Social Context and Policing: Measuring What Matters

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Consistent with Anthony’s Eulogy in Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar, “I come to bury Caesar not praise him”

- Anthony reminds the Senate that Caesar was much more benign than Brutus suggests

  “The evil that men do lives after them; The good is oft interred with their bones. So let it be with Caesar”. (Act III, Scene II)

- The evidence-based movement in policing is important, necessary and welcome

- It adds value to understanding police interventions

- Yet it is important to understand that there are numerous forms of evidence – as there are many roads to Rome
Revisiting the Medical Model and EBP

- The Medical Model is invoked in much of this discussion, but what medicine?
  - Pharmacological science = much of what we see in EBP
  - Doctor/patient relations? The role of the general practitioner and/or the specialist?
  - Psychiatric interventions and medicine?
  - Ecological study of disease?
  - Why don’t people go to the doctor/hospital or take their meds?
  - In police studies there is still a concern with Craft versus Science – often yielding a need for qualitative and quantitative study
- A Hippocratic Oath for Police – “First, do no further harm”, has qualitative and quantitative implications – especially concerning legitimacy.
Place and Social Context

• Places are defined physically (geographically) and socially

• Social context refers to the immediate social setting in which people live or in which something happens or develops

• Social context is about social interactions and the meaning of those interactions which occur in differing social spaces
  • It includes the culture of the place the individual was socialized or lives in
  • It includes the people and institutions with whom individuals interact

• Place-based research on the police is conditioned by an ecological approach drawing heavily from social disorganization theory
  • Aggregating social characteristics is not the same as measuring interactions and meaning in specific locales
Two Illustrations

• Variation in Use of the Same Physical Space
• Public Parks
  • Public Parks as Contested Spaces, Hilborn, 2009
  • Public Parks as Crime Attractors, Clark and Eck, 2007
  • Public Parks as Crime Generators, Groff and McCord, 2011.
• Downtowns, Shopping Malls, Transit Hubs
  • Increases in Downtown Improvement Districts, Peterson and McDonogh, 2012.
  • Who is attracted to Shopping Malls, shoppers, youth, criminals? Beck and Willis, 2006.
  • Understanding crime along transit systems, Newton, Partridge, and Gill, 2014.
Social Networks

• A social network is a social structure of people, related (directly or indirectly) to each other through a common relation or interest.

• Social network analysis (SNA) is the study of social networks to understand their structure and behavior (Source: Srivastava, et. al., 2006)

(Source: Freeman, 2000)
Networks and Connections in Our Social World

• Social networks -- micro-level contacts and exchanges between individuals and other individuals, small groups, and large (even global) organizations

• Networking -- using our social networks to get information, favors, or resources

• Captures the exchanges and the meaning of the exchanges
A Mixed Methods Example from Boston’s Crime Analysis Meetings

• Twice a month, police managers gather to examine a particular geographic district within the Boston PD, there are 23 of them.

• Two approaches/conversations emerge – one quantitative, one qualitative

• Quantitative – Crime analysis maps with patterns of criminal behavior, data driven and sophisticated – led by the crime analysis unit

• Qualitative – Comes from two directions
  • The district Captain, describing dynamics in the district that may not be captured by the “stats”
  • A larger discussion among specialized units (school police, drugs, warrants, gangs and the like mostly focused on people, groups and locations.)
Karl Popper Meets Margaret Mead

- Crime analysis – focused on patterns

- District/Special Units focused on actors and meaning
The Current Skewed Sense of What the Police Do and What it Means

- The police produce both instrumental and symbolic public goods
  - Instrumental goods include, crime and social disorder responses, the movement of vehicles and people in public spaces, protection of the vulnerable, medical and other emergency services
  - Symbolic goods include public sense of safety, support of the police, police individual and institutional legitimacy
- For a number of reasons the police and ultimately the academic community are more focused on crime control above all else the police do, public safety goes relatively undiscussed
- Police agencies do not measure very consistently or well police non-instrumental activity and its results; nor are they much rewarded in police agencies
What do the police actually do?

• Any number of studies suggest that, while the police crime response has increased, at least half of police workload is not crime focused.

• Crime activity is temporally and spatially distributed such that often many police have little crime control contact.

• The police help many people by providing medical and other emergency services, mediating small disputes, protecting the homeless and other publically vulnerable populations often with little recognition – here the police are focused on harm not risk.

• When police move away from large urban populations centers the amount of crime control policing generally recedes.
A Harm vs. Risk-Focused Police Agenda

• Shift from Harm to Risk (Ratcliffe, 2014)
  • Harm yields a need to assist and protect, risk a need to defend and control – question is what is the balance
  • Socially disorganized communities have more problems than crime

• Requires more knowledge about what harms the community (Maltz, 1995)

• Requires police advocacy for the community (Boydstun and Sherry, 1975) – perhaps the real implementation of community policing
MIXED METHOD DESIGNS FOR IMPROVING UNDERSTANDING OF POLICE AND POLICING

- **Triangulation Mixed Methods Designs** – where quantitative and qualitative data are collected and analyzed and then integrated

- **Nested Mixed Methods** – where quantitative data are collected as in pre/post tests and qualitative data collected about treatments, interventions and dosage

- **Explanatory Mixed Methods Designs** – where qualitative follow-up on initial quantitative data leads to improved subsequent data collection

- **Exploratory Mixed methods Designs** – where qualitative data precede the development of instrumentation used in quantitative studies

- And there are hybrids of these designs
Hybrids: Using Qualitative and Quantitative Data in Policing

• **Content analysis** – analysis of news accounts, internal reporting processes (workload sheets, field reporting, complaints against police documents) – can be made quantitative or remain qualitative

• **Systematic Social Observation** – police and community field studies designed to frame ethnographic observation often within a quantitative framework

• **Case Studies and Thick Description** – police agency or neighborhood specific qualitative efforts or integrations of qualitative data obtained from observation, interview, qualitative focus group and the like, often with official data for the same site.

• **Social Problem/Impact Analysis** – a policy-analysis viewpoint to use quantitative and quantitative data to trace the contours of social problems (crime, disorder, fear) or proposed impacts for selective interventions. e.g. what level of harm do communities experience?

• **Program Evaluation** – use qualitative and quantitative methods to understand programs processes and impacts, what happened when the police did X and with what effect?
Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted.

— Albert Einstein
Thank you
References


• Newton, A.D., H. Partridge, and A. Gill. 2014. Above and below: measuring crime risk in and around underground mass transit systems,. Crime science, 3,1.

