows for a more macro level approach to be taken towards understanding the research questions put forward.

In his text, The Culture of Control: Crime and Social Order in Contemporary Society Garland (2001: vii) proposes to demonstrate how over the past thirty years or so, social, cultural and political forces have given rise to developments within crime control and the criminal justice system in Britain and the USA. As Garland (2001: 23) highlights, to understand how we have come to where we are today in the criminal justice system, it is important to look not only at the big picture, but also the local detail: to produce a history of the present. Just as Mawby (2001c; 2002a) recognised in his work on police-media relations, Garland (2001: 23) also highlights the “continuity and discontinuity” in the “field of practices, discourses and representations” of criminal justice more broadly. His recognition of the “multiple structures, strategies and rationalities” within the field of criminal justice on a broad level, can be equally as applicable to the complex and multi-dimensional nature of the relationship police and media representatives have with one another, particularly with the advent of professional PMUs within policing agencies. Just as a review of the existing literature has identified a need to move away from antagonistic or one-dimensional explanations for the condition of the police-media relationship, Garland (2001) too warns for the need to resist “simplified dualisms” in his own studies. As such, the value in his theory is that it is not trying to essentialise the history of the
present criminal justice system, in the same way that this thesis does not want to 
esentialise the police-media relationship.

Each of the above theories has important aspects to offer, and I believe that this 
research is best served by taking a critical, multi-theoretical approach. This is 
because police-media relations, and the emergence of professional PMUs within 
policing organisations, are complex, multi-faceted areas that cannot simply be 
explored through one theoretical perspective. It has been argued previously by this 
author (McGovern 2004; McGovern and Lee 2006) that there is the potential for 
police-media relations to be analysed in a governmental fashion, by looking at the 
tactics, techniques and technologies of governance employed within PMUs. 
Furthermore, some of the broader, macro-level theories surrounding the late modern 
condition, and the ways in which aspects of power and control play a role in criminal 
justice systems of today also offer a potentially useful way of understanding the 
many levels of this field of research.

Method

Methods are sets of specific techniques for selecting 
cases, measuring and observing aspects of social life, 
gathering and refining data, analysing the data, and 
reporting on results (Neuman 2006: 2).

To date there has been a limited amount of investigation of PMUs; it was therefore 
necessary for this research project to have a flexible research design, in order to try 
and capture a wide range of data and information on an area of policing about which 
little is known. The methodologies chosen aimed to collate qualitative research data
that generated a broad spectrum of information specific to the research area, as opposed to focusing on information that would generate any sort of statistical or quantitative outcomes (Robson 2002). The approach taken towards the fieldwork component of this project was an ethnographic analysis of the NSW PMU. An ethnographic study “seeks to capture, interpret and explain how a group, organisation or community live, experience and make sense of their lives and their world” (Robson 2002: 89). In doing so it seeks to answer specific questions about a particular group, analysing data that involves explicit interpretations of meanings and functions (Silverman 2001: 56; McLaughlin and Muncie 2001; Robson 2002). The methodologies were selected to try and understand how structures operate, how people interact with one another and what underlying mechanisms and mentalities characterised the relationships being examined.

Using an ethnographic approach, has allowed the researcher to obtain a ‘true-to-life’ understanding of police-media relations by becoming become immersed in the day-to-day activities of journalists and PMU staff, and a detailed understanding of the culture of police-media relations as understood by those who “inhabit it” (Garland 1999: 34; Robson 2002).

Ethnographic research quite often takes a multi or mixed-method approach towards the collection of data (Hall 2005; Robson 2002) and, indeed, this was the case in this project. Mixed methods allowed for the researcher to have a higher degree of flexibility in exploring the research questions (Hall 2005), and this ended up being very important for the project. Additionally, the use of multiple methods allowed for
the triangulation of the research findings, which makes for stronger and more valid findings (Hall 2005; Jupp 1989; Neuman 2000).

It was initially my intention to carry out three different methods of enquiry in relation to this project: interviews with key stakeholders of the police-media relationship, observations of the NSW PMU, and documentary analysis of police documents and other materials to trace the historical development of the NSW PMU. For reasons that will be discussed later in this thesis, the potentially fruitful method of observing the happenings of the PMU did not eventuate in any substantive way. As a result, there were two predominant methods employed in this thesis, both of which were aimed at acquiring an understanding of the NSW PMU and the broader role it plays in police-media relations, as well as trying to understand individual experiences in the relationships between police and reporters.

The first method carried out was an analysis of official NSW Police Force documents, together with supplementary historical data from various periods in time relating to these police documents. Written documents played an important role in the research, as they provided the primary source for the historical account and context, developing an understanding of what is important to the organisations at the centre of the research. The second element of fieldwork conducted was a series of semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders of the police-media relationship, with a specific focus on the NSW Police Force condition. This method was employed because it would allow interviewees to freely express their understanding and perspectives on a variety of questions and provide richer data than structured interviews or surveys would permit. During this stage interviews were conducted
with NSW PMU staff, official and/or political representatives that work with and amongst the Unit or have some interest in policing in an official capacity, former employees of the PMU, crime reporters and police journalists who work closely with the Unit, and freelance journalists who report on crime issues. The following is a detailed account of the methods employed and the procedures by which they were carried out.

**Document Analysis**

Collection, review, interrogation, and analysis of various forms of text as a primary source of research data (O’Leary 2004: 177).

The decision to conduct a document analysis as a method of enquiry in this thesis began from a recognition of the paucity of information in the field about the emergence and development of media relations units generally, and specifically the NSW PMU. As such, initial searches were exploratory in nature, aiming to locate any information pertaining to the NSW PMU and its history. Following this, searches became more directed at finding information about the social, cultural and political conditions that prevailed throughout the history of the Unit.

In this method the main distinguishing feature between document analysis and other forms of fieldwork such as interviews or observations is that the documents in this case are “pre-produced”, generated by sources other than the researcher (O’Leary 2004). The documents examined during the research were produced for purposes other than the present research project. The documents most commonly used in this analysis were public documents, such as media articles and reports of inquiries;
personal documents, such as autobiographies; administrative documents, such as official reports, annual reports, policy guides, and progress reports; and formal studies and reports related to the topic, such as the Media Effectiveness Survey carried out by NSW Police Service (NSW Police Media Unit 1990) (see Table 1 for a more detailed outline of the types of documents utilised). The documents analysed were written from a number of perspectives, ranging from contemporary comments at the time of certain events; retrospective documents relating to past events; primary documents detailing eye witness accounts, and; secondary documents deriving from a primary source (Saratanks 1993a).

In this form of method the researcher is “limited to gathering, reviewing and interrogating the relevant documents” (O’Leary 2004: 177). As such, the analysis was primarily “descriptive-comparative research”, whereby a variety of documents were examined in an attempt to explore and explain the event in question. The primary question being asked of the documents was about the condition of emergence of the NSW PMU, and the social, political and cultural context from which it emerged (Saratanks 1993a: 275).

**The Process**

As outlined by Saratanks (1993a: 276), there are four stages to documentary analysis:
**Stage 1: Identification of Relevant Documents**

Document analysis involves using documents, such as newspaper articles, historical archives and so on, as a source of data (O’Leary 2004). The documents employed in this research were varied, and sourced from a number of categories. Utilising the document type categories as outlined by O’Leary (2004) the below table details the documents used.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document Category</th>
<th>Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Authoritative Sources:** must include ‘unbiased’ sources such as censuses, surveys, books, journals, independent inquiries and reports produced by authorities. | • Independent commissions of inquiry e.g. Lusher Inquiry, Independent Commission Against Corruption inquiries, Police Integrity Commission inquiries, Ombudsman investigations  
   • Memoirs, biographies and police books e.g. Avery’s (1981) Police Force or Service? and Peter Ryan’s biography (Williams 2002)  
   • Annual and other reports e.g. NSW Police Force Annual Reports |
| **The Party Line:** documents that have an ‘agenda’, such as political campaign materials, promotional material and surveys. | • Promotional material, such as Police and Union journals and publications, Police Media Releases, police advertisements  
   • Police journals  
   • Surveys, such as the Police Media Effectiveness Survey (NSW Police Media Unit 1990)  
   • Websites, such as the NSW Police Force Website (2007; 2008)  
   • Police media policies |
| **Personal Communication:** may include letters, emails, and memoranda. | • Communications with past and present police via conversation and email |
| **Multimedia:** refers to newspaper or magazine articles, current affairs shows and news reports. | • Newspaper articles  
   • Television news programs such as Media Watch  
   • Other articles and reports |
<p>| <strong>Historical Documents:</strong> such as organisational records, policy documents | • Policy documents, such as the NSW Police Force Media Policy |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Document Category</strong></th>
<th><strong>Sources</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>or any of the above materials from a particular historical period.</td>
<td>(NSW Police 1994; 2002a; 2004a; 2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Books detailing history of NSW Police Force and Police Unions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Speeches given by prominent figures in the history of the NSW Police Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Organisational records such as Annual Reports</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 1:** Document Categories for Analysis Adapted from O’Leary (2004: 178)

Given the lack of previous accrual of such data, one of the most difficult tasks in the initial stages of the documentary analysis was in actually locating documents that pertained to the PMU. Following O’Leary’s checklist, I took the following steps in identifying relevant documents for this step of the analysis:

1. I began by creating a list of documents I wanted to explore;
2. I followed this up by assessing whether or not the documents were publicly available and whether I would need to obtain approval in order to obtain them;
3. I then began the process of seeking out the documents by contacting relevant organisations, such as the NSW Police Force, the NSW Police Union, the NSW Police Academy Library, and the NSW Police Archives to see what documentation they might have that could be passed onto me, and;
4. After assessing what materials I was after and whether they were attainable, I considered what types of data I might wish to extract from the documents (adapted from O’Leary 2004: 179).
Stage 2: Data Collection

This stage of the analysis was dependant on me organising and prioritising the documents that were collected in the initial stage. O’Leary highlights three stages to this phase of the fieldwork:

1. Firstly the material needs to be gathered. This follows on from Stage 1 of the process, and incorporates the actual act of obtaining the documents;
2. Develop and employ a scheme for organising and managing the documents, and;

This stage was quite time consuming and began as a search of all official police reports that were available to me, together with newspaper archival searches, searches of police and union journals, academic and other journals and articles, and general internet searches for other relevant materials. These were mostly restricted to online annual reports, which were limited in their content and historical context. The lack of relevant data led me to contact Archivists at the NSW Police Force, who searched through their records and located any information they could that pertained to the NSW PMU and its predecessors. The only limitation to this was that I had to trust in what they had located and sent me and that nothing had been overlooked. The identification of these official documents then led to further document gathering, including documents from the NSW Police Academy library, memoirs, and other historical documents, for information to contextualise the data.

Once all the data had been gathered I then categorised the documents chronologically, and followed this up with an annotation of what was obtained and what potential gaps there were in the data.
**Stage 3: Data Analysis**

At this stage it was essential to review the documents I had obtained to assess not only the authenticity and credibility of the texts, but to also explore the potential biases and organisational agendas of the material (O'Leary 2004). This meant going beyond simply chronicling the history of the NSW PMU, and examining the social, cultural and political conditions that led to that particular historical development.

According to O’Leary (2004), this involves extracting any background information from the documents, such as the intended audience, author information, the purpose of the document, and the style in which it was written. Beyond this, the content was also examined to determine the various themes of the documents, the issues being portrayed in them, and what historical, social or political information may have been gleaned from them. Such an approach is consistent with the work of Garland (2001), in attempting to understand the macro level within which the NSW PMU operates.

**Stage 4: Interpretation of Findings**

During this stage I attempted to contextualise the documents in relation to the research field in general. This was characterised by an “interview” process carried out on the documents (O'Leary 2004). By this, the document was treated like any other qualitative source of information, where inquiries were made of the documents as were relevant to the research questions posed earlier in the chapter. O’Leary sees this as an iterative and ongoing process of analysis and this was certainly true of how I approached the task. Part of this process involved reflecting upon the data obtained, reviewing sources and content, and considering questions left unanswered by the
documents. At this stage further exploration for documents continued, in order to bring richer material to the data already gathered. This was an important step in the analysis as it took the analysis towards the theoretical underpinnings of the research.

**Advantages and Limitations of Documentary Analysis**

It is important to recognise that in any research project there may be some advantages and limitations faced that impact upon the research being conducted. Advantages may be something as simple as the ease of information accessibility, whilst the limitations may range from methodological problems to the characteristics of the researcher. As long as the researcher is aware of the potential advantages and disadvantages of the research, then he or she may be better prepared for the potential outcomes these may have on the research.

Saratankos (1993b) outlines a number of advantages and disadvantages involved in conducting documentary analysis. The most pertinent advantages for this research project of employing a document analysis are that it allows an aspect of ‘retrospectivity’ to be introduced into the work; it has allowed me to study past events and issues that have been important in building a theoretical understanding of the environment being studied (Saratankos 1993b: 277). It has also been beneficial in that through the use of such documents, information has been obtained which would otherwise have gone undiscovered given the paucity of information available.

There are, however, a number of identifiable limitations in conducting a document analysis, the most important of which is that an inherent bias built into any official documentation, such as the data retrieved from the NSW Police Force archives. Such
Biases can lead to questions of reliability in the data, not in the sense that it is necessarily false or incorrect, but that it is being presented from a particular organisational viewpoint, which naturally may lead to the omission of information important to the researcher. As Stenson (1999: 56) highlights, reliance upon archival or other textual and documentary data “tends to highlight the more institutionalized forms of professional knowledge which have been assembled and authorised within professional networks”, silencing or downplaying alternative, non-official discourses. As a result, it is acknowledged that data gleaned from documentary sources are in some ways incomplete, with one dominant voice, the NSW Police Force, dictating the content of the documents.

Despite this, the documentary analysis of information pertaining to the background and history of the NSW PMU was an extremely important part of the research. In fact, recognising the potential biases or organisational slants in the documents analysed, allowed for a more theoretically rich understanding of the history of the PMU and police-media interactions. Institutional discourses are an extremely important element of creating an understanding of the socio-political standpoints that feed into the criminal justice system. As such, these are conducive in contributing towards the theoretical aspects of the thesis. According to Layder (1993: 101), “history represents the temporal dimension through which all the other elements move…it is especially important to incorporate processes of change in the forms of power and domination”. As such, the documentary analysis phase was complemented by the data obtained during the interview phase of the fieldwork, which garnered information from a number of key stakeholders from a range of fields relevant to the police-media relationship and NSW PMU. Recognition of the
potential problems associated with this method is the first step in pre-empting and rectifying them.

The outcome of this document analysis can be seen in Chapter Three, Background to the NSW Police Media Unit, which details the development of the NSW PMU.

**Key Stakeholder Interviews**

The second of the methods involved a number of semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders in the police-media relationship. These key stakeholders, identified by the researcher, were made up of these categories:

1. Members of the NSW Police Force, specifically members of the PMU;
2. Former staff from the PMU;
3. Police and crime reporters/journalists, and;
4. Politicians.

The interview technique for this project took the form of semi-structured interviews [see Appendix A for Interview Schedules]. These interviews were primarily qualitative; they examined the social world of the respondents, relationships and situations (Denzin and Lincoln 2000: 8). Less important was a rigorous examination and measurement of police-media relations that a quantitative analysis would offer, as it was not the aim of this research to quantify the data obtained through these interviews. Rather, the intention was to draw out some common themes from the interviews, linking this data with data from the document analysis, as well as relating

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16 Those individuals who are affected by or have a particular interest or concern with an issue or activity.
it to broader macro level theoretical understandings of police media relations and the role of PMUs.

During the interviews a range of major themes were addressed, and a number of probing questions used to obtain further information (Burgess 1982: 107). Themes explored included:

- Experience as a journalist/Media Unit staffer;
- Importance of positive police-media relations;
- Changes in the police-media relationship over time;
- Understanding of the function/role of the NSW PMU;
- Level and nature of contact between stakeholders in the relationship;
- Quality of the relationship, and;
- Power balance of the relationship [see Appendix A for Interview Schedules].

By using a semi-structured format more freedom and flexibility was afforded to the researcher and the interviewees (Saratankos 1993a: 178, 182). This led to the collection of information that perhaps would not have come across in structured interviews.

It was the initial aim of this researcher to conduct interviews with all of the staff working within the NSW PMU. Due to a variety of restrictions faced, explored later in this chapter, this was not possible. A sample of six staff members from a total of twenty five working within the current Unit were interviewed. In addition, six individuals who had formerly worked within the PMU or related areas were also interviewed in relation to their role within the Unit. Using a purposive sampling
technique, as outlined below, meant that I was able to determine persons of interest and approach them directly and to request their involvement in the project.

Journalists interviewed for the project were identified via their work, either because they identified as police or crime reporters, or because they regularly wrote or presented material about crime and policing matters. As detailed in the following section, these journalists were sourced from a range of media, including television, radio and print. There was no particular quota for the number of interviews I wanted to achieve, my approach was rather to contact as many Sydney-based journalists in the field as I could, and hope that they would respond positively.

Sample

A method of sampling commonly used within case studies and ethnographies is that of ‘purposive sampling’ (Robson 1993: 142). Purposive sampling is a way of recruiting participants for a research project based upon the researcher’s judgement as to typicality or interest, because it illustrates some feature or process of importance (Robson 1993: 141; Silverman 2001: 250).

Given the specific nature of the project in using the NSW PMU as a case study, it was important to employ purposive sampling as the primary method for the recruitment of participants for this project. Purposive sampling is aimed at selecting participants representative of a specific set of characteristics or with a specific purpose in mind (Robson 1993: 141; Neuman 2000). According to Neuman (2000: 198) purposive sampling is appropriate in three situations:
1. In selective cases that are especially informative;
2. To select members of a “difficult-to-reach”, specialised population, and/or;
3. When a researcher wants to identify particular types of cases for in-depth investigation.

As the NSW PMU had been selected as the main site of study, and the main aim of the interviews was to enable the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the nuances of the relationships between journalists and police in NSW, purposive sampling was a key method of allowing key stakeholders and relevant individuals in these relationships to be approached to participate. Once a decision was made to employ such a sampling method, individuals identified as key stakeholders were approached and invited to partake in semi-structured interviews [see Appendix B Information Sheet].

**Interviewee Characteristics**

Given the relatively small pool from which interviewees were chosen, the anonymity of participants was an important condition of their participation in the research. It is, however, possible to give a broad account of the characteristics of those interviewed based upon information garnered through the interview process. This information reveals much about the standpoints and experiences from which the interviewees come, and adds another layer to the strong interrelationships in the police-media nexus.

A total of 26 interviews were conducted with members of the PMU, former staff from the PMU, police and crime reporters/journalists and politicians. The table
below (Table 2) outlines who was interviewed and the areas from which they were sourced.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Journalists</strong></td>
<td>16*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Print</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Current Police Media Unit Staff</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sworn Officers</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civilians</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ex-Police Media Unit Staff/Other</strong></td>
<td>7*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>29*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Interviewee Fields and Totals

Due to the condition of anonymity of the participants involved in the interview process, each individual interviewed was given a code by which they will be referred for the remainder of this thesis. Some individuals interviewed had worked within the journalistic field, as well as within the NSW PMU or other relevant governmental role. To protect their identities, these individuals were classified as two separate interviewees. This means that when interview data is presented, their experiences as a journalist are denoted by them being identified under a journalist analysis code, but when data is presented about their experiences as a former Media Unit Officer or otherwise, this is similarly denoted by categorising them under the NSW PMU/Other analysis code.

* Totals for journalists do not add up due to the multiple media formats some journalists have worked across.
* Totals for Ex-PMU Staff/Other do not add up due to individuals working within more than one field.
* Total does not correspond with total number of interviews conducted, as some individuals were counted in more than one field. This was done to protect the identities of participants, as signifying the one person as working across more than one field would make them easily identifiable given the small number of individuals within these fields.
Journalists

The journalists who participated in the research were from a range of reporting fields and included General Reporters, Police Reporters, Senior Crime Reporters, Newsroom Managers, Political Commentators and Investigative Reporters. These journalists worked across a range of media formats including television, radio, print and freelance industries. It was quite common for interviewees to have worked in more than one industry during the various stages of their career, and a few had even worked on the ‘other side of the fence’, as press and media advisors for the NSW Police Force specifically, or the state government in general.

Those interviewed also had a range of career experiences as crime reporters, with time in the job ranging from a few months to over forty years’ reporting. In total the journalists interviewed had over 300 years of experience in the field of crime reporting. Table 3 details the codes by which the journalists are identified in the thesis, together with the media format they currently work or had previously worked within.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analysis Code</th>
<th>Field</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Journalist 1</td>
<td>Newspaper/Other Print</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalist 2</td>
<td>Television/Other Print</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalist 3</td>
<td>Television/Other Print</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalist 4</td>
<td>Newspaper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalist 5</td>
<td>Newspaper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalist 6</td>
<td>Radio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalist 7</td>
<td>Newspaper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalist 8</td>
<td>Newspaper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalist 9</td>
<td>Other Print/Television</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalist 10</td>
<td>Newspaper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalist 11</td>
<td>Newspaper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalist 12</td>
<td>Television/Other Print</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Current and Former Police Media Unit Staff

The current PMU staff who participated in the research identified from both civilian and sworn categories; that is, participants consisted of those who were sworn NSW Police Force officers, who were seconded or had chosen to work within the PMU for part of their career, as well as civilian staff, who were sourced from the general community to work within the PMU.

Of the sworn staff working in the Unit that were interviewed, time spent within the Unit ranged from months to many years, and followed time working previously in general police duties and other operational positions. Of the unsworn staff, all had previously worked in the media and been trained in journalism outside of the PMU. Many had worked in positions akin to the journalists and reporters interviewed so, like these journalists, civilian staff within the PMU had experienced life on the ‘other side of the fence’.

Of the other stakeholders in the relationship, many were employed formerly as PMU staff, in the political arena, as Media Advisors or politicians specifically working within the realms of policing and law and order or across all of these arenas. As was found with the journalist category, work experience crossed over a number of fields.
during individuals’ careers. Tables 4 and 5 detail the codes by which the current and former PMU staff and other stakeholders are identified by within the thesis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analysis Code</th>
<th>Field</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ex-PMU/Other 1</td>
<td>Politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ex-PMU/Other 2</td>
<td>Politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ex-PMU/Other 3</td>
<td>Police</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ex-PMU/Other 4</td>
<td>Police/Politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ex-PMU/Other 5</td>
<td>Police</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ex-PMU/Other 6</td>
<td>Police</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW Shadow Police Minister</td>
<td>Politics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Ex-Police Media Unit/Other Code Names

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analysis Code</th>
<th>Field</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PMU Staffer 1</td>
<td>Civilian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PMU Staffer 2</td>
<td>Police</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PMU Staffer 3</td>
<td>Police</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PMU Staffer 4</td>
<td>Police</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PMU Staffer 5</td>
<td>Civilian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PMU Staffer 6</td>
<td>Civilian</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Police Media Unit Staff Code Names

The Process

Identification of Key Stakeholders

The first step in carrying out this method was to identify who I wanted to interview. For this project it was decided to interview those with the closest connections to the NSW police-media relationship, that being crime and police reporters from all media formats in NSW and the Sydney metropolitan area. Given the prominent role the NSW PMU presumably played in this relationship, I identified PMU staff as important stakeholders to interview. I was also open to interviewing those on the fringe of these relationships, so I identified past PMU staff and political figures.

17 The Shadow Minister opted to be identified in his Consent Form, although his name will not be specified in the thesis.
involved in law and order positions as potential interviewees. This strategy was also recommended by other participants.

Upon identifying the key stakeholders, contact was made with each of the key figures. For PMU staff it involved liaising with NSW Police to arrange interviews; for journalists, it involved contacting relevant individuals directly, via email, by telephoning them, or often through the assistance of other journalists who initiated contact with their colleagues. This was a time consuming process, with individuals and the police often having to be contacted on numerous occasions to ascertain consent and arrange suitable times and locations for interviews.

**Interview Process**

Once key informants were identified, a standardised interview schedule was developed [see Appendix A] based upon a range of chief areas of interest that would assist in answering the research questions about the PMU and police media relations. As interviews were semi-structured in format, questions were arranged within key themes, with prompts and allowances made for variation to the schedule. Interview schedules were slightly modified for each journalist interviewed based on background research into the journalist and the media formats they had worked within. Interview schedules for current and former PMU staff remained for the most part unaltered, but there was scope in the schedule for individuals to elaborate on their previous experiences outside the Unit, such as in the fields of journalism or politics.
All interviews were conducted in an environment selected by the participant, with the nominated Information and Consent Forms provided, read and signed by interviewees [see Appendix B and C for copies of the Information and Consent Form]. All interviews were recorded on tape with the permission of participants and transcribed at a later stage. Participants were notified of their prerogative to withdraw consent for the use of the interview at any time, although none of the interviewees took up this option.

**Interview Analysis**

Once all the interviews were transcribed, they were thematised and categorised. This involved reading through the transcripts and identifying general categories and common themes that emerged from the interview data. The decision was made to categorise, code and thematise the data manually. Carrying the analysis out manually made it easier to engage with the data and preempt its interpretation. While I initially had planned to make use of the NVIVO software program to input and code the data, a system which has a number of benefits, I found this process to be cumbersome and more difficult to manage than manual coding. By manually coding the data, I also felt that I was better able to retain the context of the data, allowing me to better analyse the data on both the micro and macro levels of theorizing (Welsh 2002). Given that the thesis was not taking a grounded approach, there were no theoretical issues in deciding not to use the program.
Interpretation of Interview Data

In order to interpret the data, the themes and categories of analysis from each interview transcript were compiled into one document for each of the major themes that emerged. These themes were then contrasted and compared with the theoretical positions of the key theorists as outlined in earlier chapter. The emergent themes were then placed into broader categories that allowed for discussion to emerge around the themes. These themes and categories are explored in the following chapters of the thesis, particularly Chapters Four, Five and Six, which represent the three overarching premises that emerged from the data.

Advantages and Limitations of Key Stakeholder Interviews

There are a number of recognised advantages and limitations to conducting interviews as a method of inquiry. Wilson and Sapsford (2006) and Creswell (1994) believe that one-on-one interviews, like those conducted in this study, allow for the researcher to have more control over an interview than methods such as surveys permit. In this scenario, an experienced interviewer has the ability to encourage answers from the respondent by using prompts and other tools that would not be feasible in self-administered methods. Utilising a semi-structured format for the interview schedule was a particularly important element to preserving this ability for the researcher to guide and control the interviews, whilst also allowing the interviewee to elaborate on details.

There are, however, a number of recognised limitations to conducting interviews as a form of inquiry. Much of the literature on interview methods warns researchers on the potential practical problems facing them during the fieldwork process. For
example, Easterday, Papademas, Schorr and Valentine (1982: 62-64) highlight a number of potential issues in interviews with relation to gender, which include:

- The establishment and maintenance of a rapport with interviewees;
- Sexual, cultural, status and power issues when men and women interact, and;
- Hustling or patronising of female interviewers by male interviewees.

As a female entering a male dominated environment, I recognised that there was the potential for me to experience problems interviewing male participants. I was fortunate, however, not to encounter any such problems. In fact, the interview method itself was a relatively trouble free process, particularly in comparison with the actual process of negotiating access to participants in the field (see later in this chapter for a detailed discussion on this).

Neuman (2006) has also discussed some of the disadvantages of conducting face-to-face interviews, and has identified the biggest hurdle as the costs involved. These costs, according to Neuman (2006: 301, 309), can be both financial and personal in nature: financially, travelling to and attending the interviews can be costly; personally, interviewer bias can be costly to the research project, with things such as factual errors, making mistakes or forgetting information, the use of leading questions, the failure to use probes, or the interviewer’s influence on answers due to his/her appearance, attitude, reactions to answers, or comments all being potentially harmful to the interview process. Given the semi-structured format of the interviews, and the time and care taken to prepare adequately prior to each interview by researching the respondent and taking the time to present myself in a professional
manner, I believe that I managed to minimise and/or eliminate the potential impact of such interviewer biases. Following the guidelines of Robson (1993: 273-274) I made sure I put in place a number of strategies that I believe allowed interviewees to communicate freely with me, without having my own behaviour impact upon the interviews:

1. The first step in the process was to communicate my expectations with the participant. This involved providing each participant with an Information Sheet and Consent Form prior to the scheduled interview time. These sheets described the nature of my research and my reasons for wanting to interview them. It also highlighted the amount of time I predicted the process to take. Given how time-poor many of my participants were, this was an extremely important piece of information to allow them to decide whether they could commit to the project;

2. During the interviews I was careful to listen to the participants. While this occasionally led to discussion off the specific topic area, the semi-structured format of the interviews allowed me to direct conversation back to the subject without me sounding brash or abrupt;

3. I also ensured that the questions presented to interviewees were straightforward, clear and non-threatening. Coming across as an interested, yet non-threatening interviewer was particularly important, as causing interviewees to become defensive during the process would not have been conducive to obtaining useful data for the project, and;

4. I also ensured that I eliminated information from the schedule that directed the responses of participants. Robson believes that providing particular cues may prompt interviewees to try to please the interviewer. Whilst this was at low risk of occurring with the particular individuals I was interviewing, I was mindful that their responses may in fact be influenced by the particular position they held. For example, PMU staffers were more likely to bring out the usual organisational responses to questions asked, and journalists were likely to present their responses in a sensationalised or journalistic manner.
Another potential limitation highlighted by Silverman (2001) is the method of recording data and then analysing that data at the completion of the fieldwork. It is important to recognise the potential influence various theoretical perspectives may have on the recording and categorisation of data (Silverman 2001: 65), and consequently the analysis of data. As such, it was important to be reflexive throughout the process of the fieldwork being conducted, at all stages and levels of analysis (Jupp 2001).

It was also important to recognise these potential hurdles in the research process and, as the researcher, attempt to negotiate the issues and have a reflexive awareness of how the subjects’ perceptions of myself as the researcher influenced the material obtained (Reiner 2000a: 224).

Limitations must also be recognised in the theoretical perspective being employed during the fieldwork stage. It was important as a researcher that I took care that theoretical presuppositions did not influence the selection and analysis of data (Jupp 1989: 122).

Being aware of the potential limitations involved in conducting semi-structured interviews, and taking measures to minimise or eliminate the potential impact of such limitations, was an important aspect of ensuring that my fieldwork was conducted in the most appropriate and successful fashion. The results of my semi-structured interviews can be seen in Chapters Four, Five and Six.
**Ethical Considerations**

This research adhered to the ethical guidelines set out by the University of Western Sydney Ethics Committee [see Appendix D for a copy of approval], reducing any possible ethical issues that may have been encountered during the course of the project. Research approval was also obtained from the NSW Police Force. Despite discussions relating to a need to sign and complete confidentiality agreements and a research contract, neither of these were forthcoming, despite numerous attempts from the researcher to obtain them from the NSW Police Force. As a consequence, the research was carried out as agreed verbally and via email exchanges, and given that the researcher was adhering to University of Western Sydney ethical requirements and no ethical issues were raised at the time of, or after the research was carried out within the NSW PMU, it is the researcher’s belief that there were no ethical concerns resulting from the fieldwork conducted.

**Research in a Complex Environment: The NSW Police Force**

Traditionally, policing organisations have been ‘closed’ settings, where access is controlled by ‘gatekeepers’. Despite a growing emphasis on openness, accountability and transparency within these policing organisations, there is still an element of these organisations operating as ‘closed’ environments, especially in regards to external researchers, who may be perceived as challenging their role or status (Silverman 2001: 57). As Dixon (1999a: 94) suggests, openness in administration:

…continues to be a problem in Australian police services: some officers still apparently believe that the sky will fall if… researchers have access to the institution. [This manifests] not so much in flat
refusals to cooperate, but rather in seemingly endless swamps of bureaucracy and responsibility-shifting (Dixon 1999a: 94).

Like many before me (see Brookman 1999; Fox and Lundman 1974; Punch 1993; Punch 1989), two of the biggest limitations faced in this research were, gaining access to the NSW PMU, and gaining the trust and cooperation of officers once ensconced within the research setting. Access to the NSW PMU involved a long and drawn out process of negotiation with NSW Police Force, not unlike that described by Dixon above.

**Negotiating Access to the NSW Police Force Media Unit: A Personal Research Experience**

Once I decided upon this project I went through the formal channels of the NSW Police Force in order to obtain approval for my research. At this stage I had decided upon a unique research schedule unlike anything that had been carried out previously in Australia. The major component of my fieldwork revolved around accessing the NSW PMU and conducting a series of interviews with all of the staff. On top of this I planned to conduct a period of observation within the Unit, to gain an understanding of the ways in which the Unit operates on a day-to-day basis. Silverman (2005: 111, 113) notes that observation is fundamental in understanding culture and behaviour, and as such would provided useful information for understanding the daily activities of the PMU and the processes used by staff in carrying out their duties. Such an approach would have lent itself to the ethnographic approach of the thesis. Sixty hours was the figure decided upon for this method, so as to get an accurate representation of the operation of the Unit without the observations impacting too
highly upon the staff, and such a period would have allowed for a more ‘true to life’ understanding of the operations of the NSW PMU (Punch 1993). Unfortunately without the approval for this observation, the thesis was limited by the brief, one-day, tour of the Unit.

**Getting In**

In early May 2005 I contacted Educational Services within the NSW Police Force, who deal with all researcher enquiries and oversee research within the Force. I was advised to submit a Research Application, outlining:

- My ‘Research Program’, including research questions, theoretical orientation, data collection information, intended research outcomes and value of research to the NSW Police Force;
- A copy of my University of Western Sydney Ethics Application, including a draft interview schedule, and;
- A copy of the University Ethics Approval Letter.

This research application was accordingly submitted to the NSW Police Force on the 20\textsuperscript{th} May 2005. By June 2005 I had been informed that I had received official approval from NSW Police to begin my fieldwork in August. Unfortunately, due to the internal politics operating within NSW Police Force, I faced a long and arduous wait for the commencement of my fieldwork, as access was blocked on numerous occasions by individuals within the NSW PMU who quite literally ignored my attempts, and the attempts of the Principal Researcher of Educational Services within NSW Police, to initiate the research schedule. Table 6 outlines the timeline from the time of the submission of my Research Application until the time I concluded my fieldwork within the PMU, detailing the difficulties faced.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Further Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18th May 2005</td>
<td>University ethics phase</td>
<td>Subsequent to an Ethics submission, approval was obtained from the UWS Ethics Committee to conduct fieldwork in the form of interviews and observations within the NSW PMU.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20th May 2005</td>
<td>NSW Police research application submission to Educational Services</td>
<td>After ascertaining the procedure for research approval within the NSW Police Force, a Research Application was sent to the Principal Research Officer of Educational Services NSW Police, outlining my request to conduct interviews and observational research within the NSW PMU. This Application was then forwarded to the Public Affairs Branch, who oversees the NSW PMU, for approval.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28th June 2005</td>
<td>NSW Police conditional research approval notification</td>
<td>I received notification from the Principal Research Officer of Educational Services that my Research Application had been supported with no amendments by the Public Affairs Commander. I was notified at this time that now I was only awaiting formal approval from the Commander of Education Services, which would not take long.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28th July 2005</td>
<td>Follow up with NSW Police Educational Services</td>
<td>I followed up the approval process with an email to the Principal Research Officer, asking if there had been any progress with approval from Education Services. I was informed there had been a delay in writing up my Research Contract, as well as getting the project signed off by the Commander. I was then informed that a contact would be identified for me from within the PMU so I could arrange a preliminary briefing and visit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16th August 2005</td>
<td>Contact initiated with NSW PMU</td>
<td>The Principal Research Officer contacted me with the details for a member of the NSW PMU, whom I was to contact and arrange a briefing. Upon attempting to make contact I was informed the individual was on leave and was put in contact with another officer, who was also away that day. The third person I was put in contact with was also going to be on leave, so I was redirected to a fourth individual. After speaking with this PMU</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

139
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Further Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; September 2005</td>
<td>Follow up with NSW Police Educational Services</td>
<td>I contacted the Principal Research Officer to detail the difficulties getting answers from with the PMU and to again re-confirm that my research had been approved, given that my contact in the PMU was unaware of its approval. The Principal Research Officer assured me again that the research had been approved and informed me that my contact in the PMU would be contacted to confirm the approval of my project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; October 2005</td>
<td>Contacted by NSW Police Educational Services</td>
<td>The Principal Research Officer called me to inform me that my PMU contact was currently on leave so was uncontactable in relation to my research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; October 2005</td>
<td>Contacted by NSW Police Educational Services</td>
<td>The Principal Research Officer contacted me to inform me that the PMU had concerns with my research, despite it already being approved. It was suggested that we set up a meeting with the PMU to discuss some of the concerns they raised. I was told to expect a call from my PMU contact.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; October 2005</td>
<td>Follow up with NSW Police Educational Services and PMU</td>
<td>I decided to contact both the Principal Research Officer of Education Services and my contact within the PMU to set up a meeting rather than wait for a call from my PMU contact who did not return calls. I requested a meeting the following week for the three of us to discuss any issues and hopefully establish a time for me to begin the fieldwork.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; October 2005</td>
<td>Exchange with NSW Police Educational Services and PMU</td>
<td>I contacted both parties and it was agreed that we meet the following Wednesday 19&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; October at 1pm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; October 2005</td>
<td>Last minute meeting cancellation</td>
<td>Shortly before I was to leave for the meeting I was left a message by my PMU contact, who rang me to cancel the meeting. At this point of time the Principal Research Officer of Education Services was already an hour into the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Action</td>
<td>Further Details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; October 2005</td>
<td>Follow up with NSW PMU</td>
<td>I spoke with my PMU contact to discuss rescheduling the meeting. No date was agreed on as we needed to re-confirm the availabilities of the Principal Research Officer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; October 2005</td>
<td>Attempted contacted with NSW PMU</td>
<td>After trying all week to get in touch with my PMU contact, via telephone and email, with no response to either, I contacted the Principal Research Officer who personally tried to chase up the PMU contact to reschedule our meeting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; November 2005</td>
<td>Follow up with NSW Police Educational Services</td>
<td>The Principal Research Officer was able to get hold of my PMU contact but no meeting date was confirmed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; November 2005</td>
<td>Follow up with NSW Police Educational Services</td>
<td>I received communication from the Principal Research Officer informing me that they were having difficulties getting in touch with the PMU contact, who was not answering or returning calls. The Principal Research Officer informed me that they would call my PMU contact’s Supervisor and set up a meeting for Monday 21&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; November. This meeting time was confirmed later that day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; November 2005</td>
<td>Meeting with NSW PMU and Educational Services</td>
<td>The Principal Research Officer and I met with the PMU contact to discuss their concerns with my research. No final decision was made by the end of the meeting in relation to me commencing fieldwork. The PMU contact wanted my Research Proposal, which had already been signed off, to be submitted for re-approval. The Principal Research Officer stated that this was a very unusual step to take, considering approval from the Commander of Public Affairs had already been given. The PMU contact did not change their view and subsequently the process of the approval of the application began again.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; December 2005</td>
<td>Follow up with NSW Police Educational Services</td>
<td>I contacted the Principal Research Officer to enquire about the process of the re-approval of my application. I was</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Action</td>
<td>Further Details</td>
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<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; January 2006</td>
<td>Follow up with NSW Police Educational Services</td>
<td>I contacted the Principal Research Officer to see if there was any news about my Research Proposal resubmission. I was informed that there had been a change in Commanders in the Public Affairs Branch and they would speak to the new Commander soon about my research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; February 2006</td>
<td>Contact with NSW Police Educational Services</td>
<td>The Principal Research Officer contacted me to inform me that my research had been approved by the PMU, but with conditions. It was agreed that I was to be given a tour of the PMU and access to senior staff for interviews. The Principal Research Officer suggested to me that perhaps I should revisit my plan to observe the PMU once this initial stage of fieldwork was conducted, assuming it went well. I was requested to again contact with my PMU contact to instate with the fieldwork. Upon making this call to the PMU I was informed my contact was on leave.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; March 2006</td>
<td>Follow up with NSW Police Educational Services</td>
<td>The Principal Research Officer contacted me, after being notified of my problems getting in touch with my PMU contact. I was informed that my PMU contact had been awaiting my call and apparently had not been passed on any of the messages that either myself or the Principal Research Officer had left. I was also informed my PMU contact wanted a copy of the types of questions I was going to ask staff. This had already been provided some months earlier in the Research Proposal. I rang my PMU contact to organise my fieldwork and it was decided that I would visit the PMU on Monday 20&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; March 2006.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; March 2006</td>
<td>Follow up with NSW PMU</td>
<td>I rang my PMU contact to reconfirm I would visit the PMU on the Monday to conduct my interviews and tour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; March 2006</td>
<td>Visit to NSW PMU</td>
<td>I visited the NSW PMU and conducted two interviews, and was given a tour of the Unit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Action</td>
<td>Further Details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21st March 2006</td>
<td>Visit to NSW PMU</td>
<td>I returned to the PMU to conduct four more interviews with staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30th March 2006</td>
<td>Follow up with NSW PMU</td>
<td>I emailed my PMU contact to give thanks for providing me with the support to conduct my interviews with PMU staff and revisit whether I could carry out the observational element of my research, which had been approved. After further telephone calls and emails, all which went unanswered, it was decided that I would sever contact and accept that part of the project would not be completed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 6: Timeline for Gaining Access to the NSW Police Media Unit**

As demonstrated in the above table, the process for negotiating the fieldwork was challenging. Even after finally gaining access to the NSW PMU to conduct my interviews, further attempts to follow up with the observation aspect of my fieldwork were unsuccessful. As the timeline indicates, my access to the NSW PMU was long and protracted and despite my best efforts to speed the process up and provide the police with as much information and cooperation as was asked for by them, I clearly could not control the fact that I was continually delayed by the PMU in commencing the project. It may not be accurate to determine that these delays were deliberate, or evidence of some concerted attempt to impede my research project, however the experience may be indicative of organisational indifference to the research. My experience, however frustrating, is not a unique one. Many researchers in the past have found dealing with policing organisations across the world a difficult and challenging experience.

As Reiner (2000a) points out, the police may be understandably anxious about the underlying purpose of research and concerned about how they will be represented by the researcher. This may feed into issues of trust of the subjects of research,
potentially influencing how they behave in the presence of the researcher (Reiner 2000a: 219). Horn (1997) has expressed a similar view, arguing that researchers attempting to gain access into a police force were likely to be perceived as ‘spies’. In her own research Horn found she was the subject of much suspicion, especially since she appeared to have gained entry into the field through her connections with senior officers. These associations were viewed more than suspiciously by those whom she was researching, with many police officers believing that she was either a “management spy”, or attempting to “employ underhand methods with the aim of discrediting the police” through the administration of “trick” questionnaires (Horn 1997: 299).

As Brookman notes however, “the ease, or difficulty, with which one is permitted access to sensitive data is dependent upon many factors, several of which appear to owe very little to the value of the research, and more to serendipity, determination and good negotiation skills” (1999: 48). Conversely, Fox and Lundman (1974: 53) viewed gaining research access to police organisations as something more of a process, involving access through two “gates”: the first “gate being top-level administrators of the organisation, and the second being the group of proposed research subjects”. They believed that three key factors were involved in determining whether or not researcher access was attained:

1. The existence of pre-research, informal relations with the top-level administrators of the police organisation;
2. The recognition of patterns of overlapping vertical authority. That is, where formal lines of authority are obscured or not used, acceptance at successive levels of the organisation may not be required, and;
3. Self selection, whereby a decision made by the police organisation at any time during the researcher-organisation contact may be influenced by events in the transition from informal to formal relations. That is, how open the organisation is to external contact and observation (Fox and Lundman 1974: 54).

In this project, contact and relations with top-level administrators, whilst not ‘informal’ in nature, as Fox and Lundman highlight, were quite easily made. When the project was proposed to them, official approval did not take long; I was asked to highlight the benefits the organisation would see from the research, and provide them with an executive summary of the thesis once it was completed. As Fox and Lundman found, however, my problems sourced more from the successive levels of the organisation, namely the PMU. Fox and Lundman (1974: 58) found that:

When observation of organisational activities is focused on the lower levels of a hierarchical structured, those observed can become suspicious that data being gathered are being fed to their superiors.

This mirrors the experiences of Horn, whose research was conducted some twenty years after Fox and Lundman. Whilst in my own study it appeared that the people I proposed to observe and interview were worried about information going to the hierarchy, I believe that they were also concerned with information being ‘leaked’ to the media or other interested parties and potentially affecting their careers in the organisation. I consider this to be reflective of the modern day ideologies of policing organisations, where image and perception, and being seen to do the right thing, are more important than doing the right thing. The potential impact of a media scandal can be highly detrimental to an organisation, and those lower on the hierarchical scale quite often end up being the scapegoats for such failings.
Perhaps some of the challenges I faced in accessing the NSW PMU should have been expected, given the experience of Chappell and Wilson when they attempted to access the NSW Police Force in the 1960s to conduct interviews and surveys on similar themes to this project:

Permission to interview a cross-section of policemen in Victoria, New South Wales, and Western Australia was requested, but refused. The general response from Commissioners of Police or Police Ministers in these states was that “the survey could be embarrassing for the force”. New South Wales stated that they were “considering the request” but two years after the investigators sought permission, the Commissioner had not yet decided on whether the survey should go ahead. Reluctantly we decided not to pursue the matter further with police in that state (Chappell and Wilson 1969: 58).

I felt that in the case of this project, without a sense of determination, the willingness to compromise, and some well timed assistance from my networks, this project may well have easily fallen apart given the numerous misgivings and hurdles put in my way by those who were concerned with my research agenda. The irony was not lost on me however that the very people who were so concerned about my research, and prepared to block my attempts at entering the field, were the very same people charged with negotiating external requests for information and media enquiries on a day to day basis.

Getting On With It

Eventually I was able to obtain access to the NSW PMU. Although the observational aspect of my research was unable to be carried out, I believe it is important here to
document my few hours in the PMU talking with staff, as it gives a greater understanding of the daily running of the Unit, at least in the period of time I was there. It is important to note here that my experience in the PMU is not necessarily typical of what goes on in the PMU. My mere presence would obviously impact on the way in which people acted and reacted. Without the chance to establish myself within the research setting, it was impossible to get a genuine feel for the Unit. Despite this my experience is still useful.

Having read what others had said about how they were viewed in the research setting, in my own experience it was difficult to tell whether I was viewed suspiciously or not. Given the difficulties I faced in attempting to gain access, I was quite suspicious myself of the agenda of the PMU. Like Horn, it seemed to be only through the efforts of Senior Police and other various contacts that I was able to negotiate access to the PMU. Throughout the process of attempting to gain access it became apparent that the PMU either wanted little to do with me, or simply did not see it important to communicate with me when I tried to initiate the research schedule. Despite the challenges I faced in getting the research underway, I perceived no obvious signals of animosity or suspicion towards me from staff within the Unit. Most seemed genuinely willing to help me out, even though most told me that they knew very little about what I was doing there or what they were and were not allowed to tell and show me. Maybe, as Horn (1997: 300) experienced, they viewed me as a “harmless”, “unthreatening” or “slightly incompetent” female, although given the high female ratio within the Unit, perhaps this is too simplistic an evaluation.
I arrived at the Police Executive Offices at 10:00am to meet with my PMU contact. After waiting for twenty minutes I was taken through to the PMU by a woman from another part of the Executive Offices. Upon being introduced to my PMU contact I was taken to an office where it was explained to me that one of the PMU staff would show me the Unit and explain its day to day running. I would then be given the opportunity to interview staff who volunteered to speak with me.

I was then taken through to the PMU where I was sat next to the person who would show me around the Unit. She explained to me the composition of staff in the Unit: twenty three staff, with one on leave, one on secondment, one on special projects, two senior media officers (one uniformed, one civilian), four supervisors working within the operations units, five uniformed officers and nine civilian staff. I was told that police working in the Unit were self-selecting, expressing an interest to work in the Unit. Staff worked four ten hour shifts a week, with a start time of as early as 4:00am. At 4:00am, 5:00am and 6:00am staff of the unit worked on preparing media briefings for the Police Executive staff, and between 4:00am and 6:00am staff on shift worked on Media Releases in time for breakfast radio. During the morning staff were also involved in live radio spots between 5:00am and 7:00am each day. Staff also recorded ‘voice grabs’ for news broadcasts, and organised interviews with on air presenters in relation to specific stories. Requests were also responded to during this period, and anything political in nature was generally referred to the Police Minister’s Office.

Staff working in the Unit overnight had the duty of collating media clippings about various police matters being discussed in the media, particularly the newspapers.
These media clippings were supplemented by a clipping service from the Australian Associated Press (AAP)\textsuperscript{18}, with one staff member commenting that, at $1 per page, the service can cost up to $10,000 a month for AAP to source any media material relating to the NSW Police Force\textsuperscript{19}.

After being given an account of the general workings of the Unit, I was invited to accompany the PMU staffer to observe a media conference. Unlike the majority of media conferences the PMU was involved with, this conference was held at the Sydney Police Centre and was primarily being run by the NSW Premier’s Department, the government department that looks after the affairs of the State Premier of NSW, together with the Office of the NSW Police Minister. The press conference had been called to announce the Premier’s approval to fund a riot water cannon for the NSW Police Force. The PMU were present at the conference because the officer in charge of the NSW Police Force Riot Squad was participating in the press conference, addressing the media on the benefits of the water cannon, as well as answering media queries. Prior to the running of the conference, the PMU staffer briefed the officer, giving him an insight into the questions the media might ask him, and gauging the responses he might offer. The PMU staffer told me that where she thought a more appropriate answer may be given, she advised the officer on this. In the end, however, it was up to the officer as to whether or not he would follow her suggestions. Upon returning to the PMU at the completion of the press conference, I conducted my interviews with staff from the Unit.

\textsuperscript{18} Ward (2003a) has found that the practice of purchasing newspaper clippings and other media transcripts is a practice carried out also at the federal government level. He indicates that the “government’s ability to harness the public affairs capacity of the departments and agencies of government over which ministers exercise control” is a feature of the ‘PR state’ (discussed later in the thesis) (Ward 2003: 7).

\textsuperscript{19} Recent media reports (O’Brien 2008) put the overall budget for the NSW PMU at $2.1 million per annum as of July 2008.
During the brief time I spent talking with the PMU staff member and observing a little of what goes on in the Unit, I was able to gather a better understanding of the operations of the Unit, although limited somewhat to a simple observation of the layout, interior design, and some (but not a full range) of the activities of the Unit. One staff member even asked if I was going to spend a few weeks in the Unit observing. At that stage it still was not clear what the senior staff in the PMU were going to allow me to do, but it later eventuated that my short time in the PMU interviewing staff and getting an understanding of the Unit’s activities was the beginning and the end of my research in the Unit. Despite attempting to follow up this initial visit to pursue the possibility of carrying out my proposed observation time in the Unit, I once again was ignored.
In this chapter I have covered the various aspects of the research design of this thesis. I began by outlining the research problem: the lack of current empirical research on police-media relations in Australia and the lack of knowledge about the background and influence of professional PMUs within police forces in Australia. This research problem led to two overarching research questions: how, and under what conditions did the NSW PMU come into formation, and; what role does the PMU play in mediating police-media relationships and the processes creating public perceptions of policing. These questions led to a number of sub-questions for the research, as
outlined at the beginning of this chapter. As outlined in the chapter, the epistemological framework for the thesis is constructivist, with the methodological approach being qualitative, taking a critical perspective.

The chapter also discussed the theoretical approach for the thesis, which draws heavily on the work of David Garland (2001). Following on from this, the chapter detailed the approach taken towards method in the thesis, of documentary analysis and semi-structured interviews. In outlining the reasoning behind the application of these approaches, the advantages and limitations of each approach were addressed, together with the processes and modes of analysis to be employed. Issues around sampling and ethics were also considered. The chapter concluded with a discussion of the practice of attempting to carry out research on policing agencies, along with my own experiences with the NSW Police Force.

The following chapters are the product of the aforementioned research design. Chapter Three is a detailed account of the emergence and growth of the NSW PMU. This chapter details many of the changes over time that the PMU has undergone, and attempts to relate the path of the PMU’s development to the social and political happenings of the day. Chapters Four, Five and Six are a detailed analysis of the data that emerged from the semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders in the police-media relationship in NSW.
CHAPTER THREE: BACKGROUND TO THE

NSW POLICE MEDIA UNIT

In trying to gain an understanding of the present condition of police-media relations and the role of PMUs in these relationships, it is important to understand the context within which these have emerged and developed. Not only are the specifics around these relationships in NSW and the emergence of PMUs a particular history that needs to be explored, but given the prominence of the NSW Police Force to many of the discussions in the thesis, I feel it is first important to give a brief background on policing in Australia and, in particular, the NSW Police Force. The history of the establishment of police agencies within Australia is quite a unique one, and it is perhaps these idiosyncrasies that have allowed the history of police-media relations to develop the way that they have. As Wilson (2008: 18) argues, colonisation, together with the introduction of policing concepts from the UK, have combined “to forge a distinctive legacy that shapes Australian policing to this day”.

The Emergence of the NSW Police Force: Colonial Concerns

Very little has been written that comprehensively details the history of policing in Australia. What we do know is that “Australia’s colonial history has had enduring influence on the forms and organisation of policing” (Wilson 2008: 19). As Wilson (2008) and others (Bryett, Harrison and Shaw 1994; Finnane 1994; Findlay 2004; Sturma 1987) have contended, policing agencies in Australia today are highly
centralised and bureaucratic in form. This has allowed for a system of organisation that differs quite markedly from policing agencies in the UK and USA. The role of governments in policing agencies is also something that needs to be examined. In 1789 the first civilian police force in Australia was established by Governor Arthur Phillip in the state of NSW (NSW Police Force 2008). Early ‘policing’ duties were initially carried out by military rule, whose main tasks were to maintain order and uphold the law through the control of convict populations (Edwards 2005: 32). It was soon realised, however, that police functions were needed beyond the supervision and control of convicts. Problems began to develop with the release of convict populations into the general population.

The arrival of European settlers in Australia coincided with the beginnings of policing in the UK. Whilst notions of organised police agencies were not quite developed at the time of Australian settlement or invasion\textsuperscript{20} in 1788, early conceptualisations of the role of ‘the constable’ had begun to be explored in Britain (Finnane 1994: 11). Naturally, these early ideas were important in the implementation of police in Australia, however the notion of a professional police force remained somewhat undeveloped in Australia for a long time (Wilson 2008). This was due to the distinctive way in which police agencies were built up in Australia, and the unique problems that faced colonial Australia in the 18\textsuperscript{th} and 19\textsuperscript{th} centuries. While early formations of policing were largely based on models imported from Britain and Ireland, according to Findlay (2004: 18), “the exigencies of colonial society forced swift and significant organisational and functional adaptations”.

\textsuperscript{20} Whether Australia was settled or invaded is a matter of great contestation in terms of the history of Australia. Subsequent to the 1992 ‘Mabo’ judgement in the High Court, the assumption of Australia as terra nullius (empty land) upon its discovery by Captain James Cook has been quashed.
Unlike the situation in England, Australian policing was not seen to have emerged from any form of community conception, where “urban elites” established police departments to supervise the migrant poor (Brogden 1987). Rather, early policing was imposed by the state, which moved towards instituting police because it felt obligated to respond to local demands for security, the prevention of thefts and assaults, and order maintenance, amongst other things (Finnane 1994: 9, 11; Findlay 2004: 20; Fishwick 2007; Wilson 2008: 19-20). Equally important was the need to establish basic state infrastructure, a concern that simply did not exist in the UK. Broad notions of policing derived from European models, based on duties such as administration, welfare and surveillance, according to Wilson (2008) were quite influential on the Australian condition, where police were called upon for a variety of tasks that often had very little to do with enforcing the law or preventing crime (Wilson 2008: 20; see also Finnane 1994). The social conditions of the day, along with the anxieties over the new societies and the forms of government, were all seen as contributing to the eventual emergence of centralised, bureaucratically organised police in Australia (Finnane 1994: 9).

Edwards (2005: 28-30) states that there are a number of factors that caused the practice of policing in Australia to be significantly different from Britain: geography, history, existing forces, and the gold rush, which will be explored further below.

**Establishing a Convict Colony**

“Comparison of the Australian police with other mid-nineteenth-century constabularies reveals not only a range of similarities but also the depth of their differences… the Australian police responded to distinctive geographical and
demographic factors” (Sturma 1987: 23), in particular the repression and use of force against convicts and Indigenous populations, and the demands of establishing a social and bureaucratic infrastructure in a sparsely populated, huge geographic area.

According to Sturma (1987: 16), “[t]he demands of regulating a convict population and the nature of the frontier profoundly affected the pattern of law enforcement in Australia”. One of the main issues that delayed the centralisation of policing in Australia was the sheer breadth of land across which settlement occurred, with colonies being settled in Sydney and beyond, Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania and Western Australia. Additionally, colonies differed between those of free settlers and convicts, and shifting populations of military, convict, ex-convict, children of convicts and free settlers created unique problems for the various settlements (Bryett et al. 1994:73). Whatever the settlements though, “it is contended that the political experience of the early Australian population was that of highly centralised government with strong military influences. The police, in effect, were the instruments of a ‘paternalistic’, strong state” (Bryett et al 1994: 74-75).

Some of the issues and conflicts were similar to those experienced in the USA, but the ways they were dealt with in Australia were quite different. Due to the geographical and demographic factors, Australian police forces initially established specialised and highly mobile police forces, such as the Mounted Police, who were seen to be particularly well suited to Australian conditions (Sturma 1987: 23). These forces were later followed in NSW by the Border Police and Gold Police (Sturma 1987: 24).
Given the expansive nature of settlement, and the variety of issues to be dealt with in each settlement, the organisation of policing in settlements was initially fragmented, with forces emerging out of need. As a result, places such as NSW and Victoria contained up to ten separate police forces between them as well as many constables working on behalf of local magistrates (Bryett et al 1994: 75). In Victoria prior to the mid-1800s for example, police forces included the City Police, the County of Burke Police, Geelong Police, Gold Fields Police, Water Police, Rural Bench Constabulary, Mounted Police and the Native Police Corps (Wilson 2008: 22), each created to deal with various problems faced in the settlements.

As settlers moved to various parts of the country they often came into conflict with Indigenous populations, which created a different set of policing issues (Edwards 2005). Another significant event in the history of Australia was the gold rush period, which attracted new immigrant populations, and a number of perceived ‘rogues’ and ‘thieves’, into Australia (Edwards 2005). Police were given the responsibility of managing the goldfields, which Edwards (2005: 33) describes as containing some of the “most difficult and volatile sections of the Australian colonial population in the nineteenth century” (see also Finnane 1994: 28-29, 30). “The convict period demanded immediate and frequently ad hoc solutions to the problems raised by large numbers of exiled prisoners” (Finnane 1987: 4).

Pastoralism and the interests of white domination played a significant role in the determination of police functions. Containing and controlling Indigenous populations for example created problems that simply were not faced in Britain. The other issue of concern was the “ambiguous attitude to police within the colonies” (Findlay 2004:
19). Whilst Finnane (1994: 23-24) warns against overstating its influence, Findlay (2004: 19) contends that policing developed within a context whereby there was a popular disrespect for the police and their activities. Perhaps influencing this was the fact that many of those who constituted these early colonial police forces were sourced from the convict population, who themselves were less than enthusiastic about the role, given their anti-authoritarian persuasions (Findlay 2004). In this early form of policing, control of the police was vested in the governor, with the government having no supreme authority over policing within the various colonies.

Colonial policing was characterised by clashes with Indigenous and minority populations early on. Whilst police may not have played a role in the early dispossession of Aborigines in eastern Australia, Finnane (1994: 111) asserts that they certainly played a key role in completing the process. As late as the 1970s, police played a significant role in the administration and the regulation of Indigenous populations and their welfare (Fishwick 2007). This included their involvement in the removal of children from their families for their ‘protection’, the dispossession of land from Indigenous inhabitants, and the control of other daily activities of these populations (Finnane 1994; Fishwick 2007). Understandably, the regulatory role played by police, amongst other things, was the source of great animosity between the police and Indigenous people. As such, the resistance police faced from Indigenous inhabitants was at least as important as the issue of convictism in the development and reform of policing during the colonial period (Finnane 1994: 25; see also Findlay 2004: 19). It is Finnane’s (1994: 25) belief that these resistances provoked the centralisation and specialisation of police, with the establishment of the
border and native police aimed at tackling some of the problems Indigenous communities raised for the colonial communities.

Issues facing the police differed across the settlements. In Sydney, crime and social degradation were rampant (Bryett et al 1994: 73). Urban crimes were supplemented by threats posed by bushrangers between settlements (Bryett et al 1994: 74). Cultural conflict was also a problem, with the Indigenous populations being presumed to be uncivilised and without legal rights to the land. Inequality and dispossession were rationalised and became institutionalised (Bryett et al 1994:74). To deal with growing problems of bushranging and Indigenous resistance, Mounted Police were established as a means of mobile policing.

One of the most important and enduring features of colonial policing were the close ties established with governments of the day. Many of the functions and duties of colonial police were carried out explicitly on behalf of the interests of the government and elites. Governments were reliant on police to carry out a number of protective duties and, similarly, police were reliant upon governments for their survival. As Findlay (2004: 24-25) sees it:

Colonial police work was largely the work of the state, or the elite commercial and political interests which supported and maintained governments… The master-servant role for police in Australia is well founded in the relationship between the police and their political ‘controllers’. While this has been an uncomfortable alliance against the ideology of operational independence, the ties between the police and politics in Australia are close and prevailing. They extend from commissioners to ministers, police unions and political parties, as well as police culture and political commitments. The history of the police as servants of
political power in Australia and beneficiaries of political patronage is more convincing than any history of the transition of policing from force to service, in a community sense.

Centralisation

Following years of criticism, and in the wake of the 1850 New Year’s Day riot in Sydney, constabulary reforms were forced to be implemented (Sturma 1987: 18). The riot prompted a strong reaction, and subsequently led to “an almost immediate reorganization of the police” (Sturma 1987: 19). As the “first non-military law enforcement group” in the state, and in line with the move towards centralising police across Australia, the NSW Police Force as we know it was established in 1810 by Governor Macquarie to maintain law and order in Sydney (Avery 1981: 13; Edwards 2005: 32). By the 1840’s the six separate divisions of policing in NSW- the Sydney police, mounted police, Sydney water police, the rural constabulary, the border police and the native police- were consolidated under one central force. The eventual centralisation of the Sydney police as a “distinct administrative entity” was confirmed in 1833 under law, bringing together a broad range of duties and responsibilities under the responsibility of the police (Finnane 1994: 19).

In the latter half of the 19th century, state based Australian police forces became centralised. They ceased to be under the direct control of magistrates, or local councils, and became an arm of central government. This, coupled with the colonial project, laid the foundations for the police-government relationship today (Bryett et al 1994: 75; Finnane 1994). According to Finnane (1994: 15) the erosion of at least three influential aspects of colonial policing led to the centralisation of police in Australia. These were:
1. The abolition of the early system whereby magistrates controlled the police\textsuperscript{21}. This was removed in favour of appointing a police commissioner who, via the executive government, took control over police on a state-wide level;

2. Local forces were abolished and therefore local controls removed, and;

3. There was a suppression of specialised police working under limited pay. This resulted in the further consolidation of power over police at the state level.

As the literature demonstrates, the development of the police as a professional body within Australia, and particularly NSW, was uniquely different from the experiences of policing in other Western societies.

**The NSW Police Force**

As well as being the oldest police organisation in Australia, the NSW Police Force is also the largest, with 15,301 members as of 31\textsuperscript{st} January 2008 (NSW Police Force 2008; Chan and Dixon 2007; Chan 2007). Since its establishment there have been a number of name changes associated with the NSW Police Force, some of which are linked to various dominant ideologies of the day. For example, in 1990 the NSW Police Force was renamed the NSW Police Service. This name change was said to reflect a more “community-based” approach to policing as advocated by the then Commissioner, John Avery (see Avery 1981; Hansard and Papers, Legislative

\textsuperscript{21} After policing duties were removed from the military rule of the governor, police were appointed locally by Magistrates who, who were generally land-holders. Edwards (2005) notes that such appointments were problematic for a couple of reasons. Firstly, there was a potential conflict in that magistrates were appointing the police as well as meting out justice to individuals brought before them by police. Secondly, the numbers of police in these communities were usually quite low. If major problems developed and extra police were required, requests needed to be submitted to magistrates in surrounding localities for the use of their police, which could be quite time consuming and potentially dangerous (Edwards 2005: 32-33).
Assembly 2002: 3775). By 2002, the NSW Government decided to drop the word ‘service’ from the police. Then Minister for Police Michael Costa explained the reasons for this as follows:

I am a strong supporter of community policing - an important theme in all the Government’s policing activities. The police and community service process… is aimed at strengthening bonds with the community. I do not believe we need the word ‘service’ in the name of the police force. I do not accept the argument that we need the word ‘service’ in a community-based policing approach. I spoke to John Avery about this matter. He was of the view that the word ‘service’ had probably outlived its usefulness (cited in Hansard and Papers, Legislative Assembly 2002: 3775).

As such, the title NSW Police was instituted. By 2006, however, the name of the NSW Police changed again, this time to again include the word ‘force’, in what has widely been perceived as an attempt to bring the concept of ‘fear’ back into policing, characteristic of neo-conservative government rhetoric. As of March 2008 the name remains the NSW Police Force and there does not appear to be any movement being made towards changing the name again in the near future. These name changes are important to note given the analyses provided in coming chapters of this thesis, which highlight the importance of police being seen as reducing crime and reducing fear of crime in the community, something which the recent move back to use of the word ‘force’ in the police name suggests.

This very brief discussion of the history of the establishment of the NSW Police Force sets the scene for the role of the police in the modern condition. This

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22 Chan and Dixon (2007: 464) argue that the return to the word ‘force’ was in response to “panics about public lawlessness”, an issue which this thesis examines further in Chapter Four.
background has introduced a number of important relationships, such as that between
the police and the government, which are important for understanding the conditions
of such relationships today. Drawing on this backdrop, this chapter will now examine
the background to the NSW PMU, the increasingly important role of the Unit, and
the conditions from which it developed.

The New South Wales Police Media Unit: History and Development

The development of what is today known as the PMU is revealing in a number of
ways, not least of which is how the Unit came to play such an important role within
NSW Police. The history of the Unit is important because it reflects of the ideologies
and political and policing concerns of the times. This history plays an important part
in helping to define the Unit today, as these early manifestations have undoubtedly
left their mark on the workings of today’s PMU in some shape or form. With this in
mind, what follows is the tracing of the historical development of the NSW PMU
that is sensitive to the methods of enquiry as proposed by Garland and influenced by
Foucault, and conscious of the socio-political context within which the Unit has
developed.

Introduction

The importance of police-media exchange was recognised as early as the 1950s,
when the then President of the Australian Journalists Association, Mr. G. F. Godfrey
gave an address to NSW Police Detectives. In his address Mr. Godfrey (1957: 301-302) declared that it was:

The joint task of police and journalists to examine how best they can carry out the functions allotted to their respective professions to develop those aspects on which mutually advantageous cooperation can be achieved and to study any factors on which there may be variance with a view to their elimination.

Furthermore, he also believed that “an atmosphere of confidence and trust must exist in the relationship between the police and the press” so that both parties could rely implicitly upon each other (Godfrey 1957: 305).

Godfrey’s vision, however, may have been slightly ahead of its time, with police-media relations prior to the 1960s being less than comfortable. Before the creation of press officers within policing organisations, relations between the police and the press in NSW had been subject to little policy attention or regulation (Finnane 1994; 2002). The police-media relationship was made even more strained by the intervention of the Police Union in police-media interactions. With police attempting to tightly control their relationship with the media, journalists looking elsewhere for comment were often led to talk to the Police Union. The Union had long been concerned with the effects of media reporting on their members, and the apparent lack of willingness for the police to address these concerns led the Union to take on an advocacy role from the 1960s (Finnane 1999a; Finnane 2000; Finnane 2002: 137-139). This was a source of conflict not only for senior police management, but the government of the day, because of the Union’s tendency to lobby for increased
police resources and powers, challenging the government’s commitment to policing issues in the state.

Over time however, as will be demonstrated, the police dramatically altered their relationship with the media and, as a consequence, came to see utility in engaging with the media, particularly for communicating information to the public. From the view of the police, as well as the government, there was an increasing realisation that in the past police had adopted a reactive approach to policing, and that a commitment was needed to becoming more proactive about policing, and to engage in partnerships and foster change in a number of areas, including relations with the media (Etter 2001: 25).

**The 1940s to the 1960s: Early Beginnings**

During the early 1900’s and up until the 1940’s the police in NSW were involved in continual political controversy due to social and industrial conflicts (Finnane 1999a: 8). On a world scale, during this period police forces were regarded by the community as occupying “a dominant position in the field of security provision” (Garland 2001: 32). Crime became an issue that the community wanted authorities to do something about. At the same time police leadership in NSW began to mirror some of the developments in policing that were occurring overseas, with a newfound focus on ‘professionalisation’ within police forces, developments were being made in detective skills and the surveillance of crime and new, merit based, promotion systems were introduced within the Force (Finnane 1999a: 8-10).
In the USA this movement towards professional policing was sparked by August Vollmer, a Los Angeles Police Chief who in 1931 published the Wickersham Commission report, which came to be known as the professional model of policing following its publication (Lovell 2003: 96). Vollmer’s model called for dedication in policing, with proficiency in crime fighting and rigorous training for recruits. Tied into this was a focus on efficiency and a strong public relations campaign. Whilst the professionalism movement in Australasian policing has not been seen to be explicitly driven by the Vollmer program, there are some areas of common ground. For example, the emphasis on better education of policing recruits was introduced into the police cadet system within NSW Police in 1933, which integrated both physical training and legal instruction (Finnane 1994: 143). By the mid twentieth century, this interest in education led to the development of police colleges (Wilson 2008:27; Finnane 1994: 144-150).

Policing in the UK was also experiencing a movement towards professionalisation in this period. Following a Home Office Committee investigation in 1933, it was determined that England lagged behind other countries in relation to police training and the operation of scientific investigative tools. As a consequence of the report, significant developments were made in training, communication between forces and the use of scientific aids (Emsley 2002: 218). These changes all contributed to the continuing development of police professionalism in the UK (Emsley 1996).

The effects of this change of philosophy within the NSW Police Force brought with it a change in the demands of policing, with increasing specialisation being implemented into the police force, leading to an increase in the numbers of police in
the post-war period being employed to fit in with the structural changes that specialisation of police functions\textsuperscript{23} engendered (Edwards 2005; Finnane 1999a). In the two decades following 1945, much of the increase in numbers of police personnel was directed towards the Traffic Branch, which was seen as an area of growing importance within the force (Finnane 1999a: 11). The expansion of car ownership during the post-war period was a contributing factor in these growing concerns, with new problems surrounding crime and security growing in significance during this time, as well as new methods of policing (Garland 2001; Hogg 2002).

Documented formal links between the NSW Police Force and the media can be traced back to the Traffic Branch, where many of the media related issues of the NSW Police Force in the 1940s were carried out (NSW Police Force 1950). In these early dealings, the Police were mainly concerned with issues of safety, particularly in relation to children. Within the Traffic Branch police developed a variety of programs, lectures and patrols aimed at protecting children against road accidents, as well as educating children on safety measures. For some time the police had been shaping a greater involvement with the community, and significant to this focus on community was the role of police in educating young people, who were seen as future citizens (Finnane 1999a: 11). Within this educational capacity, officers attended primary and secondary schools and discussed general road safety precautions and other aspects of the law and help them to ‘educate themselves’ (Finnane 1999a; Hunter 2005).

\textsuperscript{23} As Finnane (1999a: 10) states, there was an expansion of detective numbers and responsibilities became divided into specialist areas such as homicide, arson, or traffic.
Mirroring the trend towards the intense regulation of lives by the state during this period, the focus of the Police on the safety of children was hardly surprising (Finnane 1994). The 1940s marked the height of police involvement in the removal of Indigenous children from their mothers to ‘protect’ and ‘assimilate’ them to the Australian way of life (Wilson and Dodson 1997). According to Finnane (1994), the capacity of the state to intervene in the government of populations had increased enormously and, as a consequence, the police were key to this intervention. As the sole holders of the de facto powers to coerce within the state, the onus was upon police to carry out these ‘protective policies’ (Edwards 2005: 34). As Reiner (2000b) notes, although those experiencing the coercive powers of the police may not have accepted the police, the vast majority of the population at this time would have accepted the legitimacy of the powers of the police. As had occurred in the UK, police in NSW were seen as playing an important role in “the wider process of pacification of social relations” (Reiner 2000b: 60-61). A consensus on the acceptance of this role, according to Reiner (2000b: 63, 67), was partly based on some of the organisational policies put in place by policing institutions, such as the maintenance of the rule of law and the presentation of non-partisanship policing.

Road safety was seen to occupy an important place in this intervention, especially in the lives and minds of children, and the lectures were important not just from a safety angle, but they were also regarded as “excellent public relations work in securing the confidence of children in the Police Force” (NSW Police Force 1950: 10). The ‘innovation’ of using female officers to conduct many of these lectures highlights the initial role of women in the Force as principally a ‘child-saving’ one, where they
were seen to serve as protectors of children (Finnane 1994: 106; NSW Police Force 1950: 10).

At this time the NSW Police Force also initiated the ‘Safety First’ campaign, again managed by the Traffic Branch, whereby weekly safety broadcasts were conducted on two radio stations (NSW Police Force 1950). Over time these broadcasts widened to include a number of other stations and by the mid 1960s over two thousand radio sessions were being broadcast across metropolitan and country areas (NSW Police Force 1964). These broadcasts were complementary to a variety of other safety campaigns being run by NSW Police during that period.

With the focus at the time being very much on the processing of large numbers of minor offenders against public order and traffic regulations, the Police Traffic Branch “used every available publicity medium in an effort to secure public interest and co-operation in reducing the high incidence of fatal accidents on all roads and highways throughout the State” (Hunter 2005; see also Finnane 1999a). Radio broadcasts were soon joined by television broadcasts in the late 1950’s, and in 1957 NSW Police announced the “introduction of television as a means of safety propaganda” (Hunter 2005; NSW Police Force 1957: 12). This saw the ‘Constable Careful’ campaign launched on two television stations, with “special staff” being dedicated to the program and its organisation. School Lecturing exhibits were also presented at the Royal Agricultural Show during the 1950s in an attempt to not only interest the public, but also bring to their notice the need for safety (NSW Police Force 1958).
The 1960s was a decade associated with changes across many aspects of society and culture throughout the world, and these changes impacted both directly and indirectly upon policing (Edwards 2005). The 1960s and 1970s marked a period of political and social dissent over matters such as Australia’s involvement in the Vietnam War, Aboriginal rights, standards of health and welfare, the equality of women, abortion law reform and censorship matters (Chan 1997; Edwards 2005; Finnane 1987; 1990; 1994). Civil rights groups, including those representing Indigenous people, women, homosexuals, prisoners and mental patients became increasingly affirmed and their influence grew, leading to important shifts in the balance of power between ‘government’ and the ‘governed’ (Garland 2001). This had an effect on policing, as police were increasingly being seen as aligned with the government and out of touch with the community, the same community whose confidence they relied upon to legitimise the policing role in society.

Technological developments were at the forefront of many of the changes faced by the police, with many of the newly implemented policing strategies attempting to merge traditional policing practices with the new technological advancements. The effects of such developments, however, contributed to community alienation from the police, with practices such as foot patrols declining and vehicle patrols increasing, removing officers from the streets and taking away the proactive elements of policing in exchange for reactive approaches (Edwards 2005; Garland 2001). This too had implications for the image and legitimacy of police.

According to Finnane, it was during this period that the ability of the police to carry out their role came under increasing public and political scrutiny (Finnane 1999a:
13). With technological changes also came cultural changes during the 1960s, with a growing emphasis on equality and rights in society. Edwards (2005) argues that greater public interest in these issues led to closer public scrutiny of those in authority, and it became more common for police authority to be questioned. In particular, issues of public order control and police powers came under scrutiny, especially as they related to the ways in which police dealt with public dissent and protest, under pressure from the government. Certainly the role television played in the media coverage of many of these issues would also have had an impact on how these matters were viewed by the public, who were able to witness the police role in many of these protests (Edwards 2005: 76).

The push for democracy and egalitarianism during this period also “extended beyond the political sphere into private domains of the family, the workplace, the universities, [and] schools, with major consequences for authority and control in these settings” (Garland 2001: 87). As a result of these shifts in thinking, many organisations changed their management styles to be more aligned with consumer cultures and mentalities prevalent at the time. Police were not immune from this consumer culture, with community policing initiatives beginning to be considered at this time to help overcome the public’s disaffection. The Police Boy’s Club movement and school road safety education were manifestations of this greater community involvement (Finnane 1999a).

In 1965, in what was to be a symptom of change, the first successful law and order election was held in NSW, signalling the increasing public concern for matters relating to crime and policing (Finnane 1999a; Tiffen 2004). In March of that year
Robert Askin and the Liberal Party defeated the twenty four year reign of the Labor Party following favourable press and a range of policies that were aimed at attracting the votes of groups alienated by the Labor Government, such as city commuters, shop keepers and people wanting greater police protection (Puplick 2001: 445). During the election campaign, Askin attacked Labor over the declining standards of justice, promising to increase police numbers by one thousand in his first term in office if elected (NSW Police Force 1965; Puplick 2001: 451). It was this focus on the lack of adequate police protection that was said to have been one of the major influences on the election of the Liberal Party into government in NSW.

Perhaps as a response to some of the pressure they were facing during the 1960s, both from the public and the state government, the NSW Police Force followed global policing trends towards the continued specialisation of policing. One result of this increasing specialisation was that the NSW Police Force broadened their range of media related activities, introducing the Police Public Relations Branch, the first formal unit within the organisation specifically created to deal with media issues (NSW Police Force 1965). In 1964, when the Branch was established, it consisted of three staff: a Sergeant, a Constable and a female Public Service Officer (NSW Police Force 1965). The Branch was set up for the promotion of ‘Police Public Relations’, assisting materially in the investigation of serious crimes, not only by publication through press, radio and television of information relating to cases, but also through the publication of photographs and descriptions of people who were suspected victims of crime (NSW Police Force 1965). In addition to this, a number of general warnings were issued by the Branch to the public via the media in respect to the subject of crime prevention. In the 1964 Annual Report it was highlighted that the
activities of the Public Relations Branch were expected to increase in the near future (NSW Police Force 1965).

The importance of the police’s self image was beginning to be recognised after a number of incidents increased the media attention surrounding police, such as the Graham Thorpe abduction and murder (NSW Police Force 1967). In the 1965 Annual Report “the importance of the co-operation of the public in the enforcement of law and order” was stressed, with the development of this relationship being imperative to the police image (NSW Police 1967: 22). One way in which this manifested was through the involvement of the Public Relations Branch in organising the delivery of addresses and attendance of police guest speakers to a variety of organisations. By the end of 1965 approval was given to the further expansion of the Public Relations Branch staffing levels.

In this period the NSW Police Force, led by Commissioner Norman Allan, talked about actively attempting to address some of the ‘bad blood’ between the media and police. In 1965 Allan met with the Australian Journalists Association (AJA) to discuss police-press relations (Finnane 1999b). Following the meeting Allan thanked the AJA and the over eighty journalists with whom he spoke, issuing them with “new press passes to facilitate reporters passing through police lines” (Chappell and Wilson 1969: 138).

Whilst the Commissioner continued to hold official talks with the press on the need for improvement in public relations, in practice little seemed to be being done to achieve this (Chappell and Wilson 1969: 61). When Allan implemented a new
system for the release of information to the press it did not sit well with many journalists. In 1965 Allan issued instructions that the only people allowed to speak to the press in an official capacity were the heads of various departments within the NSW Police Force (Finnane 1999b: 130-131; Finnane 2000). This resulted in all other officers being banned from speaking with journalists (Chappell and Wilson 1969). In a further attempt to manage the flow of information from the Police Force, Allan initiated daily conferences from the Sydney Headquarters of the Criminal Investigation Branch, to be held at 7am, 9am and 5pm, where senior police were to brief journalists on daily events (Chappell and Wilson 1969).

Many journalists found that this method of communication not only stifled their ability to compile interesting and novel reports, but also resulted in a lot of unanswered questions from these police representatives. In order to try to combat this, journalists turned to forming unofficial contacts from within the police, which also came with their own set of problems. Forming contacts with police in this way meant that journalists had to be extra careful so as not to reveal their sources when filing their stories, which often resulted in the holding back of some of these reports for the protection of their contacts (Chappell and Wilson 1969: 131).

Allan further antagonised reporters when he refused them access to police radios and police communication facilities (Chappell and Wilson 1969). As a result, journalists took to illegally carrying police radios in their cars, to maintain awareness of current events. While Allan’s new system for police-media interactions was seen as a determined attempt to more tightly control the information being given to the media, the effect was detrimental to both Allan and the NSW Police Force in general.
Without the ability to confirm a lot of what they were writing, journalists were quite often ‘getting it wrong’. As one journalist interviewed by Chappell and Wilson, cited in Finnane (2002: 132) stated:

> Press reporting is undoubtedly more hostile in New South Wales than in other states. The press do, on occasions, write stories which are half correct, which show police in a bad light. But the reason for this is that police do not tell them enough.

What was obvious was that despite his best efforts, Allan’s attempts to control information and protect the image of the police proved futile, with critical press coverage of the NSW Police Force continuing throughout the 1960s (Finnane 1999a: 138). His actions, rather than fostering better relations with the media, had the opposite effect. The experience of the police-media relationship during this period evidences the continuity in attempts of police to control their relationship with the media. The important distinction to make here is that attempts to manage the relationship during this period, as distinct from contemporary attempts at control, were much less subtle and more overt than today’s attempts (Salter 1994: 12). As Lovell (2003) has discussed, these attempts at control were also more reactive in nature, with police less willing to interact proactively with the media, who were often considered ‘the enemy’.

**The 1970s: A ‘New Look’ Public Relations Branch**

In the 1970’s there was an increasing concern within the state government, as well as the NSW Police Force, about the amount of media attention given to the apparent increase in crime, as well as occurrences of police misconduct (York 1987). In the
late 1960s and 1970s, during the protest movement against the Vietnam War, allegations of police brutality in police handling of protestors surfaced, and it was during this time that the political nature of policing was said to have been revealed as the government began to realise they were no longer immune from demands of accountability in matters of criminal justice (Finnane 1999b: 161-162).

The government wanted to address some of these concerns about policing, particularly surrounding the leadership and administration of the police force, with talk of an inquiry being considered to expose some of these perceived problems (Finnane 1999a: 18-19). At this time the relationship between the police and government was seen to be “exceedingly poor”; the government questioned the ability of the police to reform their administration and deal with corruption and misconduct issues, while the police faced a government that actively challenged and directed police strategies, implementing policies that broadened the ability of the Ombudsman to investigate complaints against police (Chan 1997: 20; Finnane 1999a; Dixon 1999b). Within political circles, there were heightened concerns about the efficiency of the police, and it was during the 1970s that aspects of ‘new managerialist’ thinking began to develop in relation to policing (Lusher 1981: 41). Perhaps these anxieties were pre-emptive of some of the concerns highlighted by Justice Lusher (1981) in his Inquiry into Police Administration, held at the end of the 1970s.

When Nevil Wran was elected as the NSW Labor Premier in 1976 his political strategy was to not let the apparent corruption issues within the NSW Police Force intrude on his government and cause electoral damage (Tiffen 1994: 1178). For the
first few years of his party’s reign, this position was not challenged, but in the following years a number of statements made by Police Commissioner Mervyn Wood were to have an effect not only on the NSW Police Force, but also upon the State Government. What resulted was a general feeling amongst the community that there was inaction by the police and government on a number of corruption issues that pervaded through the NSW Police Force. It seemed that “a series of scandals and crises had more or less taken up permanent occupancy on the front page of newspapers over recent years” (Tiffen 2004: 1179; Bradley and Cioccarelli 1989: 9). These apparent and very public failings of the Police Force and its administration led the then Premier to write to the Police Commissioner in 1977, in an attempt to arrange an independent examination into the methods and philosophy of the education and training of police (Bradley and Cioccarelli 1989). Not long after, in 1979, the Inquiry into New South Wales Police Administration was commenced by Justice Lusher, addressing these and other concerns relating to police, in an attempt to bring about reform.

At the same time as these concerns about public perceptions and the reputation of police grew, the role of the Branch continued to develop and expand. By 1970, the Public Relations Branch not only informed the public on matters of crime prevention and detection, but also assisted in tracing missing persons, gave traffic control advice, addressed community groups, produced crime prevention pamphlets and cooperated with the news media, authors, feature writers and film producers in preparing material depicting police activities (NSW Police Force 1972). In 1972 the NSW Police Force presented a ‘new look’ Public Relations Section, which was touted as already making “a favourable impact on the public image of the Police
Force” (NSW Police Force 1972: 364). At this time the Branch was expanded both in activities and staff levels, with twenty people working on “presenting a better Police image to the media and the public” (NSW Police Force 1972: 364). Duties of the staff within the Branch ranged from administration and editorial duties, to research, and promotion.

As well as continuing to produce daily radio scripts, leaflets, booklets and posters about the Police, the Branch also purchased a semi-trailer display unit which, with two specifically allocated staff, travelled the State “promoting interest in the Police Department” (NSW Police Force 1972: 364). This development displayed a greater focus and effort on the public relations aspects of policing.

Further developments made within the Public Relations Branch during 1972 included press releases covering a wider spectrum of stories and twice daily press conferences that aimed to give police roundsmen regular briefings on daily activities. Attempts to foster a more positive image within the media were so significant that the Branch began to maintain a ‘clipping service’, whereby items of interest to the police were collected in daily and weekly editions of Sydney publications, in an effort to monitor the trends in public and press attitudes towards the Police (NSW Police Force 1972: 364, 365). The Branch was so confident in their ‘new look’ Public Relations Branch that they were able to:

[S]tate emphatically that there is a marked and noticeable trend towards a more favourable public image of the Policeman being reflected in the media over the past three months (NSW Police Force 1974: 365).
Consideration of an in-service training program to enable more personnel to liaise with the media across a number of formats was further evidence of the importance placed on police-media interactions during the early 1970s. During this time the Public Relations Branch also saw its duty as being the dissemination of “authentic information regarding crimes, the Police force and its members, etc., to members of the public” (NSW Police Force 1976: 28).

In 1975 a three day conference was held in Sydney which brought together police relations representatives from police forces across Australia (NSW Police Force 1976). Obviously by the mid 1970s police relations with the community and the media were of concern for a number of police forces in Australia, not just NSW.

By the end of the 1970s, staffing levels in the Public Relations Branch had increased tenfold on the previous decade and operating hours were extended. Unnamed “reputable public companies” had also, by 1978, begun to link with the Public Relations Branch, offering support and sponsorship to “matters of community interest” (NSW Police Force 1979: 33). In addition, the Branch also launched Police File, a weekly television program on Channel 10, similar to Australia’s Most Wanted, detailing unsolved crimes, incidents and wanted criminals (NSW Police Force 1979).

**The Lusher Inquiry**

In 1979 Mr. Justice Lusher was appointed to inquire into the structure of administration of the NSW Police Force (Dixon 1999a), which included the role of the Public Relations Branch. The role of the inquiry was to provide extensive
guidance for the reform of a number of administrative aspects of the police, ultimately producing a more professional and responsible police force (Finnane 1999a: 23).

The background to this Inquiry had been building for some time. As mentioned, during the 1970s relations between the police and state government had been tense. Public confidence in the police and government was at an all time low due to whispers of police corruption and government acquiescence. This was having a detrimental effect on the Wran government, and was an impetus for their change in approach to law enforcement (Finnane 1999a; Pitman 1998). What was hoped was that the Inquiry would address some of the problems that had emerged in policing over the past decade and show that the government were open to addressing potential issues of corruption within the NSW Police Force.

Issues addressed by Lusher’s report included training and education, the relationship between the Police Minister and Police Commissioner, anti-corruption strategies, the function and role of police and ways in which the police could integrate community needs into policing (Finnane 1999a; Lusher 1981). “Conscious of developments in management theory over recent decades, Lusher described an organisation in which long-established patterns of hierarchy had stifled the capacity for innovation and responsiveness” (Finnane 1999a: 21). As the Inquiry developed, Lusher soon found that there was no definition of police objectives, which in turn impacted upon the role of police, who were confused as to their function and direction (Lusher 1981).
The Inquiry called for greater focus and coordination within the Public Relations Branch. Whilst the Branch had listed a number of functions, such as the preparation of media releases, the arrangement of police interviews, organising police events and so on, Justice Lusher found that the list was insufficient in terms of actually managing a comprehensive public relations program (Lusher 1981: 644-645). Upon examining a range of the functions carried out by the Branch, it was the opinion of the Inquiry that there were no clear objectives or strategies being implemented (Lusher 1981: 645). Rather than there being any particular forethought to activities and programs, the Inquiry found that many of the projects put in place were done so ad hoc, with no real consideration of budgetary needs, the targeting of certain groups, or the anticipated effectiveness of what was being executed (Lusher 1981: 648-655).

The Inquiry also encouraged a more open system of administration within the Public Relations Branch, as a closed approach was seen to “mask police inefficiency and blunt attempts at innovation and change” (Lusher 1981: 657). Indeed, Justice Lusher suggested that police, rather than dismissing criticism and comment directed at them, should get involved in discussion, communication and discourse with those directing such comments towards them (Lusher 1981: 659). All of these observations offered by the Inquiry were aimed at not only making the Public Relations Branch more open and accountable, but also instilling a more managed and organised approach to their activities and duties.

The Inquiry went on to make a number of recommendations in relation to the Public Relations Branch, some of which were:
• The Public Relations Branch should be responsible for, or at least have, a coordinating role for all public relations activities undertaken by the Force;
• The Branch should produce a public relations program and forward plan developed on the basis of specific objectives and measurable targets;
• An itemised budget for public relations projects should be part of the Police Force estimates;
• Each activity should be regularly evaluated in terms of its cost effectiveness having regard for the objectives, and the number and nature of people influenced by the activity;
• An increased emphasis on training in dealing with the media, including the legal and privacy implications of any comments made by police, and;
• The Police Force should…adopt a policy of openness in respect of its operations, policies and procedures (Lusher 1981: 660-661).

According to Chan (1997) the Lusher inquiry was a powerful driving force pushing the NSW Police Force towards change. The appropriateness of the organisational structure of the NSW Police Force was questioned, and it was suggested that by holding on to a ‘paramilitary’ style the Force would ultimately alienate the community that police were there to serve. The enquiry was essentially suggesting that the NSW Police Force completely reorganise its structure and objectives to reflect a more flexible, community-based perspective.

While there was a commitment from newly appointed Commissioner Cecil Abbott to implement many of the recommendations made by Lusher, it was not until the mid-1980s, when Commissioner John Avery was appointed that many of these recommendations were acted upon. Simultaneous to Lusher’s findings being handed down, Avery (1981), not yet Commissioner, had published his book entitled Police-
Force or Service (1981), which shared some common critiques with the recommendations of Lusher.

**The 1980s and Beyond: Greater Focus and Accountability**

According to Chan (1997: 118), the 1980s and the early 1990s was characterised by rapid development in the NSW Police Force. During the 1980’s there was a significant change in the philosophy of policing in NSW (Chan and Dixon 2007: 445), with moves to embrace a ‘community policing’ model, one which focused on a ‘service’ mentality, as opposed to one of ‘force’, with police consulting and working together with the community and making officers more accountable (Finnane 1999a: 24-25). Some of the groundwork for this change in philosophy was established in the late 1970’s, and was signalled by John Avery during his years as a senior officer. In his research thesis, prior to taking over as Commissioner, Avery (1981) asserted that effective policing was a joint project between the police and the community, and he demonstrated this by focusing on the increasing amount of community work being carried out by police in their everyday activities.

It was Avery’s (1981: 5) belief that the NSW Police Force should change its name to the NSW Police Service, in line with the true identity of the organisation, which did more than just enforce the law. At the same time, calls were being made to increase the levels of training and education received by police to reflect moves away from a ‘military model’ style of policing (Fleming and Lafferty 2000: 155; Chan and Dixon 2007: 445). Perhaps too, the growth in the private security industry during this period may also have been an impetus for a change in police ideologies and practices, given
that police had perhaps not been seen as filling the preventative role that private security could (Chan 1997).

In what was seen as a major turning point in NSW Police history, John Avery was appointed Police Commissioner in 1984. In the aftermath of the Lusher Inquiry, and under the influence of overseas trends that called for a reconsideration of the role of police in Western industrialised societies, upon his appointment to Commissioner John Avery was said to have called for a number of reforms to policing in NSW, particularly in regards to developing closer relationships between police and citizens (Chan 1997: 120-121; Avery 1981). This marked the beginning of Avery’s commitment to a community policing philosophy (Dixon 1999a). With an undercurrent of corruption and misconduct allegations still present, the NSW Police Force underwent a major restructuring, with the decentralisation of specialist squads and a new focus on regions, to correlate with the spotlight on community policing (Finnane 1999a: 24-25; Fleming and Lafferty 2000) and moves towards reforming police services as “corporate entities” (Fleming and Lafferty 2000: 155).

The 1980s saw the name of the Public Relations Branch change to Media Liaison. With this change came the further expansion of the unit. Media Liaison was extended to a seven day a week operation on twenty-four hour standby. Individuals working within the unit also saw their role extend beyond the office and out into the field, with Liaison Officers often visiting the scenes of serious crimes and disasters to assist in the dissemination of information to the public and media (NSW Police Force 1983). There was also an expansion of many of the related duties of the Media
Liaison Unit in the 1980s, with separate Photographic and Film and Television Units operating and dealing with media related tasks.

The appointment of a journalist to Media Liaison in the early 1980’s was seen as a significant step in the professionalisation of police media communication systems (NSW Police Force 1983). Commissioner John Avery, who was appointed shortly after these changes to Media Liaison, was of the belief that if police wanted to establish good relationships with the public, which was important to the success of community policing initiatives, then they “must display an openness and frankness with the press and the public”, as defensiveness only encourages suspicion (Avery 1981: 89). The introduction of a journalist into Media Liaison signified a willingness of police to distance themselves from the defensive approaches of the past. This appointment was also important because one of the main roles of the journalist was to improve police-ethnic relations and educate the non-English speaking community on various aspects of the law (NSW Police Force 1986: 51).

Drawing from successful overseas operations, community-based policing, initiatives such as Neighbourhood Watch, Operation NOAH\textsuperscript{24}, Safety House\textsuperscript{25} and Crime Stoppers were also developed and introduced by Media Liaison, in collaboration with other sections of the NSW Police Force such as the Crime Prevention Unit, during this period. This not only extended the proactivity of their media work, but also further solidified the connections between police and citizen and strengthened

\textsuperscript{24} Operation NOAH was an annual police and government campaign where the community is urged to phone a special hotline and ‘dob in’ people they suspect of manufacturing or supplying illicit drugs within the community.

\textsuperscript{25} Safety House was a campaign run nationwide providing education, particularly in schools, about personal safety. One of the hallmarks of the program was the Safety House scheme, whereby children were encouraged to seek refuge in advertised ‘safety houses’, marked with a yellow triangle, if they were lost or in danger.
the focus of police communications on elements of safety and risk. The importance of community relations was further evidenced by the introduction of a Public Service Community Relations Media Coordinator to the Media Liaison Branch in 1986 (NSW Police 1986).

The Neighbourhood Watch program was formally launched in NSW in 1984 as a community crime prevention scheme, bringing together Police and local residents (Neighbourhood Watch Vic Inc. 2005). The Neighbourhood Watch scheme was one of a number of community crime prevention programs, with a main aim of reducing the opportunity for crime by “improving citizens’ awareness about public safety, by improving residents' attitudes and behaviour in reporting crime and suspicious events in the neighbourhood and by reducing vulnerability to crime with the help of property identification and installation of effective security devices” (Wilson and Mukherjee 1987: 156). According to Ericson and Haggerty, however, the scheme was introduced not only to prevent crime and catch criminals, but also “to help residents confront their emotional responses to risk and to become responsible for policing their own territories” (1997: 2). A year after its inception, NSW had organised four hundred and thirty five areas and by 1987 there were over one thousand Neighbourhood Watch districts in operation (Bayley 1989: 65; Wilson and Mukherjee 1987).

Crime Stoppers was developed as a concept in the USA during the mid-1970s, and was adopted by NSW Police in 1984 as Operation Crimestop, becoming known as Crime Stoppers by the late 1980s (Challinger 2003; NSW Police Force 1985; NSW
Police 2005). The aim of the program was to link the resources of the police and media in a crime fighting project. According to NSW Police website (2005):

> Crime Stoppers is a community-based initiative which encourages members of the community to provide information on wanted people, unsolved crimes and people they know have committed criminal offences but have not been arrested.

The concept of Crime Stoppers was further developed in the late 1980s with the broadcasting of the television program, Australia’s Most Wanted. The program ran for thirteen seasons during the 1980s and 1990s. The program involved the re-enactment of unsolved crimes, together with interviews with victims and police investigators. Updates on recent crimes and information on wanted and missing people were also featured in the program. In line with the Crime Stoppers campaign, Australia’s Most Wanted viewers were encouraged to contact the program if they believed they had information that could assist police enquiries.

Mirroring Commissioner Avery’s earlier words, in 1990 the NSW Police Force changed their name to the NSW Police Service, signalling a change in the focus of policing in NSW. This new direction in policing was highlighted in the 1990 Annual Report of the NSW Police Service, where changes implemented were said to be designed to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of police, making the Service more productive in serving the community. These reforms were part of a broader occurrence sweeping public services in the Western world, involving reforms that centred on neo-liberal ideology of cost-cutting and efficiency (Dupont 2003), as well as corporate private industry working within the policing and security fields. Where

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26 Dean and Thorne (2008: 50) argue that reform agendas within Australian policing organisations aimed at making police forces “more accountable, efficient and effective” are a “never-ending story”.

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previously much of the managerial responsibility had been held at police
headquarters, the Service was now split into regions, decentralising command and
making regions more accountable to the communities that they serve (Moore 1992:
48-49). It could be said that these changes bore the hallmark of new managerialism
(Fleming and Lafferty 2000), something which was first raised in the 1970s. At the
helm of this new managerialist direction was the principle of cost cutting, increased
professionalism, decline in crime rates and an increase in public satisfaction with
police. With the private sector increasingly encroaching upon services traditionally
provided by the government, organisations were feeling the pressure to perform or
perish (see Dupont 2005).

This service mentality flowed through into police-media relations when in 1990 the
former Media Liaison Branch, re-named the NSW Police Media Unit, conducted a
‘Media Effectiveness Survey’ of twenty individuals from newspaper, magazine,
television, radio and Australian Associated Press (NSW Police Media Unit 1990).
Whilst the purpose of the survey is not explicitly outlined, it could be assumed that
the PMU were interested in gauging their effectiveness as a source of information for
journalists and reporters.

Results from the fifteen questions tabled suggested that overall respondents were
pleased with the level of cooperation and service they received from the PMU. Half
of all respondents rated the service from the PMU as adequate and seventy percent
were satisfied with the response time between requests for, and the delivery of,
information from the PMU (NSW Police Media Unit 1990: 9, 11, 17). In terms of
cooperation, those surveyed found the PMU to be much more cooperative when
making inquiries than other units within the NSW Police Service. Ninety percent of respondents found the cooperation with the PMU satisfactory, compared with the mere forty-five percent who were satisfied with other branches within the Police (NSW Police Media Unit 1990: 17).

While thirty percent of respondents were said to be unsatisfied with the time it took the PMU to respond to queries and provide information, the remaining seventy percent of respondents were satisfied with general response times (NSW Police Media Unit 1990: 17). Overall the survey found that reporters were far more satisfied with their interactions with the NSW PMU than they were with other individuals and units within the NSW Police Service at the time. Comments from the respondents, however, did allude to the fact there were still some improvements to be made in the dealings between reporters and PMU officials.

In 1994 and 1995 these Media Surveys were followed up by a series of two-day forums held in a number of police districts between local media representatives and senior and local police. The proposed forums were to be held across the twenty-five districts which the NSW Police Service worked within. By the end of 1995, seventeen of the districts had held forums (NSW Police Service 1995), but it is unknown whether all twenty-five areas were ever completed. The overarching aim of the forums was to help form closer working relationships between the police and the local media within specified districts, encouraging a flow of communication between these parties and the community (Morley 1995). Each media forum invited representatives from the various media outlets in the area, as well as key police commanders, to discuss local problems or concerns in the police-media relationship,
in an attempt to understand how each side operated (Small 1994; Williams 2002). As well as helping to understand each other, the forums helped establish guidelines for dealing with major incidents, created awareness of the Police Media Policy and facilities for media enquiries outside PMU operating hours.

Despite the obvious attempts being made within NSW Police to rectify what historically had been a challenging relationship between themselves and the media, interactions were still problematic into the mid and late 1990s, possibly not helped by the intense media scrutiny around the Wood Royal Commission, which was a contributing factor in the resignation of then Police Commissioner, Tony Lauer. The Wood Royal Commission, held between 1994/1995 and 1997, was established to investigate alleged entrenched and systemic corruption within the NSW Police Service, as well as paedophilic activity and other systems and policies within the Force (Wood 1997: 1; Chan and Dixon 2007). According to Chan and Dixon (2007: 445), the Commission grew out of “a long-running history of rumours and allegations about corruption and misconduct in the police generally”. Close to three hundred police officers were unfavorably named in the Commission, which made a finding of “systemic and entrenched corruption” (Wood 1997: 84) on the basis of activities such as:

- Process corruption; gratuities and improper associations; substance abuse; fraudulent practices; assaults and abuse of police powers; prosecution-compromise or favourable treatment; theft and extortion; protection of the drug trade; protection of club and vice operators; protection of gaming and betting interests; drug trafficking; interference with internal investigations, and the code of silence; and other circumstances suggestive of corruption (Wood 1997: 83-84 cited in Chan and Dixon 2007: 446).
Whilst outside the scope of this thesis to examine the detailed findings of the Commission, it is suffice to say that the aftermath of the Commission had an enormous and immediate impact on the reform strategies within the NSW Police Service, especially given the question mark the inquiry placed over the ability of the police to fight crime (Chan and Dixon 2007: 447).

Peter Ryan came to the NSW Police Service from being a top British police chief at the height of the Wood Royal Commission into police corruption (Wood 1997). This was an extremely difficult period within NSW Police, one which came with intense media scrutiny, to which the new Commissioner was unaccustomed. Even before his arrival in Australia, Ryan was subject to criticism from parties who were skeptical of his abilities to familiarise himself with the situation of policing in NSW (Williams 2002: 151). He did nothing to quell these criticisms when in his first press conference to announce his appointment he replied “Who is Roger Rogerson?” when asked how he would deal with the corrupt former detective (Williams 2002: 152).

Ryan was also unprepared for the intense government interest in policing matters. Ryan often found himself at the centre of political panic, recalling a period in

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27 One of these reforms was the establishment of the Police Integrity Commission, which will be discussed later in this thesis.

28 According to Ryan, during his six year tenure, there were on average over 500 newspaper reports on him per month (Williams 2002: 330).

29 Roger Rogerson was a former NSW Police detective who was accused of being corrupt. His exploits are documented in the film Blue Murder, which shows Rogerson’s alleged involvement in the murder of drug dealer and user Warren Lanfranchi, the attempted murder of NSW Police Detective Michael Drury, and his association with known criminals Arthur ‘Neddy’ Smith and Graham ‘Abo’ Henry amongst others. It was said that Rogerson gave criminals the ‘green light’ to commit a variety of crimes, so long as he and his colleagues were given a cut of the profits (Smith and Noble 2002). Despite the accusations levelled against him however, Rogerson was only ever convicted of perverting the course of justice in 1990, and lying to the Police Integrity Commission in 1999. For both these offences he served time in prison.
particular where a series of murders occurred over a short period of time. Ryan (cited in Williams 2002: 161-162) mused:

I began to realise at that stage how quickly the Government responded to any troublesome newspaper headline and looked for immediate solutions as if they were being blamed for the murders, so they had to look for someone else to blame. They were all saying, ‘Let’s have crisis talks with the Commissioner’, which was a silly response. But it was a lesson to me that I would have to watch very carefully how we needed to be on the front foot whenever unusual incidents occurred because you could expect very little help politically to deal with such things.

As will be discussed in subsequent chapters, Ryan’s experience of government interest in policing issues reflects the increasing political interest in policing issues. This was especially true given the level of scrutiny on both the government and policy in regards to the Wood Royal Commission and its recommendations for reform, recommendations that were resisted internally by many officers (Williams 2002; Fleming and Lewis 2002).

It can be seen through an examination of NSW Police Force history that the relationship the police fostered with the media became increasingly important, so much so that a dedicated Unit was established to extend and solidify these relationships. This facet of the NSW Police Force, now known as the Media Unit, has become a major vehicle for the promotion of the police profile, as well as police-community relations. As noted by the former Director of Marketing and Media, Sue Netterfield (1994), in the past the media had been used by NSW Police Force in a reactive way, to announce details, rather than proactively promote issues (Netterfield
1994). The following section examines the contemporary role, policies and profile of the NSW PMU.

**The Police Media Unit of Today**

Within NSW Police, ‘professional’ relations between the police and media have developed over the history of the force, culminating in the establishment of a specialised PMU to deal with all matter of inquiries related to policing matters. Today’s PMU has continued to broaden its scope and usage of communications, which has allowed “the Police Service to retain strategic control of the agenda and the key messages” (Keelty 2006: 3). The NSW PMU is described as a “dedicated media liaison team” that handles enquiries from local, interstate and international media (NSW Police 2004b). According to the NSW Police website, the Unit:

- Manages media at major crime scenes and disasters,
- Provides a daily briefing to the senior executive,
- Manages media enquiries, produces media releases,
- Coordinates press conferences, organises launches and provides strategic advice, focusing on how media opportunities can be best managed for investigative purposes (NSW Police 2002a).

Today the PMU is a twenty four hour a day, seven day a week operation, staffed by “experienced journalists, public relations specialists and police officers” (NSW Police 2004b: 5). The PMU is an arm of the Public Affairs Branch of NSW Police, which was established in 1989. Along with the Corporate Communications Unit, the PMU comes under the leadership of a Superintendent, and reports to Support Command within NSW Police (NSW Police 2002a).
The PMU assists the NSW Police Force in their communications with the media, encouraging a “positive and co-operative relationship” between the two (NSW Police 2002a: 5). Staff at the PMU, along with all NSW Police employees, are governed by the New South Wales Police Media Policy (2004a). This policy “provides police with guidelines on the release of information to the media…what information can be released, the circumstances that should be considered and the level of authority necessary for releasing information” (NSW Police 2004a: 3). As such, the PMU is a point of contact for NSW Police faced with:

- Suspicious deaths;
- Emergencies;
- Major arrests;
- Serious crime;
- Contentious issues;
- Requests to film police;
- Incidents involving famous people, and;
- Along with any other media-related issues (NSW Police 2004a: 5).

The PMU assert that they are there not only to provide ‘accurate information’ to the public and the media, as well as advice to members of the NSW Police from Constables through to the Commissioner, but also to warn of “public danger”, “reduce unnecessary fear”, and to “highlight the positive aspects of police and policing” (NSW Police 2003: 17). As of mid-2003, there were seventeen staff members located within the NSW PMU: five serving police officers, ten civilian employees, and two special projects officers. These Media Officers were reported to have a range of skills in journalism, public relations, communications and police
operations (NSW Police 2002b). In 2006 twenty three people staffed the PMU, including nine civilian employees and five seconded uniformed officers.

According to the NSW Police 2001-2002 Annual Report (NSW Police 2001: 25), the PMU issued more than 2,500 media releases within the reporting period, also providing operational support to senior officers with 231 callouts and media conferences. It was also noted that the PMU received over 46,000 calls from the media, averaging at approximately 128 calls per day.

Of course, all this sounds very much like an advertising brochure for the prowess of the NSW PMU. The question remains, given the history of the Unit, who are they now? What role, beyond the jargon, does the NSW PMU play in negotiating contact between the police and the media? And how is the PMU of today different from its past expressions? These questions become all the more interesting when you consider some of the current and future challenges facing the relationship between the police and the media, such as proposals to legislate against police speaking with journalists (Police Integrity Commission 2007), and the digitalisation of police radio communications (Spicer 2008; Morri 2008), both of which will greatly impact the ability of the media to access first hand information from the police.

This chapter has explored the context from which the NSW PMU emerged, tracing the lead up to its establishment in the 1960s, and its subsequent development to its current form. The chapter began with a brief history of the establishment of the NSW Police Force. This was important to address, as it is the idiosyncrasies of this history which have allowed police-media relations to develop the way that they have. This
brief history sets the scene for the history of police-media relations in NSW, and the
development of the NSW PMU, which is explored chronologically and within the
socio-political context of this history. What emerges from this chapter is that the
development of what is today known as the PMU is revealing in a number of ways,
not least of which being how the Unit came to play such an important role within
NSW Police. The history of the Unit also emerges as being reflective of the
ideologies and political and policing concerns of the times. This history plays an
important part in helping to define the Unit today, as these early manifestations have
undoubtedly left their mark on the workings of today’s PMU in some shape or form.

The following chapter is the first of three presenting and analysing data collected
during interviews with key stakeholders in the police-media relationship in NSW.
The theme of law and order politics, as it emerged from the interviews, will be
explored, detailing the ways in which politics have come to play a significant role in
policing organisations. Part of this exploration involves examining how PMUs, such
as the NSW PMU, find themselves located in this nexus between serving the police
and public, and answering to their political masters. The chapter will begin by
broadly addressing the nexus between police and politics, and will go on to identify
examples of the situation in NSW. These themes will then be analysed with reference
to the existing literature and theoretical considerations.
CHAPTER FOUR: THE INESCAPABLE POLITICS OF LAW AND ORDER

In the previous chapter the background to the formation of the NSW PMU and the development of the Unit within its socio-political context were outlined. The chapter showed the growth in size and responsibility of the Unit, which initially emerged from the promotion of traffic safety, to the Unit of today, which amongst other duties contends with proactive and reactive media inquiries. This chapter is one of three dealing with the data generated from interviews with key stakeholders in the police-media relationship in NSW. In this chapter the theme of law and order politics, as it emerged from the interviews, will be explored, and the ways in which politics have come to play a significant role in policing organisations will be detailed. Part of this exploration involves looking at how PMUs, such as the NSW PMU, find themselves located in this nexus between serving the police and public, and answering to their political masters. The chapter will begin by broadly addressing the nexus between police and politics, and will go on to identify how the situation is seen in NSW and relate these themes to the relevant literature and theory.

According to Reiner (2000: 8), “policing is inherently and inescapably political”, as the police are at the centre of state functioning. Indeed, Bayley (1985: 189) has suggested that police are “to governments as the edge is to the knife”. The high profile of police business, and the ways in which law and order issues come to be known through the mass media, means that the impact of policing on the political arena is something of immense interest to politicians (Finnane 2002; Ericson et al
1989; Chan and Dixon 2007). According to Lewis (2005: 2), it is for this reason that police enjoy a privileged relationship with government, a relationship that is sometimes improperly exploited by governments for party political advantage. Lewis (2005: 2) goes on to say that “[p]olice are often courted by government and opposition parties in the lead up to elections, particularly when law and order issues are seen to be politically sensitive” (see also Dupont 2003). This is no less true for the NSW Police Force, who find that, particularly during pre-election climates, they are undeniably important figures in the law and order debate, as was evident in Chapter Three’s discussion on the situation during the 1980s, and has been highlighted by former NSW Police Commissioner Peter Ryan (cited in Williams 2002: 249):

I didn’t realise what was happening at first, until I started seeing pictures of myself alongside politicians used as a way of promoting them… It was quite unnecessary to drag me into politics the way they did.

As Hogg and Brown (1998: 116) contend, law and order has become an issue “of considerable electoral significance”, where political parties espouse ‘get tough’ rhetoric on matters of crime in an attempt to placate community fears about crime. Again, this was certainly evident in the examination of the history of the NSW PMU in Chapter Three. To understand the nexus between politics and policing, it is important to first discuss the role that fear plays in this relationship.

**The Politicisation of Fear**

As noted, in late modern society it is practically impossible for politicians to ignore
the strong impact of public opinion, and this includes many of the fears and concerns voiced by the community in relation to crime and victimisation. These concerns and fears have been harnessed by governments, providing fertile ground for the political strategies employed by governments (Hogg and Brown 1998). With such a steady stream of public concerns around matters of crime, politicians can readily “tap into this reliable stock of anxieties, concerns and expectations” (Hogg and Brown 1998: 117; Lee 2007; Simon 2007; Lawrence 2006). Fear of crime has come to be regarded as a major social problem, a characteristic of contemporary culture and a useful tool for politicians in the quest for public support.

According to Garland (2001: 10), fear of crime has actually come to be regarded as a problem in and of itself. Late modern society is characterised by a constant sense of fear and panic over the state of society and issues relating to law and order (Young 1999). Where the concept of moral panic (Cohen 1972; Young 1971) was once used to describe discrete periods in history where specific concerns were harboured around specific groups in society, the late modern condition is defined by a continual sense of panic around a variety of concerns. In their article ‘Rethinking ‘Moral Panic’ for Multi-Mediated Social Worlds’, McRobbie and Thornton (1995) argue that Stan Cohen’s (1972) initial conception of moral panics has undergone a shift, whereby the role of moral panics in today’s society, as well as being more regular, are also more orchestrated in their presence. McRobbie and Thornton hypothesise that where once moral panics were the “unintended outcomes of journalistic practice”, they are now a form of rhetoric utilised by politicians, and others, as a way to attempt to coordinate consent and make a variety of matters newsworthy (1995: 560).
Today, in contrast to the experience during the era of Cohen’s work, many of the ‘folk devils’ that come under scrutiny in the form of moral and other pressure groups, are more likely to ‘fight back’ and respond to their demonisation. The ways in which these groups interact with the media present a number of challenges to the prevailing political culture. With such groups willing and able to interact with the media, who often welcome these opposing voices, governments have to devise ways to override these dissenting voices and re-establish their own rhetoric as superior. As McRobbie and Thornton (1995: 571) contend, “nowadays, most political strategies are media strategies. The contest to determine news agendas is the first and last battle of the political campaign”, where political parties are competing against one another for the ballot.

As is well documented, many of the moral panics that have emerged throughout history have usually had some sort of criminal aspect to them. One only has to think of the panic around the AIDS virus and the vilification of the homosexual community, Muslims and terrorism, Asian crime gangs, the use of drugs such as ecstasy and heroin, and broader panics around youths (see Poynting and Morgan 2007 for examples in an Australian context). Many of the behaviours that have been subject to moral panics have not necessarily been criminal to begin with, but become criminalised because of the reaction to, and fears surrounding, the behaviours of these groups. Consequently, the police play a pivotal role in defining, perpetuating, quashing and/or responding to such fears. To reiterate a common theme throughout the thesis, governments are acutely aware of the importance policing plays in political rhetoric and legitimacy and thus are keen to harness police around the issue
of fear.

Distinctive policies have been developed and set in place, which aim to reduce levels of fear rather than simply focus on reducing actual crime (Garland 2001; Lee 2008). For example, one of the explicit goals at the centre of the NSW Police Force’s strategy is to not only reduce crime, but also the fear of crime (NSW Police Force 2008: 3). This aim has manifested itself in a number of ways, from crime prevention tips on the NSW Police Force website, to posters, leaflets and literature advising how to avoid becoming a victim of crime (see Lee 2007: 143-150). Boyle (1999a; 1999b) discovered in his own research that police campaigns aimed at reducing the fear of crime signalled a new phase in police-media relations across the UK.

As one interviewee for this thesis related, proactive ‘tools’ are often used by the police to demonstrate their effectiveness both statistically and in terms of perception:

**Journalist 11:** They’ve [NSW Police] got this thing called the worm, and everyday there is an adjustment of proactive policing, actual events in various crime categories, you know break-and-enter whatever… Much of that is about benchmarks, designed to measure the performance of those Area Commands, not only in arrest rates and that sort of stuff, but also on people’s perception.

Given all of this, police organisations are one of the institutions through which governments are able to coordinate various discourses around policing matters generally, and fears pertaining to moral panics specifically. As one journalist

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30 For example, on the latest visit the tip of the day displayed on the Home Page of the NSW Police Website was “Have an engine immobilizer for fuel cut-out switch installed to restrict the theft of your motor vehicle” (NSW Police Force 2008). This tip is then followed by a link directing visitors to more safety tips, and other pages filled with tips on business, home, school and personal safety.
commented in the interviews:

**Journalist 5:** Media and marketing has become an extremely important part of policing… the Public Affairs Branch of the Police Force is run by a Chief Superintendent. Compare that to the fact that the Missing Persons Unit for years has been run by a Detective Sergeant [and] the Homicide Squad’s run by a Superintendent.

As the key department dealing with communication between the police and public, PMUs play an important, yet often divergent, role in communicating messages around these fears. On one hand there are Media Releases espousing the successes of police in catching a dangerous criminal. This contrasts with Media Releases detailing information on a wanted person, informing the public about what steps to take if the person is spotted. For example, a recent abduction attempt in the Sydney suburb of Tempe prompted the NSW PMU to produce a Media Release with the following advice:

Police are reminding parents to reinforce ‘safe people, safe places’ messages and to be vigilant about their children’s whereabouts.

Children and young people should be encouraged to identify safe places in the streets around where they live and on the route to places where they regularly go, like school and the shops.

Some further things parents can do include:

- Parents are encouraged to walk to and from school with their children, making sure it is the safest route to travel.
- If possible, use busier roads and streets, or paths where other people are likely to be. Avoid back lanes and short cuts through isolated areas.
- Tell your children to avoid talking to people they don’t know, including people in cars that
pull over to the side of the road, and instil in them that they should never go anywhere or get into a car with someone they don’t know.

- Always tell your children if someone other than you is going to pick them up from school.
- Talk to your child about where they should go for help if they feel scared or something happens to them. Safe places to go would include a shop, service station, police station or school.
- Use common signs to help children identify ‘safe places’ they can approach for help. For example, the police blue checked square, their own doctor’s surgery, a service station or library, an information sign at a shopping centre or a hospital if there is one close to home or school (NSW Police Force Media Unit 2008a).

Lee (2007: 143) terms this as “governance through fear”. That is, the advice disseminated by the police, and the PMU specifically, not only directs us to be ‘self-responsibilising’ in relation to potential victimisation, but it is also fear inducing in that the consequences for not protecting ourselves against the scourge of crime can be frightening (Lee 2007:149). Lee (2007; 2008) and others (O’Malley 1992; Stenson 1993) see this as indicative of the shift towards neo-liberalism, whereby individual responsibility is emphasised, accordingly taking the focus away from governments and police and their failure to provide for the safety and security of citizens (see Chermak and Weiss 2005). For governments and police alike, fear becomes a technique of governance, producing “active, liberal subjects” (Lee 2007: 150). It is for this reason that the police, and particularly their PMUs, play an important role in aligning with the state’s broader project of governance.

It is important to note that the use of fear by governments and the police happens on two levels. On one level, fear is constructed by political parties as a way of
harnessing community anxieties and fostering support for particular policies. It is not uncommon to see governments and opposition parties play out particular issues in the public arena, trying to ‘one up’ each other on their solutions to crime concerns. Police can often be enlisted in this project when governments offer support for projects targeting particular issues. For example, the recent government support and funding towards the use of tasers\(^ {31}\) by general duties police saw both the government and NSW Police Force come together to announce the deployment of tasers to officers across Local Area Commands (NSW Police Force Media Unit 2008b). Of course, this announcement was countered by the Opposition, who labelled the taser roll out “just a stunt”, “more spin than substance”, and declared that “the Government would make the guns more readily available if it was serious”, referring to the decision to only supply the tasers to supervising officers, not front line police (ABC News 2008a)\(^ {32}\). Lawrence (2006: 14) likens this type of rhetoric to the “magician’s trick of misdirection- directing the public’s attention away from real trends and dangers”. Thus, the use of fear here is for party political advantage.

Fear can also be utilised within a broader agenda of governance. This is where policing and fear converge again, but for a different type of agenda, one which is interested in using fear as a technology of the neo-liberal project. We see this in the examples provided above, where discourse develops around the ways in which citizens can safeguard against the risks of crime themselves: the project of self-governance. Fear of crime therefore is not just a tool through which politicians can compete against each other in the ‘war on crime’, but also a tool through which

\(^{31}\) Tasers are electronic stun guns utilised by police as a “less than lethal” alternative to guns (Symons-Brown 2008).

\(^{32}\) Boyle (1999a; 1999b: 239) encountered similar responses his Strathclyde study, with some journalists branding the ‘Spotlight Initiative’ a publicity stunt.
governments can shape the behaviour and activities of the public, and in both cases, the police are, complicitly or not, inherently tied to these agendas.

## Politics and the Police

Garland (2001: 13) argues that the politicisation of crime control has transformed the structure of relationships that connect the political process and the institutions of criminal justice, such as the police. Schlesinger and Tumber (1994) too have recognised the increasingly central role of the state in policing practices. Finnane (1994; 2002) in his work on police, unions and the government has traced the developments of these relationships in the NSW context to highlight how important police organisations are to the political landscape. Dixon (2001: 216-217) too has argued that NSW Police are “over politicised”, suffering from their “historical commitment to crime fighting” at the hands of politicians “who misrepresent crime problems, exploit public fears and offer hopeless solutions” masquerading as law and order policy. The evolving political interest in matters of policing in NSW came across in interviews conducted for this thesis, and was highlighted by one interviewee:

**Journalist 3:** I think I’ve seen the political climate change too. I think in the 80s, late 80s and early 90s, politicians saw a political benefit, not just a public benefit, in police reform… then I think by the late 90’s it became like an unexploded bomb. And they moved back into the mode of wanting to conceal scandal, which is where we are now.

As discussed in Chapter One, Finnane paid particular attention to the role that police management and unions had in early dealings with the media. According to Finnane
(2002), it is these early interactions that characterise the ways in which police bureaucracy and the government in Australia have attempted to regulate the police-media relationship. In Australia, much of the political interest in policing was prompted by the recognition of the growing influence of the mass media on the population (Finnane 2002). Where previously politicians were reliant upon the views of experts and research, their actions are now more commonly buoyed by publicity; they pay greater attention to the wave of popular opinion when formulating ideologies and policies around law and order (Garland 2001: 13). Consequently politicians have become principally concerned with law and order decision making, taking a more ‘hands on’ approach in the policy making process (see for example Anderson 2001). As Finnane (1994: 39) explains in his work, “there has long been an ambiguity in understanding the proper domain of ministerial authority and that of the commissioner”. This very issue came to the fore in the 1970s when Queensland and South Australian police commissioners refused to obey ministerial directions on operational issues (Dupont 2003), and it was again raised as a concern during the tenure of Michael Costa as NSW Police Minister in the 2000s (Williams 2002: 334; Chan and Dixon 2007). Despite Royal Commissions delineating police and government roles within the relationship, as Dupont (2003: 17) notes:

[T]he managerial reforms undergone by Australian police services since the 1980s have significantly altered the operational independence of commissioners and strengthened the grip of ministerial controls on law enforcement functions.

A striking example is the recent transfer of decision making powers from the police executive to politicians, through the Treasury (Dupont and Drive 2002: 2; Dupont 2003: 15; Dupont 2005), as well as the intervention of former Police Minister
Michael Costa in “what would conventionally be considered operational matters” (Chan and Dixon 2007: 46). This correlates with the increasing management and oversight within policing organisations, as discussed elsewhere. With every crime control decision coming under intense public and media scrutiny, it is little wonder governments might wish to hold a tight rein over this potentially politically damaging area of the public service.

As explored in Chapter Three the face of crime control has changed in other ways too. No longer confined to the realm of public organisations, such as the police, the private and commercial sectors in recent decades have encroached upon the previously public sphere of security provision and crime prevention. This, combined with the erosion or reshaping of the sovereign state, results in the inability of the state to continue to uphold its status as the sole provider in the field of crime control (Garland 2001; Bauman 2004; Crawford 2002; Hughes 2007). With the state’s ability to govern all aspects of social life becoming increasingly limited, particularly in the realm of crime control and law and order, governments are now faced with the problem of potentially having to withdraw their claim as primary providers of crime control (Garland 2001). With crime rates increasing since the late 1960s, 1970s and into the 1980s, the impact of globalisation and the erosion of borders, and the proliferation of neo-liberal political rationalities, crime control has now become less centralised within governments. As a result, aspects of crime control have moved beyond the realms of government into the private sector. One of the major consequences for governments in making such a withdrawal is that, given the highly politicised nature of law and order issues and the glare of publicity surrounding this aspect of government as already explored, the admission of failure can have
devastating political outcomes. As Mawby (2007) and Lovell (2003) highlight, increasingly the police are being exposed for their failures and inadequate practice.

Casey and Mitchell (2007: 7) argue that although in Australia we have not experienced the same degree of constraints to funding, or the outsourcing of policing as other public sector agencies, “many of the fundamental organisational concepts of public sector reform have been adopted, as reflected in the emergence of new operating discourses such as the ‘governance of security’”. This is also supported by Wood and Dupont (2006), who in their edited collection, Democracy, Society and the Governance of Security, explore in depth the pluralisation of security provision, the de-centred state agenda, and the dispersal of practices in the promotion of security.

The capacity of the state to govern has also been judged in new ways since the September 11 terror attacks on the USA. These events have increasingly put focus and pressure on both state and national policing agencies, and the government, to promote national security and anti-terror messages, with one of the most famous and much criticised Federal Government campaigns, the ‘Be Alert, Not Alarmed’ campaign. Policing agencies have had to respond to these pressures to detect and prevent potential terror threats, and governments have responded in kind by allowing greater powers to police in order to combat these risks. Federally, this has resulted in amendments to the Crimes Act 1914, including:

- Powers to stop and search persons in relation to terrorist acts;

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33 As Lee (2007: 160-161) discusses, this campaign was aimed at advising citizens to be alert in detecting and reporting information related to suspicious, terror-related activity. As well as an extensive media campaign, households were sent an information package, which included a fridge magnet, outlining the contact number for a 24-hour terror hotline.
- Powers to obtain information and documents in terrorism investigations;
- Bail not to be given for terrorist offences;

In addition, new laws such as the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism Act 2002, the Border Security Legislation Amendment Act 2002, the Telecommunications Interception Legislation Amendment Act 2002, and the Anti-Terrorism Act (No. 2) 2005 have all been introduced post-September 11 (Parliament of Australia 2008; Australian Federal Police 2008). At a state level, the powers now afforded to the NSW Police Force include the NSW Terrorism (Police Powers) Act 2002, the Terrorism (Police Powers) Amendment (Preventative Detention) Act 2005 (since repealed) and the Surveillance Devices Act 2008. Internally, police have set up a number of special groups and taskforces aimed at preventing, preparing and responding to “high risk situations, and all acts of terrorism in NSW” (NSW Police Force 2008: 46).

Since the introduction of terror laws, there have been a number of ‘good’ outcomes for police. The recent arrest and conviction of terror suspects in Victoria has been heralded as a success based on this new legislation. There have, however, been a number of controversial cases to emerge from the application of these new terror laws. For example, the Mohamed Haneef case, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation

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34 In September 2008 seven men were convicted of being members of a terrorist cell who were plotting to bomb a popular sporting event. Post-conviction, Federal Attorney-General Robert McClelland praised the work of, and cooperation between the Australian Federal Police (AFP), Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO), Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) and the Victorian Police Force (ABC News 2008b; Maley 2008a).

35 In July 2007 Mohamed Haneef, and Indian born doctor working in Queensland, Australia, was arrested and subsequently charged by the AFP for “recklessly supplying support to a terrorist organisation” (Rix 2008: 111). It was alleged that Haneef have supplied a mobile SIM card to his cousin, who was later implicated in the Glasgow Airport terror attach (Rix 2008). Some two weeks later, all charges were dropped against Haneef, with the Commonwealth DPP determining that there
(APEC) conference security approaches and the attempted introduction of ‘anti-anoyance’ laws during the recent visit of the Pope all generated negative publicity for state and federal policing agencies and governments (Maley 2008b; McGrath 2008; Powell and Pelly 2008; Matchett 2008; Gibson, Morris and Gibson 2008). The federal intelligence watchdog has since called for the review of terrorism legislation (AAP 2008).

Given the reduced abilities of the state, and the potential political costs of admitting failure on crime control provisions, the goal for politicians has been to create policy choices that promote the state’s capacity to govern, whilst at the same time maintain their political credibility and evoke popular support (Garland 2001). Hogg and Brown (1998) believe that this has resulted in new styles and techniques of political campaigning, where there is greater emphasis on polling and the marketing of political issues, messages and images to a more suspicious voting population. For example, the graduation of a new group of police recruits immediately prior to the 2007 NSW State Election was heralded by the incumbent government as the realisation of their promise to increase police numbers (Hansard and Papers 2007: 242). Consequently, politicians, no longer able to predictably rely upon established supporters, instead present voters strategies based more around imagery and issues based ideas than firmly grounded policies and ideologies, in the hope of securing the popular vote (Hogg and Brown 1998: 117).

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was not enough evidence to support the charges. Haneef’s arrest and detention was facilitated under the recently acquired amendments to the federal terrorism related legislation, which has since been criticised. At the time of writing, findings of an official inquiry into the Haneef case are being finalised.
This signifies a shift in the framework through which criminal justice policies are formulated and implemented, “creating practical and ideological dilemmas for actors” located in this organisational field (Beckett 2001: 901). Policies are not always based on informed and detailed information and debate; rather they are often prompted by emotional and moral ‘commonsense’ understandings of crime (Hogg and Brown 1998: 117-118). Former NSW Police Commissioner Peter Ryan argued in the aftermath of his controversial departure that the media were too influential in the running of policing in NSW (Colvin 2002; Williams 2002). Indeed, he felt that government decisions, including his own sacking, were often made in response to media criticism and critique. This view is supported by Dupont (2006), who argues that the media have a considerable influence over policing decisions. Garland (2001) believes that these dilemmas can often lead to conflicts and struggles between administrative actors, who are concerned with organisational management, and their political masters, more concerned with popular appeal.

**Politics and the NSW Condition**

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, indisputably strong connections between the NSW Police Force and the NSW State Government exist, although these relationships may shift and evolve. In the interviews conducted with journalists the issue of separation, or lack thereof, between police and politics, was repeatedly identified as a significant issue. As some reflected:

**Journalist 12:** I think the NSW Police Force is highly politicised. And if there was a change in government it would be politicised the other way because of the nature of the Westminster system.
Journalist 5: All of the criticism about government spin and government spin as it relates to policing comes back to the importance that media and marketing has within the Police Force, and vice versa. That branch of the cops has got so much importance because police are such political pawns.

Journalist 14: The government worked out a fair while ago that policing is their main political battleground when they come to election time. It’s highly politicised and the police themselves are highly politicised, they know how to wield their power, they know where they stand in the political forefront. They’re extremely potent basically.

What is suggested by the interview data here is reflective of theorising around the public relations (PR) state. What we see now is that PMUs, and the NSW PMU in particular, have become “an institutionalised and indispensible feature of the Australian public relations state” (Ward 2003b: 32; see also Ward 2007). According to Deacon and Golding (1994: 5), in the pursuit of promoting their own policies and successes, governments are increasingly looking towards public relations professionals to ensure that the media carry forward their preferred message to the public, a message that is more about symbols, style and the control of image and information than substance (Grattan 1998); a ‘PR State’. It is no surprise then that government is one of the biggest employers not only of press and public relations officers, but also advertising (Deacon and Golding 1994: 6; Savage and Tiffen 2007: 81-82; Ward 2007). Police, as an arm of the government, are not immune from this.

Increasingly we see that police, along with other government agencies, are investing in reality television programs in an effort to boost their image (Mawby 2007; Reiner
2000b). Shows such as *The Force*\(^{36}\), *The Code*\(^{37}\), *Missing Persons Unit*\(^{38}\), *Crime Investigation Australia*\(^{39}\) and *Crash Investigation Unit*\(^{40}\), focusing on policing in NSW, gives ‘good copy’ or publicity for the police, who have veto over what goes to air and the angles promoted in the programs (Burton 2007). Mawby (2002b: 38) has also recognised this phenomenon in the UK. Within the latest NSW Police Force Annual Report, under the banner of ‘Public Trust and Confidence’, NSW Police acknowledge film and television opportunities such as those listed above as offering “a platform to promote our business” and core objectives (NSW Police Force 2008: 41). This scenario is not unique to police however, with shows such as *Border Security* depicting the ‘good work’ of Australian Customs, Quarantine and Immigration Departments.

Ward (2003a; 2003b) argues that there are three arms of the PR state: departmental public affairs sections, media units and media minders. These three arms, according to Ward (2003a: 9), demonstrate the importance of public relations as a fundamental part of contemporary governance. In this way, media units within policing agencies are not only representative of the PR state, but also are demonstrative of the influence of ‘new public managerialism’ within policing agencies, as discussed later in this thesis.

\(^{36}\) *The Force* promotes itself as a “real-life cop series”, highlighting “the raw reality of life as a police officer” (*The Force Channel 7 TV Show Website* 2008). The show, broadcast on Channel 7, focuses on situations involving both NSW and Western Australian Police Forces.

\(^{37}\) Similar to *The Force*, but broadcast on Channel 9.

\(^{38}\) *Missing Persons Unit*, broadcast on Channel 9, describes itself as the “real-life Without a Trace”, where viewers can assist police in finding missing “loved ones” (*Channel 9 - Missing Persons Unit Website* 2008). The show follows staff from the NSW Police Missing Persons Unit as they investigate missing persons cases.

\(^{39}\) *Crime Investigation Australia* is broadcast on Foxtel’s pay television Crime Investigation channel. The series examines “Australia’s most infamous murder cases”, speaking with police investigators, witnesses, victims’ families, and re-enacting events in many of the cases (*Channel 9 –CIA* 2008). The show has also been bought by Channel 9 (a free to air station).

\(^{40}\) *Crash Investigation Unit* follows the NSW Police Crash Investigation Unit as they investigate the causes of fatal car accidents around the state.
Police themselves are also acutely aware of the politicisation of policing in the State, so much so that, rather ironically, a number of ex-NSW Police officers decided to run for parliament in the 2007 State Election. Each of the five candidates chose to stand against the incumbent government due to “the politicisation of the police, the use of the force as a public relations arm of the Labor government and chronic underfunding” (Mitchell 2007: 22). This was in line with the policy being promoted by the Opposition in the lead up to the election, which advocated the reduction of the bureaucracy within the Police Ministry and “Police Media spin doctors by 70%” (NSW Liberal Party 2007a: 3). As Garland (2001) explains, however, both ruling and opposition sides in government cannot afford to ignore the ballot box mileage in politicising policing, for it plays such an important role in securing the public vote. For example, in an attempt to outdo the Labor Government at the last state election ballot, the Liberal Opposition committed itself to increasing police resources and numbers, as well as introducing a ‘zero tolerance’ approach to street crime (NSW Liberal Party 2007b; 2007c).

In NSW the PMU is seen to play an extremely important part in this nexus between police and politics. The Unit is frequently accused by opposition politicians of being the ‘government’s mouthpiece’; or part of the NSW government ‘spin’ machine (The Sun-Herald 2006), and the issue of police-government interface has long been a trouble spot for policing in NSW (see Dixon 1999a; Finnane 1994). Ward (2003b: 33) contends that whilst departmental public affairs sections ostensibly do not serve a political purpose, situations can arise whereby these units are directed by ministerial
offices to suit a political objective that can be beneficial to the minister\textsuperscript{41}. Support may also come in the form of the departmental units monitoring relevant media coverage alongside the minister’s own media office, as well as dealing with media inquiries and disseminating press releases (Ward 2003b: 33).

Ward’s analysis resonates with a case which made headlines in NSW. In 2001 the NSW PMU faced allegations that it had acted improperly in relation to the circumstances arising from a statement made by John Aquilina, the then NSW Minister for Education and Training (Independent Commission Against Corruption 2001b). On the 10\textsuperscript{th} April 2001 the Minister made a statement within NSW Parliament relating to diary entries made by a high school student. In these diary entries it was alleged that the student outlined his intentions to carry out a massacre at his school (Independent Commission Against Corruption 2001b). The Minister’s Statement resulted in a great deal of public comment and media attention (Australian Associated Press 2001; Chulov and McIlveen 2001; McIlveen 2001; McIlveen, Chulov and Denney 2001), and shortly afterwards, it was alleged that someone within the NSW Government ordered the NSW Police Service to withdraw a media release that contradicted the government’s own version of how the alleged school massacre was foiled, in a bid to prevent political damage to the Education Minister (Chulov and McIlveen 2001: 3; Penberthy 2001). This action came under great media and public scrutiny and led to the launching of an investigation by the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC).

\textsuperscript{41} Ward (2003b) gives the example of the ‘children overboard’ scandal for the Federal government.
In examining whether public officials improperly ordered the NSW Police Service PMU to withdraw a media statement that contradicted the Minister’s statement that police had been contacted about the incident (Independent Commission Against Corruption 2001b), the ICAC (2001a; 2001b) determined that:

No improper pressure was brought to bear on the Police Media Unit to withdraw an initial media statement which contradicted Minister Aquilina’s statement that police had been contacted about the student diary incident. No finding of corrupt conduct against anyone was therefore appropriate.

Although in this case there were no adverse findings in relation to the alleged political intervention, it certainly raises questions of independence, accountability and the separation of powers between Ministers as political appointees, and public service officials, such as the police. And, given that the alleged situation involved input from the Minister on a non-operational level, one asks the question whether it is any more or less improper than if the Minister had directed NSW Police operationally.

Similar concerns were highlighted by Fleming (2004: 60) in her article on relationships between Australian Police Commissioners and their political masters. Fleming found that these relationships were often marked with conflict and ambiguity due to the “complex and diverse legislation” surrounding the roles and responsibilities of the two parties, leading to the blurring of jurisdiction over policy formation and policy implementation and operation (Fleming 2004: 61, 67 and 68).
Many of these same concerns around the police-politics relationship were expressed by the journalists and ex-PMU staff interviewed for this thesis. As one journalist put it, while the PMU staff might suggest they can put the Minister’s office in its place, this might be overstating it:

**Journalist 11:** If you talk to Police Media people, they’ll say ‘oh you know we just tell the Minister’s office to get fuc[ked’, that kind of stuff, but it’s simply not correct. At some point they have to answer the requirements of the political master.

This view was supported by an ex-PMU staffer:

**Ex-PMU/Other 3:** When I joined [the PMU]… it was really just an arm of the government, of the Minister, it was a political office which it shouldn’t have been. To me the separation of powers weren’t [sic] there; and the Minister’s man was in there making sure that what came out was positive… What they were really doing there when I was there was protecting the Minister and the image of the department.

Another journalist experienced first hand how a politically sensitive issue could result in intervention from the Minister’s office:

**Journalist 4:** I was doing a story on a non-operational matter that I had organised through the Media Unit. When I went to actually do the final interview, the Minister’s office intervened and tried to stop me from doing the story… I resisted and did the story anyway. I think it was political interference from the Minister’s office… Their entire policy is against holding things back when it is non operational isn’t it?

This reflects Burton’s (2007) notion of the increase in PR, not as a way of providing information to the public, but as a means of protecting agencies and ministers from
public controversy. Other journalists also discussed the ‘pressure’ to conform to the political line being held by the government:

**Journalist 6:** The way it works, there’s a lot of pressure from Macquarie Street on the Police Media Unit to do exactly what they say.

**Journalist 9:** I’m telling you now if you’re sitting in an office now on the 14th floor, or 15th floor, and the Minister’s office is just below you, and the Minister’s man is in charge of the Media Unit, what do you think is going on?

Another interviewee put it quite bluntly:

**Journalist 2:** Well, make no mistake. These days the Police Media Unit is a political arm of the government of the day. At a time when the government wants to avoid nasty headlines, it needs to be in control of the Media Unit… It’s quite insidious the extent to which the release and the dissemination of news is manipulated, depending on whether it’s politically hot or not… I am acutely aware of the undue influence that the government has over media units in various government departments. The Police Media Unit is just a very graphic example of how that works.

In 2004 NSW Opposition member Andrew Constance attacked the role of public relations within the NSW Police. In a speech to parliament he made the following assessment of the PMU and PR within NSW Police:

There is no doubt that the Police Media Unit is politicised. The fact that the Government is not at arm’s length from that organisation could make police in that unit and in the community who have to deal with media exposure vulnerable. In 1999 I was concerned about that amount of money that the

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42 Macquarie Street is where NSW Parliament House is located.
Government was willing to throw at media training for police\textsuperscript{43}, and no doubt that training is ongoing. The emphasis on public relations training for police is of continuing concern. That is clearly demonstrated in the contractual obligations between the commissioner and the Minister. The Government, which has been built on spin, puts its public relations before the substance of debate and continually allows public relations to get ahead of the debate and the facts (Hansard and Papers 2004: 11025).

Concerns surrounding the politicisation of policing have also been further compounded by the fact that the State Government appoints the position of Police Commissioner. In this sense there was a perception amongst interviewees that the problem of political separation began at the top. Many of those interviewed believed that, as a political appointment, the NSW Police Commissioner invariably has ties and obligations to his political masters who gave him his job. Journalist 10 indicated that there was some complexity to the relationship, but that it was still problematic:

\textbf{Journalist 10:} The government appoints the Commissioner, and the government doesn’t want the police service being on the front page, that’s the last thing they want, in a negative way. But, relationships between Commissioners and Government can vary tremendously… you can have absolutely poisonous relationships between Commissioners and Ministers. I think, it’s more complex than the Police Commissioner and Media Unit being onside with the government… the interrelationships are very complex I think. I don’t think that they do the bidding of the government, although, I must say, Moroney is probably as acquiesce [sic] to a lot of the State Government decisions, and is seen as something of a weak Commissioner in terms of maybe being too close to the government and not standing up to them enough.

\textsuperscript{43} Andrew Constance earlier in his speech claimed that in 1999 the Government contracted a number of public relations agencies to administer media training for over 650 police (Hansard and Papers 2004: 11025).

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This view resonates with former Police Commissioner Peter Ryan’s experience. For him, when things were going well, the Government were happy to share in the limelight. Conversely however, when things went bad, the Government were quick to distance themselves from the police (Williams 2002: 188, 190, 191).

For others, things were more straightforward:

**Journalist 2:** As a Police Commissioner, you’re always going to want to please the Minister in some way, because he’s the one who has given you the job! You’re not going to go out of your way to piss him off.

Despite declarations from the Commissioner on his separation from the political arm, journalists were still critical of the reality of the relationship, and the need for the police to engage in politics:

**Journalist 5:** One thing that Moroney said almost immediately [upon his appointment as Commissioner] was that he would be making the point to the Police Minister that he would have to acknowledge, actively acknowledge, the fact that there was a complete division of power between the role of the Police Commissioner and the role of the Police Minister. In other words, a separation of power. But I think in reality, it was a false message. I think NSW Police, as far as its Executive and Senior, are very much an extra arm of government. They sometimes complain about policing issues and policing figures being politicised. I think that’s also false, I think they actively sought to enter the political den themselves. The Police Commissioner for example would never openly criticise the Police Minister. The Police Minister would never openly criticise the Police Commissioner and everyone under the Commissioner is expected to toe that line. You’ve got this audacious concept whereby members of the Police Executive, and these are officers from the rank of Assistant Commissioner up to Commissioner, there’s about thirty odd of them,
work on a contract basis and part of their contract is the expectation that they will not uphold laws so much as implement government policy. And that’s just wrong, I think that’s wrong. But you’ll never see a copy of that contract, it’s not for the public record.

For one journalist, this was seen to manifest in the powers afforded to the Police Commissioner:

**Journalist 14:** There is no clear delineation in New South Wales. We had a case a while ago where the Minister, as far as I’m concerned, curtailed the Commissioner’s role and took over more aspects of the Commissioner, in the way they make decisions in the Police Force overall… I was writing stories about that and contacts of mine were basically saying ‘look the Commissioner should be the Commissioner of Police, they should be the ones that make the decisions’. The whole reason is that politicians are only into one thing, which is to get elected, their whole role is to get elected in the Government to maintain power, that’s the only reason they’re there. Therefore decisions that are made are based on that rather than what’s best for policing. I think there’s a massive conflict of interest there that really shouldn’t occur. The Commissioner of Police should be somebody who is totally separate from that, whose only role in life is to decide what’s best for our community to protect us and to make sure that we have the right police force and the right resources, and the right needs, and within his budget, or her budget. But unless you’ve got someone in government who is such a wonderful person, who really doesn’t care about being voted in and all that and does his decisions on that basis, it’s not going to occur.

The observations made by the journalists interviewed very much resonate with the concepts put forward by Garland and others. In the realm of crime control Garland (2001) considered two categories of personnel that are involved in policy development, and the delivery of criminal justice principles, in late modernity.
Political actors, as mentioned earlier, are concerned with making policy choices that are heavily influenced by popular opinion, and demonstrate a degree of ‘toughness’ and steer public opinion away from the idea that the state is avoiding its responsibility for controlling law and order matters (Garland 2001; Hogg and Brown 1998; Dupont 2006). This group of actors consists primarily of politicians, who develop policy initiatives in relation to competing political ideologies and in line with the populist thinking of the day. According to Dupont (2006: 91):

> Governments, ministers and parliaments represent the main authorizers of public security, passing laws, appropriating budgets and expecting responsiveness from police agencies in return… This has resulted in direct and indirect attempts to control operational policing in an effort to please the media and public.

This phenomenon is something that has been discussed at the start of this chapter, and rose to prominence in the 1980s as discussed in Chapter Three. For Dupont (2006: 94), the place the media play in the relationship between political and administrative actors is in their creation of unrealistic demands on police, government and the public.

On the other side are the administrative actors, whose job it is to run an organisation, but who are often constrained in their decision making by external considerations (Garland 2001). Policing organisations, as administrative actors, are “driven by the need to maintain the integrity of internal processes, to adjust their organisation to keep pace with changes in its external environment, to repair perceived deficiencies and to address organisational failures” (Garland 2001: 111). As Feeley and Simon (1992: 451) argue, the problem for administrators, such as the police, is the
translatability of many of the ideologies being put forward by political actors into practice. They are also hamstrung by governmental and parliamentary arbitrations around things such as budgets, political capital and cultural capital (Dupont 2006). The solution, Feeley and Simon (1992) argue, is ‘the new penology’. The new penology is a management tool, concerned with rationality and efficiency. As Feeley and Simon (1992: 453) explain, “[t]hese new doctrines rest upon actuarial ways of thinking about how to “manage” accidents and public safety”. It is perhaps these very ideologies that have contributed to the proliferation of PMUs within policing organisations, as a technology of this new discourse. This is where the police agency as inward looking is important. As previously discussed, institutions such as the police measure their own outputs as indicators of success (Feeley and Simon 1992: 456; Garland 2001). As Gillespie, Sicard and Gardner (2007: 168) put it, “police strategy and allied performance management is always constrained by a duality of purpose, notably legitimising the police, their functions and operations to the electorate, whilst encouraging and demonstrating efficient resource use”.

The State and Crime Control: Political and Administrative Actors: Spot the Difference

One of the main problems in trying to understand the position of the PMU in relation to the government and NSW Police is that they are situated in a potentially contradictory position between political and administrative domains. Their goal is not only to illustrate administrative efficiency within the Police Force, and communicate crime risks and information to the media and public, but they also have to contend with external political pressures, which require them to act in ways that
seek to avoid many of the scandals and risks that are often associated with policing organisations. For the police, as administrative actors, the problems of political spin and public relations have become an increasingly important aspect of their organisation (Finnane 1994; Dixon 1999a), and the impact and consequence of public perceptions is reinforced internally, but more significantly externally, via political actors (Garland 2001; see also Lovell 2003). In the following section I will address the ways in which the politicisation of policing is manifest through the NSW PMU.

The Rhetoric of the Police Media Unit

As has been noted, rhetoric is important in the political arena, and for the NSW PMU this is one of the key areas in which agendas can be advanced, not only for the benefit of the government, but also to the benefit of the police. This resonates with the move towards new public management systems within policing organisations, as will be discussed in the next chapter. The important issues here are the themes advanced around accountability, transparency, participation, relationship management and efficiency; ‘good (corporate) governance’ (Gillespie, Sicard, Gardner 2007: 168; Edwards 2002: 52). More than ever, there is an expectation for governments, and consequently the police, to communicate with the public (Edwards 2002: 59). Given the importance of being seen as effective, as has been previously outlined in this chapter, it is vital that the PMU communicates in ways that advertise the good work that the police are engaging in. In the aftermath of the Wood Royal Commission into police corruption, this was especially important and, as will become apparent in the following chapters, often the line that the PMU promotes
directly impacts on the relationship they have with journalists and others who challenge them. As one journalist put it:

**Journalist 13:** It is always in their [PMU] interest to publicise police and make them look good, so if there’s been a particularly good arrest or something, they’re going to want the whole world to know, because it’s important for them and certainly for Ken Moroney that the perception of crime, not in a twisted propaganda like way, but they want people to know that police are dealing with things out there…

The PMU, whether in a calculated way or not, works in ways that enable the filtering of information about the police to the media and the public. But more than this, they can serve consumers and react to customers’ needs by providing ‘public service’ information. At the very same time, however, they can help to redefine the goals of the organisation by shifting the responsibility for crime control to the public. PMUs create opportunities for the ‘responsibleisation’ of the public, where crime control is reconstructed as a ‘partnership’ and the ability to ‘serve and protect’ is rendered contingent on inter-alia public input.

This chapter has explored the condition of police and policing, examining how increasingly matters of policing have become politicised. Continual moral panics, and fear around all manner of issues, have become tools of government and police in their governance project. Police, as the primary definers of fears around crime, have the ability to perpetuate or quash such concerns. Politicians, equally, have come to realise this, and thus have enlisted police, and the PMU, in ‘governance through fear’. In this way, fear can be used as a political tool that feeds into the self responsibilisation of citizens. This has become a particularly important project for
governments and police alike, who have come under increasing scrutiny from the media and the public for their abilities to manage crime control and community safety.

The chapter has also explored the link between politics and the police in NSW specifically, drawing on interview material that highlights the politically significant role that the NSW PMU plays in the promotion of the police, and therefore the government too. Many interviewees raised concerns about the separation of powers, or lack thereof, between police and the state. The PMU has come to be situated in a difficult, and sometimes contradictory position, which has it responding to often conflicting political and administrative priorities.

It is with this in mind that we move to the next chapter, which deals with the specific ways in which the NSW PMU are demonstrative of a ‘taming of the system’, whereby the PMU operates in such a fashion as to tame, or manage, the flow of information in relation to police. The chapter will examine the ways in which the PMU not only ‘tames’ the media, but also the ways in which the PMU is itself ‘tamed’ by administrative and managerial oversight, media policies and guidelines, and political demands. Furthermore, the chapter explores how the PMU controls information pertaining to the NSW Police and attempts to present policing in a way that often blurs the lines between information and political spin, attempts at control that go beyond previous attempts in the history of the PMU.
In the last chapter the nexus between police and politics was explored, and both the importance of policing issues to the government of the day and the ways in which political interest in policing can directly influence or interfere with policing organisations were described. In this chapter the aim is to explore the ways in which the NSW PMU can be seen as one of potentially a number of sites within the NSW Police Force that are indicative of and contribute towards a ‘taming’ of the system. As discussed in Chapter Three, the NSW PMU has emerged over a period of some forty years, and the development of the Unit is such that we are able to trace the increasing influence of new forms of monitoring and management on police-media interactions. What is clear from the stakeholder interviews is that this notion of ‘taming’ occurs on many levels of the police-media relationship and in the existence and operation of the NSW PMU itself. This theme will be explored in detail in this chapter.

Garland (2001: 115) notes that over the past two decades criminal justice organisations – including the police – have become less committed to externally defined purposes and more inwardly directed and have developed more defensive postures (see also Feeley and Simon 1992). New levels of monitoring, assessment and accountability have been increasingly introduced into policing organisations from the 1980s onwards as governments enhanced their capacity to pursue system-wide objectives (Garland 2001). As indicated in Chapter Three, this is very well illustrated in the case of NSW. Central government has often colluded in developing reduced and ‘more realistic’ mission statements, and part of the price of failure
(perceived or otherwise) is that professional autonomy and discretion are reduced by the introduction of state-imposed guidelines, monitoring and inspection (also see Feeley and Simon 1992). As Garland (2001: 115) puts it, “‘taming the system’ – its costs, its discretionary powers, its liability to expose the public to dangers – came to be part of the project of government in this field”. The emergence and development of PMUs within policing organisations may be, at least in part, demonstrative of this very rationality of ‘taming’ of the system. The PMU becomes a form of information filter, siphon, and a guardian where sensitive stories can be ‘managed’ and ‘good news’ stories fostered and disseminated.

The NSW Police Media Unit: The ‘Tamed’ and the ‘Tamer’

The emergence and growth of the mass media from around the 1950s onwards had a significant impact on public knowledge and perceptions of the phenomenon of crime, and brought the threat and fear of crime closer to many previously unaffected by crime. The impact of the mass media on criminal justice officials and politicians, and the public opinion stemming from it could not be ignored (see Garland 2001; Lee 2008; Lee and Farrall 2008a; Lee and Farrall 2008b). These developments changed the face of policing, which increasingly had to respond to a range of outcomes from the mass media effect, such as inaccurate and unrealistic representations of crime, the distortion of public perceptions and the increasing fear of crime, community outrage over penal responses, and the growth of victim focused discourse amongst others (Garland 2001: 157-158; Edwards 2005; Finnane 1999a; Tiffen 2004). One of many progressions that occurred within policing organisations as a way of dealing with the
impact of the mass media in more proactive and productive ways was the introduction of PMUs.

This has been a continuous and significant strategy up until present times. Australia’s Federal Police Commissioner Mick Keelty (2006: 2) only recently addressed the Australian Press Council to discuss the promotion of “strong and productive” relationships between the police and the media. Keelty, aware of the increasing pressures both on the police and journalists to exchange and obtain information, called upon both parties to be more accountable and honest in the ways in which they inform and educate society (Keelty 2006). Keelty (2006: 3-4) believes that despite the complex environment police and media representatives operate within, both organisations share a responsibility to work together to “mitigate against the escalation of tensions”. This further demonstrates recognition by police of the importance of fostering their relationships with the media in a way that will be of benefit, most importantly to themselves.

As it stands today, the NSW PMU, and the Media and Marketing Branch within which it exists, plays a significant role in not only fostering links between the police and the community, but also the police and the media. It is placed in a paradoxical position of not only being the ‘tamer’, managing and fostering images of policing and shaping media and public knowledge about crime, but also being the ‘tamed’, itself being subject to administrative monitoring and guidelines for its operation and function. As evidenced through interviews conducted with a number of staff within the NSW PMU, the Unit has to juggle internal, administrative and political demands, along with external pressures for information. NSW PMU staff see the Unit as
having a number of functions. As one staff member put it:

**PMU Staffer 5:** Basically we’re here to provide a service to both police and the media. Firstly with the police officers out in the field to the executive positions upstairs, the Assistant Commissioners, Deputy Commissioners, and the Commissioner’s office. We provide a consultative role, or consultation role, and helping them somehow to deal with media, media strategies, assist them in putting information out to the media that they need to about major incidents or crimes, or arrests, that sort of stuff. We also provide a training role to officers out in the field on how they should conduct themselves during interviews, and that sort of thing, or deal with media during major incidents such as riots or public order incidents.

While one role of the PMU might be to tame the media, therefore, it also provides a role in taming the police organisation:

**PMU Staffer 2:** I suppose it’s got a number of roles. One, and these are in no particular order, is acting as a conduit of information from NSW Police to the public on our activities, what we do and what will affect the public, but it can only get to the public via the media, that’s radio, TV, or print. So our job as I see it, one of the roles is to find out what’s happening in our organisation, whether it’s good, bad or indifferent, and putting it out there… It’s also responding to media inquiries, when they find out about events or incidents, it’s chasing up that information for the media, finding out what’s happening, and… providing information to the media so they can give to the public. It’s also about identifying the good stuff that we’re doing.

Of course in reality little ‘bad’ news about the organisation is siphoned, despite the position of the PMU staff:

**PMU Staffer 1:** Basically to provide information to the media about police incidents in a timely and
accurate fashion and to assist with police on the ground dealing with media issues, to provide strategic advice to executive staff. Basically to liaise with the media to facilitate information to the public on certain incidents whether it be [of] high profile or concern, or public safety issues.

It will be argued here that the position of the NSW PMU is such that it must act as both a channel for the flow of information between the police, the media and public, and must perform in ways that satisfy the many ‘ overseers’ who demand the fulfillment of administrative and bureaucratic obligations.

### The Police Media Unit as Information Filter, Siphon and Guardian

As discussed in Chapter One, PMUs “peddle the most self-serving and optimistic version of events” (Salter 1994: 12). The NSW PMU plays an important administrative function, not only for NSW Police Force itself, but also for the NSW State Government which, as previously discussed, has an influential role, and high stakes invested in, the control of law and order matters in the state. Consequently the NSW PMU is precariously positioned in such a way that together with its own organisational duties, it often has to deal with different and sometimes competing political agendas. The increasing political involvement in the law and order agenda has also resulted in the decrease in autonomy for administrative actors, such as the PMU.
These conflicting agendas can have an effect on the ways in which the PMU operates. When questioned on the function or role of the NSW PMU, many journalists who regularly interact with the PMU recognised its facilitating role, and most had no great objection to this, as Journalist 14 notes:

**Journalist 14:** I understand their role is essentially probably not a bad idea because it’s to form a focal point for journalists because major incidents occur and there’s a lot of media in Sydney and if something major happens in Sydney they’re going to have media from everywhere ringing around… So the idea of the Media Unit from what I was under the impression of was that they formed a focal point where the information went to them, they pulled it together, and then you could ring them up and they could give you the correct information, what was happening, who was involved, why it happened...

The range of roles of the PMU was something Journalist 3 also recognised:

**Journalist 3:** Well it’s got a range of roles, but you know it’s an interface; it’s there to manage information flow because, obviously, there are a whole range of problems that have to be dealt with, such as if there is an ongoing investigation there is a limit to what can be said. There are confidentiality considerations and then of course when matters reach court there are all sorts of other considerations and then the flow the other way is managing requests from the media for all sorts of access and background briefings and checking stories and all that sort of stuff. They do a lot of media monitoring as well.

Others also point to its role in bringing information together while noting its role is really to disseminate ‘good news’:

**Journalist 13:** It’s a siphoning unit, it’s a siphoning unit in a very positive way that there are eighty local
area commands out there across the whole State, it saves me having to ring round to every single one of them to see what’s gone on overnight, or what’s happening. At the same time they can sanitise what is sent out to us as well, because obviously their function is to not only get the news out there, but to make sure it’s all good news, and if there is something that reflects poorly on police they may well take the decision while some journalist somewhere is going to find out so they’re going to put it out there anyway, generally their job is public relations, essentially a PR firm, their job is to make police look as good as possible and tell the truth at the same time and facilitate for us an easy way of reporting the news. So, you know, there’s nothing in it for them to let us know for instance that some sort of murder has happened, it doesn’t make the police look good or bad, that’s their job, and the by-product of what they do is to protect the police name.

A fourth journalist noted the role of the PMU in staying ‘on message’:

**Journalist 8:** They’re a facilitating unit there to pass on details just to facilitate media coverage. Their basic use seems to be informing journalists of where doorstops are likely to be held, who’s likely to be speaking and when. There is also a conduit role, a filter of information in some ways between police and journalists; a screen occasionally, but more so just to make sure that police get a consistent message out.

In theory many of the functions of the PMU identified by the journalists are consistent with the PMU’s own prescribed role, to help police deal with the media, anticipate media and public responses to incidents, draft statements and media releases, organise media conferences, and disseminate information instantaneously to the media, amongst other things (NSW Police 2004a: 5); basically to act as a filtering or channelling mechanism through which information can be exchanged. The journalists I interviewed also clearly articulated, however, that its role was one of ‘taming’ this flow of information.
Outside of this ‘official’ role, however, some journalists who interact with the PMU are much more skeptical about the PMU’s ‘real’ role (see also Grabosky and Wilson 1989; Wilson 1992), with one believing the Unit deliberately engaged in repressing negative stories on the police, whether that was due to being ill-informed themselves, or simply being evasive:

**Journalist 5:** I think the reality is that they are meant to provide a limited amount of factual information regarding any story of interest and general stories of interest and certainly any operational story of interest to journalists. Over and above that I think their unwritten role is to smother negative police stories, full stop. I don’t think that individuals within the Unit are employed with the express purpose of trying to trip journalists up, hide things from them, you know, to go out there and choke the life out of negative coverage of police, but, they are only given a certain amount of information themselves and if something becomes problematic, they are told to refer it to someone more senior and then a different process begins again.

Some believed that in the aftermath of the Wood Royal Commission, producing a positive image of the Force was something at the forefront of the minds of those working in the PMU:

**Journalist 1:** Their main role is to make the police service look good because if you think of the Royal Commission, it really damaged the police service, and if they don’t look good, if they don’t have respect, if they don’t have the respect of the public, then people are going to treat cops like crap. It’s really important for them to look like an organisation that’s working properly, functioning properly, it’s not corrupt, and the Royal Commission did a lot of damage there, so that’s where it was after the Royal Commission that the Media Unit really ramped it up and became a really important part of the police service.
The incongruity in the priorities of PMU staff was recognised by one journalist, who mused over exactly what the role of the Unit should be:

**Journalist 14:** They’re in this really weird position where they’ve got a job to do and I think it’s wrong that their role is to promote positive outcomes for policing, I actually don’t know if that should be their role. Their role should be to inform the community, and if they inform the community through us, then so be it, but if they’re informing the community by putting out their own TV show so be it, it should be their role to keep the community informed on what police are doing.

Others who had worked within the Unit believed that promoting positive images went beyond protecting the police. As Ex-PMU/Other 3 relates, often the Unit was charged with protecting the image of the Police Minister, a role that, it was argued, should not be its priority:

**Ex-PMU/Other 3:** [Their role was] to protect the Minister, well they shouldn’t be. What they were really doing there when I was there was protecting the Minister and the image of the department. All right the image of the department’s fair enough, but I found that very rarely when a mistake was made they put their hand up… The main function of that Media Unit should be to inform, keep the public informed of important events that they need to know, the public has a right to know what’s going on in the community, if there’s a paedophile out there or someone’s trying to kidnap kids, I mean you see police appeals and that sort of thing, so number one is to keep the public informed and give the public a sense of safety, that police are out there doing their job, and number two is to help police operationally through the media, so they’re the bridge, they should be the bridge, but they’re not. They’re a big gap.
This sentiment was echoed by another journalist, who felt the Unit deliberately blocked information that may be politically sensitive:

**Journalist 8:** I can think of quite a few cases where say, for example, there are matters going on within the police force in which a Deputy Commissioner or a senior officer may be in some kind of trouble and it would not suit anyone’s interests from the police or the government for information pertaining to why they’re in trouble to be out there. You can find a case there where they are obstructionist, where they don’t want to cooperate, because they are under instruction not to. But that’s not peculiar to the Police Media Unit, I think you will find that most government bureaucracies will try and obstruct when they have to.

Quite simply, some saw that the PMU now engaged in propaganda tactics, blurring the lines between the provision of information and political spin:

**Journalist 11:** I suppose, in an ideal world they are there to provide information, and to be as transparent as they can within the bounds of operational security and that sort of thing. I think they’ve now evolved into an extremely sophisticated propaganda tool. They have responded to the needs of the net, television, video footages... And now there’s a kind of, I think, there’s a difficulty between drawing the line between public interest and public information, and police spin.

Despite this however, one journalist believed that the PMU was much more helpful in recent times, but argued that they could be more forthcoming with information:

**Journalist 7:** They have improved a lot in the last year or two, they used to be absolutely notorious for just never telling you anything. You would ring up and ask them whether it was daytime and they just wouldn’t answer you, ‘well you know you really have to look out the window yourself’. They were just notoriously unhelpful, whereas they’re much more helpful now
and I think that’s partly for having people with a bit of a media background in there. I think they could be much more forthcoming in the details that they provide. They go straight to a bare bones sort of philosophy, even when there are no charges laid and there is no need for a bare bones attitude.

Indeed, from the point of view of many journalists involved with the organisation, the NSW PMU acts more like a ‘gatekeeper’ than a siphon to NSW Police Force and any information relating to its operation. The observations made by journalists of ‘control’, ‘spin’, and ‘propaganda’ functioning from within the NSW PMU are further suggestive of the disciplining of information in the Unit. As Deacon and Golding (1994: 3) warn, “information designed to persuade is never the same as information passively offered as a service”. The perceived need for the NSW PMU to be totally controlling of all information pertaining to NSW Police Force, however, was not always how the NSW PMU and/or relations between police and journalists in NSW were seen to operate. In fact when asked about the changing face of police-media interactions, and the expansion in the influence of the PMU in NSW, journalists interviewed reported considerable changes, both positive and negative, which reflect the ‘taming’ theme:

**Journalist 9:** Now it’s a lot more controlled, the information flow, and a lot more dire consequences for police who leak information, although it still happens, don’t worry about that, but not to the same extent that it did… In fact, when I started as a cadet, back in those days, not even as a fully fledged journo, what used to happen was the official relationship between police and the media, what happened was the head of the CIB [Criminal Investigations Bureau] used to hold two media conferences a day, and they were informal, you’d sit around and we had press officers in the CIB, in a section of it. We’d all go into the CIB bosses office, sit around, on a first name basis, ‘alright Ron what’s on today?’. He’d have all his running sheets
there, ‘well mate look we’re still hunting this murderer’. And you know what, he’d tell you honestly, but he’d say ‘look between you and me, we know who the killer is, it’s such and such, but we don’t want you to say anything yet because we don’t want to alert him’, and we had this relationship, and if one journo broke that he’d be ostracised by the others, finished.

And so it was suggested that things were much more sedate than in the ‘good’ or ‘bad’ old days of reporting:

**Journalist 6:** It’s a lot more professional now, it’s a lot fairer, I would say. You can survive more without the use of established contacts. If you were even to go back five or ten years, a lot of the police used to talk to the media, and there was a real relationship of going out socialising with police and journalists. With the Wood Royal Commission, it changed a lot of that. There’s a lot more pressure now on the police to avoid the media, to maintain corporate governance requirements, strict guidelines with what they can and can’t do, and there’s oversight problems like the PIC, ICAC and the Ombudsman, so they really need to be squeaky clean in absolutely everything they do, so there has been a reticence for police to give any information, in some occasions, to journalists. So while it is a lot more professional there’s a wider dissemination of information through the Police Media Unit, it has had to develop through the fact that traditional channels of information, like detectives, have shut down… I think the way the police deal with the media, and the way the media deal in turn with the police is a lot more professional now than it has ever been. I think that that can only continue. I think it’s important that those relationships are maintained for the sake of the accuracy of the news, but also for good management.

Again though, this ‘professionalism’ is somewhat double edged:

**Journalist 5:** I think it’s become more formularised. When I first started doing police stories… we would rock up at police headquarters, the old sergeant would
read through the list of sit reps, situation reports or incident reports from incidents that had happened overnight, and it would be left up to his judgement what he could tell us about, what he couldn’t. We could press him further on things, you know, if we were up to it, but generally he controlled the flow of that first batch of police information that would hit the airwaves on any given day, and that was fine, because he was an experienced sort of guy, you know he knew what would come back to bite and what wouldn’t, he basically knew because there was that one on one contact every morning. What we wanted to do with the information that he was giving us, how it would be presented, he had a general feel for all that sort of thing. Then when you got back to the office it was dealing with people from the Media Unit. I think that probably that process wasn’t as managed as it is today and it wasn’t as restricted as it is today.

It is apparent that from speaking with journalists who deal with the police and their PMU, that they have witnessed a significant change in the way that police deal with them. This change is obvious not only on a day to day level, but also in the broader administration of processes journalists have to go through in order to access information from the police. Terms such as ‘professional’, ‘good management’ and ‘corporate governance requirements’ litter journalists’ descriptions of how the NSW PMU has evolved over their reporting careers. Such descriptions resonate with Garland’s notion of ‘taming’, whereby the systematisation of criminal justice has allowed for greater measures of planning and control to occur across a number of government agencies, including the police (Garland 2001: 115; Jiggins 2007: 214). Administrative processes carried out in the NSW PMU, are demonstrative of what Garland (2001: 111) describes as “the need to maintain the integrity of internal processes”, whereby organisations, such as the police, are required to “adjust their organisation to keep pace with changes in [the] external environment, to repair perceived deficiencies and to address organisational failures” (see also Mawby
In this way, Garland’s ideas around this concept link in with the strong ‘gatekeeping’ role that the NSW PMU appears to have embraced in recent years.

**The Gatekeepers**

This ‘gatekeeping’ role, however, is not only reserved for the journalists and others that the NSW PMU interacts with. The introduction of new information technologies and management practices during the 1980s and 1990s, as explored in Chapter Three significantly impacted upon the “control of criminal justice staff, who have been subject to increased levels of monitoring, assessment, and accountability” (Garland 2001: 116; see also Chan 1999). This has led to changes in the ways in which organisational performance is measured, with emphasis being placed more upon “strategic planning, line management, devolved budgets and financial responsibility” for agencies such as the police (Garland 2001: 116; see also Rose 2000: 30).

Increasingly, PMU staff themselves have been subject to shifts in their own management. Senior staff in particular find that with the readjustment of media communications also comes a readjustment of the way in which the PMU itself is operated. These management practices are hinted at by staff when describing their daily routines:

**PMU Staffer 1:** There’s a lot of paper work involved, so I’ve got to ensure that staff sign on, sign off, their rosters are reflected accurately, deal with staff changes if there’s people sick, so I do a lot of paperwork actually, semi-middle management sort of stuff, arranging roster changes, but also as a standard media officer you’re taking enquiries from the media, you endeavour to liaise with the officers in charge, or the commanders, or whatever is relevant, you can comment on the situation that you’re dealing with and provide a response to the media within their deadline.
There seems almost to be a set routine and prioritisation in the work that staff do:

**PMU Staffer 3:** If you start a 4am shift that’s basically preparing the news for the day, so you would come in, see what’s happened overnight, prepare the press releases required, and the follow ups from the previous day. If you start later in the day, about a nine o’clock shift, then comes in all the requests for talk back radio, any media conferences that have to be prepared, so this is when you’re mainly trying to get their day organised for the night news and to report during the day to get all the talk back slots organised.

Such organisational discipline and accountability is in stark contrast to the narratives of the ‘old days’ related by journalists. Here, the ‘timetable’ and ‘audit’ are of utmost importance:

**PMU Staffer 4:** I usually start every day at six in the morning... Probably five to ten minutes into my shift I’ve had a verbal briefing, checked my emails, checked the running sheet just to see the major issues, I read the clippings that have been done by the overnight person… I assist the supervisor on duty to work out the taskings and the other general duties. Most days I’ll do some of the morning radio reports, the live spots. And depending on what’s on that day quite often I’m dragged off to meetings left, right, and centre, sometimes I manage to stay in the operations room or go to assist staff, particularly if it’s short staffed, I try to stay in the room to do that… Quite often I may be out the back working on some administration, I do a lot of the HR [human resources] paperwork for the room so I have to worry about these balances, rosters, as well as aspects, the HR aspects that we need to consider. So I’m often doing those kinds of things as well as the police corporate things that we have, our auditing system, and all those other things, I manage those as well.

Journalists complained that all the oversight of the PMU only served to delay the
dissemination of information to them:

**Journalist 6:** Well the police are bound by legislation to respond to crises or stories in certain ways and as a result the bureaucracy makes it very difficult to get stories approved quickly. They need to get ticked off by Supervisors and Assistant Commissioners and sometimes Commissioners, and as a result we might have information we’re waiting to publish, to broadcast but we can’t, or we’re waiting for clarification on something. The rate at which information is disseminated sometimes is very slow. If there’s one thing that I would change it’s reducing the red tape and speeding up as a result of how quickly information is processed and then disseminated to the media.

Budgeting issues specifically were also raised by one staff member:

**PMU Staffer 4:** There’s a branch budget and certain allocations across the branch. So there are budget meetings now being held fairly regularly, but… it’s very complicated, there’s a different budget for salaries, there’s a different budget for overtime, there’s a different budget for training, and there’s just no fat in the budget.

This increase in paperwork and procedure within the PMU is not exclusive to NSW. Such practices reflect the international experience of a PMU officer, as highlighted by Mawby (2002b: 74), who found that managerial approaches towards communication within policing organisations took in “the mundane, routine, organisational, bureaucratic processing of information and workloads”. A formulaic approach to the daily routine was also discovered by Lovell (2003) in his study on contemporary police media relations. He related that the typical day for a Public Information Officer was to meet deadlines of various news outlets, respond to inquiries from reporters who require information based on broadcast deadlines,
prioritise calls from reporters, prepare reporters for the evening news, as well as spend time preparing proactive, image building stories (see also Mawby 2007; 2002b; 1997; 1998; 2001a; 2001b; Ericson et al 1989) and arranging media conferences or interviews (Lovell 2003: 144; see also Motschall and Cao 2002: 167; Surette 2001; Surette and Richard 1995). For Lovell (2003: 139), these units have become a central aspect of “the police organisational structure and daily function of routine police work”.

These approaches resonate with the new public managerialism approach within public sector agencies, including the police, which focus on “outputs and on the tacit contract between government and the public to provide efficient and effective services” (Casey and Mitchell 2007: 6; Chan 1999). For Lovell (2003), police media relations units have become key aspects of police administration. Casey and Mitchell (2007: 7) believe that as a result of this administrative and managerialist approach, there is greater weight on “the social skills of communication, cooperation across the agency and externally, [and] on the ability to motivate staff”, amongst other things. There is far more pressure now on police leaders to deliver on ‘government desired outcomes’. These include performance based criteria, which are conflated by the high level of public and media scrutiny and interest in the success, or otherwise, of policing organisations (Gillespie, Sicard and Gardner 2007: 167; Casey and Mitchell 2007; Chan 1999; Fleming and Lafferty 2000; Dean and Thorne 2008). Chan (1999: 255) believes that new public managerialism targets have been “woven into the ‘mission statements’, ‘corporate plans’, ‘business plans’ and ‘marketing strategies’ of police forces”. This managerialism has not only been felt here in Australia, but also in the UK. Mawby (2002b: 29-35) recognised the push towards the ‘new public
sector management model’ during the late 1980s, which subsequently influenced the focus of ‘police image work’ specifically, and police agencies more broadly.

Furthermore, the role of the NSW PMU as ‘gatekeepers’ also extends more broadly within the organisation to impact upon police officers themselves. Another common feature of modern day PMUs are media policies or guides, which can be seen as additional management tools that outline the responsibilities and limitations expected of both PMU staff and police generally when communicating with the media. In NSW the Police Media Policy has been constantly developed and has continued to evolve since the 1980s, and is demonstrative of the increasing role the PMU has played in ‘taming’ interactions between the police and the media (Putnis 1996: 212).

For NSW Police officers, the Policy is said to help officers deal with the media, directing officers to always “keep the PMU informed of any contact you might have with media organisations” (NSW Police 2004a: 4). In this way, the Policy acts as a ‘taming’ mechanism upon NSW Police officers, who are expected to keep the PMU ‘in the loop’ not only about their contact with the media, but also with regards to any events they themselves consider newsworthy.

PMU staff recognise that the Media Policy is something that is seen to guide not only their own decision making capabilities, but also those of the NSW Police Force generally:

**PMU Staffer 1:** Well [the] Media Policy has changed about five times since I’ve been here, basically it sets parameters under which we operate and provides guidelines of what we must adhere to, like often it’s as basic as appropriate racial descriptors or acceptable racial descriptors, legal guidelines on what we can and
can’t release with regard to the identity of people, and missing persons and protocols such as permission from [the] family over different issues… So it basically provides us with guidelines that we have to operate under and I also do training of police, so we train police in the Media Policy and discuss the Media Policy and what it means to them as a day to day on the ground on the street cop, and why we do it that way.

One PMU staffer was keen to point out that the aim of the Policy was not to deliberately hinder journalists in their pursuit of information:

**PMU Staffer 5:** It just determines how to deal with media inquiries and that sort of thing, and what information we can and can’t release. [It’s] not meant to be a hindrance to media outlets, and you know there are some people who would ring up and want names of offenders so they can go and cover it at the court, but it’s part of our policy that we don’t release names because obviously it’s a matter of privacy, and also it’s a duty to the case by police… There’s just legal reasons why we don’t give out certain information, as well as the fact that if we do give police too much information that can be pushed into an investigation.

At the same time, some PMU staff recognise the limitations that they are faced with because of the Media Policy, which is heightened by the restricted role they play in actually formulating it:

**PMU Staffer 3:** I think without going beyond the Media Policy I don’t think [police and media relationships] would get any stronger. The journo’s would love us to be able to give them more information, they’re always going to say that, they never get exactly what they want but we can’t, we’re legally bound and we can’t. They will push that limit forever, I think the only way that they’d ever be happy… That’s just the way it is, there’s certain boundaries and we have to abide by it.
Some suggested that the Media Policy needed to be redeveloped from the ground up:

**PMU Staffer 4:** We haven’t had always a direct input, I mean I think it would be great to get a working team from the Unit to help revise the policies from the grassroots up, and then that would get overseen by a project manager, and previously that hasn’t really happened. We had a Director that wrote the policy on his own and didn’t let anybody have any input, and now… it’s not done from the grassroots who use the policy every day. I mean that would be my preference, but then we have our day to day work to do and how difficult is it to move say ten people out of the room for a couple of days to just work on a policy. We do get asked for consultation into the process, we have been asked to look at it and make suggestions, but that’s not quite as ideal as a project team.

**PMU Staffer 1:** We have a policy, a new one in the process of being put together, and we had a review sent through and there was certain things certainly that I marked down, one of them was we didn’t have it set in stone in this one that we require a family member to give us the okay to release the name of a deceased person, so we asked for that one to be included. Previously the policies have been very not-specific, whereas I think the latest one is really quite specific. It doesn’t have our philosophy or whatever, our mission, which I think probably could be included. And the reason why we do this is to provide information to the public and communicate this information in a timely and accurate way. So maybe we should do that, what our mission or our motto or our aim is. That could be included.

Journalists too were critical of the motives and purpose of the Media Policy, going as far as to suggest it had corrupted the process of media dissemination:

**Journalist 3:** I think the old Media Policy the NSW Police had, it was obviously designed with the public interest in mind. But I think a lot of that has been thrown out, and that’s where there’s a corrupt synergy.
Ex-employees were even more forthcoming on the issue:

**Ex-PMU/Other 3:** Well you know when I was there, the Media Unit had been going for what fifteen years or more, and they were still working on a Media Policy. And they were still writing the Media Policy. And I’ll tell you something, it was just a work in progress, I mean there was a policy but it was being reviewed all the time and rewritten… They keep changing it to suit themselves politically. Everything’s in review when a politician is in trouble, you know ‘oh yeah we’ll look at it again, we’ll review it’.

This is again an example of the inherent failure of attempts to govern crime (Hunt and Wickham 1994). The introduction of an official Media Policy, which directs both the PMU staff and all NSW Police on the purpose, nature and method of interactions with the news media can be seen as another expression of the reduction in autonomy and discretionary powers of the police and an increase in the monitoring and directing of police behaviour, such as through the PIC, the ICAC or the NSW Ombudsman\(^44\) \(^45\). Chan (1999: 262) argues that such oversight bodies are simply another form of the new accountability. As can be seen from the interview data, the Media Policy has a twofold role: firstly it guides NSW Police employees on their interactions and the exchange of information with the media; and secondly, it also

\(^44\) It may be argued, however, that the reduction in powers of the police is not as straightforward as the case in relation to contact with the media. It must be recognised that more recently, and in the aftermath of September 11, the NSW Police Force have been granted extraordinary powers in relation to the police of terrorism related offences (see for example the Terrorism (Police Powers) Act 2002; Terrorism (Police Powers) Amendment (Preventative Detention) Act 2005 (since repealed). Despite this, police continue to argue that they need more powers in order to carry out their duties (Marr 2007).

\(^45\) The PIC was established in 1996 following the NSW Royal Commission into the Police Service. According to their website, their main functions are to “detect, investigate and prevent misconduct” by NSW Police officers (Police Integrity Commission 2008). The ICAC was created in 1988 to investigate matters on the behalf of NSW citizens independently of government (Independent Commission Against Corruption 2008). ICAC investigates reports of corruption in the public sector, which includes organisations such as the police. The NSW Ombudsman acts as a watchdog for a range of government agencies, including the NSW Police Force. The Ombudsman oversees complaints about the conduct of NSW Police officers, including mistreatment by police, criminal conduct and abuses of power (New South Wales Ombudsman 2008).
acts as a filtering mechanism for the type of information journalists and other media representatives are able to access from the police. Consequently, as a manifestation of the government’s project to ‘tame the system’, the NSW PMU exhibits many of the characteristics identified by Garland (2001) that are not only aimed at managing their relationship with the media, but also with the public. This is an aspect of the PMU not lost on journalists:

**Journalist 6:** Journalists are encouraged to go through the Police Media Unit as essentially middle men in dealing with stories, with breaking information and that can slow the process down. They can [also] act as filters, if we were to go directly to the source.

As an exercise in PR, the control of information by the PMU was a continual annoyance for journalists:

**Journalist 1:** They want to be in control of [information], they want to know exactly what’s going on in their organisation… Their main purpose is look after the image of the police service, look after the Commissioner, so everything that comes through has to look good for the Commissioner and the police department.

**The Filters**

The journalists that interact with the NSW PMU are well aware of attempts by the Unit to not only channel information from the police through to the media, but also filter and control what information is released. This reflects results from studies conducted by Grabosky and Wilson, who found that journalists saw PMUs as trying to manipulate information for police interests (Wilson 1992: 171; Grabosky and
Many felt that the easy flow of information was not the intended outcome of the Unit and its policy:

**Journalist 7:** Often they sort of serve a counter purpose really in restricting the flow of information… They can give out much more information than they do I think.

Some went as far as to suggest their role was the ‘restraint’ of information rather than the ‘dissemination’:

**Journalist 14:** I think [the PMU is] really there to restrain [information], really I mean…they’re there to facilitate it in the way that they’ve always got press releases coming out and information, things like that, but equally it doesn’t mean that they’re letting free-flow of information. A lot of the time there’s some restriction of information, and it’s, I don’t know if it’s sort of Orwellian or whatever…

And thus certain information is ‘tamed’ by the PMU:

**Journalist 2:** At a day to day operational level, the Media Unit will disseminate certain information: armed robberies, car chases, fatal accidents. But anything that is contentious, that could reflect badly on the government, is kept under wraps… It’s quite insidious the extent to which the release and the dissemination of news is manipulated, depending on whether it’s politically hot or not.

To the annoyance of some:

**Journalist 3:** When they start to say ‘look, let’s get in the way of this exercise’ then, that’s when I get cross and that’s when I don’t want to deal with them. Because that’s not their job, their job is simply to
protect their reputation and tell the truth. Their job is not to obstruct someone else trying to tell the truth.

One of the most graphic examples of the PMU attempting to control and filter information was provided to me by one interviewee. This particular journalist approached the PMU seeking permission to interview a number of police as part of research for an upcoming publication. Upon making the request, the journalist was stunned to be asked to read and sign a lengthy legal document, outlining the terms and conditions for these interviews. Of particular interest is the following excerpt, which seems to unambiguously detail the intentions and philosophies underlying the PMU and the outcomes they desired from allowing the journalist to speak with police:

4 Publication of the Work

4.1 The Grantee must, prior to publication of the Work in any form or medium, submit a manuscript of the whole Work to NSW Police. NSW Police may give or withhold its consent in its absolute discretion. If given, NSW Police may attach such conditions to the consent as it may determine in its absolute discretion. If the Grantee proceeds to publish the Work it must comply with any such conditions as though they were expressly contained in this deed.

4.2 Neither NSW Police nor the Specified Officer shall have any liability to the Grantee for failure to give consent to publication of the Work.

4.3 The Grantee acknowledges and agrees that:
(a) the Interview material; and
(b) the fact that the Interview is proposed or has been given, as the case may be, remains the confidential information of the NSW Police and of the Specified Officer until the Work is published with the consent of the NSW Police under this deed.
4.4 Until the Grantee obtains consent to publication of the Work under this deed the Grantee must not disclose the Work to any third party.

4.5 If NSW Police does not give consent for the publication of the Work:
   (a) Grantee must not publish the Work including any Interview Material;
   (b) Grantee must not publish the fact or any inferences from that fact that consent was declined.

4.6 If NSW Police gives consent to publication of the Work, the Grantee must not publish the work with any variations from the manuscript submitted to NSW Police.

4.7 The Grantee acknowledges and agrees that any consent of NSW Police to publication of the Work is personal to the Grantee and the Grantee must not allow any third party to publish the Work without prior written consent of NSW Police and the Specified Officer.

4.8 Despite the fact that the Grantee may obtain consent to publication, the Grantee must not publish the Work if the Work:
   (a) inaccurately depicts the events of the subject of the Interview Material or is otherwise misleading in any respect;
   (b) is reasonably likely to bring NSW Police or the Specified Officer into disrepute; or
   (c) includes Interview Material that is designated by NSW Police as confidential or not-for-publication.

The contents of the deed, if agreed to by the reporter, overtly expresses the desire for the PMU to not just control who speaks to journalists and about what events, but it also details the ability of the PMU to veto the final document, instruct the utilisation of the material gathered, disallow the publication of information that may be detrimental to the police or officer being interviewed, and censor the ability of the reporter to acknowledge any cessation on the part of the police in relation to the use
or collection of information. Little wonder then that the journalist in question decided against signing the document, and instead fostered his own unofficial contacts in order to obtain the information required.

Furthermore, many journalists believed that the NSW PMU were actually defensive in their interactions and how they chose to deal with the media because they believed that the PMU were not so much interested in keeping the public informed as they were in satisfying other parties, such as the government, the police hierarchy or prominent media figures:

**Journalist 12:** We live in a Westminster political system and the Commissioner’s contract is written with the government and they don’t want the Commissioner, or anybody in the police office, walking over any other policy debate, so it’s a structured defensive mechanism.

These concerns mirror many of the issues raised in Chapter Four, where political priorities are seen to override the public’s right to know:

**Journalist 12:** But if I was in police media I would be trying in some way to broaden the debate because the public is very aware, we’ve got a highly educated public… I’ve tried in some of my reporting to reveal that, the nature of crime, that’s what police media should do, it should be into a bit more education, beyond a ‘cover-your-balls’ defensive approach… It’s just a layer of political ad-hocery [sic] I suspect. I’m sure if I got in there I’d find that that was the case. And it was run on a daily ‘Alan Jones’ news’ basis.

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46 Alan Jones is a prominent radio broadcaster based in the Sydney metropolitan area. His breakfast talk back radio program is broadcast via radio station 2GB from 5am until 10am, Monday to Friday. As well as his media work, he has previously worked in the sporting arena, as a coach of the Australian Rugby Union team, as well as in rugby league. He was once also the speechwriter for former Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser. Jones, one of the highest paid radio broadcasters, enjoys a high public profile, with many arguing that he uses his radio program to promote his conservative
You know, ‘who’s bagging us today and what are our defensive strategies, what’s our response?’ Knee jerk, reactionary.

**Journalist 8:** I can think of quite a few cases where say, for example, there are matters going on within the police force in which a Deputy Commissioner or a senior officer may be in some kind of trouble and it would not suit anyone’s interests from the police or the government for information pertaining to why they’re in trouble to be out there. You can find a case there where they are obstructionist, where they don’t want to cooperate, because they are under instruction not to. But that’s not peculiar to the Police Media Unit, I think you will find that most government bureaucracies will try and obstruct when they have to.

Despite the identified problems with the NSW PMU as seen from the point of view of reporters, there is obviously still some utility to their function. Many of the journalists interviewed frequently communicated with the NSW PMU, ranging from an hourly basis to approximately once a month. Data from the PMU was consistent with these reports, with staff suggesting that reporters often telephone the PMU hourly in order to update the latest news, check that ‘nothing’s going on’ or in the hope of being first to report major events. One PMU staff member noted that ‘the phone in the Media Unit never stops’. So despite much of the cynicism surrounding the real motives and agendas of the NSW PMU, most police reporters interviewed still communicate and deal with them, to varying degrees.

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*political opinions. In his biography (Williams 2002) former NSW Police Commissioner Peter Ryan claimed that Jones was highly influential in the decision by the NSW Labor Party to terminate his job as Commissioner.*
Critical Reportage

This in itself presents an interesting question: with the PMU operating twenty four hours a day, continually putting out media releases, holding regular press conferences and contacting journalists with information on various matters, does the existence of a Media Unit within NSW Police make it easy for some journalists to overlook the critical investigative function of their reporting? Grattan (1998: 42) argues that “spin can encourage lazy journalism and distorted journalism”, where material is accepted uncritically from ‘spin factories’, such as PMUs. Jiggins (2007: 204-206) has also likened journalists to ‘lapdogs’, more so than ‘watchdogs’. One journalist seemed to agree with this assessment:

Journalist 12: …The police could offer cheap sensation to journalists and journalists would be like Pavlov’s dogs and they would salivate at this and they would say “I got the scoop” but they wouldn’t think about what was the motivation of the police officer giving them that.

When other police reporters and PMU staff were questioned on the issue of journalists being lazy, they were almost unanimous in their responses. Some questioned the investigative capabilities of other journalists and the roles of the ‘roundsmen’:

Journalist 3: Definitely. I don’t think many police reporters do original investigations at all. You know, the investigation doesn’t really go beyond the coppers that will give them a bit of information.

Whilst others felt that there was little question that some journalists overlooked their responsibilities, they noted that such reportage would only take the reporter so far in their career:
Journalist 5: Theoretically I guess the answer is yes. Although I think most media outlets expect a bit more than press releases and sound bites, sometimes they need, you know, harder information than they are going to get from a press release.

Some saw it as more acceptable to cover smaller stories without going to other sources:

Journalist 1: Yeah, in particular with the smaller stories, like you know, if the Media Unit puts out an armed hold up or something, and they’ve got the information there for us, we just write briefs from the information they give us.

Journalist 9: Oh yeah, look let’s face it any of us in our job, if we can just sit down and get a phone call to complete that job, you’d do it, I mean you know, I don’t blame the journo’s.

This opinion reflects Reiner’s (1997: 222) view that many news stories are just ‘routine fillers’, following “a clearly established paradigm”, and thus conform to a similar pattern of presentation, only with different names and dates according to the event. Even though the PMU was seen as an important and up-to-date source of information for journalists, there was some circumspection about the quality of the information one was likely to receive. This journalist appeared to have a conflicting view about the influence of PMU information on reporters:

Journalist 6: Oh yeah, it breeds lazy journalists. But it’s also very convenient, particularly for some aspects of the media like radio, where we need information quickly. Without it you are required to go to different sources, and in a sense it legitimises the cowboys of the industry who are prepared to go to print without
having checked as many sources as possible or legitimising it through some officially sanctioned authority.

For another journalist the PMU, and the ease with which journalists replicate information provided to them by the PMU, was simply indicative of a culture that was spreading across the board, where ‘spin doctors’ increasingly played a role in news reporting:

**Journalist 14:** Yeah sure. I mean that doesn’t just happen because of the Police Media Unit, that happens because of spin doctors everywhere, I mean that’s perfectly accurate, yeah... if you’re lazy... But yeah there’s always people who undoubtedly get things from the Media Unit, type it in as a press release, and let it go.

This perhaps conflicts with previous findings by Grabosky and Wilson that journalists only use PMUs as a starting point in the construction of news stories (Grabosky and Wilson 1989: 37; Wilson 1992: 171). As Reiner (1997) highlights, crime reporters foster symbiotic relationships with their contacts and organisations such as the police (see also Freckelton 1988), with these contacts being able to exercise a certain degree of power in the relationship given that they hold the information reporters seek. Since the work of Hall et al (1978) and Reiner (1997), however, I believe the issue has become more complicated than crime reporters simply accepting information from their contacts. Crime reporting is no longer the realm of specialist reporters alone (Jiggins 2007). Whilst, as Reiner (1997) and Hall et al (1978) argue, specialist reporters foster contacts that might leave them open to their stories being filtered through the eyes of these contacts, the introduction of the generalist reporter into the field of crime reporting also suffers from a similar fate.
Given the broad spectrum of stories such reporters deal with on a day to day basis, one could argue that their ability to foster and maintain close sources within policing agencies is limited, thus generating a reliance on PMUs, which provide information to journalists in an efficient and relatively effective way.

With the growth and proliferation of PMUs within policing agencies, this potentially opens up a new realm through which stories are filtered. Instead of individual police contacts acting as the filters, or ‘primary definers’ of police related news, as is the case for specialist crime reporters, for the generalist reporter, the PMU, their first port of call for information, now becomes the ‘primary definer’ (Hall et al 1978).

With commercial and financial pressures now impacting upon staffing within media organisations, as well as the impact of technology, such as the internet (Burton 2007; Davis 2000; Deacon and Golding 1994; Salter 1994; Jiggins 2007; Lovell 2002; Mawby 2002a; Chermak 1995), the likelihood of all-rounder, general reporters is on the increase, to the detriment of specialist reporting. Even staff within the PMU itself identified the scarcity of investigative reporters these days, almost admiring those few investigative reporters for their unwillingness to engage with the PMU, except in the most desperate of situations:

**PMU Staffer 3:** There are not that many journalists out there that are good investigative journalists anymore. There are a few and I would bend over backwards to help the few, ‘cause these are the ones that don’t ring often, they only ring as a last resort, and you know they’re stuck and you try and help them as best you can, you’re still abiding by the policy, but there’s journalists out there that are slack and lazy and….we’ll send out a media release and they’ll ring up and say, ask questions and they haven’t even read the release. You say if you’ve read the release it’s actually in there, that’s how lazy they become. So
rather than them doing their job properly, they’re just depending on us too much.

Despite the acknowledgement that investigative police reporters were scarce, some PMU staff were not so kind towards inexperienced, lazy reporters, a potential issue raised by Skolnick and McCoy (1984) in relation to the growth of police media relations units. One staff member agreed that they encountered lazy journalists, and in their experience, some journalists practically wanted PMU staff to write their news stories for them:

**PMU Staffer 4:** Absolutely [some are lazy], I’m sure you’ve heard this a lot as well… With some they want the story written. We had a request yesterday when someone wanted to know about female murderers or something like that, which she thought ‘well can you do the legwork, or can you do the research’, and we’re like ‘well no that’s your job, you know we’re happy to provide you with information’… So I think it does make their job easier. I don’t want to be critical because not all journalists are like that, but some certainly take advantage of it.

And as much as the PMU policy discourages and even threatens sanctions against police who talk to the media without approval, PMU staffers criticised journalists for not bothering to foster their own contacts outside the PMU:

**PMU Staffer 1:** Yes, they can get very, very lazy. They don’t develop their own contacts within the police. They rely on the Police Media Unit too much for certain things… I think if you sometimes get too much information you can get a bit slack.

For one of the PMU staffers, much of the laziness came down to the inexperience of those working the police rounds:
PMU Staffer 5: There are so many lazy journalists out there… So many lazy journalists that can’t even read the press release to get information. We send out a media release and they would see it come off the fax, pick it up and ring the Media Unit straight away and go ‘can you tell me this’ and like ‘it’s in the first part’. ‘Can you tell me where it occurred?’, ‘it’s like in the title of the press release, it says Lidcombe and that’s where it occurred’. There are so many….and a lot of inexperienced junior reporters out there, especially in Sydney at the moment that years ago would not get a job in Sydney straight out of uni, but for whatever reason have managed to get jobs, and that’s across all mediums, they don’t know how to do…not how to do their job, they’re just really lazy and inexperienced like I said, and just ring the Police Media Unit for information that’s right in front of them.

As such examples suggest, perhaps the days of the investigative reporter, who are exemplified by their bypassing of official police channels to chase new sources (see Wilson 1992; Grabosky and Wilson 1989), are numbered.

The issue of reporter reliance on police and their contacts was also one highlighted by the program Media Watch, which in 2005 reported on a case of media reliance upon incorrect police sources. On the morning of the 21st March 2005, a story emerged across Sydney media outlets about an alleged murder-suicide in the NSW Hunter Valley region (Robinson and Gosch 2005; Vallejo and Lawrence 2005). A husband and wife and their two young children were found shot dead inside their property. At the time the story broke, there was no official word from the PMU as to the alleged perpetrator of the offences; however newspapers and radio broadcasts had already attributed blame:
Police were treating the tragedy as a murder-suicide, and believe the man shot himself dead after killing his family (Vallejo and Lawrence 2005: 1).

Apart from the fact the reporting of this development in the case was unconfirmed, it was also incorrect. At 10:30am, after these reports had surfaced, police called a press conference to clarify what they actually believed had happened; that the wife had committed the crime (Media Watch 2005).

When asked by Media Watch why they had reported the husband and father as the killer, reporters were quite apologetic, yet some believed what they were reporting at the time because:

[O]n the night of the incident, a senior member of the NSW Police Force told us by way of a background briefing that some officers believed the father was responsible for the shootings (Roger Coombs cited in Media Watch 2005).

Again, as with the Blackburn inquiry discussed later in this chapter, it seems conceivable that police overlooked their own policy in regards to the leaking of information, as well as the privacy that should be afforded the victims and offenders. Perhaps one of the reasons policing organisations are so supportive of official structures such as PMUs within their organisation is that they are aimed at combating the use of unofficial contacts by journalists, although in this case, it did not appear to stop the leaking of information to the media. Moreover, this example brings into question the reliance reporters have on police sources, whether formal or informal, for information pertaining to crimes. As a number of media outlets that incorrectly reported the story told Media Watch, perhaps they should have done a better job of
checking the facts. Furthermore, this also highlights reporter reliance on dominant ideas of crime and offending, in their assumption that it was the male who had perpetrated a crime of violence such as this.

Hall et al’s (1978) work on primary and secondary definers of news is important to raise again here. As the authors argue, journalists do not create news items on their own. Rather, they have access to a range of sources and institutions that “make themselves visible by means of dramatization, or through press releases and press agents” (Rock cited in Hall et al 1978: 57). This information then is digested by journalists, who manufacture news items based on the information they have been provided with. Information sourced from these organisations is typically considered ‘authoritative’ because of the position and power these institutions hold. Hall et al (1978 57-58) argue that in accepting this information, journalists are doing little more than replicating the opinions of these powerful institutions, referred to as primary definers (see also Kiel 1989: 256).

In a previous study conducted by this researcher (McGovern and Lee 2006) the issue of reporter reliance on information from the PMU was explored in more detail. Drawing on the interview data from this research, together with NSW PMU press releases, and articles from two major daily newspapers from the Sydney metropolitan area, the article assesses the journalistic deployment of information produced by the NSW PMU (McGovern and Lee 2006: 1). During a one month period, both press releases from the PMU, and articles from The Daily Telegraph and Sydney Morning Herald were monitored to determine how closely the newspapers reproduced the press releases.
Four categories were devised within which to classify the level of reproduction. These included: paraphrased, for articles that paraphrased or directly reproduced the press release; semi paraphrased, for articles that drew heavily on the press release as a source but may have also contained additional material; prompts, which were articles seemingly prompted from press releases, but contained significant amounts of information from other sources (including follow up articles) and; non-media release articles, which were articles that appeared unprompted by information produced from the PMU. Such articles were generally controversial or negative in nature, often referring to ‘unofficial’ police sources (McGovern and Lee 2006: 3-4).

What emerged from the study was that a significant amount of the articles monitored came under the ‘paraphrased’ category, with thirty five percent of all Daily Telegraph articles, and thirty three percent of all Sydney Morning Herald articles falling within this category (McGovern and Lee 2006: 5). Furthermore, in such articles, author attribution was much less likely to occur. As McGovern and Lee (2006: 5) argue:

> The heavy overall reliance on the PMU as a source, and the fact that journalists were relatively unlikely to seek out other sources, raises serious questions about the impartiality of reportage and the power of police organisations to influence crime news.

On one level this heavy reliance upon the PMU as a source of information might suggest that the NSW PMU’s unwritten objective to control and shape knowledge of policing has been successful. There is, however, another equally important aspect to this interchange that influences the ways in which journalists access and utilise the
information they are given by the NSW PMU. Journalists themselves are subject to ‘taming’ within their own organisation, not just that which is being imposed upon them by the police. The ‘taming’ of journalists comes in the form of the news organisations that they work for. Increasingly journalists are being restricted in what they can and are required to do by commercial and financial constraints (see also Mawby 2002b; Davis 2000; Putnis 1996; Salter 1994; Jiggins 2007) faced by media outlets:

**Journalist 9:** Don’t forget, except for the ABC, media are private enterprises, they’re profit making, they’re there to make money for the shareholders; Fairfax, and News Limited, and the Channel 9 network and all that. The cost of good stories and scoops translates into higher ratings or better circulation, which translates into higher advertising revenues. They both have leverage in different ways. You find that sometimes [the police media relationship] can get far too cosy, far too cosy, and that becomes by definition, corruption. It’s not corruption like you’re planting evidence on somebody, or you’re stealing money, but it’s corruption.

Journalists felt the pressure to perform:

**Journalist 14:** We’re [journalists] always competing. That’s how it is, we all compete for the stories, which means we’re competing for contacts, we’re competing to make sure that they trust us, and that they’ll give us something over somebody else. Our newspapers are here to make money, that’s the primary job of the newspapers is to make money, so that it can produce news and inform the community.

This could often prompt journalists to seek out information in ways that made them feel uncomfortable:
Journalist 7: We have people on our back who are demanding every detail we can possibly get… I’ve gotta support my kids, I still gotta get up and go to work. Sometimes you find yourself knocking on doors where you really don’t want to.

Journalist 4: Even harder than dealing with Police Media is having to talk to people who horrible things have happened to them and you’re basically saying please tell me your story while you are grieving.

As Jewkes (2004: 18) points out:

[S]ince the mass media are largely privately owned, the drive for profit will shape their output and political position. Concentration of ownership, it is suggested, leads to a decline in the material available…, a preoccupation with ratings at the expense of quality and choice, and a preference for previously successful formulae over innovation and risk taking.

To summarise, the number of true ‘investigative reporters’ are on the decline in favour of generalist reporters who can cover a range of topic areas (Tanner and McCarthy 2001: 116; Johnston 2005); restricted finances, restricted resources leads to a heavy reliance on the PMU, and less contentious stories with limited critique. As Davis (2000) argues, PR has become a way in which sites such as PMUs can dominate access and manage media agendas, thereby affecting the abilities of sources to gain access to journalists and set media agendas. Again, this resonates with the ‘PR state’ literature.

Another aspect to this that is worth further examination is the direct role the media themselves have had in the proliferation of professionalised PMUs, not just within policing agencies, but other government departments more generally. As Mawby
(2002b: 43-44) highlights in relation to the British situation, from the 1980s onwards, there have been increasing demands on police departments to engage with the media, together with increased criticism directed towards police, which forced police to reassess their public image. As a result of these pressures, Mawby (2002b: 44) details the growth, both physically and monetarily, of press relations offices in response. Similarly, we could argue that in Australia the rise in size and scope of media relations units, and the NSW PMU, is an inevitable response to the demands of contemporary media (see also Savage and Tiffen 2007; Putnis 1996).

The Police Media Unit as Promoters of Positive Police Images

Closely related to the PMU’s attempts to filter and manage police news is their desire to present positive policing stories. As many authors in the past have noted, public images of the police and crime have largely been constructed and contested via the mass media (Leishman and Mason 2003; Mawby 1998; Mawby 2001; Mawby 2002; Mawby and Worthington 2002; Reiner 1997; Reiner 2000a; Reiner 2000b; Reiner 2003; Jiggins 2007). One of the most important roles NSW PMU staff saw themselves as playing was that of promoters of positive police images, and the media naturally were instrumental in distributing such messages. As one PMU staffer mentioned, it was important that they gave positive messages to the media:

**PMU Staffer 5:** We have to get a certain message out to the media to focus the message we’re giving to the media on the positives of what the police are doing… I think in the higher ranks and especially in the executive positions, the officers upstairs understand the importance of the media and having them onside
and getting information out that they need to and that it can be used as a positive tool.

Another former staffer noted that the PMU was a vital element in ensuring the police, and significantly the Police Commissioner, continued to be seen in a positive light, despite negative press:

**Ex-PMU/Other 2:** There was a very public campaign of criticism of what [the Police Commissioner] was doing, so my main job was to try to break through, to pierce the veil of that criticism to make sure that the Police Commissioner was still being seen in a positive way. It was up to me to make sure that I tried to do that.

Journalists were often quite aware that the NSW PMU tried to utilise them in ways that aided getting these positive messages out to the public:

**Journalist 13:** It is always in their interest to publicise police and make them look good, so if there’s been a particularly good arrest or something, they’re going to want the whole world to know, because it’s important for them and certainly for Ken Moroney that the perception of crime, not in a twisted propaganda like way, but they want people to know that police are dealing with things out there… And that’s what the Police Media Unit does. They will contact us if there is a court story we may be interested in, and they will always contact us if things like appeals or press conferences [are planned].

Not that it stopped some from also reporting on contentious matters. Perhaps for this journalist, as Savage and Tiffen (2007: 83) see it, the “bank of goodwill” built up by reporting the positive stories helped to overcome the pressures faced by only focusing on the bad:
Journalist 5: I found myself looking at a new tactic, and that was to get a call with the offer of a good police story. It might be small, it might be medium sized, on an exclusive sort of basis, you know, ‘oh the Commissioner’s doing this this week, you know, we’ll let you go in and do it, you know, this is all good, it’s positive it’s worthwhile’ and all that. And I was happy to do that, so I’d go and write those and I’d write my next negative story as well. So, you know, I think they pretty quickly realise they might be able to get among the good stories, but they were still going to get the bad ones too.

And again, the importance of the Commissioner’s image was important:

Journalist 1: Everything that comes through has to look good for the Commissioner and the police department.

Many of the journalists however felt there was a hidden agenda behind the NSW PMU’s push for positive policing stories being provided to the media, beyond simply assisting the NSW Police Force itself to look good:

Journalist 2: There’s a certain spin on things, and it’s the job of the Media Unit to enhance the corporate image of the police force. And anything that reflects badly on it, it’s not going to get a run. There is a distinct lack of candour.

The importance was in recognising that agenda:

Journalist 5: You’ve got to keep in mind though that this sort of information is part of an agenda, which may be to create generally a good news story for the police, it may be a story that shows that they’re being, you know, tough on crime. It might be a story that shows that the Commissioner was taking a hard line in respect to something. It may be a critic of the police is cast in a bad light, it may be any number of things. But it’s got a hidden agenda, and the problem with that is
sometimes those stories make good stories, but you get the effect whereby these stories are being spoon fed and you know, I suppose its open to the idea that this is spin.

One infamous case of the PMU becoming involved in trying to put a ‘positive spin’ on a particular story is the case of Harry Blackburn.

**The Infamous ‘Walking’ of Harry Blackburn**

As one journalist musing about the case surmised:

**Journalist 13:** [The Blackburn case] changed the landscape of the police media and media relations forever because the media went to town on a story that was facilitated by police and it was garbage. It blew up in everybody’s face.

On the 24th July 1989, 59 year old Harold James Blackburn was arrested by the NSW Police Force and charged with a series of sexual assaults and kidnappings that had been committed over a twenty year period in the Georges Hall and Sutherland areas of Sydney (Brown and Wilson 1992; Lee 1990). What made this case unique was that Harry Blackburn was a forty one year veteran of the NSW Police Force, a former Detective Superintendent, and an investigator for the War Crimes Commission. As Brown and Wilson (1992: 198) attested, for police Blackburn’s arrest was seen as “a sensational coup, the ultimate entrapment of a master criminal operating in the guise of a senior policeman”. In all reality though, the case against Harry Blackburn was tenuous, and fraught with forensic mishaps and prejudicial publicity, resulting in an Inquiry into the case. Whilst this example is some twenty years old, many of the issues raised, and the priorities evident, in terms of positive
policing images, repeat the current day interests with police image, but with less oversight from managerialist agendas.

**The Case**

Between 1969 and 1972 a rapist operating in the Georges Hall area was responsible for a series of attacks whereby young couples were stalked in their cars in isolated ‘lover’s lane’ parking spots. In 1985 a series of similar offences resumed, this time in the Sutherland area, where over a five month period eight couples were attacked. Despite determinations from the Department of Public Prosecutions (DPP), police were convinced there was a link between the two series of attacks (Brown and Wilson 1992: 8; Davis 1990a: 197-8).

From descriptions given by a number of victims, ‘penry sketch’ portraits were compiled for both series of attacks. Upon seeing these sketches a Detective Constable, Jim Thornwaite, was taken by the similarities between the alleged offender and another officer he had come across, Harry Blackburn (Brown and Wilson 1992: 199-200). Later setting eyes on Harry Blackburn, Thornwaite was convinced of the similarities but, despite passing on his suspicions to investigating officers at the time, “there was no formal investigation of Blackburn” (Brown and Wilson 1992; Davis 1990a: 200) until some years later, when Thornwaite took up the case whilst working within the Tactical Intelligence Unit. There, Thornwaite recalled the resemblance between Blackburn and the penry of the Georges Hall attacker, consequently ordering an investigation into Blackburn in relation to both the Georges Hall and Sutherland attacks, which came to be known as Operation Photo (Brown and Wilson 1992: 200-202).
The identification of Blackburn as the offender, and his subsequent arrest for the offences, was seen as a significant step in NSW Police Service demonstrating that they were “unsparing”, even on one of their own (Lee 1990: 198). The publicity the case could potentially generate for the police was seen as so significant that the Commissioner and his Deputy, Tony Lauer, oversaw the whole investigation, although to what capacity is questionable. In early June 1989, Steve Brien, the then Director of the PMU within NSW Police was approached in relation to the proposed publicity for the case (Lee 1990: 476). The following month the media had apparently become aware of the story, so Brien met with investigators in order to gather information and prepare for a release to the media at an appropriate time (Lee 1990: 478). The plan was to stage “a controlled background briefing of journalists”, followed by a full press release after the arrest (Lee 1990: 478).

During the same series of meetings, attended also by Deputy Commissioner Lauer, it was alleged that Mr. Brien said he would arrange for the press to be on hand when Harry Blackburn was transported to the Sydney Police Centre (Lee 1990: 479). Evidence given later at the Inquiry\(^47\) (Davis 1990a) suggested that Brien, Lauer and the head investigator Thornwaite were aware that Blackburn was to leave through the front door for the benefit of the waiting media.

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\(^{47}\) Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Arrest, Charging and Withdrawal of Charges Against Harold James Blackburn and Matters Associated Therewith, presided over by Justice J.A. Lee.
The Arrest

On the day of the arrest of Harry Blackburn, twelve journalists were invited to attend a police ‘lock-up’ for a 4pm briefing (Davis 1990a). It was at this time journalists were given information pertaining to the impending arrest of Blackburn for the rapes. This media briefing was to become very important in the overall operation and came under significant scrutiny from the Inquiry and Justice Lee, something which will be discussed in more detail in below.

Following the media briefing came the arrest of Harry Blackburn, who was transported to the ‘Old Hat Factory’, the former Criminal Investigations Bureau (CIB) building, via the underground parking entrance. It had been decided by senior decision makers\footnote{This was apparently decided upon without the knowledge of the investigating officers and was mainly orchestrated by Steve Brien, Director of the Media Unit, in collaboration with Mr Lauer.} within the NSW Police Service that Blackburn’s arrest was to be used as a major media event, with the media being advised that Blackburn would be “walked” so as “to enable full media coverage of his arrest” whilst he was being moved from the ‘Old Hat Factory’ to the Sydney Police Centre (Davis 1990a: 3-4). Shortly after 9:30pm Harry Blackburn was escorted in custody along the corridor of the building and infamously “walked” out the front, face in full view, with the media on hand filming his leaving, getting into a car and sitting in the car (Lee 1990: 502, 504, 505).

The arrest of Harry Blackburn was the leading news item and, in what was described as one of the worst features of the orchestrated media coverage, the broadcasting of the arrest of Harry Blackburn was underlined by the screening of a Rape Hotline during telecasts (Brown and Wilson 1992: 4). The clear suggestion here was that the
police believed Blackburn had committed other attacks. They were hoping that the broadcast of Blackburn’s face, along with the Hotline, would prompt unknown victims or witnesses to come forward and consequently present investigators with further proof of Blackburn’s status as the offender (Brown and Wilson 1992; Davis 1990a). The clearly prejudicial nature of the publicity generated by the arrest went unrecognised by both the police and the media.

**The Aftermath of the Arrest**

In the wake of Blackburn’s arrest, a series of circumstances led to the investigation being taken over and reviewed by another officer, Clive Small. He soon “discovered massive problems with the evidence- problems which in his mind were deadly to the chances of the brief ever succeeding” (Brown and Wilson 1992: 199). Later that year Small informed his superiors that he did not believe the charges against Blackburn would hold up in court (Brown and Wilson 1992: 207, 212). Small’s recommendation that charges be dropped was not supported by his superiors, and it was not until the DPP became involved later in the process that all charges were officially dropped against Harry Blackburn (Brown and Wilson 1992: 212).

**The Inquiry**

The Blackburn case was fraught with a number of problems, most of which will not be dealt with here. The most pertinent issue for this research is the extent to which the police utilised the media as a way of promoting not only their own image, but also as a means of obtaining more information to strengthen the case against Mr. Blackburn. In 1989 following the dismissal of charges against Blackburn, then
Premier of NSW, Nick Greiner\textsuperscript{49}, under intense media pressure for action to be taken, called for a Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Arrest, Charging and Withdrawal of Charges Against Harold James Blackburn and Matters Associated Therewith (Lee 1990; Miller, Blackler and Alexandra 2006). The terms of reference the Inquiry was to investigate were as follows:

1. The circumstances of and surrounding the investigations of the offences of rape, sexual assault, kidnapping, forcible abduction of a woman, assault, and armed robbery which Harold James Blackburn was charged on 24\textsuperscript{th} July 1989, and of the surrounding of the arrest, charging, prosecution and the discontinuance of the prosecution of him for those offences, including but not limited to:
   a. the inquiries made by the Police Force into the circumstances of those offences, and the gathering and marshalling of the evidence sought to be relied on for the prosecution of the said Harold James Blackburn;
   b. the taking of advice from the Office of the Direction of Public Prosecutions or any other person, in relation to the charges or the evidence to be adduced in support of them;
   c. the provision to the media of information concerning the investigations, the arrest, the bringing of the charges, the prosecution or the discontinuance of prosecution of Harold James Blackburn;
   d. any events affecting persons involved in such investigations, arrest, charging, prosecution of Harold James Blackburn which may have influenced the conduct of such activities.

2. Whether any person who was involved in such investigations, arrest, charging, prosecution, discontinuance of prosecution or provision of information to the media referred to in paragraph 1, acted out of any improper motive.

3. Whether any person involved in the investigations, arrest, charging, prosecution or discontinuance of prosecution referred to in paragraph 1 should be

\textsuperscript{49}The Liberal State Government were also criticised post inquiry by the Opposition for only taking action in the Blackburn case after public embarrassment and media outcry (Lee 1990).
charged with any criminal or disciplinary offence in connection therewith, and, if so, with what offences (Lee 1990).

Of significance here is reference 1c, whereby the provision of information to the media surrounding the Blackburn case was examined by the Inquiry. As stated elsewhere, the way in which the NSW Police Service managed the media in this case was seen as vital to the projection of a positive image of the Police and the gathering of additional information in the case against Harry Blackburn. While initially this case may have been spurred by vengeance, or at least the strong suspicions of a determined officer, the case certainly became one that police felt they could harness as an example of their forcefulness against crooked officers.

As has previously been mentioned, the proposed publicity surrounding the Blackburn case was something that had been initiated the investigative team and the Director of the PMU prior to the arrest of Harry Blackburn. After a few days of discussion concerning the proposed media release, media briefing and ‘walking’ of Harry Blackburn, a final media briefing and release were drawn up. The media briefing, which was to be read out to the media immediately prior to the arrest of Harry Blackburn, included specific details as to the intended whereabouts of Blackburn upon arrest and charging, the details of the alleged offences and the covert taskforce as directed by the Commissioner (Lee 1990: 487). In addition, detailed information was to be given about the use of scientific DNA analysis, despite there being no results at that time and the fact the police had not yet obtained a sample for comparison from Blackburn (Lee 1990: 488; Brown and Wilson 1992: 209).
The press release that followed the arrest of Harry Blackburn was also quite detailed in nature. Again, the use of forensic and scientific techniques and analysis were highlighted, as were the details of the Rape Hotline, which were later to appear alongside footage of the arrest of Blackburn (Lee 1990: 489). The media release ended by quoting Lauer (cited in Lee 1990: 490):

This operation has demonstrated that the NSW Police Service is more than capable of handling an extensive and highly sensitive inquiry.

On the morning of the arrest individual journalists were said to have been informed that from 4pm a media “lock-up” would be occurring (Lee 1990: 491). It was during this “lock up” that Brien, as Director of the PMU, was to give the media “confidential background information”, with information coming solely from the media briefing paper (Lee 1990: 491). What resulted, however, was that Brien was alleged to have gone beyond the material contained in the briefing paper. As discovered in the Inquiry, Brien provided “Blackburn’s name, an explanation as to the suggested origin of the term ‘Operation Photo’, [and] some alleged details of some of the attacks” (Lee 1990: 492). Reporters at the briefing told the Inquiry that they were informed there would be an opportunity to film Harry Blackburn as he was leaving the front door of the Old Hat Factory later that evening, and were requested by Brien to publish Blackburn’s photograph to assist the investigation (Lee 1990: 493).

Following the arrest of Harry Blackburn, Deputy Commissioner Tony Lauer gave a press conference from Police Headquarters, where he read from a prepared statement and answered questions. As Brien had done earlier in the afternoon, Lauer went
beyond the prepared statement and referred to the use of technology in linking the
suspects to attacks, as well as information about Blackburn’s work background and
the confidence he had in the integrity of the operation (Lee 1990: 494-495).

The Inquiry established that it was clear that:

[T]he underlying meaning to be given to the media briefing material and the news release was that the police had caught the rapist responsible for the Georges Hall and Sutherland attacks and were deserving of congratulation (Lee 1990: 496).

This objective, and the orchestrated ‘walking’ of Harry Blackburn, is further supported by an item written by Steve Brien (1986: 10-11 cited in Lee 1990: 509) about dealing with Media Coverage of Major Events, which stated that:

In terms of public interest, photographs or television film of a man under custody at the culmination of a major inquiry is one of the most powerful public relations tools we have…Page one photographs of such offenders in New South Wales Police custody do more for our image than most other measures could hope to achieve.

If we have success, we need to promote it as actively as the constraints of privacy and the law will permit…What we have to do is capitalise on our successes, to show the people of New South Wales what a good job is being done…

In the view of the Inquiry Commissioner, Justice Lee, very few police, from all levels, felt that the media events surrounding the Blackburn case were improper or undesirable and in fact many were supportive of the proposed publicity from the start. Justice Lee found that as a consequence of the arrest, Blackburn was subjected
to an “enormous fanfare of publicity”, whereby he was presented by the police as if already convicted of the offences (Lee 1990: 516). These actions, determined by the Inquiry, were within the laws of contempt (Lusher 1981: 518).

In his summation Justice Lee pointed to the recommendations as made by Justice Lusher in his Inquiry into NSW Police Administration (Lee 1990) where he dealt with ‘Police Communications with the Media’, as discussed previously. Overall, Justice Lee expressed the need for the PMU to include staff that were able to “immediately and accurately assess the propriety and legality of passing on to the media information in respect to an investigation or arrest” (Lee 1990: 527). The police were also provided with a media policy document, which was to be implemented on his recommendation. Along with this policy came a warning from Justice Lee that whilst the media wish to publish news that entertains, the police are not in the business of entertaining, and the integrity of an investigation should be upheld at all times (Lee 1990: 531).

The Harry Blackburn case identified a number of failings of and disregard for legal processes by the police. Dixon described the case as exemplifying just how pervasive inappropriate attitudes to law and basic misunderstandings of legality and of its proper relationship to police practices are (Independent Commission Against Corruption 2001b).

Furthermore, the case demonstrates the continuing importance of positive publicity for policing agencies, specifically the NSW Police. As has been alluded to in other examples, the police are keen to make examples of ‘good cases’, to highlight the
work that they are doing. Cases involving corrupt or criminal officers, potentially highly damaging for the police image, present an interesting dilemma for policing agencies. As the interview data suggest, police are keen to suppress stories that make the police look negative or incompetent. Conversely, however, harnessing a story such as the Blackburn case, and turning the negative into a positive story about police tackling corruption can have a great outcome for police, as they see it. The risks associated with not being seen to do something about corruption were evidenced in the aftermath of the NSW Royal Commission into police corruption, where police failure to take legal action against corrupt officers was met with outrage in the media and from the public (Williams 2002: 170). Consequently, it is no surprise that policing agencies are keen to convert potentially damaging stories into positive ones (see for example Lovell 2002).

Chan (1999) would argue that the approach taken by police towards these situations is indicative of a managerialist discourse, in line with the discussion earlier in this chapter. Chan (1999: 251-252) argues that:

Public sector managerialism has brought with it a new principle of police accountability. The new accountability gives emphasis to managerial rather than legal or public-interest standards, favours external oversight combined with self-regulation rather than centralized control and promotes risk management rather than rule enforcement.

In this way, we see ‘private sector techniques’ being employed within policing agencies for dealing with issues such as corrupt behaviour in the ranks (Chan 1999: 252). Chan’s analysis seems particularly applicable given the high level interest in the Blackburn case from senior executives within NSW Police. As Chan (1999: 252)
discusses in her own case study, upper echelons of the police are quick to adopt the managerialist discourse, and this is not surprising given the political sensitivity directed towards policing matters. There is huge pressure on police to be ‘accountable’ to both the public and their political masters. Chan (1999: 253) argues that they can satiate these pressures by “providing an acceptable excuse or justification, a credible denial, or an apology” when things go wrong. Of course, as with the Blackburn case, the public may also be told lies or give murky accounts of situations, which serve to confuse matters.

For Chan (1999: 254) this new accountability resonates with earlier discussions of this thesis, where accountability within policing agencies are increasingly under pressure from governmental rationalities which espouse “fiscal restraint, efficiency, performing and the cutting back of the public sector”. As discussed in Chapter Four, it is the discourse of new public management, and accountability within this framework, which Chan has recognised in her own work as being carried out reactively and proactively by the PMU (Chan 1999: 256; 258; Chan 1997; see also Putnis 1996).

‘Police PR’

The pursuit of positive publicity within the police has not gone unnoticed in media circles. The ABC TV program Media Watch has highlighted one interesting case where police public relations priorities have prevailed over operational and investigative concerns. In 2003 Media Watch reported on a submission made to the ICAC in which it was alleged a NSW Police staffer was asked by the senior press secretary to the Commissioner to provide a mugshot of an offender to a metropolitan
newspaper, contravening the organisation’s policy against revealing information about offenders once a matter was before the court.

In January of 2003, The Daily Telegraph published an article titled ‘The Man Disqualified From Driving for Almost 1000 Years’ (Knowles 2003). The article detailed the case of a twenty four year old male, Raymond George Morgan, who had been disqualified from driving for nine hundred and ninety six years after a series of driving offences. As Media Watch stated, it “was a good little story for the Tele[graph]- and better if they could get a pic of the tragic drive-aholic” (Media Watch 2003). According to reports, The Daily Telegraph requested a picture from NSW Police of the offender to add to their story. The problem with this is that to provide a mugshot of an offender post-arrest is very rare. In fact, according to the NSW Police Media Policy at the time, photographs:

[M]ay be issued to the media only if it will materially assist your investigation, or to warn of danger (NSW Police 2002a: 26).

With the investigation being earlier concluded, it was up to Megan Miller, Press Secretary to Police Commissioner Ken Moroney, and also the partner of The Daily Telegraph’s pictorial editor, to overcome this hurdle (Media Watch 2003). As reported by Media Watch, Megan Miller rang staff at the PMU, requesting them to send mugshots of the offender to The Daily Telegraph. The Supervisor who took Miller’s call was reluctant to acquiesce to Miller’s request, instead calling lawyers, who then went on to advise the head of the PMU, Ross Neilson, that Megan Miller’s request did not comply with the policy on these matters (Media Watch 2003).
Instead of following the lawyer’s advice, however, Neilson went on to send the photograph of Raymond Morgan to The Daily Telegraph. When asked by Media Watch why he gave the mugshot to the Telegraph, Neilson (2003 cited in Media Watch 2003) responded by saying:

On balance in this case, I decided that helping news media and informing the public about the work of police in bringing dangerous offenders before the Court, outweighed other considerations.

Of course while in this case the accused had already been charged and convicted, some similarities between this case and the Harry Blackburn case can be seen. Again, the rights of the offender in relation to privacy, along with the written policy pertaining to the release of information to the media were overlooked in favour of the promotion of a positive police image, one which showed the great job done by police. It also raised questions about the close and possibly favourable relationship between police representatives and individuals from media organisations, and whether or not this influences decisions on the exchange on information.

The way both these cases were handled by the NSW Police Force highlights the amount of power police have in controlling the way in which cases are portrayed in the media. This can have serious consequences for the accused and raises questions about abuses of power and respect for due process values. It is also an example of the ways in which police are pre-occupied with getting convictions, and of other miscarriages of justice where suspects have been ‘fitted up’ for other motives, scenarios which have littered the police history (see Brown and Wilson 1992; Finnane 1994).
The Police Media Unit as Public Service Providers and Risk Managers

Since the 1980s criminal justice organisations have increasingly had to deal with the blending of public and private service provisions in a range of fields, including policing. As Garland (2001: 117) argues, this blending has had consequences for the ways in which public organisations in the crime control field operate, particularly in relation to some of the problems public organisations have faced with questions over their legitimacy and decreasing public confidence. In response to the ‘customer relations’ philosophy touted in the private industry, organisations such as the police are increasingly reviewing their focus away from grander ‘public interest’ principles towards reacting to public opinion demands (Garland 2001). As such, police now represent themselves less as crime-fighters and more as “a responsive public service, aiming to reduce fear, disorder and incivility and to take account of community feeling in setting law enforcement priorities” (Garland 2001: 18). In NSW policing we have seen these ideologies manifest through ‘community policing’ approaches and community campaigns such as Neighbourhood Watch, Crime Stoppers and Safety House, as discussed in Chapter Three.

PMUs themselves play an important role in reacting to and shaping this public opinion objective. Such Units are one of the most important arms through which policing agencies are able to exchange public information and respond to public concerns surrounding policing matters. As one NSW PMU staff member related, “[we act as a] conduit of information from NSW Police to the public on our
activities, what we do and what will affect the public… the community has an expectation that they will know of the events and incidents that impact upon them”.

When asked to explain the most important thing the PMU were trying to achieve when communicating with the news media, the same staff member said:

**PMU Staffer 2:** It’s to assist [police] investigators to elicit information from members of the public who might have witnessed [a crime], who might have seen something… and through that we’re assisting the investigators, and ultimately the community by solving a crime. So we’re reducing fear in the community one, by showing we can solve these crimes, and two, we want them to be confident in our ability to solve those crimes, and three, it’s providing that information to the media… So, one, it’s meeting their needs, meeting the community needs, and it’s meeting the police needs.

The reduction of fear in the community was also mentioned by another staff member as an overall ideal for police to achieve:

**PMU Staffer 4:** Ideally the vision of the police is to reduce crime, and fear of crime in the community, but that’s not the underlying motivation behind what we give out. When we come to work each day we look at the issues that have occurred and try to responsibly give the information out to the media so it’s factual, so that the community have the facts about what’s gone on.

Another staff member went so far to suggest that the PMUs ‘unwritten motto’ was “to provide information to the public and communicate this information in a timely and accurate way”. In addition, this principle to communicate information to the public, PMU staff also recognised the important role they played in notifying the public of potential risks:
PMU Staffer 1: I think public information and public risk is possibly, I think the most important and prevention strategies, risk and prevention I think personally... I think that's most important because it feels like you're actually doing something positive to help... [For example with] the inner west rapist [we have] duty of care issues. We have a big duty of care consideration in the Unit, in sexual assaults, if somebody has been sexually assaulted and there is a random nature to it, as the inner west rapist has, we publicise it as duty of care, to warn people to be aware, we try and put out the images, put out descriptions, we warn people, we put out media releases saying protective strategies, ‘don’t walk home by yourself after dark’, ‘women try and walk together’, that sort of stuff. All those things, provide spokesmen to go on radio, we have a whole situation like when those pack rapes were occurring in 2001, we did a really positive thing then because we needed to warn people.

These perspectives are somewhat indicative of Beck’s risk thesis, whereby risk thinking has become pervasive across a number of organisations, not just police (Hudson 2003). Ericson and Haggerty (1997), Rose (2000), O’Malley (1996) and Chan (1999) posit that police are one of a number of agents that now put themselves forward as advisers on risk reduction and management techniques. As evidenced in the quote above, the NSW PMU plays an active role in informing the community of risks and responsibilising citizens to act in ways that minimise risky situations. This role continues on from Garland’s idea that policing organisations are moving away from placing an emphasis on their role as crime fighters, preferring instead to assess their performance through internally focused endeavours.

At the same time as they communicate in ways that try to foster good ‘customer relations’, policing agencies are managing expectations and redefining their aims, emphasising the constraints they face in attempting to do their job, and therefore reframing what constitutes failure for themselves and hopefully the public (Garland
This new ‘public opinion’ driven focus has led to the development of new indicators for performance measurement. These new performance indicators, rather than being focused on reducing crime rates and catching offenders, are now focused internally, towards organisational outputs, as previously discussed in relation to ‘new public managerialism. For example, the NSW PMU website proudly displays performance indicators for the Police Assistance Line, showing the average length of time in answering calls, the total number of calls answered, and the percentage of calls answered in twenty seven seconds or less, the latter being a performance indicator for the grade of service (sitting on 80% at the most recent viewing), signifying police both responsiveness to the public and bureaucratic efficiency (NSW Police 2007). One of the consequences of this inwardly directed approach within policing agencies, however, is that they are now “increasingly subject to state-imposed standards and guidelines, and are closely monitored and inspected to ensure they comply” with these reduced mission statements (Garland 2001: 120; Chan 1999).

As has been shown in this chapter, Garland’s concept of ‘taming’- the desire for orderliness, control, the management of risks, the imposing of administrative controls, regimes of regulation and monitoring- has increasingly impacted upon late modern policing organisations and the ways in which they operate (Garland 2001). Within NSW Police Force, the NSW PMU can be seen as a manifestation of the government’s project to ‘tame the system’, whereby the NSW PMU functions in such a way as to filter and manage information relating to the NSW Police Force. Drawing on interview data and examples, the chapter has examined the ways in which the PMU not only ‘tames’ the media, but also the ways in which the PMU is
itself ‘tamed’ by administrative and managerial oversight, media policies and guidelines, and political demands. Furthermore, the chapter explores how the PMU controls information pertaining to the NSW Police and attempts to present policing in specific ways. These representations often blur the lines between information and political spin, attempting to control such representations in ways that go beyond previous attempts in the history of the PMU.

In the next chapter the issue of power will be explored, as well as resistances to the exercise of power. Using concepts from Foucault and Garland, the chapter explores the diffusion of power between the two parties in the relationship and the role that knowledge plays in determining how, and by whom, power is exercised in any given situation. The chapter also looks at how each party, the PMU, journalists, as well as operational police, resist attempts at control. While there are policies, procedures, techniques, and administrative and managerial mechanisms of control in place, each of the groups identified actively tries to resist these mechanisms of control at various points of time. This naturally impacts on the police-media relationship, and it is these implications which will be explored in Chapter Six.
CHAPTER SIX: POWER AND RESISTANCES TO CONTROL

Previous chapters have explored some of the ways in which PMUs have demonstrated the increasing politicisation of the criminal justice system in late modern society, and the ways in which PMUs have been subject to, and encouraging of, attempts to ‘tame’ the field of criminal justice. Many of the themes that have emerged through the analysis of interview data go some way to identifying how policing organisations, given their political salience, play an important part in the construction of law and order rhetoric. Previous chapters have attempted to explore some of the mechanisms through which this ‘taming’ of the system has occurred.

What is yet to be examined, however, are the ways in which many of the actors in these fields exercise agency against or challenge attempts at control or governing. Foucault (1982) would characterise these actions as resistances, and it is his belief that it is the resistances to techniques of control that contribute towards the success (or failure) and progression of systems of control. Accounting for these resistances is something Garland, in his work on cultures of control, does not explicitly address. It is therefore useful to utilise the work of Foucault in order to try to understand the ways in which resistances to taming are important to the ‘success’ or ‘failure’ of mechanisms of control. For Foucault, it must be understood that the concept of ‘failure’ is not necessarily a negative one. Rather, ‘failure’ is a productive apparatus, for it is failure that brings about the possibility of change and progression. Given the

50 He does however go some way to addressing the issue of resistances in his 2004 article ‘Beyond the Culture of Control’ (Garland 2004).
ever evolving nature of attempts to govern or control, not just police media relations, but any facet of society, it is almost inevitable that for change to occur there must be challenges or resistances to these ‘taming’ techniques. It could be argued that Garland (2001: 201) would see these challenges as natural developments related to the conditions of late modernity. It will be argued in this chapter, however, that resistances to control need to be addressed more closely than Garland allows for because they demonstrate the ‘productivity’ of attempts at ‘taming’. For Miller and Rose (1990: 4) these ‘failures’ are linked to attempts at devising programs or policies which “work better”, which correlates with Garland’s culture of control thesis (see also O’Malley 1996).

Before the matter of resistances and challenges within police media relations can be examined however, one facet of Foucault’s work that must be addressed is his thoughts on power. For Foucault (1980), there is no resistance without power, and vice versa, so the power relations experienced in the police-media relationship are essential in establishing the conditions for the ‘success’ and ‘failure’ of policies of control and governance.

**Power Relations in the Police Media Relationship**

In the police-media relationship, much has been written about which party has the most control or power over the other. Wilson (1992: 160) has written of the ‘close, comfortable’ relationship between police and media in Australia. Wilson (1992: 161) believes “there is a power balance …so that reporters rely far more on police information than the police rely on reporters’ knowledge of events”. He also notes
that most reporters would not acknowledge the delicacy in developing and maintaining the relationship. Wilson (1992: 163) suggests that:

> Even though the press recognise that the police manipulate the news media, reporters and editors often uncritically publish police accounts of crime. It is not that journalists actively promote the interests of the police or that they deliberately ignore other versions of particular crime events. Rather, the fragility of their relationship with law enforcement agencies demands that they acquiesce to the police version.

He goes on to argue that the power exercised by police can have a number of negative consequences: the orchestration of what is written and photographed; the withholding of information from journalists with whom they have conflict; even the intimidation of journalists (Wilson 1992: 163, 166, 169). The consequences for reporting information that police considered to be detrimental to them certainly affected the relationship between some of the journalists interviewed and the NSW PMU. One journalist, who had prior approval to do a story, found out the consequences for publishing the story after the PMU suddenly withdrew consent:

**Journalist 4:** [The PMU] tried to stop me from doing the story about a non operational matter. I resisted this and did the story anyway. They threatened me that if I did it, they wouldn’t help me anymore… unless I agreed to certain conditions they had, which were unacceptable to me. Those conditions involved the publication of the story and when the story would be published, [but] I resisted that and did the story anyway… They have punished my outlet by giving some stories to other outlets.

Other journalists too related that there were often widespread consequences for adhering to the guidelines of the PMU:
Journalist 11: The night before last all three media organisations were reporting, or attempting to report, just some detail of this operation that occurred yesterday. There was communication between the Commissioner’s office and Police Media, and the editors [of the three newspaper organisations]. Two of the newspapers pulled right back on what information they had on the basis that there were security issues involved. And one newspaper didn’t pull back as much which caused a huge stink… and that caused major friction between police media and a couple of journalists here… There’s little doubt that the police media were upset with what was said or how it happened and so they withheld basic information to others. It’s par for the course.

The practice of ‘freezing out’, or blocking journalists from obtaining information on particular matters is not new in the Australian context, and has been discussed extensively by previous researchers (Putnis 1996; Freckelton 1988; Wilson 1992; Grabosky and Wilson 1989; Kiel 1989). One former PMU staffer reflected on what would happen if journalists abused the trust of PMU staff during their time at the Unit:

Ex-PMU/Other 4: They [the media] wouldn’t be treated very well. They may find it much much harder to find information. They wouldn’t be calling me on my personal mobile, they’d be in the queue… We would probably freeze them out.

Others felt the consequences were not so dire:

Journalist 13: [The] Police Media Unit is a bit more savvy about how media works, so they might give you a rap over the knuckles, or say that was a bit unfair, or you didn’t have to be so harsh, and then it’s another day the next day.
In Wilson’s (1992: 177) view PMUs have simply strengthened police attempts to ‘manage’ the presentation of crime news.

The relationship of power between police representatives and the media however cannot simply be explained away as one dominating the other (Putnis 1996). Drawing on the work of Mawby (2007; 1999; 2003; 2002a) Garland and Foucault especially, there is a broader context in which these power relationships take place, one which does not prescribe totalising power to either party in the relationship. One of the central messages to come across in the interviews with key stakeholders in the police-media relationship was the unpredictability of the relationship police and journalists had with one another, and the frequent power struggles that each feel they are faced with in their exchanges. Foucault has addressed the issue of power relationships extensively in his work, moving away from notions of power as a repressive force, and instead arguing that power is productive, producing domains of objects and rituals of truth (Hunt and Wickham 1994: 16). Unlike traditional understandings of power, Foucault believes that power is not owned by any one person or institution, rather it is diffuse across a number of sites, exercised through a variety of sources, and is dependent upon how “different groups, institutions and discourses negotiate, relate and compete with one another” (Danaher, Schirato and Webb 2000: 80). For Foucault, power functions in terms of the relations between different fields, institutions, bureaucracies and other groups within the state (Danaher, Schirato and Webb 2000: 71). Foucault’s conception of power seems to best typify the interplay of power in the police media relationship.

As addressed in previous chapters, police organisations, like other state institutions,
are reacting to new institutional arrangements, new performance and accountability measures, a new socio-political climate and new modes of governance. The relationship between police and media representatives therefore is not as simple as one controlling the other. As evidenced by the interview data, the relationship between the two is a lot more fluid than this and is dependent upon a number of variables. This resonates with the concept of power as Foucault sees it. For Foucault, power relationships will often be unstable, ambiguous and reversible (Hindess 1996: 97, 101). He maintains that:

We must distinguish the relationships of power as strategic games between liberties- strategic games that result in the fact that some people try to determine the conduct of others- and the state of domination, which are what we ordinarily call power (Foucault 1988: 19).

Power in this sense then for Foucault is exercised over others through instruments, techniques and procedures by those who are in the position to be able to exercise this power, yet at any point of time the power balance may shift. This potentially constant shifting of power was evident in the responses of many of the key stakeholders in the police media relationship. When asked who held the balance of power in the police-media relationship, staff from the PMU recognised the control both sides were capable of wielding. One staffer believed that the PMU had the advantage:

**PMU Staffer 3:** We have the upper hand on control of what information goes out there, they [journalists] have the upper hand on what information actually gets in the news, we can’t stop them reporting, we can limit and control the information we give them… that doesn’t mean to say that they can’t go and get it in another method… we can’t stop them printing a story either.
Another saw that the balance shifted depending on who held information useful to the other party:

**PMU Staffer 2:** It’s an ‘us’ and ‘them’ situation where we say ‘we’ve got all the marbles and you’re gonna play with them’, and then say ‘well we’re going to take away the marble mats so you can’t play on them’… We’ve got the information, they’ve got the means, I suppose that’s one way of describing it, and sometimes we use each other, we use each other well, sometimes we don’t. But I think striking a balance, I think both sides benefit from the relationship.

Some, however, were resigned to the fact that the media ultimately had the most power:

**PMU Staffer 4:** The media always have the last word. Police may think they have the upper hand by not feeding information, but whether you give the information or you don’t give the information, you don’t get the last word. I would say the media has the slight upper hand because no matter what we say they can say what they like.

The power held by the media was often associated with bullying tactics used by the media in order to obtain information from the police:

**PMU Staffer 1:** I don’t think we’d have as much power as the media, the police, definitely not. The media can bully and can force police possibly to give more information out than they would really like to, because that they’re concerned that down the track their actions may be questioned. ‘Why didn’t you tell us that, that wasn’t fair, you knew’. I think that then that also forces us to be honest and open. I think the media does have more power, I think certain areas of the media have too much power to control things.
And whilst PMU staff believed that they had the ability to control the information they disseminated to the media, ultimately it was the media who conveyed this to the public, and thus could choose how this information would be presented:

**PMU Staffer 5:** I think I’ve always realised that the media is very powerful and I think, having reflected on what I just said, I think yes, well we can control what information they have access to, but what they can say about us, and the fact that they’ve access to the public, and that’s what they’re reading, listening to, watching on TV, yeah I think the media is probably a very powerful thing and yeah, I think that’s the answer. Yeah, it’s the most powerful side.

Journalists interacting with the police on a regular basis also had mixed feelings about the balance of power in the police media relationship. Some were adamant that the media had the most power, and like the PMU staffer quoted above, felt that the ultimate message the media could present to the public would be the most important:

**Journalist 6:** Well the media always has the last say, I would think, because they have the power to print or go to air, to broadcast, to publish, and that’s gonna hit the wider community. The police hold a certain degree of power in the sense that they hold the information, but once the media has access to that information it’s open season, so if you’re asking me who has the power, I would say the media has the power, and has considerable power.

Another journalist believed that this power was linked to the fact that the media presented the truth over and above external interests and pressures:

**Journalist 2:** The media does… the media ultimately will have the upper hand; the truth will prevail against commercial interests, political interests.
Other journalists felt that the police would always hold the power given that they were the ones with the control over information:

**Journalist 5:** The cops. The cops. No matter how many dramatic, shocking, powerful, bold, you know, captivating, sensational, beat up stories there are about police, police work, crime and the impact of crime, we’re only just scraping the surface. You know, there are so many secrets in that joint... There is a huge amount of stuff that journalists never find out about. That would be my view. And, I think that they play politics pretty hard and they get their own line out and if you’re someone that’s trying to counteract that for whatever reason, even if it’s for good reasons, you’re the underdog.

The influence of the PMU on establishing and maintaining the power of the police in the relationship was also recognised by journalists.

**Journalist 11:** Police Media are an incredibly powerful organisation, and have become increasingly powerful as the security issue has become more and more important to State Government politically. And the only way that most journalists covering that niche can really operate and be productive and be competitive between each other is to stay within the loop.

The majority of journalists, however, recognised that the power balance was interchangeable and contingent upon the prevailing circumstances, and sometimes dependent on the particular media outlet dealing with the police:

**Journalist 10:** I don’t think the police would think they had control over, say, the Daily Telegraph or the Herald, or anything like that. And I think most media organisations are pretty aggressive and would take the view that you should take notice of us… On the other hand, they’ve got the information, and if they don’t tell
you, it makes life harder. So both sides have got a fair
degree of power.

Whilst the introduction of PMUs was presumably meant to enhance the control
mechanisms of the police, one journalist felt that this actually fed into the power of
certain media personalities who are able to hold the police to ransom:

**Journalist 3:** I would have said that police have the
upper hand…but I think one of the consequences of
media units, be they in the government or police,
thinking that the agenda was to control the output of
the media, has been a kind of surrendering of control
in an ironic way because when you start doing those
deals with people like Alan Jones, you have to, by
definition, give them power too. And then when they
start saying ‘but if you don’t do this, we’ll do this’
then you do wonder who’s in control.

**Journalist 9:** Well they both have power; the power
that the media has is the public ear. They can make
you or break you. The power that the media unit has is
to give you the information you need, and that can
translate into… higher ratings or better circulation,
which translates into higher advertising revenues. They
both have leverage in different ways.

Others saw the relationship as fairly balanced in terms of power, but often
unpredictable in any given circumstance, and thus interdependent:

**Journalist 13:** It can be like a poker game, you don’t
know what cards they’ve got, they don’t know what
cards you’ve got, and you think ‘oh god I’m not really
all that confident with these cards’, which puts you in
the position of being intimidated by what they might
have, and you have no idea that they’re on the other
side of the table thinking ‘oh god, I really don’t like
these cards’. It is a very interdependent relationship
and of course we need stories from them, and they may
desperately need for us to get a message out.
Journalist 14: It’s balanced in the way that sometimes they’ll have the upper hand, sometimes we’ll have the upper hand, just depends on each story and what you’re doing with it… They need us as much as we need them. It’s probably pretty balanced in that respect.

One journalist commented that depending on the nature of the story, the PMU could often be forthcoming with information. This helpfulness, however, could be for less agreeable reasons, with assistance being given in one instance to distract reporters from other matters, thus demonstrating the power the PMU wield:

Journalist 1: I think it changes for different stories. It depends who breaks the story first as well. I think if the Media Unit comes out and gives you everything, they’ve got the upper hand really. For instance [in a particular case] they [police] found I think it was $500,000 in the boot of a car that was handed over as ransom money. And they told us that they had arrested these guys and they let us take photographs of all the money that they had found in the car. They opened the boot of the car for us… that was the beginning of a lot of that sort of stuff, them really helping us out in that way, because if they do that, we’re not gonna bother. The more of our time they take up, the less time we’ve got to go and do other things… So really, they’re almost journalists themselves doing our job.

This story reflects concern journalists have that in being fed positive stories, the PMU might be trying to hide the more negative, controversial stories. Savage and Tiffen (2007: 83) have argued that the power these sorts of units have over journalists can be used to “divert attention away from uncomfortable scrutiny to popular or innocuous news stories”.

Many of the responses given reflect Foucault’s assertion that power is never entirely one-sided (Hindess 1996: 102):
Even though the relation of power may be completely unbalanced of when one can truly say that he has ‘all power’ over the other, a power can only be exerted over another to the extent that the latter still has the possibility of committing suicide, of jumping out of the window or of killing the other (Foucault 1988: 12).

The issue is not just one of power, however. The interview data demonstrates the importance of knowledge and information in the exercise of power. As many of the interviewees recognised, at any one time, either the police or the press might have knowledge of a piece of information that the other one does not, and the possession of that knowledge plays a significant role in which of the parties has control or power in the situation.

**Power/Knowledge**

Given that knowledge plays an important factor in the power relations between police and media representatives, it is also useful to address how knowledge and power inform one another. One of Foucault’s most well known concepts is that of power/knowledge. Foucault (1980: 52) argues that:

The exercise of power itself creates and causes to emerge new objects of knowledge and accumulates new bodies of information… The exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge and, conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power… It is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power.
Foucault’s view challenges traditional ideas of power and knowledge as being separate and individual concepts, instead putting forth the idea that power and knowledge do not exist or operate without one another. Accordingly, in order to understand the development of knowledge there “always involves the consideration of power dimensions within which the knowledge is produced… knowledge is a major resource of power” (Hunt and Wickham 1994: 13). Given that there is no power without knowledge, and given that the operation of power is reliant upon the exercise of knowledge, it becomes apparent how power relations between the police and the media often fluctuate and vary.

The implication of power/knowledge is that it allows objects to become ‘knowable’. Power/knowledge is productive, in the sense that it creates objects, but in resourceful ways rather than just negative ways, as traditional understandings of power might tend to imply (Townley 1993: 521). For the police-media relationship, power/knowledge is transferable, and by exercising power/knowledge both police and media representatives engage in the creation of truths around a variety of issues. The contacts between journalists and operational police often had positive outcomes for both parties. As other researchers have uncovered (Innes 1999, 2001; Feist 1999), police and media representatives frequently work together for mutually beneficial reasons. For police, this often manifests in the solving of a criminal case, and for journalists, this can result in additional, or exclusive information for their next news story. As one journalist related:

**Journalist 2:** I remember there was a recent homicide on the Northern Beaches where we were asked to come along and prod the suspect with some fairly heavy emotional questions and we did… We were
asked to go along and screw him basically, just screw him down with questions like ‘what were your mum’s last words?’ and really, stuff that just got to him. Within 2 weeks he gave himself up. That wracked with shame and guilt, he just walked in and gave himself up. So there is an aim there for working closely with the police... And we’ll help them like if there is an incident.

Another stated:

**Journalist 14:** In the end we need them as much as they need us basically, no matter what happens they need us, they need information to get out to solve crimes, they need information to get out to calm people down and try and sort out problems, to inform the community as to what’s happening, to tell them that ‘we’re the police force and we’re here protecting you’, and all that sort of stuff, without us they don’t have that. There’s a lot of cases that have been solved purely because the media have taken an interest and pumped it along and they really helped out. Equally we need them because I don’t have a job if I don’t have any contacts.

In this way, we can see that both sides are exercising power in the relationship.

According to Hunt and Wickham (1994: 11), “truth is not separated from power, rather it is one of the most important vehicles and expressions of power; power is exercised through the production and dissemination of truth”.

Therefore, knowledge and the production of truth are important facets of power relations that operate in ways which are conducive to attempts at control. The exercise of power/knowledge also feeds into the exercise of governance, which will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter. As has been addressed in previous chapters, the PMU plays a very important role in police and government attempts to ‘tame the system’. The ways in which they attempt to control and are themselves
controlled have already been detailed, and it is these attempts to ‘tame’ that reflect Foucault’s concept of power relations in attempts to govern.

**Resistances to Power**

An essential element of power for Foucault is resistance to power. Foucault believes that power (and therefore knowledge) does not exist without resistances to that power, resistance is never exterior to power, and in order to understand power relations, the resistances and challenges to that power must be investigated (Foucault 1982: 780; Garland 2001: 95). Like Foucault, Garland believes the field of crime control generally is marked by tensions and contradictions, and it is these conditions that often contribute to the evolution of the field, demonstrating that attempts to control are always being revised (Garland 2001: 19). Challenges to and tensions in the realm of police-media relations have been evident across the history of the relationship. The introduction of PMUs in policing organisations has done little to ease any tensions and in many cases has led to a whole new range of challenges to police attempts to control, not only how the police and media interact, but how policing organisations themselves establish protocols surrounding interactions with the media.

For Foucault, power always involves and engenders ‘resistance’ (Hunt and Wickham 1994: 17). There is no relationship of power without the means of escape or possible flight. Every power relationship implies a strategy of struggle, in which the two forces are not indistinguishable from one another, do not lose their specific and individual nature, or do not finally become equivalent to one another (Foucault 1982: 17).
As Foucault (1976: 99) states, “[r]elations of power-knowledge are not static forms of distribution, they are ‘matrices of transformations’”.

**Journalists Resisting**

Journalists who interact with the police and in particular the NSW PMU were on the whole well aware of police attempts to control their access to information and the ways in which they are now able to deal with police. As discussed in Chapter Five, journalists have noticed considerable changes over time in how journalists and police are able to communicate and the growing role of the PMU as a filter for the flow of information between police and media representatives. One of the ways in which journalists try to circumvent the PMU’s role as the gatekeeper of information is by establishing contacts and sources, unofficially, from within the NSW Police Force. This fostering of sources is not a recent phenomenon, however. As highlighted in Chapter One, Chappell and Wilson (1969) addressed the reliance upon sources by journalists. The reasons for turning to sources were much the same in the 1960s as they are today, except that a professionalised PMU within the police was not cited as a major source of trouble in terms of obtaining information. For the journalists interviewed in the current research, the use of contacts was seen as practically essential to being able to carry out their role as a police reporter (see also Grabosky and Wilson 1989; Wilson 1992). As one journalist emphasised, “you do have to develop independent sources”, for no other reason than relying solely on the PMU would not be very fruitful, given their size and agenda:

**Journalist 14:** If you only relied on the Police Media Unit then you wouldn’t get much and you’d be in the shit basically because they’re not going to give you stories that are good ones.
**Journalist 6:** You’ve got to remember that there’s sixteen thousand members of the NSW Police. The Police Media Unit is a unit of about twenty five. So in an organisation as big as NSW Police, of course, yeah we talk to police outside the Media Unit every day.

This was supported by other interviewees, many of whom preferred dealing with frontline police who provided them with information and who were trusted:

**Journalist 5:** Almost exclusively my contact with police is with people who are not working in the media area of the force or the marketing area of the force, they’re people that are actually doing front line jobs. And they are a range of people from detectives, to Superintendents that run local area commands in the suburbs, to coppers on the beat. People that I’ve gotten to know one on one over the last roughly ten years, and know that I can be trusted and for them to talk fairly frankly off the record to me about things, that’s how I get my stories.

**Journalist 14:** I had the shits with them [PMU] so I just decided I wasn’t going to deal with them. So I just didn’t ring them, I rang other people. I always made sure the story was balanced, and I rang someone in the police force who I knew was on the side of what I was doing to get a balanced story, but I just didn’t ring the Police Media Unit because I didn’t need to deal with them, and I had my own contacts I could go through.

Moreover, the fostering of these types of contacts was seen as vital to journalists being able to carry out their role:

**Journalist 1:** It’s really important that you have your own police contacts as a journalist, especially sources that you don’t have to talk to on the record… If you want to sort of move to the next level of journalism, if you want to break stories for instance- because the Media Unit disseminates these stories to everyone- so, if you want to actually break a story or have a new
angle on a story, it’s good to know a police officer that’s working on the job.

Some journalists felt that policies restricting journalist contact with police were unproductive:

**Journalist 2:** Just because these are the rules the government sets up in terms of dealing with police, it doesn’t mean you have to play by them. You rely on your own contacts. And that’s what I do, I work the edges. Information comes from a variety of sources.

PMU staff were only too aware of the lengths journalists were prepared to go to in order to garner information the PMU were not authorised to distribute. Many staff members felt journalists pressured them to release information outside their legal barriers, reflecting Jiggins’ (2007) findings that police media policies restricted contact between police and journalists:

**PMU Staffer 3:** [Journalists] want information that goes beyond the media policy and they expect that they can get around it and get the information, and they’ll try time and time again and we just put back to them, you know our media policy we can’t do that, so they will try anything to go outside those boundaries.

**PMU Staffer 3:** The journo’s would love us to be able to give them more information, they’re always going to say that, they never get exactly what they want but we can’t, we’re legally bound and we can’t. They will push that limit forever.

PMU staffers who had previously worked as journalists found the pressures especially difficult:
PMU Staffer 5: They [journalists] expect, because that you’ve known them, that you’ll help them out, but obviously you’ve got that media policy there.

PMU staff also recognised that because the PMU were restricted in the information they could give out, journalists would source links beyond the PMU. This did not seem to particularly bother one staff member:

PMU Staffer 2: There’s still a lot of journo’s out there who still have a lot of contacts with police, their own personal contacts, and if they have so be it. That’s the way of the world. I think they find the information they get from their contacts is pretty similar to what we could give them.

Given the importance placed on contacts by journalists, however, it appears that perhaps information is more freely available to journalists once they step outside the official ‘gatekeepers’ of police news. Many of the journalists interviewed felt they could trust what their unofficial contacts and sources told them than they could trust the PMU to provide them with detailed and accurate information:

Journalist 1: Your more important contacts are your cops, the people on the ground. ‘Cause they’re the ones who are sort of seeing it as it is. And if you get to know them, you know that the information they are giving you is legitimate and you test it out when you put it out there don’t you? And if someone is giving you the wrong information, you’re not really gonna use them as a source again.

These contacts were also more reliable than the PMU:

Journalist 3: I’ve got my own contacts, and they are much, much more reliable than the Media Unit.
Some however, were wary of agendas that contacts might be trying to advance:

**Journalist 14:** I’ve been done over a couple of times… I’d believed that what they [contacts] said was correct and we’d done some checking and it seemed to be correct, and it wasn’t really a problem, ran it and then probably about four weeks later after I’d dealt with them a number of times afterwards I realised that they were basically exaggerating, and had their own barrow to push and it wasn’t a good barrow… After I’d looked at what I’d done I just thought, righto well I won’t do any more stories with them, they can’t be trusted. Sometimes you get caught, nobody’s perfect.

And for journalists, the level of detail provided by the PMU was simply insufficient for them to be able to fulfil their role:

**Journalist 13:** I don’t get a whole lot of detail out of the Police Media Unit. Most of my detail comes from contacts, individual police stations, whether it’s detectives, or sergeants or whatever it is, people who trust me enough with the information.

Recent legal threats from the former NSW Police Commissioner Ken Moroney (Mercer 2006b) did nothing to deter journalists from relying upon unofficial sources for information. Many said their loyalty to these sources would prevail over any court ordered attempts to divulge the origins of information they receive:

**Journalist 12:** If somebody leaks stuff to me and I’ve accepted the information on an ethical basis that I will not reveal you, even if we go in front of the PIC, we’re not going to give up our source. So as long as the source holds to the view ‘it wasn’t me’, it won’t go anywhere.

‘Giving up your sources’ was seen as akin to committing journalistic sin:
Journalist 10: As a journalist, you don’t give up your sources... Short of a confession from someone saying ‘yes I leaked it’, which is pretty unlikely, the only person who is going to tell you is the journalist, and that would involve putting a journalist in the witness box and then using, eventually, the contempt powers if that journalist doesn’t answer the question... I certainly am not in favour of journalists being put in the witness box and facing gaol for revealing their sources.

So for journalists, these attempts to manage the ways in which they carry out their job has merely meant that they have had to adapt their investigative and research techniques over time. It is little wonder then that, as one Ex-PMU staffer said, the Media Policy “was just a work in progress… it was being reviewed all the time and rewritten”. In line with Foucault’s analysis of attempts at governing, in many ways the use of the NSW PMU as a tool of governing over journalists was set up to fail.

Police Media Unit Resisting

Journalists however are not the only ones who actively resist at attempts to govern their activities. The PMU itself can be seen to also actively resist some of the attempts by the police hierarchy and government to closely manage and monitor the Unit, although they themselves may never admit it openly. Many of the journalists interviewed alleged that the PMU staff themselves were guilty of leaking information to certain sections of the media. For one journalist, the leaking of information from the Unit, in defiance of the police, was a question of independence, particularly given that such leaks could affect police operationally:

Journalist 9: The Media Unit wasn’t independent, not at all, not at all, and it’s still not, and in that form
there’s a hell of a lot of corruption… but the corruption comes in the form of leaked information. In fact it’s the information leaked from that Unit that police didn’t want made public.

Off the record contact between PMU staff and journalists was also said to be common:

**Journalist 5:** When you get to the next level of the Media and Marketing Department, it’s the sort of structure in NSW Police, you’re getting a lot of off record contact between journalists and people who work in those positions, and that is a strong source for a lot of journalists.

For this reason some journalists felt it was important to maintain a good relationship with the PMU as they could potentially become a good source if they were willing to go outside the Media Policy:

**Journalist 12:** I’ve always tried to maintain good relations with PR people because they can still be informants. They can let their guard down too and drop something to you, by way of a genuine insight quite apart from the line or the corporate spin they might be pushing, particularly if you ask them questions.

Some journalists also believed, along the same lines, that information was given to ‘favourites’ of the PMU staff, directly contravening the Media Policy:

**Journalist 9:** The leaks now come from the Media Unit you see, they go to their favourite journo, so now instead of journalists or crime reporters having to develop a relationship with police and get to understand them and how they operate, it all goes through this monolith of a Media Unit they have there.
One former staff member put the leaks down to conflict within the PMU, with staff trying to get the upper hand over one another:

**Ex-PMU/Other 3:** There’s a lot of in fighting, or when I was there, a heap of in fighting and I’m telling you, people had their own agendas, people had their own favourites, people making sneaky little phone calls.

This naturally upset some journalists who felt they were disadvantaged by these sorts of arrangements:

**Journalist 12:** Maintaining the integrity of your investigation is absolutely important, and you shouldn’t have leaks to the media, to media favourites, for all sorts of power [reasons].

For this reason one journalist accused the media of being out of touch with the culture and spirit of the police-media interface:

**Journalist 9:** You need to have somebody who understands police culture and media culture, understands what the true needs and purpose of that Media Unit is, and you know and is fair minded, you can’t favour one against another even if you’ve copped a pasting off the Herald, even so that does tend to make you want to favour one over the other.

One journalist even avoided informing the PMU about stories they were about to file because in the past the PMU had given the story to rival outlets to try and get an advantage over the journalist:
Journalist 3: One of their ways of dealing with me is to leak what I give to them... I don’t tell them what I’ve got until the absolute last minute, and the reason for that is that if I tell them what I’ve got it will be in The Daily Telegraph tomorrow. So their way of neutralising me is to say ‘oh shit, [Journalist 3] found out about this, oh shit, give it to the Tele’. So the Tele run a little piece on page thirty and it neutralises what I have to do.

Along a similar vein to the PMU playing ‘favourites’, other journalists believed that the PMU contravened its own ‘non-exclusive’ policy by giving specific stories to one journalist or outlet rather than all media outlets. One journalist related how the PMU neglected to tell their outlet about a particular event:

Journalist 11: There’s no doubt that there was a conflict between the Herald and counter-terrorist type people and the Police Media Unit, two nights before this operation occurred, then the following day the Herald was out of the loop and the Daily Telegraph got a leak that there was an operation, you know, ‘stand by for an operation’, and so did Channel Nine, and that could only have come from them [the PMU].

Others felt that the leaking of information to particular outlets was unfair:

Journalist 9: There’s a lot of angst amongst journos. If you pick up the Daily Telegraph any given day and you see a crime story, police story, an exclusive, you know where it came from. It wasn’t great journalism, it wasn’t great reporting, it wasn’t great investigation, it was getting a phone call right?... Someone’s rung up and said ‘listen, this is happening here, here’s an address, get there’. Now is that fair for the Herald or Channel 9 news or Channel 7? No, and if they were going to tip the media off, they all should be there.

Journalist 4: After my experience with them trying to stop me doing a story I won’t tell them about stories that I have got coming up because I suspect last time
they actually gave my story to someone else as well. I can’t prove that, but that’s what I suspect.

These experiences reflect Putnis’ (1996: 208-209) claim that often police, and in this case the PMU, obstruct journalists by revealing their exclusives to another journalist.

**Rank and File Police Resisting**

Guidelines directing police interactions with the media also impact upon street level, rank and file police officers. The NSW Police Media Policy dictates who is authorised to speak to media representatives, what they are sanctioned to discuss and the ways in which officers are expected to negotiate their contact with the media. Due to the increasing levels of monitoring and administration in policing organisations, officers are increasingly finding their level of autonomy in carrying out their duties is being minimised. For many police, the formalisation of media protocols, and the increasing importance of the PMU removes yet more of their discretionary power as information dissemination is centralised and sanitised. Often, as Wilson (1992: 172) found, this results in police officers being reluctant to pass on news to the PMU. One PMU staff member articulated the internal relationship struggles with serving police officers:

**PMU Staffer 5:** Some police officers are skeptical of our role in the Police Media Unit because we are obviously dealing with the media all the time… They don’t quite see us or accept us as part of the actual Police Service… I don’t know that they don’t trust us; I think it’s more that they see us as another body who are on their back wanting information… they just see us as part of the media and not part of them.
Journalists too recognised the animosity many officers have towards PMU representatives:

**Journalist 5:** I think you’ll find that there are any number of coppers out there in the field that have absolutely no regard for the Head Office media people… But you know, they are able to throw their weight around because they’ve got the Commissioner’s backing.

The concerns many street level police have with the PMU manifest in a variety of ways and for a number of reasons. As alluded to in the above quote, many police distrust the PMU purely because it is representative of the media, whom they also distrust. Others feel that they would rather bypass the Unit and deal with the media directly when trying to get across a message about a particular crime or offence, and others again communicate with journalists on an individual basis and outside the confines of the Unit and the Media Policy. As one interviewee put it:

**Journalist 3:** Police leak stuff to the media all the time and, sometimes it can be for malevolent reasons, but sometimes it can’t be.

Journalists related that they had little difficulty in finding police whom they could talk to ‘off the record’ about various policing matters:

**Journalist 5:** The police hierarchy have got to accept the fact they are never going to stop detectives and other coppers from talking to journalists off the record.

One likened the police to a sieve:
**Journalist 1:** The police service, let’s be frank, it leaks like a sieve, and it’s so political, not just from the top end, it’s political at the bottom end. There’s so many frustrated government workers that are always ringing up the papers saying you know, ‘I’m not giving my name, but this, this and that’ and then [we] check it out and it’s fair dinkum.

And, as has been discussed, having contacts outside the PMU was seen as important for journalists being able to do their job and get the real stories police want told:

**Journalist 1:** If you want to actually break a story or have a new angle on a story, it’s good to know a police officer that’s working on the job. And he will say ‘well you know what, with this job there was a huge stuff up, they didn’t give us this, this and that, and they didn’t give us enough resources or whatever, and, we had major problems with it’. Now the Media Unit would probably leave that piece of information out of course, and then that’s when you’ve gotta kind of put it to them... Like with the Redfern Riots, there was talk about them not being provided with proper equipment and things like that. We only got that from the police on the ground, we didn’t get that from the Media Unit. So basically all the critical stories you will see are from our own contacts.

As discussed in Chapter One, an increasingly concerning trend is attempts by police and government watchdogs to trace information leaks to journalists (Putnis 1996). This manifests in the seizure of journalists’ telephone records, and raids of news offices. Only recently in Queensland accusations were made by the Police Union that

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31 The Redfern Riots in February 2004 were triggered by the death of a 17 year old Indigenous boy by the name of TJ Hickey (Weatherburn 2006). Hickey, who had an outstanding warrant for his arrest, was riding his bike through the streets of Redfern when he spotted police. Aware of the warrant, and presumably under the impression police were after him, Hickey fled police. Whilst trying to avoid police, Hickey lost control of his bike and crashed, becoming impaled on the spike of a metal fence, causing his death (Kennedy 2004). Residents of Redfern, blaming police for the incident, gathered to mourn Hickey, a gathering which turned violent, escalating to a full scale riot. Police, in their attempts to quell the riot were found to be significantly under-resourced, with 40 officers sustaining injuries. A subsequent Inquiry into the death of TJ Hickey cleared police of any involvement in the death of Hickey. Further investigations were critical of the police’s preparedness for the riot.
Police Internal Affairs were monitoring phone records to see if officers had been speaking with journalists, as well as checking police bank accounts to see if they were being paid for supplying journalists with information (Bita and Fraser 2008). With the recent move to digital encryption of radios within the NSW Police Force, the problem of leaks, and threats to sanction ‘leakers’ might escalate (Morri 2008; Penberthy 2008; Spicer 2008).

But the leaking of information to journalists does not just happen at the rank and file level. Senior police have also been accused of leaking information to the media, so much so that former NSW Police Commissioners Ken Moroney and Peter Ryan issued warnings to senior colleagues against speaking with the media, lest they face criminal charges for doing so (Mercer 2006b; Williams 2002). Indeed, Peter Ryan extensively maps out the repeated leaking of information from senior staffers in his biography (Williams 2002: 206, 230, 240, 286, 292).

One of the most prominent cases of senior officers revealing information relates to the ‘Bulldogs rape scandal’. In 2005 NSW Police again faced allegations of information leaks in relation to a high profile investigation. As with the incidents mentioned already, these leaks appeared to have originated from the upper levels of NSW Police. On the 20th April 2005, NSW Police Commissioner Ken Moroney referred a complaint against five senior NSW Police Officers to the Police Integrity Commission (PIC) (Lawrence 2005b; Police Integrity Commission 2005b). The complaint received was in relation to the handling by certain police of allegations made against a number of Canterbury Bulldogs first grade Rugby League players in March and April of 2004. In early March of 2004, six players were accused by a
twenty year old woman of gang rape following a pre-season game in Coffs Harbour (Kent and Wockner 2004). In the following months, police investigators interviewed Bulldogs players and other witnesses, eventually dropping the charges due to a lack of evidence.

The story gained much publicity, due to the high profile nature of those accused, and during the period of investigation, police were called upon on an almost daily basis to comment on the progress of the investigation and the likelihood of charges being laid. At the time of the investigation a number of players had their phones tapped by police and it was during this line of enquiry that police allegedly came across evidence of a player discussing a drug deal (Lawrence 2005a).

This information was very quickly leaked to the media, upon which the Chief Executive Officer of the Bulldogs, Malcolm Noad, requested a meeting with Deputy Commissioner Dave Madden and investigators of the rape accusations. Noad, alarmed over what he had heard in the meeting and by continued leaks to the media and public comments by investigating officers, asked the Police Integrity Commission to investigate police behaviour (West and Kogoy 2005: 3). Following the lodging of this complaint, on 26th April 2005, the Police Integrity Commission put out a media release stating that they had commenced ‘Operation Vail’, an investigation into “whether there have been any breaches of the Telecommunications (Interception) Act 1979 or other misconduct” from those who attended the meeting with Mr. Noad (Police Integrity Commission 2005a: 1).
Whilst the inquiry by the Police Integrity Commission found the officers guilty of breaching the Act, ultimately ending the career of the Deputy Commissioner, what the inquiry more importantly did not address was the source of the initial leak of information to the media. By the time Mr. Noad met with police officials, the story was already out in the media and all police did was confirm the story. This oversight was not ignored by the NSW Opposition. In mid-May 2005, Opposition Police Spokesman Michael Gallacher declared that the terms of the PIC inquiry should be broadened so as to also investigate leaks to the media that resulted in reports that “a Bulldog player had been recorded on phone intercepts discussing illegal drug transactions” (The Daily Telegraph 2005: 7).

Indeed, the NSW State Government was also concerned with the way police handled the publicity surrounding the Bulldogs case. At the time of the investigation NSW Premier Bob Carr used parliament to criticise Detective Inspector Jason Breton, who led the investigation team, for being too free with media comment (West and Kogoy 2005: 3). Carr was quoted as having said:

The comments from police have got to be spartan and got to be guarded (ABC News 2004).

In the months following Carr’s comments about the need for new police protocols in such cases, the NSW Police reviewed their Media Policy, which was subsequently made available in early 2005. Coincidently or not, the Bulldogs allegations certainly caused a number of people to question the policies police followed in this high profile case.
In NSW it seems that inquiry after inquiry have made recommendations, beyond those relating to the PMU and, as McDonnell (1999: 6) recognised, there is an “apparent cycle of public scandal, formal inquiry, the adoption of reform policies followed by a decay in the reform process”. This has been acknowledged by other academics, including Mark Finnane (1994), who has noted that the impact of corruption scandals on policing organisations in Australia has been minimal. In fact, Finnane believes that any substantial changes in policing have had less to do with inquiry recommendations and more to do with shifting social demands and political requirements (see also Reiner 2000b: 183). Perhaps this opens up a new set of questions about the role and influence of governments on policing organisations in Australia and particularly NSW.

The journalists interviewed for this study were asked about their opinion on the case, and whether they perceived that action should have been taken against those who allegedly leaked the information. One journalist believed that the source of the initial leak should be pursued:

**Journalist 13:** My point of view may be completely different, from their point of view, it’s ridiculous that the media leak shouldn’t be chased up… The genuine corruption [in the Bulldog example] would come from the police officer who slipped it to the media, that’s where the leak came from in the first place, so yes from the police side of things, of course they should be pursuing that, the PIC should be pursuing that leak. That is the most important thing, not Madden’s transgression, what Madden did was foolish, but it’s hardly a capital crime, from the police point of view the initial leak was the truly the thing that got that out into the public arena. From a journalist’s point of view, yeah, terrific, you know, it could be deemed irresponsible because you do a story like that… but at the same time it’s a very good story, so you have to
weigh up as a journalist which way you’re going to go. There are some things that I know about at the moment that I could do an exclusive tomorrow, that I don’t even tell my bosses about because I can’t be bothered dealing with them telling me to do it and at the same time jeopardise an investigation.

This reflects the arguments of Putnis (1996: 207), Mawby (2007) and Feist (1999) who discuss how the media can impede police by releasing information that may interfere with an operation. Contrary to what some of the literature insinuates, however, journalists are not always willing to overlook operational imperatives in order to get their story. Another journalist also believed the leak of information risked the veracity of the investigation:

**Journalist 12:** If somebody was leaking highly sensitive information during the Bulldogs rape investigation, which advantaged the suspects, that was a compromise of the integrity of a serious criminal investigation... For someone to leak material, even if it's superficially just to play media games, is really pathetic. It’s a break of the integrity, it’s a compromise of the criminal intelligence or of the evidence that was being gathered in the Bulldogs case. And I see that as a management issue, an irresponsible professionalism within the police force.

A third journalist related that there were numerous leaks in relation to the case that could not be controlled by the PMU:

**Journalist 9:** There was leaks coming from all directions on the Bulldogs from the investigators in Coffs Harbour, from headquarters, coming from everywhere, Bulldogs officials, it was just pouring out, and the media unit could not control it... The Media Unit could not control it, it was just a flood of sewage.
Another believed that the original source of the leak would never be uncovered, for political reasons:

**Journalist 5:** I would go as far as suggesting to you that the issue of the Bulldogs wire tapping thing being leaked will never go anywhere, we’ll never find out who did that. The police will never turn up anything in their investigation because of the value of media and marketing to the organisation and to the Commissioner’s office and to the Minister and the government... Happy to do it to the little people, refuse to do it when it comes to the important people in the organisation, including media and marketing… the senior media and marketing people in NSW Police are just as important as any of the senior officers.

Chan (1999: 256) has also addressed the issue of resistance, particularly in relation to forms of accountability within policing agencies, stating that police are often unwilling to discipline themselves, which perhaps may be the case with the Bulldogs scandal. As such, the leaking of information in relation to the case may simply be an expression of resistance by those leaking the information against the way in which the PMU operates as a filter or siphon through which all information pertaining to the case was meant to be disseminated. Alternatively, if the leaks are from the PMU itself, they may be a way of PMU staff themselves resisting.

Despite the ease with which journalists reported that they could access police as sources for their stories, the PMU did not necessarily believe that police would so willingly talk to journalists:

**PMU Staffer 2:** It’s only a very small minority [of journalists who] might think us as a stumbling block to get that information, but if they really tried to get it
themselves, they might find [that] the investigators or the police out there might really put a wall up against them.

This was acknowledged by some journalists:

**Journalist 14:** There’s going to be people who will never deal with you, who hate your guts and there’ll be people who are your best mates… I think that the way that the force itself features or trains its police to deal with media I think has made it worse… I know people at the Academy who tell me that what they’re told from day one is ‘do not talk to the media they will do you over’, that ‘they will switch what you’re saying, you can’t trust them’, ‘don’t tell them anything’… It’s a real fear sort of thing that’s beaten into these young people coming through.

As such, some of the resistance being experienced may come down more to fear of repercussions for talking to the media than anything else.

**Resistance and Governance**

In applying Foucault’s (1976: 95) theory to the police media relationship, it may be said that the existence of this power relationship is dependent upon “a multiplicity of points of resistance: these play the role of adversary, target, support, or handle in power relations”. The plurality of resistances is evident in the interview data. Sometimes these resistances were spontaneous, sometimes compromises were made, or alliances were formed, there were no set parameters for the conditions and manifestations of these resistances. As Foucault (1976: 96) postulates resistances “are distributed in irregular fashion: the points, knots, or focuses of resistance are
spread over time and space at varying densities, at times mobilising groups or individuals in a definitive way”.

What commonly occurs is that points of resistance often pass through various layers and alliances but do not often become situated in one specific locality (Foucault 1982: 794). This is apparent when looking at the ways in which journalists and PMU staff members characterise the nature of their relationships with one another. One likened it to a love/hate relationship:

**Journalist 10:** It’s a sort of a love/hate relationship I guess with them… As long as you recognise their role, and the limitations, and the conflict, the inherent conflict that’s always gonna be there between us, they certainly have a role to play.

Others agreed:

**Journalist 9:** It’s always been a love/hate relationship between coppers and media because often reporters have to publish things that anger police, something bungled, some corruption, some information that you come by that police prefer you not to run but it’s such good information and you go with it, because the story outweights, in some cases the public benefit, well it shouldn’t. But there are times when you’ve got the personal relationship with police that you do hold back, they say ‘look please don’t run that okay?’ [and] I won’t if it’s vital to the investigation, but there are reporters who will.

**Journalist 14:** A love/hate relationship. Some days you deal with people and it’s fine, and the next day somebody might hate your guts. I’d say probably love/hate; in the end we need them as much as they need us basically.
Another felt that for the most part, relationships between journalists and PMU staff were good:

**Journalist 7:** There’s a couple of people there you could really live without… But most of them there are used to us and have good relations with us and are really helpful, or as helpful within the fairly limited bounds that they have. We find them very annoying to some degree in that they won’t tell us a lot.

As the interview material demonstrates, the relationship between police and media representatives is one of constant power plays, where a plurality of resistances exist. In the tradition of the work of Foucault, resistances, through actions such as the leaking of information (from both the police and the media), are the result of the application of power. As Hunt and Wickham argue, power and resistance coexist with respect to the relation of success and failure (Hunt and Wickham 1994: 17). It is the failures in attempts to control the police-media relationship that feed into further attempts at control. For example, the failure of internal policy that establishes who is permitted to speak with the media, has recently led to recommendations by the PIC to introduce legislation that will lead to the prosecution of police who unofficially speak with the media and provide them with information (Police Integrity Commission 2007). Foucault would see this cycle of successes and failures as one of the most fertile sources of governance; governance always involves the cycle ‘attempt at control-incompleteness (failure)- attempt at control- incompleteness (failure), no matter how long the cycle takes (Hunt and Wickham 1994: 82-83).

Governance is subject to politics. Policing organisations, as explored in previous chapters, are involved in the governance project, where attempts to control or direct
objects are always incomplete, thus perpetuating the governing process (Hunt and Wickham 1994: 129). The failure of police to succeed in the governing process, and thus fail in controlling crime, has resulted in more resources being directed towards police, in an attempt to improve their successes in this area. The importance of the success of policing to the state, as discussed in Chapter Four, means that politicians are more than willing to respond to police calls for more resources and funding. One of the many areas that receives a significant amount of funding (O’Brien 2008) is the NSW PMU, which it may be argued is involved in the governance project.

This chapter explored the power relationships that operate between police, particularly the PMU, and media representatives. The chapter has also examined the ways in which many of the actors in the field of police media relations exercise agency against or challenge attempts at control or governing; that is, they exercise resistance. Police resist media attempts to exercise power by establishing policies that control the ways in which the PMU and other staff interact with and impart information to the media; journalists resist police and PMU attempts at control by seeking out unofficial police contacts through which they can obtain information. Operational police resist attempts by the PMU to control who they speak to in the media by acting as sources unofficially to journalists and bypassing the PMU; and the PMU staff themselves resist governance within their own organisation by acting outside the scope of their policy and leaking information to particular reporters.

Such resistances are shown to reflect Foucault’s (1982) notion of governance; resistances to techniques of control contribute towards the success (or failure) and progression of systems of control. These attempts at control are not necessarily
negative. As Foucault would see it, such resistances are actually productive, bringing about of change and progression. As such, it could be argued that attempts to exercise power in the police media relationship have led to resistance and, consequently, have led to changes in the police media relationship. In fact, the very emergence, growth and development of the NSW PMU is demonstrative of the broader governance project that operates within policing organisations.

The next chapter offers a conclusion to the thesis, and assesses the initial aims and research questions of the thesis against the developments made in the thesis in answering them. The chapter then outlines some of the key themes that emerged from the research, and discusses possible further research that the research has lent itself to.
CONCLUSIONS

This thesis has examined the police-media relationship in NSW and the impact of the NSW PMU on these relationships. The thesis has shown that the relationship between police organisations and the media is of great significance in contemporary society, where information is seen as a valued commodity, particularly in the public sector, and representation or image is vital to political and public acceptance and consent. As the thesis demonstrates, this is apparent within the NSW Police Force.

This thesis has traced the emergence of the public relations arm of the NSW Police Force, the NSW PMU and has demonstrated how the history of the Unit has been vital to understanding the importance of the Unit within the NSW Police Force today. The thesis has also explored the impact of the PMU on the complex relationships between police and media representatives in NSW. The introduction and increased presence of the Unit has indeed impacted upon the police-media nexus in a range of ways and for a range of reasons. The thesis has also extended upon existing research and literature in the field, especially Australian literature, adding new knowledge to the field theoretically, and situating the field in broader, multi-theoretical analyses.

This final chapter offers the reader some concluding remarks on the key findings of this thesis and offers some insights into possible directions for future research. It will begin by reconsidering the original aims and objectives of the thesis, and then highlight key themes and future directions.
Aims and Research Questions of the Thesis

This thesis has provided an insight into police-media relations in NSW and the role of PMUs within the NSW Police Force. There were, as outlined in Chapter Two, two broad research questions that underpinned this thesis which have now been addressed. These were:

1. How, and under what conditions, did the NSW PMU come into formation?
2. What role does the PMU play in mediating police-media relationships and the processes creating public perceptions of policing?

These two broad research questions were underpinned by seven subsequent questions:

1. How have police-media relations in Australia been historically constituted?
2. What is the NSW PMU? How does it function and what are its practices?
3. When and why was the NSW PMU established, and how have its functions shifted and developed over time?
4. What place does the NSW PMU play within the NSW Police Force?
5. What role does the NSW PMU play in police-media relationship?
6. What role does the NSW PMU play in the broader social and political climate of today? What is the socio-political context within which it operates?
7. How has the emergence of the PMU within the NSW Police Force changed police-media exchanges and interactions?

The sub-questions provided the framework for addressing the two broader questions. The following discussion integrates these different dimensions to explore the two overarching questions.
The Emergence of the NSW Police Media Unit

This research has indicated that the NSW PMU was established in 1964. It was at that time known as the Public Relations Branch, and emerged at a time of increasing specialisation within the NSW Police Force. This new Branch signified the expansion of media related activities within the NSW Police Force and was the first formal unit within the organisation specifically created to deal with media issues. It originally employed three staff to oversee this function (NSW Police 1965) and thus had very humble beginnings. Prior to the establishment of the Branch, documented formal links between the NSW Police Force and the media originated in the Traffic Branch during the 1940s. These early dealings were primarily concerned with issues of safety, particularly road and child safety. Following the creation of the Branch, police began to become concerned with their own image (NSW Police 1967), engaging with the media for the promotion of police public relations, the fostering of information for the investigation of serious crimes (through television, radio and press publications), and crime prevention campaigns (NSW Police 1965).

Police media work continued and expanded during the 1970s and 1980s. This coincided with concerns over the public perception of the police during this period. As a result of continuing concerns, the NSW Police Public Relations Branch extended their media work, particularly around their ‘image’. The object of the media work was to produce more favourable media coverage of policing and to foster greater cooperation between the two parties in a number of media formats.
Today the PMU is a twenty four hours a day, seven days a week operation, employing upwards of twenty five staff. The Unit has a range of functions that include disseminating media releases, engaging in proactive and reactive media inquiries, organising media conferences, monitoring the media, managing crime scenes and generally communicating with the media and public (NSW Police 2002a; NSW Police 2004b). The Unit acts as a point of contact for a range of policing matters and provides ‘accurate information’ to the media, as well as advice to members of the NSW Police Force.

In the tracing of the emergence of the NSW PMU, a number of key conditions and themes emerge from the data analysed. These will be identified below.

**Law and Order and Crime Control**

The thesis found that the emergence and growth of the NSW PMU coincided with the drift towards ‘law and order’ and crime control imperatives championed by the state government. As Chapter Three discussed, the NSW PMU was established around the same time as the first ‘law and order’ election in NSW (Finnane 1999a; Tiffen 2004). Crime and order had become issues that the community, driven in part by politicians themselves and the media, wanted authorities to do something about. The background of the PMU, and the socio-political context within which it emerged, highlights that the law and order agenda ultimately led to changes towards more neo-liberal political philosophies and, consequently, greater political demands on the police. This is evidenced by the continual moves towards specialising and professionalising the NSW Police Force, and the challenge to policing organisations
more broadly from the private and commercial sectors as highlighted in Chapter
Three.

**Increased Politicisation and the Fear of Crime**

This thesis has also highlighted the increasing political involvement and interest in policing as a consequence of the aforementioned drift towards a ‘law and order’ agenda. Chapter Four, extending on the findings of Chapter Three, has discussed the nexus between policing and politics, linking crime control imperatives with these increased political interests. This chapter demonstrated that fear of crime plays an important role in the project of governance, whereby discourses around crime and law and order are employed by the state and the police, through their media unit. These emphasise on one level individual responsibility, safety and security and, on another, a broader agenda of governance that contributes towards the legitimacy of the state and the police’s ability to provide for and protect the community. As previously mentioned, challenges to the state’s ability to control crime have led to increased moves by governments to create law and order policies that promote their capacity to govern, whilst simultaneously maintaining credibility and appealing to community sentiments (Garland 2001). Interview data explored in Chapter Three support the notion that PMUs, and in particular the NSW PMU, have been enlisted in these governance agendas of the state, thus blurring the separation between police and politics.

The data indicated that the politicisation of the police has placed the NSW PMU in a difficult position. On the one hand they act as facilitators, responding and replying to requests for information, as well as disseminating information about crime and risk.
On the other hand, however, many have accused them of engaging in activities which counteract this facilitating role; suppressing negative stories, protecting the image of the Police Minister and the department, engaging in propaganda tactics, and blurring the lines between the provision of information and political spin, or public relations. These activities have had a flow on effect to the relationship between the police and the media, which will be discussed in the next section.

**Administrative Imperatives and Managerialism**

The thesis has highlighted the increasing administrative imperatives and managerialism on policing organisations, and consequently PMUs. Like many other public sector agencies, police organisations are subject to new public managerialist approaches. PMUs have become key facilitators of these approaches. The thesis has identified the potentially contradictory position in which the NSW PMU finds itself, between political and administrative domains. The research found that there is a deeper purpose to the PMU. The Unit acts as a filter, or site through which the flow of information about the NSW Police Force is controlled and managed. As staff at the Unit readily admitted, the role of the Unit is to get the right message out. Beyond this however, what the research has found is that the Unit routinely performs in ways that satisfy the many ‘overseers’ who demand the fulfillment of administrative and bureaucratic obligations whilst also being efficient and effective (Gillespie et al 2007: 168; Edwards 2002: 52).
Mediating Police-Media-Public Relations: The Role of the Police Media Unit

This research has found good support for contentions in the existing literature that the police-media relationship is complex, multidimensional and symbiotic. Beyond this however, the research has situated the increasing role of PMUs within these already complex relationships and found that such units further complicate police-media interactions. This thesis argues that PMUs, in particular the NSW PMU, have changed the nature and scope of police-media relationships, and the ways in which information is negotiated and exchanged between the police and the media. PMUs have contributed to increasing attempts to control, regulate and mediate the ways in which the media interact with police and it is argued that they are not only representative of a culture of control that exists within policing organisations, but also indicative of a broader system of governance operating within the broader context of the public sector. The thesis has demonstrated the existence of this culture of control in the activities and imperatives of the PMU, which have transformed the structure of relationships not only between the police and the media, but between the political process and institutions of criminal justice more broadly (Garland 2001: 13). This culture manifests itself in the police-media relationship in a number of ways: through the implementation of police media policies; attempts to legislate against operational police speaking unofficially with the media; the restriction of the flow of information, and; the sanctioning of reporters who produce critical work about the police. As is evidenced through the course of the thesis, the best way to examine the police-media relationship, and the place of PMUs within this relationship therefore is to take a critical approach towards understanding both the micro and macro levels. To understand the complexities in this relationship though, the work of Garland and
Foucault provided a framework around which this constructivist reading of police-media relations took place.

In the tracing of the police-media relationship, and the role of the NSW PMU within that relationship, a number of key conditions and themes emerged from the data analysed. These will now be identified.

**Dynamics**

What emerged from the research was that the relationship between the police and the media in NSW has always been complex and multidimensional, but since the introduction and increased prominence of the PMU into the realm in NSW, the dynamics of the relationship have changed. Police officers and journalists no longer regularly meet over a drink at the local pub, and operational police are less willing to engage with the media for fear of reprimand. Many journalists however still manage to foster unofficial contacts from within the NSW Police Force, and what this research demonstrates is that relationships between these contacts and journalists are considered much more significant than the contact that journalists make with the PMU. As such, the dynamics that exist between journalists and police, and journalists and the PMU are seen in very different lights. Journalists are more willing to risk their relationship with the PMU, as they are seen more as a service, than they are willing to risk their relationship with their police contacts, given the levels of trust required to establish and maintain such relationships.
Taming

The research has also shown that the PMU has become the ‘tamer’ in the relationship between police and the media, as well as being tamed itself by internal administrative and managerial principles. The taming of the police-media relationship is carried out in a number of ways. Firstly, the PMU ‘tames’ the exchange of information between reporters and police. This is done not only by acting as a facilitator for these exchanges, but also ensuring that police representatives are briefed on what to say (and what not to say) before engaging with the media, as well as ensuring the compliance of the NSW Police Force to the Media Policy that guides police-media interactions. The thesis has found that one of the many consequences of this facilitating role of the PMU is the reliance of journalists on the Unit for the compilation of their reports. The matter, however, is not as simple as journalists being lazy, but the fact that dwindling media budgets, combined with reduced resources and the proliferation of generalist reporters means that the PMU becomes the primary definer (Hall et al 1978) of policing matters.

The research also found that the PMU actively engages in repressing or minimising negative or damaging stories about the NSW Police Force in an attempt to tame the image of the police that is disseminated to the public. Beyond that, however, the thesis found that the PMU was also accused of inter alia being charged with protecting the image of the Police Minister and the government, thus operating more like a public relations arm of the government than a public information office within a policing agency.
The thesis also found that this taming or gatekeeping role performed by the NSW PMU was symptomatic of broader administrative processes operating within policing organisations. Thus, the PMU becomes tamed itself, responding to corporate governance requirements, engaging in efficient and effective management, and contributing to the integrity of the organisation through addressing organisational failures, such as the image or perception of police (Garland 2001; Mawby 2002a; Jiggins 2007). It was argued that such organisational discipline and accountability is in stark contrast to the ‘old days’. These approaches resonate with the new public managerialism approach within public sector agencies more generally.

**Power and Resistance**

This thesis has argued that the relationship between the police and the media is one of a constant power struggle, and the introduction of PMUs has added a new dimension to these contestations for power. Furthermore, this thesis argues that with these power struggles come resistances; drawing on the way in which Foucault (1982) explored the concept. The thesis has established that the power relations experienced in the police-media relationship are essential for setting the conditions for the ‘success’ and ‘failure’ of policies of control and governance. These power/resistance struggles operate on a number of levels in the relationship: journalists and operational police resisting Police Media attempts at control; PMU resisting NSW Police Force and media attempts; and in a number of different ways, including Police Media attempts to restrict journalist access to information, and journalist attempts to bypass the PMU by engaging with their own unofficial police contacts. The thesis argues that the relationship of power between police representatives and the media cannot simply be explained away as one dominating
the other (Putnis 1996); there is a broader context in which these power relationships take place, one that does not prescribe totalising power to either party in the relationship. One of the central messages to come across in the interviews with key stakeholders in the police-media relationship was the unpredictability of the relationship police and journalists had with one another, and the frequent power struggles that each feel they are faced with in their exchanges. The research findings resonate with Foucault’s concept of power relationships as often unstable, ambiguous and reversible (Hindess 1996: 97, 101).

**Governance**

The thesis found that in many respects the PMU is part a broader project of governance. This is illustrated on a number of levels. Firstly, they have been affected by the state’s inability to uphold its status as the sole provider of crime control. Consequently, governments have had to move towards policies that promote the state’s capacity to govern, as well as maintain their credibility and evoke popular support (Garland 2001). This feeds into the second feature, whereby the PMU is often aligned to the agenda of self-governance through the use of fear (Lee 2007). They create discourse around the ways in which citizens can safeguard themselves against the risks of crime by providing examples of what happens when one fails to. In this way they can shape the behaviour and activities of the public, whilst also distracting them from questioning the state’s ability to provide crime control. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, these developments can lead to struggles between administrative actors, such as the police and the PMU, and political actors. One of the consequences of this is the increased involvement of police in public relations
activities, such as those outlined in this thesis. This thesis has linked these developments to the politicisation of policing in NSW.

Perhaps the aspect of the research that best demonstrates the overall argument advanced in this thesis can be seen in my own experience in the field. As the detailed discussion in Chapter Two demonstrates, the very act of trying to gain access to the NSW PMU to conduct observations and interviews was an example of this governance in action. Whilst attempts to access the PMU were not made difficult by the wider police bureaucracy, rather individuals within it, the continual blocking of my attempts to access the Unit from within is reflective of the very findings to emerge from this research: that is, the practices of ‘taming’, resistance and control. The experiences recounted by key stakeholders in the police-media relationship were the very experiences I as the researcher encountered.

**Future Research Directions**

This project focused primarily on police media relations, and the development of the PMU within the NSW Police Force. Whilst the history of these relations, the development and growth of the PMU, and the impact of this Unit on relations is unique, the findings of the research certainly open up questions about these issues within other jurisdictions and policing departments. This research has presented a case study that creates space for comparative work in the field. For example, it would be fruitful to explore whether the theoretical analysis forwarded in this thesis, particularly the macro level theorising, is reflected in the experiences of other police departments, not just in Australia, but internationally. What is novel about this
particular study is its attempts to situate police-media relations into a broader socio-political and historical context, and it is this very constructivist approach that may add another dimension to similar studies in other jurisdictions.

Recent developments in Australian police forces, including the digital encryption of police radios in NSW and Queensland, and moves towards legislating against police speaking with the media outside police policy, create interesting and dynamic conditions in this field that have the potential not only to further affect the relationship between the police and the media, but also attempts to govern this relationship. With potentially similar circumstances arising in the context of other jurisdictions, a number of interesting questions arise as to the flow on effects of such policies on the police-media relationship both here and overseas.

There is still a great deal of scope to explore this field, particularly given this researcher’s experience, which found a distinct lack of willingness on the part of the police, specifically their PMU, to engage in this study. Future research would benefit from getting behind the scenes of the PMU and further exploring the underlying conditions to understand the intricacies and idiosyncrasies of the Unit in relation to their interactions with the media. Observations within the Unit, in particular, would enable the researcher to further elaborate more of the day to day interactions occurring between the two that may not come across in interviews.

This thesis has added to a small, but growing, body of research in Australia on the growth of PMUs and their impact on police-media relations. Taking a constructivist approach to the data gathered has allowed me to add a new dimension not only to the
study of police-media relations, but also the growth and impact of PMUs on these relations. This approach has also allowed for the subject matter to be situated more broadly within discourses around policing organisations and the imperatives that drive them. Over the space of forty years, the NSW PMU has gone from being small, but practical aspect of the NSW Police Force to one of the most powerful and important ingredients in the operation, and ‘success’ of the organisation. The broader implications of the significance and prominence of such units is something that is significant to the study of policing organisations worldwide.
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Appendix A: Interview Schedules

*Interview Schedule: Police Media Unit Employees/Ex-Employees*

**Personal Characteristics**
- Tell me a bit about yourself - your role/position within the PMU, your educational and employment background, what led you to work within the PMU
- Are you a civilian employee, or a sworn officer?
- How long have you held your current position?
- How many hours/days a week do you work?
- What is your training/experience in media?

**Police Media Unit**
- Tell me what your understanding is of the function/role of the NSW Police Media Unit
- How do you think the Unit relates overall within NSW Police?
- What are the major functions of the PMU? Do you think it carries out these functions to the best of its ability?
- Do the roles and functions of individuals working within the PMU differ from employee to employee? Do you think civilian staff perform different functions to sworn officers? Why/why not?
- Tell me about the NSW Police Media Policy - when was it adopted/amended last?
- How does the Police Media Policy impact on the work that you do?
- Are there any negatives you see in the policy? If so, how do you think they could be fixed?
- Do you think the policy could be changed/improved in any way?
- Does the PMU play a role in the creation of any media related policies?
- Who, outside of PMU staff, has routine authorisation to communicate with the media?

**Individual Role/Experience as a PMU Officer**
- On average how frequently do you communicate with the news media?
- How many different news organisations would you communicate with in an average week? E.g. newspapers, tv, radio, other?
- On average, how often would you/the PMU contact the media? What would be your reasons for making contact with them? E.g. press release, news conference, assistance/information, other?
- Have you been involved in media training? How often? How is it delivered and what is covered in this training? How helpful do you find the training?
- Do officers outside the PMU receive media training?
- What has been your greatest media success/achievement?
Media Related Questions

- On a typical day, how would you describe the quality of your working relationship with the news media/reporters?
- In communicating with the news media, what do you perceive as the most important things that your department should be achieving? E.g. citizen assistance, crime prevention, positive police image, partnerships with the community
- In the past month do you know of any stories in the news media that have reflected positively on NSW Police?
- In the past month do you know of any stories in the news media that have reflected negatively on NSW Police?
- Can you describe common situations when you find media coverage is favourable/unfavourable?
- In recent times have there been any biased/unfair reports/coverage of police matters in the media?
- What is your biggest complaint? What steps do you think you could take to address this?

Interview Schedule: Journalists

Background of Interviewee

- Tell me a bit about yourself:
  - what type of news media outlet you work for
  - your background in journalism
  - what type of focus your journalism has had i.e. what sorts of stories do you typically work on
- What, if any, are your current interests in policing?

Police and the Police Media Unit

- How important do you think the relationship, particularly one which is positive, is between the police and the media?
- Have you noticed over time any changes or trends in the nature of the relationship? Have any changes you observed been for the better or worse?
- Tell me what your understanding is of the function/role of the NSW Police Media Unit.
  - Do you think the Unit is an effective medium between police and journalists?
  - Do you think the Unit facilitates or restrains journalists’ access to information?
  - What do you think about the PMU using ex-journalists within the Unit? Is this a positive or a negative?

Individual Role/Experience as a Journalist

- On average how frequently do you communicate with the NSW PMU?
- What sort of things would you contact the PMU for?
- How often would you be contacted by the police or PMU?
  - What would be the reasons for them making contact with you?
- Do you think the existence of a Unit such as the PMU makes it easier for journalists to overlook their investigative function?
- Would there be occasion for you to talk to sources outside the PMU, or people they have approved to talk to the media, to obtain information you require?

Media Related Questions

- On a typical day, how would you describe the quality of your, or your organisation’s, working relationship with the NSW Police and/or the PMU?
- In your experience, do you find that when a particular journalist or media outlet raises controversial or negative stories about the police that this affects their relationship with the police and therefore their ability to access information?
- Where do you think the balance of power lies in regards to the police media relationship? I.e. who has the upper hand/most control?
  - Has this power relationship changed over time?
- In recent times people, particularly the State Opposition, have criticised the PMU for being too closely aligned with the reigning state government and the Ministers Office. (For example, the current PIC inquiry matters, matters surrounding the release of information when then Education Minister John Aquilina spoke about a boys plan to kill people at his school). Do you think the police, and the PMU especially, is separate from political influence?
  - If not, should they be?
- Do you have any opinion on recent Opposition calls for another PIC enquiry into the alleged leaking of information from the police/ministers office to the media in relation to the Bulldogs rape scandal?
Information Sheet: Interviewees

This is an invitation to take part in an interview for a PhD research project entitled ‘An Atmosphere of Understanding, Trust and Respect’: The NSW Police Media Unit.

The way in which crime is reported in the media is of significant importance, not only to criminologists, but also politicians, the police, policy makers and media critics. This project is particularly concerned with the agencies that are involved in the dissemination and publication of crime news. Of central interest is the roles played by the police, through their Media Units, and the news media, through reporters, in relaying this information and their interactions with one another when doing this.

Your interview will be one of a number of interviews to be conducted for this project. The information that you will be able to provide will be foremost in understanding these roles and your function within them. The amount of time required from you for this interview will be as long as you can afford, however it is unlikely that the interview will extend beyond 45 minutes.

If willing to participate in this project you will be asked to complete a Consent Form prior to your interview. During the interview you will be asked some general questions about your role as a Media Unit Officer, as well as the methods by which you go about your daily activities. The contents of the interview will be taped and transcribed for the availability of myself and my Supervisor only. The tapes and
transcripts will be stored securely in my office at the University of Western Sydney for a period of 5 years, after which time they will be destroyed.

There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this project, however, if you feel there will be any negative effects as a result, you are free to withdraw from participating at any stage. In the event that participating in this project causes you any distress, contact details for a number of counselling services have been provided below:

- **Lifeline Sydney**
  15 Belvoir St,
  Surry Hills NSW 2010
  Ph: (02) 9951 5577 or 13 11 14
  lifelinesyd@wesleymission.org.au

- **Sydney Counselling Centre**
  Level 1, 20 Wentworth Street
  Parramatta NSW 2150
  Ph: (02) 9415 2223
  help@sydneycounselling.com.au

At the completion of the project, the resultant thesis will be available for public viewing at the University of Western Sydney Library for anyone interested in viewing its content.

If you require any further information about this study, or you have any concerns, please contact either myself or my Principal Supervisor, Dr Murray Lee.

Thank you for your time.

Regards,

Alyce McGovern
PhD Candidate
Centre for Social Justice and Social Change
University of Western Sydney
Bankstown Campus, Building 1
Locked Bag 1797
Penrith South DC NSW 1797
Ph: (02) 9772 6411
Fax: (02) 9785 2217
Email: a.mcgovern@uws.edu.au

Dr Murray Lee
Principal Supervisor and Senior Lecturer in Criminology
Centre for Social Justice and Social Change
University of Western Sydney
Bankstown Campus, Building 1
Locked Bag 1797
Penrith South DC NSW 1797
Ph: (02) 9772 6740
Fax: (02) 9772 6584
Email: m.lee@uws.edu.au
NOTE: This study has been approved by the University of Western Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Research Ethics Officers (tel: 02 4736 0883). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
Appendix C: Consent Form

Consent Form: Interviewees

I have read and understood the information supplied on the Information Sheet and am aware of whom I may contact if I require any additional information.

I agree to be interviewed as part of the specified PhD research project and consent to the information I provide being used in a PhD thesis and any subsequent publications.

I understand that at all times my confidentiality will be respected, and I may choose whether or not I wish to be directly identified with any statements I make by selecting one of the boxes below:

- I wish to have any statements I make remain anonymous
- I wish to be identified in any statements I make

I also understand that at any stage I may change my mind and withdraw my consent to participate in the project.

The information on this form will be kept separate from all interview material to protect participants’ identities.

Name: ________________________________
Signed: _______________________________
Date: ________________________________
NOTE: This study has been approved by the University of Western Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Research Ethics Officers (tel: 02 4736 0883). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
Appendix D: Ethics Approval

27 May 2005

[Signature]

Dear Alyce,

Re: HREC 05/062 An atmosphere of understanding, trust and respect: The New South Wales Police Media Unit

The Committee has reviewed your responses to the issues raised and the project mentioned above is now approved.

You are advised that the Committee should be notified of any further changes to the research methodology should there be any in the future. You will be required to provide a report on the ethical aspects of your project at the completion of this project. The form is located on the Research Services Web Page.

The Protocol Number HREC 05/062 should be quoted in all future correspondence about this project. Your approval will expire 28 February 2007. Please contact the Human Ethics Officer, Kay Buckley on tel: 02 47360 883 if you require any further information.

The Committee wishes you well with your research.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

Professor Elizabeth Deane
Chairperson
UWS Human Research Ethics Committee
Cc Dr Murray Lee
UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN SYDNEY

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

HERC PROTOCOL REPORT

ATTACHMENT 1

HERC PROTOCOL NO.
HREC 05/062

CHIEF INVESTIGATOR
McGovern, Alyce

PROJECT TITLE
An atmosphere of understanding, trust and respect: The New South Wales Police Media Unit

APPROVAL DATE
May 27 2005

EXPIRY DATE
February 28 2007

CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL (if applicable)

Please advise the Human Ethics Officer if your records differ from the above Protocol