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Socializer or Signal? How Agency Accreditation Affects Organizational Culture

Agency accreditation has grown steadily as a management strategy in recent decades. Accreditation is meant to help professionalize public administration work by requiring an agency to adopt policies and practices that are sanctioned by an external organization. Advocates claim that accreditation facilitates the diffusion of best practices and builds a culture of professionalism in an agency. Accreditation clearly leads agencies to adopt formal policies. This article identifies two ways in which accreditation might affect organizational culture: (1) by socializing employees, and (2) by signaling the agency's priorities to employees. Analyzing attitudinal data from officers in six American police departments, this study finds no association between accreditation and officers' own values, but finds that accreditation is strongly correlated with officers' perceptions of their agencies' priorities.

Agency accreditation is an important and steadily growing reform in American public administration. Accreditation requires a public agency to voluntarily adopt a set of standards, policies, and practices that are sanctioned by a professional organization and then subject itself to scrutiny by a group of external reviewers. Hospitals and colleges have been subject to accreditation for a century or more; accreditation authorities have emerged more recently for corrections (established in 1974), law enforcement (1979), parks and recreation (1993), firefighting and emergency services (1996), and public health (2011) agencies. Although accreditation is now ubiquitous—indeed, effectively mandatory—for hospitals and colleges, it remains voluntary for most other public agencies. Accreditation's advocates claim that the process facilitates the diffusion of best practices and so improves agency performance. More fundamentally, accreditation is supposed to build a culture of professionalism in an organization.

Research has long demonstrated that the effectiveness of an agency depends greatly on employees' identities, beliefs, and preferences—in short, its culture (Wilson 1989). Building a sense of professionalism among rank-and-file officers who work at the "street level" is critical for effective, responsive, and responsible law enforcement work (Brehm and Gates 1997; Lipsky 1980). If agency accreditation were only a matter of adopting policies and procedures, any agency could simply adopt the standards of an accreditation authority and forgo the lengthy and costly accreditation process. The management directives, policies, and procedures that accreditation requires agencies to adopt may be valuable, but their effectiveness ultimately depends on the degree to which accreditation affects how employees think about their organizations and their jobs. Does accreditation really help professionalize an agency at a deep, cultural level? If it does, then accreditation may be an exceptionally important public management initiative.

Empirical research on the effects of agency accreditation is surprisingly thin and has yielded mixed results. There is virtually no empirical research at all about the effects of law enforcement accreditation on organizational culture. This gap in the literature on accreditation is troubling; accreditation represents little more than certification of a completed checklist if it does not shape the attitudes of rank-and-file personnel. Do employees in accredited agencies think differently about their agencies and their jobs? Does accreditation affect organizational culture?

To answer these questions, we consider the leading law enforcement accreditation authority in North America: the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA). CALEA has grown steadily over the past three decades: since accrediting its first agency in 1984, the commission had awarded accreditation to 582 law enforcement agencies through 2010. At a 2009 CALEA meeting, Arapahoe County, Colorado, undersheriff Mark Campbell claimed that accreditation's value to his agency was not only in the policies and procedures that it introduced, but also in the "custom, culture, and tradition" of professionalism that accreditation cultivated in his agency.[1]

This article examines the relationship between CALEA accreditation and the attitudes of rank-and-file officers

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toward community-oriented policing (COP). CALEA promotes and "embodies the precepts of *community-oriented policing*," a stance that represents the predominant norms of professional policing today.[2] If accreditation helps professionalize law enforcement agencies, then CALEA accreditation should affect rank-and-file officers' attitudes toward COP. We begin with a brief history of CALEA's law enforcement accreditation program, explain how the accreditation process works, and summarize the modest body of empirical research on law enforcement accreditation. Applying theories advanced by Brehm and Gates (1997, 2008), we identify two ways in which accreditation might build professionalism in a law enforcement agency and then investigate the impact of CALEA accreditation on officers' attitudes toward COP by analyzing data from six American law enforcement agencies. The conclusion summarizes our results and discusses the management value of agency accreditation in light of our findings.

Professionalism and Agency Accreditation

Credentials are central elements of professions. Professionals seek specialized education and licensure by demonstrating knowledge of and professing loyalty to standards that are sanctioned by an external group of expert practitioners (Abbott 1998; Wilson 1989). Professionalism facilitates the diffusion of innovations across agencies, as contact with peers introduces public executives to practices used elsewhere (Strang and Meyer 1993; Wolman and Page 2002). Professionalism also helps establish norms of behavior and practice for individuals working in many different agencies (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Professional *credentials* apply to individuals; professional *accreditation* is the counterpart for agencies. Accreditation by an external professional organization is meant to ensure that an agency adheres to the preferred standards and practices of the profession.

Law Enforcement Accreditation

The tumultuous social conditions of the 1960s and 1970s challenged American law enforcement agencies to develop reforms that went beyond technological modernization and more "scientific" management strategies (Kelling and Moore 1988; Wilson 1968). In response, four national organizations—the National Sheriffs' Association, National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives, Police Executive Research Forum, and International Association of Chiefs of Police—formed CALEA in 1976 (Crowder 1998; Mastrofski 1986). Accreditation was (and is) supposed to improve policing though both the diffusion of best practices and the promotion of "professional and ethical principles in the performance of responsibilities" among officers (Carter and Sapp 1994, 196).

CALEA provides agencies with a list of 463 written standards. Every agency that becomes accredited is required to provide written "proofs" of compliance for each standard. A typical standard related to COP in CALEA's manual reads as follows:

45.2.2 At least quarterly, the person or persons responsible for the community involvement function prepares and submits to the chief executive officer a report that includes, at a minimum, the following elements:

a. a description of current concerns voiced by the community;
b. a description of potential problems that have a bearing on law enforcement activities within the community;

c. a statement of recommended actions that address previously identified concerns and problems; and
d. a statement of progress made toward addressing previously identified concerns and problems.

Commentary: These concerns and problems, should, at a minimum, be communicated to their chief executive officer, both to provide information on conditions in the community and to allow the chief executive officer to react in a timely manner to alleviate concerns and avert problems. Ideally, these reports should also be disseminated to other concerned command level personnel. (CALEA 2006, 45-4)

An explanatory note following each standard clarifies exactly what CALEA expects for proof of compliance. Agencies seeking accreditation must comply with all mandatory standards and at least 80 percent of "other-than-mandatory" standards (CALEA 2006, xviii).

Section 45 of the CALEA standards manual addresses "Crime Prevention and Community Involvement" (CALEA 2006, 45-1). It calls for "targeting programs to address community perceptions or misperceptions of crime," "organizing crime prevention groups in residential and business areas targeted for such activity," and a community involvement directive (45.2.1) that requires officers to build "'grass roots' community support" in order "foster cooperative efforts in resolving community issues" (CALEA 2006, 45-2 and 45-3). The section even requires the agency to take a "documented survey of citizen attitudes and opinions" every three years in order to understand better how the community evaluates the agency, identify areas of citizen concern, and allow for suggestions (CALEA 2006, 45-6). The standards in section 45 promote COP by clearly explaining how an agency ought to engage its community.

But CALEA's program involves more than just that list of rules and procedures. In theory, law enforcement agencies could buy CALEA's *Standards for Law Enforcement Agencies* manual for $45.00 and simply adopt its required policies and procedures. Complying with CALEA's standards without the accreditation process would save an agency thousands of dollars and hundreds of hours of staff time (Williams 1988). However, according to its advocates, the very process of CALEA accreditation is supposed to "facilitate an agency's pursuit of professional excellence" by connecting law enforcement executives to a network of professional peers and ensuring compliance with CALEA standards through external peer review (CALEA 2006, xvi).

An agency seeking accreditation begins with a process of "self-assessment" in which the agency's chief executive evaluates his or her own agency on CALEA's terms. An accreditation manager is appointed—sometimes a senior officer, sometimes a civilian employee—who is responsible for obtaining written proofs of compliance for every applicable standard in the manual. Street-level officers often participate in the creation of "proofs," but ultimately, the accreditation manager organizes and records the necessary policy and procedural changes. When the agency reports to CALEA that it has reached compliance, senior officers from other law enforcement agencies visit to conduct a trial assessment. These officers are supposed to ensure that an agency seeking accreditation is fully compliant with CALEA's standards, and they are responsible for recommending any

final changes. Assessors then travel to the agency once more for a final assessment, conduct an information session with members of the community, and deliver their recommendation to the commission, which makes the accreditation decision at one of three annual CALEA conferences. Once granted, accreditation is valid for three years, after which agencies must apply for re-accreditation in order to maintain accredited status. CALEA then repeats the assessment with new assessors.

Research on CALEA

Given the steady growth in accreditation over the past three decades, there has been surprisingly little empirical research on its effects. A handful of studies have explored the impact of accreditation on agency performance. Burlingame and Baro (2005) find that CALEA-accredited agencies employ higher percentages of female officers than nonaccredited agencies, and Giblin (2006) finds that CALEA-accredited agencies are more likely to have crime analysis units than nonaccredited agencies. However, McCabe and Fajardo (2001) find few significant differences associated with accreditation status; Alpert and MacDonald (2001) find that accreditation has no effect on the frequency of police use of force incidents; and Baker (1995) shows that accreditation does not change recruitment procedures. In short, the empirical relationship between accreditation and organizational outcomes is tenuous and unclear.

Additional research aims to understand accreditation as a management strategy. Significantly for the present inquiry, Mastrofski, Willis, and Kochel (2007) find that CALEA accreditation increases agency success in implementing COP. Williams (1998) and Hoagland (2004) find that police executives perceive improvements in professionalism after accreditation. Crowder finds that executives of accredited agencies perceive improved accountability and greater "awareness of national standards" (1998, 92) after accreditation, and Carter and Sapp find that an overwhelming majority of police chiefs surveyed cite "the modernization of policies and procedures as a benefit to accreditation" (1994, 200). Based on three case studies, Widener concludes that accreditation offers professionalism to agencies that lack it, but departments that are already professional see accreditation as "a certificate of accomplishment" (2005, 139).

Unfortunately, all of these studies suffer from important methodological limitations. Widener's (2005) conclusions highlight the challenge of demonstrating causality in studies of agency accreditation: Does professionalism follow accreditation? Or does accreditation simply recognize the professionalism that an agency already had? Studies that compare the performance or characteristics of accredited and non-accredited agencies cannot demonstrate clearly that accreditation causes the differences. If agencies whose officers already hold professional attitudes and follow professionally sanctioned policies are more likely to pursue accreditation, then differences between accredited and nonaccredited agencies may have little to do with accreditation itself. Moreover, studies of accreditation as a management strategy tend to draw their evidence from individuals and agencies that have a stake in demonstrating accreditation's impact: the chief of an accredited agency probably is inclined to say that accreditation matters.

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CALEA's growth in absence of consistent evidence of its effectiveness has led some critics to question its value. Sykes (1994) claims that CALEA fails to change accredited agencies in any significant way. Mastrofski argues that accreditation offers merely "a veneer of professional assurance . . . [with] little consequence for the day-to-day practices of police" (1998, 205). Doerner and Doerner (2009) echo these skeptics and suggest that accreditation may be a symbolic exercise aimed at mollifying the public and burnishing ambitious executives' résumés.[3]

A disconnect between executive and rank-and-file perceptions of accreditation may account for the mixed results of studies on accreditation. Mastrofski suggests that "the creation of rules, even if they are practical articulations of official expectations, does little to alter the impact of personal values, group norms, and other informal influences" on officer behavior (1986, 64). Despite their centrality to the effectiveness of law enforcement work (Brehm and Gates 1997; Johnson 2011; Lipsky 1980), the attitudes of rank-and-file officers have been largely neglected by existing research on accreditation.

Gingerich and Russell's (2006) study of police officers in Washington State is perhaps the sole exception. Gingerich and Russell find that "line officers in accredited agencies are significantly more receptive to the strategies and philosophies underlying COP [community oriented policing] when compared to line officers in non-accredited agencies" (2006, 23). They suggest that accreditation creates an "organizational climate where reform becomes a department-wide and ongoing team effort" (23). Gingerich and Russell's findings are encouraging, but they are hampered by a serious limitation: their sample of rank-and-file officers includes only one officer from each sampled agency. It is unclear whether the officers who participated in Gingerich and Russell's survey are representative of other officers in their agencies. Further, the participating officers were selected by senior administrators in sampled agencies who chose a single line officer as a representative of their agencies. As Gingerich and Russell acknowledge, this sampling method introduces "an obvious bias that favored those officers who were trusted" (22) by senior management, and so were likely to report positively on accreditation's impact.

To summarize, a modest existing body of research shows mixed evidence for agency accreditation's effects on performance. Executives in accredited agencies report that accreditation increases their departments' professionalism, but critics argue that accreditation is mostly an empty, symbolic exercise. The only study of accreditation's effects on rank-and-file officers' attitudes offers encouraging signs but suffers from important methodological limitations. Whether accreditation changes rank-and-file officers' attitudes toward their work remains an open question.

Accreditation as Professionalizing Mechanism

Professionalizing an organizational culture involves more than the adoption of policies and procedures. Professionalizing an agency in a way that affects its performance requires what Robert E. Quinn (1996) calls "deep change," a change that involves fundamentally new and different ways of thinking about the organization's mission.

Based on a pair of theoretical works by Brehm and Gates (1997, 2008), we identify two ways in which accreditation might help shape rank-and-file officers' attitudes: (1) by socializing officers to share professional norms, and (2) by clarifying the accredited agency's commitment to professional goals.

Accreditation as Socializer

In *Working, Shirking, and Sabotage,* Brehm and Gates (1997) argue that the behavior of rank-and-file officers—and therefore agency performance—depends on the officers' beliefs and preferences, which are developed through a process of socialization.[4] Officers learn their attitudes and behaviors from their fellow officers, formally and informally. Brehm and Gates argue that officers look to other officers for "social proof" that their attitudes and behaviors conform to organizational expectations. Accreditation might offer such a social proof, as CALEA carries a substantial symbolic weight. At CALEA conferences, executives and accreditation managers testify to the efficacy and professionalism of their (newly) accredited agencies before members of the commission. Upon receiving accreditation, executives return to their departments with a CALEA plaque that may be proudly displayed on the wall. The award is sometimes advertised in the local media, and most accredited agency Web sites contain multiple references to CALEA. CALEA logos adorn the stationery and patrol cars of many accredited agencies.

Accreditation may shape officers' attitudes by shifting the pool of peers that provides the "social proof" for which officers look. That is, accreditation could help rank-and-file officers identify with a larger, international group of law enforcement professionals beyond their own agencies. In this way, accreditation might align officers' attitudes with those of the broader profession. If so, we would expect officers serving in CALEA-accredited agencies to value COP more highly than those in nonaccredited agencies. However, because the process of accreditation most directly involves high-ranking officers, the professionalizing aspect of accreditation could be limited to the upper echelons of the chain of command. The socializing reach of accreditation with respect to COP might be especially limited, as section 45's standards do not necessarily engage rank-and-file officers directly.

Accreditation as Signal

In *Teaching, Tasks, and Trust,* a rejoinder to their 1997 book, Brehm and Gates (2008) argue that effective management of a public agency requires clarifying the agency's goals and priorities for rank-and-file employees. Research on public organizations has long recognized that public administration work is inevitably ambiguous, with multiple priorities and a degree of complexity that defies standard operating procedures (Simon 1997; Wilson 1989). Ambiguity can be especially pronounced for police officers. Officers face uncertain and sometimes dangerous situations, and they must make quick decisions that balance multiple goals (Lipsky 1980; Wilson 1989). No set of policies and procedures, however comprehensive or well conceived, can adequately address the range of situations that officers may encounter. In their later work, Brehm and Gates argue that effective public managers "communicate the

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organization's mission, vision and values" (2008, 22) and seek to define "good performance" (26) in terms that are clear to subordinates. Communicating these organizational goals is different from ordinary task-based training. Brehm and Gates argue that "a focus on teaching helps to explain how organizations attempt to achieve a new working culture" (45). An agency's leaders reduce ambiguity for subordinates when they clearly communicate the organization's mission and values. With a strong sense of their agencies' priorities, employees know which behaviors are likely to be rewarded by their peers and superiors, even in the absence of direct supervision or applicable standard operating procedures.

CALEA accreditation offers a way for law enforcement executives to signal their goals and priorities to the rank-and-file. If Brehm and Gates (2008) are correct, then CALEA's main value may be as a signal to rank-and-file officers that their agency values COP and professionalism more broadly. The fact that the process of accreditation is costly may actually enhance its potency as an internal signal: the substantial resources that executives devote to accreditation tell rank-and-file officers that their leaders are serious about professionalism. Agency executives can invoke the rhetoric of professionalism at little cost, but accreditation provides objective, empirical evidence of the organization's commitment to professional standards (Mastrofski 1986). Accreditation assures officers that upper-level managers value COP. With such assurance, officers who value COP will follow its precepts with confidence. If accreditation is a credible signal of agency priorities, then we would expect officers in CALEA-accredited agencies to perceive their agencies to be more devoted to COP than do officers in nonaccredited agencies.

Testing the Effects of Accreditation

As noted earlier, isolating the effects of accreditation on an agency's officers is not easy. If accredited agencies perform better than nonaccredited agencies, or if performance improves following accreditation, accreditation may be merely a public recognition of management success that occurred entirely separately from but simultaneously with the accreditation process. If the attitudes of officers in agencies that are fully CALEA accredited are demonstrably different from those in nonaccredited agencies, those differences may have little to do with accreditation. Even comparing agency performance and officer attitudes before and after accreditation offers limited leverage on the effects of accreditation. Professional attitudes in accredited agencies may be the result of other culture-building management practices. For example, those police departments whose personnel are already "more professional" may seek accreditation as an affirmation—a "certificate of accomplishment," as Widener (2005) puts it—rather than as a means of building or promoting professionalism. If so, accreditation does not promote a commitment to COP but rather rewards it. Put simply, the difficulty is determining the direction of causality: does accreditation build an agency's professionalism, or does professionalism spur an agency to accreditation?

To solve this conundrum, we compare accredited and nonaccredited agencies with agencies that have begun, but not completed, the accreditation process. All American local law enforcement agencies are either (1) accredited by

CALEA; (2) nonaccredited, but in the process of seeking CALEA accreditation for the first time; or (3) nonaccredited and not in the process of seeking accreditation. Analyzing accredited agencies and agencies in the midst of the initial accreditation process together allows us to distinguish accreditation from other conditions that might make agencies seek accreditation. CALEA requires accredited agencies to renew their accreditation every three years, and the re-accreditation process is nearly as demanding as the initial accreditation process. Thus, accredited agencies are effectively in self-assessment from nearly the moment that they first gain accreditation, and so all currently accredited agencies are effectively in self-assessment as well.

Accredited agencies and nonaccredited agencies that are in the process of seeking accreditation share an important quality: their leaders evidently value the kind of professionalism that CALEA represents. If accreditation itself affects officer attitudes toward COP, it should be manifest in differences between those whose agencies have just begun the accreditation process and those whose agencies are already accredited and are in the recurring re-accreditation process. Consequently, if analysis finds differences between all agencies in self-assessment and nonaccredited agencies, but not between agencies in self-assessment and accredited agencies, then we may infer that accreditation is essentially a "certificate of accomplishment" that has negligible independent impact on officers' attitudes. However, if we find clear differences between nonaccredited agencies, agencies in self-assessment, and accredited agencies, then we can infer that accreditation itself somehow affects the ways that officers think about COP. This approach is different from past studies of CALEA's effects, which only compared accredited agencies against nonaccredited agencies.

Data

To test the effects of accreditation on officer attitudes, we analyze data from officers serving in six municipal police departments in the Northeastern United States. A survey questionnaire captured officers' perceptions of their agencies' commitment to COP and also the value that officers placed on COP in their own work. Analysis of the differences in these attitudes across the six agencies reveals the effects of accreditation on officers' attitudes.

The first dependent variable of interest is officers' attitudes toward COP in their own work, which we measure as agreement with this statement: "Community-oriented policing strategies are an important part of my job." Responses were captured with a five-point Likert scale, with responses ranging from "disagree completely," to "neutral," to "agree completely." For analytical purposes, we converted each item to a 0–100 scale. CALEA and the law enforcement profession more generally hold COP as important, although rank-and-file officers might not. If accreditation helps socialize street-level officers to share CALEA's emphasis on COP, then agreement with this statement indicates the extent to which accreditation has helped shape officer attitudes. The second dependent variable is officers' perceptions of their agencies' commitment to COP, which we measure as agreement with this statement: "My agency is devoted to community policing." If accreditation is a potent signal of an agency's commitment to professionalism to its rank-and-file officers, then officers in accredited agencies should perceive their organizations to be more devoted to COP

than officers in nonaccredited agencies (Carter and Sapp 1994; Gingerich and Russell 2006).[5]

The most important independent variable in this analysis is the CALEA accreditation status of the agency in which each officer works. We coded police departments with two 0/1 dummy variables: *accredited* and *self-assessment.* Agencies that were not CALEA accredited and were not in the process of pursuing accreditation at the time of the survey were coded as 0 for both dummies. Agencies that were seeking CALEA accreditation for the first time were coded 0 for *accredited,* but 1 for *self-assessment.* Police departments that held CALEA accreditation at the time of the survey were coded as 1 for *accredited.* Because the re-accreditation process begins almost immediately after accreditation is awarded, we also coded currently accredited agencies as 1 for *self-assessment.* Coding accredited agencies in this way isolates the effects of accreditation itself from the conditions that might cause agencies to seek accreditation.

CALEA accreditation is surely not the only or the most important determinant of officers' attitudes toward COP. Individuals vary in ways that are likely to affect their attitudes toward COP, and we do not claim to account for every possible variable that affects these attitudes. The survey instrument asked respondents to report their length of *career* in law enforcement, and this variable is included as a control in our statistical analysis.[6] Other individual-level variables, such as gender, race, and ethnicity, might affect attitudes as well. Collecting data on these variables might compromise the anonymity of respondents, and so the survey instrument did not gather any other individual-level data. However, the population of officers in our sampled agencies is overwhelmingly male, white, and non-Hispanic, with only a handful of minority and female officers in each agency; excluding these variables is not expected to bias the analytical results significantly.[7] Differences in agencies that might affect officers' attitudes are discussed later.

Research Design and Sampling

The present study is quasi-experimental in the sense that we are comparing the effects of a "treatment" (agency accreditation) on officers in one set of police departments against "control" groups of officers in other police departments. Our aim is to test whether CALEA accreditation affects officer attitudes, but not necessarily to make generalizable inferences about all law enforcement agencies. Therefore, we use a purposive sampling design rather than a randomized sample of agencies. We selected two nonaccredited agencies, two that had been CALEA accredited for at least seven years (having completed at least two re-accreditations and currently in the self-assessment process pursuant to re-accreditation), and two that were in the self-assessment process pursuant to initial accreditation at the time of the study. The executive officers in each accredited agency had conducted a successful reaccreditation, although their predecessors initiated the program several years before. The current chief had initiated the accreditation process in both of the agencies in self-assessment pursuant to initial accreditation.

To accommodate the quasi-experimental design, we selected agencies that are broadly similar: all are medium-sized municipal law enforcement agencies in general-purpose local governments, ranging in size from 40 to 70 full-time sworn officers. All selected agencies are located in Northeastern states and serve primarily residential,

suburban areas with majority white, non-Hispanic populations and relatively low crime rates. All six agencies are organized similarly; the officers in these departments are "generalists," that is, they investigate crimes, make traffic stops, and respond to emergency calls. None of these departments have officers who serve solely in specialized units, such as narcotics, bomb squads, or homeland security. The names of the participating police departments remain confidential to protect participants' anonymity. For analytical purposes, we assume that similar accreditation processes (i.e., the "treatment") were carried out in the two accredited agencies.

The main advantage of this quasi-experimental design is that it helps isolate accreditation as a variable and so may indicate the presence or absence of causality, even with relatively a relatively small number of cases. These six broadly similar agencies offer variation accreditation status, while controlling for the grossest, most obvious potentially confounding agency-level variables (e.g., size, region, governance structure, characteristics of the service population). The main drawback of this approach is limited generalizability: if the effects of accreditation are contingent on context, then the effects observed here may not apply to other agencies in exactly the same way. The present research design controls for unobserved individual-level variables by muting them through sampling: we selected agencies whose officers are overwhelmingly white, non-Hispanic, and male and are organized and trained in similar ways. Therefore, our present purpose is simply to detect significant differences between the "treatment" and "control" groups, not to predict the degree to which accreditation affects officer attitudes beyond the agencies analyzed here. As such, the results of our analysis should be interpreted as indicative but not decisive.

Survey Administration

We began by sending the chiefs of the selected police departments an advance letter informing them about our research and then administered the survey late in 2009. A member of the research team visited each agency in person to introduce the study and administer pencil-and-paper questionnaires to officers as they began or ended their work shifts. In five of the six agencies, we administered the survey at the afternoon shift change; in the sixth agency, scheduling allowed us to administer the survey to multiple shifts. High-ranking officers facilitated administration of the surveys, but the respondents understood that the surveys would not be made available to their superiors. The questionnaire's introductory script that assured confidentiality was read aloud

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics

Survey Items	All Agencies	Agency Status		
		Currently Accredited	Initial Self-Assessment	Nonaccredited
COP important part of my job (0–100)	74.3 (19.0)	78.1 (22.5)	73.7 (17.9)	71.0 (17.2)
Agency devoted to COP (0–100)	79.0 (20.3)	91.7 (14.1)	76.3 (20.3)	71.1 (20.6)
Length of career (years)	13.1 (8.9)	9.6 (4.5)	13.3 (9.8)	16.8 (9.0)
N	100	24	57	19

Note: Cells contain mean values with standard deviations in parentheses.

prior to administration, and all officers read and signed informed consent documents that assured them of complete confidentiality. In order to avoid priming effects, accreditation and CALEA were not mentioned in the questionnaire or our communications with participants.

The overall rate of response was similar for five agencies (ranging between 16 percent and 23 percent); the agency in which the survey was administered during multiple shift changes yielded a 72 percent response. We apply sampling weights in our statistical models to account for these varying response rates. We received a total of 100 complete responses, for a modest overall response rate of 29 percent. However, because we administered the questionnaire to officers based on their availability, the cooperation rate was much higher—during each administration, there were no refusals among any officers present at the stations. We have no reason to believe that any officers had unequal chances of participating, or that any such inequalities would bias responses, and so unit-level nonresponse is assumed to be randomly distributed within agencies. Table 1 offers a descriptive summary of the data.

Analysis

As discussed earlier, we attempted to isolate the impact of accreditation status by selecting six broadly similar agencies that vary in their accreditation status. Of course, gross similarities notwithstanding, the six agencies vary in ways unrelated to accreditation that might affect the distribution of officers' attitudes. All of the data were pooled and analyzed using ordinary least squares regression models with clustered robust standard errors to account for unobserved agency-level variation and sampling weights to account for varying response rates at each agency.[8] We estimate three models each for

Table 2 Accreditation as Socializer? Models of Value of Community-Oriented Policing to Officers

Variables	Model A		Model B		Model C	
	Coefficient (Robust S.E.)	p	Coefficient (Robust S.E.)	p	Coefficient (Robust S.E.)	p
Accredited	6.31 (2.37)	.05			3.10 (3.50)	.42
Self-assessment (currently accredited agencies and agencies seeking initial accreditation)			9.31 (3.98)	.07	7.90 (5.48)	.21
Career	0.44 (0.28)	.18	0.48 (.34)	.21	0.51 (.31)	.16
Intercept	67.46 (2.50)	<.01	62.54 (4.99)	<.01	62.08 (4.46)	<.01
R^2	.04		.06		.07	
N	100		100		100	

Notes: Dependent variables are five-point Likert scale agreement with statements on COP, rescaled 0–100. Cells report coefficients, agency-clustered robust standard errors, and p values generated by ordinary least squares regressions of response-weighted data.

Table 3 Accreditation as Signal? Models of Perceived Agency Devotion to Community-Oriented Policing

Variables	Model D			Model E			Model F		
	Coefficient (Robust S.E.)		p	Coefficient (Robust S.E.)		p	Coefficient (Robust S.E.)		p
Accredited	16.95		.01				12.84		.03
	(4.23)						(4.20)		
Self-assessment (currently accredited agencies and agencies seeking initial accreditation)				15.93		.09	10.10		.26
				(7.57)			(7.92)		
Career	0.19		.56	0.17		.65	0.28		.41
	(0.31)			(.35)			(.31)		
Intercept	72.25		<.01	67.31		<.01	65.37		<.01
	(1.75)			(7.12)			(6.32)		
R^2	.13			.10			.16		
N	100			100			100		

Notes: Dependent variables are five-point Likert scale agreement with statements on COP, rescaled 0–100. Cells report coefficients, agency-clustered robust standard errors, and p values generated by ordinary least squares regressions of response-weighted data.

value of COP to officer and *perceived agency devotion to COP;* tables 2 and 3, respectively, report our results.[9] The first model in each table includes a dummy variable for *accredited* agencies, which demonstrates the differences in officer attitudes between agencies with and without accreditation. The second model in each table uses a different dummy variable for agencies in *self-assessment,* which includes both agencies seeking accreditation for the first time and currently accredited agencies that are in the process of reaccreditation. The third model in each table includes both dummies. Comparing the three models allows us to distinguish "treatment effects" (qualities of accredited agencies) from "selection effects" (qualities of agencies that seek accreditation). Length of *career* has a statistically weak effect in these models, but it is retained because it improves overall model fits.

Value of COP to Officers

If accreditation helps socialize officers with the norms and values of the broader law enforcement profession, then we would expect officers in *accredited* agencies to value COP more highly than those in *nonaccredited* agencies. According to model A, officers in *accredited* agencies place somewhat greater value on COP than officers in *nonaccredited* agencies: 6.3 higher on a 100-point scale, or roughly one-third of a standard deviation greater. In isolation, this result suggests that agency accreditation promotes professional socialization among officers. However, models B and C cast doubt on this inference. Model B indicates an even greater difference (+9.3, or half a standard deviation) between officers in *nonaccredited* agencies and officers in agencies under *self-assessment* (i.e., agencies seeking accreditation for the first time or accredited and seeking reaccreditation). In other words, the most significant difference in officer attitudes toward COP seems to be between agencies that seek accreditation and those that do not.

When *accredited* and *self-assessment* status are analyzed together in model C, we find that the effect of accreditation on the value that officers place on COP is both smaller and statistically insignificant. *Self-assessment* status has a more pronounced substantive effect in this model, but its effect is statistically dubious (p = .21). Taken together, these results indicate that accreditation itself has little independent effect on officers' attitudes toward COP. If officers in accredited agencies place higher value on COP than their peers in nonaccredited agencies, it is likely attributable to other organizational variables, not accreditation. Leaders of agencies whose officers already value COP and other CALEA-endorsed practices

may seek out accreditation as an affirmation. In this sense, accreditation may be more a "certificate of accomplishment" than a "process for improvement" with respect to officer attitudes toward COP (Widener 2005, 139).

Agency Devotion to COP

If accreditation is a credible signal of commitment to COP from executives to rank-and-file officers, then we would expect officers serving *accredited* agencies to report higher levels of agreement with the statement that "my agency is devoted to community policing" than officers in other agencies. Our model estimates are consistent with this expectation: *accreditation* has a very strong and statistically robust positive effect on officers' perceptions of their agencies' devotion to COP in model D, with *accreditation* causing an increase of 17.0, nearly a full standard deviation, on a 100-point scale (p < .01). Model E indicates that officers in all agencies under *self-assessment* (currently accredited or in the process of seeking initial accreditation) also perceive their agencies to be more committed to COP than officers in nonaccredited agencies, but the difference is slightly lower (15.9, p = .09).

However, most critically, the effect of *accreditation* persists when modeled together with *self-assessment* status in model F. This result indicates that accreditation itself—not an agency's pursuit of accreditation—has a substantively and statistically significant positive effect on the perception of agency commitment to COP. If accreditation is merely a "certificate of achievement" for the professionalism that an agency already has attained or a branding exercise for ambitious, upwardly mobile police chiefs (Doerner and Doerner 2009; Teodoro 2009), then we would expect a positive effect of *self-assessment* status on perceived agency commitment to COP, but no significant independent effect for *accredited* status. *Self-assessment* status in fact has a positive effect on officers' perception of their agencies' devotion to COP, but the effect is statistically weak (p = .23). It is also worth noting that the overall fits of the models of *agency devotion to COP* (table 3) are much better than the models of *value of COP to officer* (table 2), indicating that the present evidence for accreditation as a signal is much stronger than the evidence for accreditation as a socializer.

Limitations and Directions for Future Study

These findings are highly suggestive, but certainly not conclusive. The present study's quasi-experimental design is both its main strength and its main limitation. As noted earlier, our sample of

agencies helps isolate the effects of accreditation status but does not allow broadly generalizable inferences about the effects that accreditation might have on organizational culture. In light of our findings, a clear next step is to conduct similar analyses across a wider, more representative sample of agencies. Besides the greater statistical confidence that comes from larger samples, a much larger sample of agencies would also allow more careful analysis of agency-level and individual-level variables that might condition the effects of accreditation on officers' attitudes. Our failure to detect socializing effects of COP may indicate that CALEA does not socialize officers, but it also might be a consequence of our approach to measurement. A study that examined differences in implementation of accreditation in multiple agencies could offer more direct evidence on how the process engages (or fails to engage) street-level officers—a need identified in earlier studies of accreditation (Crowder 1998; Doerner and Doerner 2009; Mastrofski 1986). Best of all would be time-series data from panels of accredited agencies, agencies seeking initial accreditation, and unaccredited agencies not seeking accreditation.

We also join Gingerich and Russell's (2006) and Doerner and Doerner's (2009) calls for more extensive, rigorous analysis of accreditation and its effects. Two important contributions to the modest existing research literature on accreditation as a public administration strategy emerge from this inquiry. First, in focusing our study on officer attitudes, we identify a potential intervening variable—organizational culture—that may link accreditation to performance and thus help account for the mixed results that past studies on accreditation have found. Understood in this way, the "culture, custom, and tradition" that accreditation brings is as important as the policies and procedures that it requires. Second, by measuring differences between nonaccredited agencies, accredited agencies, and agencies in the process of securing accreditation, we can draw inferences about accreditation's effects with greater confidence. We hope that future research will follow suit and improve further on our methods.

How Agency Accreditation Shapes Organizational Culture

More than a bundle of policies and procedures, accreditation promises a means of professionalizing an agency's culture. Prior research has demonstrated that management initiatives that fail to affect the work-related attitudes of rank-and-file personnel are unlikely to improve agency performance, especially when employees face ambiguous conditions (Brehm and Gates 1997, 2008; Lipsky 1980; Wilson 1989). In the present study, we investigate two ways by which accreditation might help shape organizational culture—socialization and signaling. We find no evidence that accreditation socializes officers with the values of the broader law enforcement profession. At the same time, we find that accreditation is strongly associated with officers' perceptions of their agencies' commitment to professional values.

These findings indicate that accreditation's main value may be as a signal from agency leaders to the organization's rank and file. Previous studies of CALEA have shown that accreditation sends a potent signal about an agency's quality to the community (Carter and Sapp 1994; Mastrofski 1986) and about

> These findings indicate that accreditation's main value may be as a signal from agency leaders to the organization's rank and file.

executive leadership to the job market for police chiefs (Doerner and Doerner 2009; Mastrofski and Willis 2010; Teodoro 2009). The present study indicates that accreditation sends a similarly important signal to rank-and-file officers about the priorities of the agency's executive leaders. Officers in accredited agencies recognize that COP is a high priority for their organizations. We suspect that the signal's credibility is attributable in part to the significant and visible costs that an agency incurs in the accreditation process. The symbols, language, and rituals that accompany accreditation are omnipresent reminders of the agency's commitment to CALEA's standards, norms, and values.

Reducing ambiguity about an organization's goals and priorities helps build an effective organizational culture, as Brehm and Gates (2008) have shown. Accreditation may not socialize officers to think more professionally, but the lengthy, costly accreditation process and its attendant symbols and rituals signal to the rank and file that the organization's executive leadership is meaningfully committed to professionalism, and not simply invoking professionalism rhetorically. Perhaps accreditation cannot make an agency's employees value a professional mission, but accreditation offers those who do a meaningful assurance that the agency's leaders share their values.

Notes
1. Observed by the authors at the CALEA Conference, Salt Lake City, Utah, November 2009.
2. See the CALEA Web site, http://www.calea.org/content/law-enforcement-program-benefits.
3. Teodoro (2009) finds that police chiefs who move from one agency to another are more likely to initiate accreditation.
4. See also Johnson (2011) for a recent analysis of the relationship between officer attitudes and work productivity in police departments.
5. Using a single-item scale to measure each of these variables is not ideal, of course; an index constructed from several questionnaire items gauging attitudes toward COP could offer greater measurement validity. However, the questionnaire included only two questions on COP. Future research focused on COP-related attitudes might benefit from multiple-item scales.
6. The questionnaire gathered data on officers' age, length of career, and tenure in their current agencies. There were a few items missing data for age and tenure, possibly because of respondents' concerns about anonymity. These variables are all highly correlated (greater than .91), and each generates substantively and statistically similar results in our statistical models. The models reported here use length of career because it has the fewest missing data points.
7. Unobserved differences in individuals' education, career path, on-the-job experiences, and other experiences

unrelated to agency accreditation might affect attitudes toward COP, too. The present study cannot control for these variables statistically; we rely on the quasi-experimental design and selection of six broadly similar agencies to account for these variables.

8. The most common approach to modeling unobserved cluster-level effects is to use dummy variables, as the present analysis does. Unfortunately, the dummy variable approach is inefficient, risks allowing outliers undue influence over estimates, and can inflate statistical significance when predictors and distributions of the dependent variable vary across clusters, as they do here (Gelman 2006). Random effects models generate efficient estimates in the presence of significant latent unit-level variation, but may be inefficient and possibly biased if predictors and units are correlated (Hausman and Taylor 1981). The present study is a case of the latter, as the predictors of interest (accreditation status) are cluster- (agency-) level characteristics that are hypothesized to correlate with unit values. Latent cluster-level variables also are expected to affect unit variation, as unmeasured characteristics of police departments are likely to affect officers' attitudes. We fitted several different estimators to ensure that these potential statistical pitfalls did not distort our findings. Hierarchical models, random-effects, and generalized linear mixed models all generated substantively and statistically similar results to the models reported here. We report ordinary least squares results because it is the estimator likely to be familiar to most readers.

9. In addition to the response-weighted models reported here, we estimated agency-clustered bootstrapped and jackknifed replications of these models to ensure that varying survey response rates did not bias our analysis. These replications generated substantively similar results, indicating that varying response rates do not significantly affect our findings.

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