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Critical moments in police-citizen reconciliation

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to analyze the interaction of police and citizen representatives during critical moments in reconciliation processes through a relational model.

Design/methodology/approach – Based on 26 in-depth interviews with key actors in three different cases of media-salient police-citizen group conflict, the interactions in the run-up to, during and after five moments that were critical in the transformation from conflict to cooperation, were analyzed. In focussing on the role of the intergroup relationship in conflict interaction, the applicability of relationship-value, compatibility and security in defining this relationship were explored.

Findings – Although interactions during critical moments differed along the specific conflict contexts, three chronological stages could be deduced. In the first stage, interactions were tensed and emotional. During the second stage, repressing this insecurity through the exchange of value and compatibility signals was important. In the third stage, the transformation toward friendlier, cooperative dialogue and a less tensed atmosphere was made. Emotional expression, information sharing and emphasizing compatibility seemed particularly important in (re)defining and negotiating police-citizen relationships.

Research limitations/implications – In analysis, the authors had to rely on limited and retrospective accounts of interactions and attitudes and its indivertible errors.

Originality/value – This is one of very few studies that analyses police-involved post conflict interactions with a relational model. With regard to the importance of strong police-citizen relationships, the results should be of value to any operational police worker and specifically those who are involved in operational or strategic conflict-management and communication.

Keywords Restoration, Police, Conflict transformation, Critical moments, Reconciliation, Relationship maintenance

Paper type Research paper

On Saturday, August 9, 2014, in Ferguson, Missouri, a white police officer shot and killed an 18-year-old black man. The shooting – which attracted the attention of (inter) national media – led to immediate social unrest and massive protests concerning the mistreatment of black people at the hands of law enforcement. Aware of the necessity of strong community relationships, local leaders from a variety of religions and races publically called for peace and reconciliation[1].

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From a policing perspective, calling for reconciliation is valid and understandable. Several researchers have advocated investing in peaceful and strong relationships between police and citizens, such that escalated conflict can be prevented (e.g. Fielding, 2005; Adang *et al.*, 2010). Moreover, in most western countries, it is acknowledged that the relationship between police and citizens is on-going and that cooperation with citizens is crucial and unavoidable for effective and legitimate police work (e.g. Tyler and Huo, 2002; Skogan, 2005). A variety of policing strategies, such as community-oriented policing (e.g. Skogan, 2006; Friedmann, 1992), problem-oriented policing (e.g. Goldstein, 1979; Reisig, 2010) and reassurance policing (e.g. Fleming, 2005; Fielding and Innes, 2006) strongly advocate building, securing and maintaining good police-citizen relationships.

Both Ferguson-like, large scale overt conflicts, as well as smaller scale incidents that do not make it to (inter)national media, can have a damaging effect on relationships. Repairing such relational damage may be of great importance to maintain strong police-community relationships. However, the dominant ways to deal with police-involved group-conflict seem litigation and external auditing which do not address the effect of overt conflict on the relationship and future contact (Yarn, 2000, p. 56). We are aware of the broad strand or research and theorizing on reconciliation and restorative practices, originating from restorative justice (e.g. Van Ness and Strong, 2010). However, in this perspective, victims and offenders are supposed to be morally involved and state actors are supposed to be a morally neutral third party (Walgrave, 2010). Police involvement in this type of reconciliation is as an intervening, supportive or mediating actor (see e.g. the *Journal of Police Studies*' special issue on restorative policing 2009-2). This leaves us with a gap with regard to the behavioral patterns and function of reconciliation in police-citizen conflicts.

A first attempt to start addressing that gap was made by Van de Klomp *et al.* (2014), who analyzed a group reconciliation process following a riot in a small Dutch town. In doing this, they made use of the relational model (Table I) developed by ethologists (Aureli and De Waal, 2000) and is useful in explaining socially embedded methods of conflict resolution. The model acknowledges the influence of the context of a conflict and the social and physical situation of the opponents on conflict interactions, but centers the (ongoing) relationship as the main explanatory factor for post conflict behavior (Aureli and De Waal, 2000).

Interdependency	Humans are a group living species. In order to survive, they must cooperate with other group members with whom they build social relationships
Overt conflict as resolution	In case of a conflict of interests/actions/goals three basic options of resolution exist: tolerance, avoidance and overt conflict
Social repair	Overt conflict may be worth the risk but it may also cause damage to a relationship. As a consequence of human interdependency, there is a natural need to repair such damage; we reconcile
Conciliatory effect	Reconciliation -defined as friendly restorative interaction following aggressive encounters- restores tolerance, reduces the occurrence of post conflict incompatibility and insecurity and has the potential to strengthen the value of relationships
Conflict as negotiation	Reconciliation, overt conflict and cooperation are closely aligned positive social tendencies through which the terms of relationships are negotiated

Source: After Aureli and De Waal (2000, pp. 25-28, 287-288)

Table I.
Basic principles of the relational model

By now, a large body of research on reconciliation in animals and humans that confirms the principles of the relational model, exists (e.g. Koyama, 2001; Fujisawa *et al.*, 2005; Wittig and Boesch, 2005; Fraser *et al.*, 2010). In line with the model, Van de Klomp *et al.* (2014) suggested that the interactions that occurred after the police-citizen riot they studied, were influenced heavily by (assumptions concerning) the nature of the relationship between the opponents. Furthermore, they found two meetings between group representatives critical in reaching reconciliation. Before these meetings, intergroup contact was scarce. Contacts that did occur were discordant and tense. After the meetings, contact between group representatives increased in frequency and intensity and were more relaxed. In negotiation theory, such moments are referred to as "critical moments"; fundamental process shifts that alter the meaning of events and transform or redefine the relations and interactions of the actors involved (e.g. Putnam, 2004; Winslade, 2009). Direct contact between party representatives is generally assumed a crucial factor in fostering a positive critical moment (e.g. Druckman, 2004; Winship, 2004). Unfortunately, the concept of critical moments (hereafter referred to as CMs) mainly receives attention in the form of a theoretical debate concerning its meaning and there is no systematic analysis of what happens during CMs and how they transform or redefine relations. An exploration of the interactions during CMs appears to be of value in exploring the function and patterns of group-reconciliation in policing contexts more thoroughly. Moreover, in our aim to continue exploring the applicability of the relational model, we have elaborated on the notions on relationship nature and qualities. Cords and Aureli (2000) conceptualize relationships as interdependencies with a certain nature, composed of at least three qualities; value, security and compatibility (Table II).

In theorizing, it is generally assumed that value, compatibility and security are unique qualities of relationships but so far, their integrated existence has only scarcely been tested[2] and demonstrated, due to methodological complexities. However, results that are available indicate their significance (e.g. Cooper *et al.*, 2005; Fraser *et al.*, 2008; Bonaventura *et al.*, 2009). Due to their ostensible clarity, value, compatibility and security seem enlightening concepts in seeking for the influence of (assessments on) relationships in restorative interaction. But it remains to be seen if this really is the case. This paper focusses on both themes by means of an analysis of three cases of police-citizen group reconciliation, along the lines of the following question:

> To what extent do (perceptions of) relationship-value, – security and – compatibility influence the interactions between police and citizens during critical moments and how does this relate to the development of reconciliation?

Methodology

Following Van de Klomp *et al.* (2014), police-citizen group reconciliation was defined as an objectively determinable process from conflictive to cooperative interaction by

Value	The value of a relationship is the prominent component. It refers to what the parties have to offer, how willing they are to offer it and the extent to which they are accessible for the other
Security	The security of a relationship refers to (confidence in) the predictability of interactions between parties
Compatibility	Compatibility refers to the general tenor of social interactions in a dyad, which results from the temperament of the partners and their shared history of social exchanges

Source: After Cords and Aureli (2000, pp. 177-198)

Table II. Relationship qualities

meaningful group representatives. We selected three cases of media salient confrontations between police and citizen groups, that were characterized by the occurrence of a group reconciliation but differed with regard to their local context, type of confrontation and actors involved. Between May 2010 and December 2011, a total of 25 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 26 respondents from both police and citizen parties, were conducted across the cases[3]. Respondents were selected by means of key-informant methodology (e.g. Marshall, 1996) in which information from and contact with carefully chosen respondents who played a key role in a matter, are considered main sources of data and main means of contacting other key-informant respondents due to their in-depth knowledge (Pauwels and Hardyns, 2009). To prevent informant bias related to their position (Kumar *et al.*, 1993), we selected respondents from various ranks within the parties involved. Nevertheless, the limited number of respondents should be taken into account when interpreting the results. Willingness to cooperate was only an issue with regard to Case 3, where two key informants refused to participate due to a general disinterest or lack of time.

During the interviews – which lasted between one and three hours and were recorded and transcribed verbatim afterwards-, respondents were asked to provide a description of events and (reasons for) interactions after the overt conflict. They were encouraged to reflect on relevant relationships and their attitudes and feelings. It should be noted that interviewers did not specifically ask about value, compatibility and security in those words. It was difficult to check for sources of error resulting from the retrospective nature of the study[4], such as memory failure or distortion (Kumar *et al.*, 1993). We are aware of their possible influence on (inter-respondent) reliability. In addition, the reliability of what respondents said about relationships should be considered, since they had plenty of time to evaluate them in retrospect (Babbie, 2012, p. 324). However, in general, across the cases, respondents defined and evaluated the dominant relationships and interactions similarly. In order to validate accounts on the sequence of interactions, articles from local, regional and national papers and web sites and relevant public policy documents were consulted.

For each case an interaction track was constructed of post-conflict interactions that could be objectively related to the confrontation. For analytical purposes and along the propositions of the relational model, a two opposing party perspective, – a police party and a civilian party – was adopted. Following negotiation theorists (e.g. Winship, 2004), it was assumed that a group reconciliation process is characterized by at least one CM between influential party representatives. Following Van de Klomp *et al.* (2014), a CM was defined as an objectively determinable meeting between party representatives before which interactions were conflictive and after which interactions were cooperative. By means of analysis of the interaction tracks, five CMs (Case 1, one; Case 2, three; Case 3, one) could be identified.

All fragments (quotations) that referred to the relationship between the police and citizens generally and the CM's specifically were coded in ATLAS.ti[5]. Each quotation that referred to the relationship between the police and citizens generally was analyzed to explore the applicability of relationship qualities as adapted from Cords and Aureli (2000). If possible, a quotation received a "value," "compatibility," "security" or "other" code, each divided into several subcomponents (Table III). During this process, it soon became clear that it was fairly easy to assign a relationship code to each quotation (and that the "other" code was hardly needed), but that compatibility appeared visible through more than Cords and Aureli's (2000) assumed temperament and shared history of social exchanges. When reflecting on relationships with (members of) the other

Quality	Sub-components
Value	What either one or both parties have to offer each other
	The willingness of either one or both parties to offer their share
	The accessibility of either one or both parties, with regard to each other
Security	The consistency of either one or both parties behavioral responses
	Perceived probability that the nature of the own/others interactions will change
Compatibility	Temperament (positive/negative) of the partners
	History of social exchanges (positive/negative)
	The normative social/formal conformity between both partners[a]

Table III. Iterative coding scheme

Note: [a]Except from the normative social/formal conformity between both partners – which was derived with reference to prior data analysis – each category was derived from Cords and Aureli's (2000) notions on relationship qualities

party, our respondents clearly added an identification aspect; they described (interactions of) themselves and others and relationships in terms of similarities and differences to the other (group). This corresponds with social identity theory (e.g. Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Burke and Stets, 2009), which presupposes that the interaction between people is strongly influenced by the extent to which individuals see themselves as members of their group, how they characterize their group and how they link this to the character of and the relationship with (members of) other groups. Consequently, all quotations referring to such processes of social identification were coded as reflections of compatibility.

Each quotation that referred to CM behavior received codes indicating its tendency (positive, negative or neutral as assessed by the coder), its behavior (e.g. questioning, expressing emotions, sharing information) and the actor(s)/stakeholder(s) involved. Each quotation that referred to CM-related relationship assessments, received codes indicating its tendency, its relationship quality (this was done as described above) and the actor(s)/stakeholder(s) involved. Finally, similar behaviors/interactions/relationship assessments were grouped, counted and analyzed separately and across the CMs. For analytical purposes, meaningful results were processed in Tables V-IX.

Analysis

In Table IV, a concise overview of the cases is presented to illustrate the different contexts in which the CMs occurred. In spite of the differences, some interesting similarities existed between the cases.

In all three cases, respondents indicated that the overt conflicts caused feelings of uncertainty and insecurity to members of both parties, resulting in stress, nervousness and a tendency to avoid (members of) the other party. This was particularly visible in CM1, where the CM attendants waited until the last moment (several months after the overt conflict), before deciding to meet and discuss the preparations for the upcoming Oranjefeesten festival. Attendants of all CMs said that they did not feel secure after the confrontation and before the CM.

In all CMs, the authorities (police and municipality in the first and second case, municipality in the third case) took the first step to organize the meeting and invite citizen representatives. Having said that these meetings could only take place because the invitees considered the invitation important enough to reach some shared goal. In CM1, this shared goal was to organize a peaceful and joyful Oranjefeesten festival. In the other CMs, it was both the shared wish to live/work in a peaceful and safe

	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3
Overt conflict	In a quiet rural community, a violent confrontation between revelers and riot police took place after the final evening of the annual "Oranjefeesten" festival	In an infamous neighborhood of a big Dutch city, police officers fired at and arrested two suspects that were considered armed and dangerous. The suspects turned out to be minors. One carried a fake gun	A Moroccan youth jumped over the service desk of a district police station in an infamous city district. He was shot dead after he stabbed two police officers
Aftermath	Within a day, there were clear signs of indignation and anger among the local community, directed at the police and mayor	Within a few hours there were clear signs of indignation and anger among the local community, directed at the police; why did they shoot at a minor with a fake gun? Why did they shoot near a playing yard with children playing?	Immediately, there were clear signs of indignation and anger -why did the among the local community, directed at the police; why did the police shoot him, were not there other options?
CMs	One CM (CM1) – between police representatives, a representative of the municipality and the board of the festive committee – occurred 8 months after the overt conflict/confrontation and 4 months before the next Oranjefeesten festival	The first CM (CM2) concerned the meeting between a chief inspector and the fathers of the boys arrested, which occurred within eight hours after the overt conflict. The second CM (CM3) –between police workers, and nine key-residents- occurred the evening after the shooting. For the third CM (CM4), that occurred 4 days after the shooting, the mayor and police invited a group of 18 key residents	The CM occurred during the neighborhood meeting held in the community center a day after the incident (CM5). Approximately 300 residents/workers, important municipality representatives and the deputy neighborhood team chief attended the meeting

Table IV.
Case overview

neighborhood and the awareness of the need for information-exchange concerning the actions and attitudes of (actors within) the parties involved.

In analyzing the CMs, three chronologic stages could be distinguished: tension, transformation and dialogue, each typified by specific interactions.

The CMs started with a tensed stage; a formal welcome by a representative of the authorities (a police representative in CM1 to CM3; a representative from the municipality in CM4 and CM5), an explicit thanks to all attendants for putting effort in showing up, a planning of the meeting and a reflection on the incident and its current state of affairs. Respondents of both the citizens and authorities parties indicated that the atmosphere was awkward and tense at start of the meeting. A CM1 police respondent expresses: "It was a bit emotional, […] the disbelief that things could go so badly, the anger that things went so badly."

Table V shows that, except for CM1, in the first stage, authority representatives were mainly concerned with reassuring, explaining and justifying behavior (a CM5 community representative reflects: "It was really a matter of calming things down in the community"). Compared to the interactions in the other stages, the expression of

negative attitudes, feelings, emotions and disappointment by both parties, also appeared to be highest in frequency. Some actions through which attendants attempted to signal a positive relationship value or compatibility were recorded, but at this point in the meeting there are no records of positive reactions to such signals. Most statements pertaining to the nature of the relationship had to do with feelings of (in)security. Feelings of distrust, hesitation, nervosity and unpredictibality were dominant (Table VI).

In the second stage, transformation, the actual transition to more cooperative interactions was made. According to police respondents, in both CM4 and CM5 a specific breakthrough enabled this transformation. In CM4, to clarify the police's decision to shoot, the chief superintendent showed photos of the fake gun, which could not be distinguished from a real one. Police networker: "And then everything went quiet in the room, as if everyone was thinking 'So […] that's not the super soaker we all had in mind." In CM5, it was the decision of the deputy neighborhood team chief to intervene into an ongoing discussion between residents and the urban district chairman. He stressed that it was a terrible shame that the Moroccan community had to lose a brother, he reported on the condition of the (police) victims and explained why shooting had been the only option. Tempers calmed after that statement.

Specific breakthroughs could not be determined in the other CMs. This could be due to our lack of contemporaneous data. Moreover, because of the various conflict contexts and social/physical situations of the people attending the CMs, the intensity and frequency of the mentioned behaviors appeared to differ along the cases. This leaves open the question what behavior at what point in time contributed to the transformation. It may, for instance, also have been a collection of increasing behavioral signs and positive responses instead of a specific breakthrough. What we could determine from our respondent's responses however, were that behavioral signals related to value and compatibility contributed to circumstances in which positive and cooperative interaction was encouraged. First, with regard to relationship value, several explicit signals through which the positive value of (the relationship with) the other party was communicated, could be deduced (e.g. the CM2 police networker: "The underlying idea is to share what we can with

Table V.
Behavior at start of the CMs by authorities (A), citizens (C) or both (B)

Behavior	CM1	CM2	CM3	CM4	CM5
Questioning	C	C	C	C	C
Negative emotional expressions[a]	B		C	C	B
Expression of disappointment[b]	B	A	A	C	B
Sharing information		A	A	A	A
Reassurance		A	A	A	A

Notes: [a]Verbal and nonverbal expressions of fear, anger, aggression, distrust; [b]verbal and nonverbal expressions of sadness, disbelief

Table VI.
Tension stage: assessments of insecurity during by police (P), citizens (C) or both (B)

Assessment	CM1	CM2	CM3	CM4	CM5
Distrust of other	B	C	C	C	B
Assessing other unpredictable	B	C	B	C	B
Nervosity	B	P	P	B	P
Hesitation	B		C	C	P

them. So that they at least know what happened"). Recipients of value signals (Table VII) – particularly the citizens in Case 2 – indicated that they felt important and valued during and after the CM and that they would perhaps have been more angry if they had not been treated this way. A CM3 citizen representative:

> It was smart what the police did. They invited me and explained things to me – that's smart. If they'd done nothing, I'd have thought 'They're all the same'. […] That's why it was good. That's why it was organized so quickly, to prevent misunderstandings. It meant that the mayor could say a few words. That REALLY had an effect at that moment.

Second, compatibility of the partners (and especially the identification aspect of compatibility) also proved to be a recurring theme at this stage of the interaction during CMs (Table VIII).

With regard to this second stage, respondents did not talk about (in)security in direct terms (not to the researcher, neither during CMs). Lacking contemporaneous data, it was impossible to track down if, when, what and by whom security signals/interactions were exchanged during the second stage. It was possible, however, to deduce that the provision of information (about the atmosphere within one's own and the other group, about confidential matters in criminal investigations) and the initiative to do so, played a role in fostering assessments of CM-relationship security.

The third stage, dialogue, was recorded mostly near the end of all CMs, and is characterized by more friendlier, cooperative interactions. In line with negotiation

	CM1	CM2	CM3	CM4	CM5
Verbal					
Explain the importance of (the relationship with) the other	B	P	P	B	
Ask for help/cooperation	B	P	P	B	P
Emphasize the importance of successive contact with other	B	P	B	B	
Provide information	P	B	B	P	P
Emphasize understanding of other	B		P		P
Non-verbal					
Being open to criticism		P		B	P
Listening to other	B	B	B	B	B
Openness, motivated attitude	B	B	B	B	B
Authority figure present at contact moment		B	P	B	B
Friendly behavior (facial expressions, eye contact)	B	B	P	B	B

Table VII. Transformation stage: behavioral signs of value by police (P), citizens (C) or both (B)

Verbal	CM1	CM2	CM3	CM4	CM5
Emphasize shared interests/goals	B	P		P	P
Refer to humanity as a common denominator in explaining behavior of self or other		P	P	P	P
Talking in terms of "we" instead of "us/them"	B	B		B	B
Ingroup/outgroup construction in which the ingroup refers to representatives of both parties and the outgroup becomes those people who do not have opposing interests/goals	C	P		P	B

Table VIII. Transformation stage: behavioral signs of compatibility police (P), citizens (C) or both (B)

theorists (e.g. Putnam, 2004) and based on the reflections of our respondents, it is assumed that at this stage of interaction, the transformation from conflict to cooperation – from debating and arguing styles, conflict spirals and negative reframing – to listening and responding spirals, positive reframing and new understandings was most visible (e.g. Wilber *et al.*, 1986; Putnam, 2004). Respondents of both parties report that during dialogue, the insecure, uneasy tension was gone and interactions were more positive and future oriented. The respondents also mentioned that dialogue interactions were characterized by several negotiation-techniques (Table IX). Most statements concerning the nature of the relationship during the dialogue stage pertained to the increase of the sense value, security and compatibility, relative to the start of the CM.

The interactions after the CMs were characterized by cooperative contacts between CM and attendants. The nature of these contacts depended on the context of the overt conflict. Respondents stressed that during direct face to face interactions, receiving visible proof that (representatives of) the other parties were committed to repairing the harm inflicted (e.g. remained committed, kept to agreements, kept being friendly) was important in continuing the CM transformation to cooperative interactions.

Discussion

This study explored what happens during CMs in police-citizen group reconciliation processes and whether (perceptions of) relationship-value security and compatibility (Cords and Aureli, 2000) influence such interactions. With regard to CM-interactions, we deduced three different stages: tension, transformation and dialogue. In all of the five CMs, these stages follow each other up in chronological order (i.e. tension first, then transformation after which dialogue developed). This could be an indication that roughly, CMs develop in such an order. At the same time, it cannot be assumed that all CM-interactions fit this pattern and that CMs that emerge in a non-institutional context develop likewise. Conversely, we assume that (repeated) switching between different stages during the CMs is highly likely. Moreover, we acknowledge the influence of the context (intensity and source of conflict) and social/physical situation of the party representatives (e.g. what are their attitudes and feelings?) on CM development. Because we had to rely on limited and retrospective accounts of interactions and feelings, our results are in need of critical examination and more case studies are needed. Methodologically, contemporaneous research including real time observations is highly recommended.

The basic assumption of the relational model – that relationships can be repaired or even strengthened through reconciliation – (Aureli and De Waal, 2000, p. 27) is supported through our analysis of the run up to and aftermath of CMs. In all cases, (renewed) group cooperation – reconciliation – was achieved (the cases were selected on

Table IX.
Dialogue stage: signs of negotiation

	CM1	CM2	CM3	CM4	CM5
Joint determination of shared goals	+		+	+	+
Joint determination of a shared communication strategy		+	+	+	+
Making verbal agreements on future cooperation	+	+			+
Exchanging information through which future cooperation is fostered		+	+	+	+

this basis) and contact between those present increased in frequency, intensified and improved after CMs. Our assumption that a group-level reconciliation process is preceded by one or more CMs was validated in the three cases we studied. We cannot conclude however, that the presence of a CM necessarily precedes a group-level reconciliation process. Further comparative studies on group-interaction after police citizen conflict, including examples of failed reconciliation, are highly recommended. Obviously, social scientific literature on factors that shape relationships between people (e.g. social identification, trust, power) and insights from fields of conflict resolution (e.g. negotiation- and conflict studies) are important sources of knowledge here.

Although we did not ask our respondents specifically to assess the value, security and compatibility of the relations they reflected on, identifying these qualities in their language was surprisingly easy. With regard to relationship value, the relational model (Aureli and De Waal, 2000) assumes value to be the primary quality and predictor of the occurrence or non-occurrence of reconciliation. This hypothesis was tested and proved valid in ethologic studies (e.g. Bonaventura *et al.*, 2009) as well as in research on the form and function of forgiveness (e.g. McCullough *et al.*, 2010). Our CM analysis supports this hypothesis: during the CMs, awareness of relationship value seemed to contribute to an atmosphere in which attendants were at least open to change and prepared to adopt a vulnerable stance. Value signals were important in fostering the actual transformation to cooperative behavior.

We dare to assume the crucial importance of shared relationship value in fostering a CM and CM transformations to cooperative interaction. Because police-citizen relationships are institutionally embedded, we also presume that there will be differences in the assessed value of police-citizen relationships on an institutional and personal level (a citizen for instance, may assess a police officer's attainability of greater importance than the fact that she is a good listener. The latter will probably be of greater importance in friendships). With regard to the generally assumed importance of valuable relationships between the police and citizens (e.g. Tyler and Huo, 2002; Skogan, 2005) it would be of great interest to investigate and determine the general institutionally determined – and contextual indicators that define police-citizen relationship value. If value-assessment is indeed important, the police would benefit from insights on how to build and maintain valuable relationships. Moreover, in the case of overt conflict, knowledge of the (importance of) effectively expressing relationship value in crisis communication would be useful.

In ethological research, compatibility is mainly used to explain and predict whether two parties will behave aggressively or cooperatively during direct contact (e.g. Fraser and Bugnyar, 2010). Our respondents' CM reflections and their capability to explain their thoughts and feelings, surprised us with interesting insights on the social construction of compatibility. As far as our analysis indicates, assessments of (group) compatibility are inferred by shared history, temperament and social identification. During the CMs analyzed, compatibility signals were important in fostering the actual transformation to cooperative behavior (in addition to value signals). The positive effect of behaviors that emphasize commonalities is endorsed by social scientific research on the Common Ingroup Identity Model (e.g. Gaertner *et al.*, 1993). Interactions which encourage identification with (members of) other groups, such as cooperation or the creation of a common enemy, can be used effectively in assuaging, preventing or reducing conflicts because the psychologically perceived distance and differences between parties are experienced as less severe or are even neutralized (e.g. Kramer and Brewer, 1984; Gaertner *et al.*, 1993; Ashmore et al., 2001; Pruitt and Kim, 2003).

Ethologists (e.g. Fraser and Bugnyar, 2010) and social psychologists (Burnette *et al.*, 2012, p. 347) have investigated the functions of security usually in concurrence with value and compatibility. Independent measurement of security figures more prominently in studies of attachment theory, but measurement and indicators are subject of debate (e.g. Van Ryzin and Leve, 2011). The reflections of our respondents indicated that, in contrast to value and compatibility, direct appeals to relationship security (e.g. statements in which trustworthiness or predictability of the other or self is discussed) are rare. But in the run-up to and during the CMs, feelings of insecurity clearly had to be overcome before the transformation to cooperation could be made. The initial overt conflict gave rise to a conflict (Case 1) or exposed a conflict (Cases 2 and 3), which put tension on the inter-group relationship. According to respondents and in line with the assumptions of the relational model (e.g. Schaffner *et al.*, 2005), this created feelings of distrust and unpredictability, which caused varying degrees of stress along the (run up to) CMs.

Assessments of relationship insecurity may well explain respondents' accounts on the intensity of CM meetings: the initial overt conflict invariably caused stress and increased feelings of risking a dismissive or aggressive reaction to any attempt at contact. This resulted in an atmosphere in which interactions that would be taken for granted in non-conflict situations (e.g. shaking hands, looking the other in the eye, a visit to another's property) carried more meaning and were considered, expressed and observed more intensely. This was particularly prevalent in CM1, where those involved avoided contact regarding the conflict for about eight months. Consequently, taking the initiative, through which one expresses that the situation/other is safe enough to show vulnerability, and that one is trusting the other in not acting aggressively, seems an important prerequisite in fostering a transformation. This resembles the notions of negotiation theorists, who describe the uneasy feeling that actors may experience before or during negotiations as insecurity or anxiety (e.g. Wheeler, 2004) and is supported by several conflict studies which demonstrated that (members of) parties embroiled in a conflict have a natural tendency not to show that they have an interest in resolving this together or looking for compromises because there is then a chance that this will be interpreted as a sign of weakness, possibly leading to loss of face and the perception that one's position *vis-à-vis* the other is weaker (Pruitt and Kim, 2003).

All these acts of public disclosure, such as sharing information, showing emotions or asking for cooperation may sound at odds with the usual image of police. Generally, in police cultures expression/sharing of emotions is seen as a weakness. Citizen's emotions should be recognized and acknowledged, but "you don't let the mask slip" (Van Reenen, 1998, pp. 28-29; Berkhout, 2009). In literature about managing public conflicts, the expression and sharing of – negative – emotions is usually advised against because of anxiety with regard to their possible stagnating and escalating effect (Fineman, 2003). Concealing information is the rule rather than an exception; disclosure of information may disrupt criminal investigations. The police officer is institutionally designed as a professional that ought to have knowledge of both his own and citizens' rights and obligations and has the mandate to coerce compliance and to use force (Black, 1980). In a culture and organization that is expected to be rational, decisive and neutral and in which the phrases "You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say or do may be used against you in a court of law" are of weight, hesitation to share information and to express uncertainty or emotions are the default.

However, the accounts of our respondents indicate that the display of emotions by police officers reduced the perceived distance between them and citizens. The importance of sharing and naming emotions in conflicts between people is confirmed

in research and theories about third-party mediation, conflict transformation, transitional justice and reconciliation among children (e.g. Shapiro, 2002; Fisher and Sharp, 2004; Jameson *et al.*, 2009; Brounéus, 2010; Verbeek and De Waal, 2001). Thus, by venting stress and negative emotions absent of physical aggression, the police expressed vulnerability. Moreover, such expression seemed to reinforce notions of compatibility: the police got a human face, which made it easier to identify with them. Likewise, the exchange of information and expressions of the unity of the parties (i.e. referring to compatibility) seemed to contribute to a secure atmosphere during CMs.

While we acknowledge the potential dangers of information sharing and the expression of emotions in particular (e.g. Pruitt and Kim, 2003; Lindner, 2006), our results indicate that in times of conflict, a certain degree of disclosure gave our citizen respondents the feeling that they were trusted and appreciated. This led to an increase of perceived trustworthiness of the police. Insights on the specifics of (indicators of) relationship security and the ways through which it is assessed, will add knowledge to current notions on (the effectiveness of) the police and policing.

Conclusion

Unfortunately, with these first and as yet limited results from our analysis of CMs, concrete and best-practice advice to the police leaders of Ferguson cannot be formulated. At the same time, it proved possible to draw some interesting preliminary conclusions on reconciliatory behavior that point to the influence of (assessments on) the nature of the relationship between opponents on police-citizen conflicts. CM interactions differed in the specific conflict contexts, but three stages could be deduced, from tension, to transformation, to dialogue. During CMs, notions on relationship value and compatibility are exchanged both verbally and non-verbally. When value and compatibility signals are sent and endorsed, feelings of insecurity are reduced even further and dialogue is on its way. In this way, the relationship between police and citizens can be repaired and cooperation can be (re)established.

Direct explicit face to face verbal and non-verbal communication seems to be an essential part of these CMs: this makes it possible to assess the status of the relationships and to determine the other's intentions. Emotional expression, information sharing and emphasizing compatibility seemed particularly important in (re)defining and negotiating police-citizen relationships. As far as insecurity is concerned: that needs to be remedied first. If everyone feels too insecure to initiate contact, reconciliation fails.

The application of a relational perspective to police-citizen confrontations is still in its infancy and many questions remain. For example, who takes the initiative during a CM, and when and why? How can we improve the analytical distinction between relationship value, – compatibility and – security and objectify, apply and analyze them more systematically in intergroup research on conflict and reconciliation? Comparative empirical research is very important in answering such questions. But despite the practical and theoretical barriers which still need to be overcome, the possibilities and potential of a relational perspective are, in our opinion, beyond question.

Notes

1. The run up to the incident and its aftermath was widely reported in local, national as well as international media. A basic digital key-word search (e.g. Ferguson and Reconciliation) will provide a large amount of information concerning the incident and its context.
2. The main method applied to test the existence of value, compatibility and security, was principal components analysis (PCA), a statistical technique that is used to identify

underlying factors which explain the pattern of correlations within sets of variables (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007).

3. Case 1: nine, Case 2: ten, Case 3: six.
4. In Case 1, the interviews were held four to four and a half years after the overt conflict. In Case 2, one and half to two years, and in Case 3, three to four years after the overt conflict.
5. Software program for the systematic processing of qualitative research data (see www.atlasti.com).

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