



The Future of Policing Research

Statement to the Division on Policing, American Society of Criminology

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By

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The future of policing lies in studies *of* the police, *for* the police, and *by* the police, with and without academics.¹

The future of policing research can be found in **Molly Slothower**, a graduate student whose qualitative work discovered that some UK police were telling crime victims that a diversion program was letting their offenders off “easy,” making victims dissatisfied; she then launched an experiment to compare victim attitudes about prosecution vs. diversion when victims in the diversion group were told in detail the intense efforts the diversion program made to prevent future offending. In this test, victims were 42% more likely to be satisfied with diversion than with prosecution.² Her study *of* the police led to a study *for* the police that was conducted with Molly *by* the police.

The future of policing research can be found in **Jerry Ratcliffe** and his team, who not only conducted an experiment in hot spots policing *for* the Philadelphia Police Department,³ but did enough research on the practices *of* the older vs. rookie officers to explain why a second experiment yielded a different result.⁴

The future of policing research can also be found with people like

- **Renee Mitchell**, a Sacramento Police Sergeant who organized her own hot spots experiment that won an award from the ASC Division on Experimental Criminology⁵
- **Barak Ariel**, a Cambridge Lecturer and former police inspector who designed and supervised the first experiment in police wearing body-worn video cameras with Rialto CA Police Chief Tony Farrar (then a Cambridge Master’s degree student), a study later cited by the US Judge who ordered the NYPD to wear cameras in high-frequency stop and search precincts⁶

- **Alex Murray** of the West Midlands Police (UK), who founded with colleagues and served as the first chair of the now 1500-member Society of Evidence-Based Policing, whose members embrace both police and academics⁷
- **Cynthia Lum**, a GMU professor and former Baltimore police officer whose efforts to make police research accessible to police and the public through the evidence-based policing matrix are an exemplar of translational criminology.⁸

The long and important tradition of research on the causes of police behavior⁹ as a dependent variable should and will continue, both by academics and police themselves—many of them in the new category Renee Mitchell calls “*pracademics*.” This research will increasingly be appreciated *by* the police as being *for* the police, and not just serving as “opposition research” for those who see democratic police institutions as a unified enemy--blind to the reality of police agencies as moral battlefields between competing factions.¹⁰ Police who share their critics’ goals of curbing police abuses and increasing police legitimacy already find research on the causes of police behavior to add practical value in strengthening a police profession. They will welcome more and better research on racial discrimination, profiling, and use of deadly force.

The new and growing field of “evidence-based policing” is also both *for* the police and *for* the communities and victims that police serve.¹¹ The Triple-T of systematic targeting, testing and tracking of the use of police resources is spreading as a policing strategy¹² in which research is the core tool of keeping the peace.¹³ Citizens who follow this research can press police to use it to the hilt, just as medical patients now confront their doctors with medical research findings paid for by citizen tax dollars. They can demand, for example, to know why police make arrests for minor domestic violence when in one experiment it doubled the risk of death from all causes among African-American victims.¹⁴

The research on the consequences of the Triple-T police decisions, treating police decisions as the independent variable, may eventually achieve a far higher proportion of all policing research than it has to date. While EBP began with fulltime academics, it is witnessing phenomenal growth in police-led experiments.¹⁵ The passion with which younger and mid-career police work to answer these questions of consequences is not yet found among the chief executives of most police agencies, but it is only a matter of time. The coming generations of police leaders will not only be consumers of research, but are increasingly likely to have been producers of it as well. No trend could provide greater justification for creating an ASC Division of Policing, nor for building a close bond between our new Division and the world-wide Society of Evidence-Based Policing.

¹Compare this prediction to the more limited foresight of Sherman, Lawrence W. (1974). “The Sociology and the Social Reform of the American Police: 1950-73.” *Journal of Police Science and Administration* 2: 255-263.

² Slothower, Molly (2014). “Victim Perceptions of Legitimacy of Diversion to a Conditional Out-of-Court Disposal: A Randomized Controlled Trial.” Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Maryland, Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice.

³ Ratcliffe, Jerry H., Travis Taniguchi, Elizabeth R. Groff, and Jennifer D. Wood. "The Philadelphia foot patrol experiment: a randomized controlled trial of police patrol effectiveness in violent crime hotspots*." *Criminology* 49, no. 3 (2011): 795-831;.

⁴ Sorg, Evan T., Cory P. Haberman, Jerry H. Ratcliffe, and Elizabeth R. Groff. "Foot patrol in violent crime hot spots: The longitudinal impact of deterrence and posttreatment effects of displacement." *Criminology* 51, no. 1 (2013): 65-101

⁵ Telep, Cody W., Renée J. Mitchell, and David Weisburd. "How much time should the police spend at crime hot spots? Answers from a police agency directed randomized field trial in Sacramento, California." *Justice Quarterly* ahead-of-print (2014): 1-29.

⁶ Ariel, Barak, William A. Farrar, and Alex Sutherland. "The Effect of Police Body-Worn Cameras on Use of Force and Citizens' Complaints Against the Police: A Randomized Controlled Trial." *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* (2014): 1-27.

⁷ www.Sebp.police.uk/

⁸ Lum, Cynthia, Christopher S. Koper, and Cody W. Telep. "The evidence-based policing matrix." *Journal of Experimental Criminology* 7.1 (2011): 3-26.

⁹ Sherman, Lawrence W. (1980) "Causes of Police Behavior: The Current State of Quantitative Research, " *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 17, 1:69-100.

¹⁰ Bouza, Anthony (1990). *The Police Mystique: An Insider's Look at Cops, Crime, and the Criminal Justice System* (Da Capo).

¹¹ Sherman, Lawrence W. (1998) *Evidence-Based Policing*. Washington, DC: Police Foundation.

¹² Sherman, Lawrence W. (2013). "The Rise of Evidence-Based Policing: Targeting, Testing and Tracking." *Crime and Justice* 42: 377-451.

¹³ As generally envisioned by Reiss, Albert J., Jr. (1992) "Police organization in the twentieth century." *Crime and Justice* 15: 51-97

¹⁴ Sherman, Lawrence W. and Heather M. Harris (2014). "Increased death rates of domestic violence victims from arresting vs. warning suspects in the Milwaukee Domestic Violence Experiment (MilDVE)." *Journal of Experimental Criminology* online first (May 14): 1-20.

¹⁵ See videos and slides from the 7th Cambridge International Conference on Evidence-Based Policing on *Police-led Experiments* at <http://www.crim.cam.ac.uk/events/conferences/ebp/2014/>