

Cops as treatment providers: realities and ironies of police work in a foot patrol experiment

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Experimental research on policing is inspired by the public health analogy of officers as treatment providers. A randomised violence reduction experiment in Philadelphia recently used foot patrols as place-based interventions in violent city spaces during a hot spots policing experiment, and a 23% reduction in violent crime was observed. This paper reports on field observations of foot patrol officers involved in this experiment, which were designed to capture officers' perceptions of, and experiences with the foot patrol function. While the findings resonate with Bittner's depiction of policing on 'skid row', they illuminated the importance of 'territoriality' in a place-based intervention. Officers developed extensive local knowledge of their beat areas, which allowed them to draw from a repertoire of techniques to exert spatial control in the management of disorder. The choice of techniques depended in part on officer style, and the ways in which individual police negotiated the tensions between 'reassurance policing' and the crime fighting demands of 'real police work'. Perhaps most importantly, officers felt constrained by the (artificial) parameters of an experiment that did not allow for the incorporation of local knowledge. This research helps to highlight the value of qualitative research for experimental designs, and reinforces the need to acknowledge and integrate officer knowledge in the design of sustainable interventions.

Keywords: hot spots policing; experimental research; public health; violence; foot patrol; ethnography

Introduction

The problem of inner-city crime and violence is now widely regarded as a severe public health threat across the United States, and as such has been the focus of varied interventions, ranging from early prevention programmes to targeted law enforcement. As is the case in other disciplines, randomised experiments are seen as the optimal research design for testing crime interventions (Sherman 2005). They can help us understand whether police, as agents of criminal law enforcement, can contribute to violence reduction at the population level. In experimental criminology, policing is conceived in public health terms as a 'treatment' (Thacher 2001), and police officers are equivalent to treatment providers.

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A recent experiment in Philadelphia testing the effectiveness of foot patrol as one such treatment demonstrated that police can make a difference in reducing violence in the most harmful city spaces (Ratcliffe *et al.* 2011). This study, which should serve to reawaken inquiry into foot patrol as a dedicated violence intervention, reaffirms the utility of experiments for police leaders as they make strategic decisions (for a detailed discussion of the study design and findings, see Ratcliffe *et al.* 2011). Yet, there is much more to be explored about the treatment itself, and in particular how treatment providers – i.e. line officers – both understand their role(s) as foot patrol police, as well as negotiate and (possibly) contest the requirements of an intervention that they did not help to design.

This paper reports on a piece of ethnographic research that was conducted in the treatment locations of the above experiment. It was designed to explore how officers perceived and negotiated their roles, both in the context of foot beat areas and more broadly in the context of an experiment designed by law enforcement administrators and researchers. Our research found that foot patrol officers gained an appreciation of the virtues of foot patrol policing within the tiny territories to which they were assigned, including the value of extensive local knowledge in both shaping behaviours and engendering positive community relations. Officers got to know what people wanted, and drew from a repertoire of techniques for exerting ‘spatial control’ or ‘territoriality’ (Herbert 1997).

By virtue of being on foot, officers accumulated knowledge over time of specific spaces and places, and the people that flowed through them. This textured knowledge helped to guide nuanced police decision-making designed to balance issues of effectiveness – what worked in a given time-space moment – with understandings of who ‘belonged’ and who was (from a long-range point of view) a threat to community order. Not everything that police did was conceived by officers as ‘real police work’, nor were there compelling organisational reward systems that helped challenge this conception. Therefore, the potential of local knowledge to fully inform police decision-making appeared partly constrained by larger administrative influences.

Our research has both instrumental and normative implications for the future practice of foot patrol and the theoretical ends and means that underpin it. Foot patrol can provide the basis for refined situational decision-making because officers come to view communities not in monolithic terms, as Kennedy (2011) has described, but in terms of a diversity of behaviours, interests and commitments. The ‘good’ people (residents, business owners) get acknowledged and valued, which helps create a strong sense of moral purpose in the work of foot patrol. At the same time, continued periods of learning and working on foot can lead to prolonged exposure to structural conditions, or what public health researchers would describe as the social determinants of violence (WHO 2002), which can result in officers questioning the long-term impact of their efforts. Over time, some officers felt defeated by the limits of what they could accomplish. These judgements were further cemented by the spatial rigidity of their assignments, as they felt constrained by their territorial boundaries and the need to monitor spatial changes in the behaviour they were influencing.

From a methodological perspective, our findings have implications for both the limits of, and possibilities for conceptualizing and measuring treatment in experiments like this one. Taking our cue from David Thacher (2001), we argue that the

nature and dosage of treatment, although difficult to prescribe, can be more clearly articulated and measured by incorporating line officer knowledge at the research design phase. We also suggest that although the public health analogy is problematic, it could inspire researchers, police and other city officials to jointly identify the potential side-effects of police interventions, effects which may vary depending on the style of treatment provider and the formal and informal reward systems that support varying styles.

Background and methods

Violence in Philadelphia is a serious public health problem, as it is in other large cities in the United States. Violent crime is a leading cause of death and injury across the nation and disproportionately affects the most vulnerable citizens, especially young people and minorities. It generates long-term emotional trauma and chronic physical illness, and worrying about crime can have detrimental effects on the mental health of citizens (Jackson and Stafford 2009). Given that police routinely manage violence and related threats to the safety and health of the population, line officers can be understood as public health interventionists (see Burris *et al.* 2010). In efforts to yield the greatest benefits from this interventionist role, police leaders are increasingly adopting a place-based view, which emphasises the targeting of police resources to the most harmful areas of a city, referred to as crime ‘hotspots’, where levels of crime are markedly higher than other spaces in a neighbourhood or community (Chainey and Ratcliffe 2005, Groff *et al.* 2008, 2010).

Given the discretionary nature of police work, it is difficult for police administrators (or researchers) to prescribe how precisely officers should do foot patrol. Within an experimental research paradigm, efforts to measure an intervention suffer from the ‘black box’ problem (Treno 2010). In this light, Sherman and Strang (2004, p. 205) have argued for the need to incorporate ethnographic research, and qualitative research more generally, into randomized controlled trial designs in order to create ‘both a strong black box test of cause and effect and a rich distillation of how those effects happened inside that black box, person by person, and story by story’. In the case of the foot patrol experiment, being present in foot beats allowed researchers to peer into the worlds of treatment providers, and capture some of the normative, cultural, and pragmatic complexities of foot patrol work. This process was intended to shed light on the contemporary realities of foot patrol work in an experiment focused on violent micro-spaces in Philadelphia. Having a clearer understanding of such realities was meant to help inform stronger causal inferences about the mechanisms for achieving the reductions in violence observed in the randomised trial (Wood 2013).

As part of the randomised design, recently graduated, ‘rookie’ Philadelphia police officers were assigned to 60 small foot beat areas (averaging only 1.3 miles of streets and 14.7 street intersections). Foot beats were drawn around street corners with the highest scores on violent crime. To put the violence occurring in these locations in perspective, in 2008, the top one per cent of high crime corners in Philadelphia was associated with 15% of the city’s robberies, 13% of aggravated assaults and over 10% of homicides (Ratcliffe *et al.* 2011). The officers patrolled these areas in pairs on day and night shifts, five days a week. A 12 week analysis of trends in violent crimes revealed an overall violent crime reduction of 23% across the 60

treatment areas compared to 60 control areas during the summer of 2009; in total, beats treated with foot patrol experienced an estimated 53 fewer crimes relative to control beats during the experimental period (Ratcliffe *et al.* 2011).

Four graduate student field researchers conducted field observations of foot patrol activities in the 60 treatment areas. Students observed each foot beat four times. Each observation lasted approximately one hour and there were two observations of the day shift and two of the night shift, totalling approximately 240 hours of observation time. Their observations were structured (guided by a systematic observation protocol developed by the research team) as well as ethnographic (involving open-ended field notes).¹

The field researchers were instructed to explore two broad themes during their observations. The first included developing an understanding of how the experiment was progressing and what the officers were doing, including how its protocols were being adhered to and the officers' activities while on foot patrol. The second theme related to how the officers saw their roles. The student researchers were given latitude in how the observations would play out and what would be discussed. This resulted in some observations being largely structured by questioning the officers and listening to their responses, and in other cases allowing the officers to guide the conversation and offer up information they saw as pertinent or worthy of discussion.

The data for this paper are drawn from the extensive field note diaries produced as a result of these open-ended observations. Observers recorded jottings in the field, and then returned home or to the office to record their observations in depth. Overall, our field researchers produced an observational diary of approximately 90 single-spaced pages in length. The analysis of the observations occurred through a staged process. One of the authors performed a descriptive coding of the observations which was enabled by *ATLAS.ti*, a qualitative analysis software tool. Another author did a second round of coding, working within the first set of codes and related text segments to distil nuances and focus the analysis. Some codes were then collapsed into broader themes, and relationships were established with the aid of a network relations drawing tool in the software. Direct quotes used in the following discussion derive from researcher field notes.

Realities of police work: past and present

Several decades have passed since Bittner's (1967) seminal scholarship on policing as a craft. Other foundational sociological studies (Banton 1964, Sacks 1972, Muir 1977, Ericson 1982) serve to support Bittner's assertion that officers respond with little oversight, or structured guidance, to the various situations that confront them on a daily basis. Officers may use the law to influence behaviours, but they often resort to non-legal means (not invoking arrest) to achieve compliance, including persuasion, negotiation and other 'soft' strategies (see Innes 2005) involved in peacekeeping. Bittner's analysis of 'skid row' policing revealed that being good at the craft of policing involved sound and nuanced judgements of how to respond to an array of 'situational exigencies' (1967, p. 701). Patrol officers should not let their feelings be their guide, nor should they resort to tactics that are either 'not rough enough' or 'too rough' (Bittner 1967, p. 701). Along the spectrum of soft to hard policing tactics, choosing not to make an arrest, in any given situation, does not reflect a lack of action, but rather 'a decision to act alternatively' (p. 703). Shaping

officers' choices of action is the 'immensely detailed knowledge' (p. 715) they accumulate on their areas of patrol. Officers are more effective in controlling behaviours once they get to know who people are, classifying them as insiders or outsiders of a place (p.707).

Although officers may choose to use non-legal interventions, the fact that they have access to force is pivotal to their authority. Moreover, this authority is bounded in space, a point that Herbert (1997) argues is under-stated in Bittner's analyses. Officers' legal and non-legal tactics often contain elements of 'spatial control' or 'territoriality' (Herbert 1997). Physically standing at a corner where drug transactions are known to take place works to disrupt these activities. Asking someone to 'move along' symbolises an officer's claim to a space or place. In the Weberian sense (Weber 1964) having access to the law, and to state-sanctioned coercion, allows officers to exert territoriality with little or no contest. The control of space, therefore, is foundational to the control of people (Herbert 1997).

In contemporary criminology, space and place, both as sites of knowledge and as targets of intervention, have taken on an acute significance. Weber's previous emphasis on the state as territory is now giving way to micro-spatial conceptions of police territoriality. At the same time, foot patrol has re-emerged as a viable place-based intervention (Ratcliffe *et al.* 2011). Despite its historical origins in the creation of Peel's police, the introduction of foot patrol is rather novel to cities like Philadelphia that had become accustomed to the 'professional' paradigm of policing centred on moving officers to cars and creating emotional distance between police and the communities they served. Foot patrol, as a targeted intervention in historically violent micro-spaces of the city, is particularly novel. Indeed, the need for, and exercise of territoriality takes on a renewed significance, in large part simply because police cannot leave the micro-spaces to which they are assigned. In what follows therefore, we use our current empirical data to engage with established thinking on the craft of policing, and in particular, foot patrol. Our findings in many ways echo those reported in previous evaluations exploring the attitudes of foot patrol police (Kelling *et al.* 1981); however, new complexities and nuances arise given the explicit focus of this experiment on crime hot spots that were identified and delineated by researchers in conjunction with police leadership.

Developing place-based knowledge

As a place-based intervention limited to several blocks and intersections, foot patrol work allows officers – like the police in Bittner's 'skid row' – to gain extensive local knowledge of the people and places that occupy their beats. The pace of foot patrol is different from that of motor patrol or other specialised units. This is perhaps one reason why officers working on foot believed they got better crime related information during the course of their patrols as compared to when in cars in previous evaluations (Kelling *et al.* 1981). Officers have the opportunity to 'take in' the rhythm and flow of the streets, and the dynamics that constitute its social relations. It was common during our field observations for officers to note that being on foot allowed them to gain an understanding of their communities that would not be possible if they worked from cars. In one way or another, officers tended to describe their role in terms of what Bittner depicts as 'keeping an eye' (Bittner 1967, p. 702). As one officer noted, 'the one good thing about foot patrol is that you learn

about the neighborhood. The guys in cars never get out so they don't know half of what we know' (Foot beat #001).

By embedding themselves in their tiny beat areas, officers developed a nuanced and contextualised view of their neighbourhoods, differentiating between its inhabitants. In contrast to the monolithic view of community noted by previous police scholars (Kennedy 2011), officers develop a sense of 'both intragroup difference and inter-group commonality' and 'the range of human action and interest' (Marguiles 1999, p. 2349) that constitute their police territories. In the spirit of Wilson and Kelling's (1982) community-based officer, keeping an eye allows officers to discern who the 'regulars' are, what they might be up to, and who might pose as threats to the safety or quality of life on their beat. Among groups of residents known to be disorderly, there were sub-categories of people, mainly in terms of those who cooperated with the police, and those who challenged their authority. The foot patrols worked as symbols of local territorial control:

One officer believed that "[o]ne positive [aspect] about walking a foot beat is that you become familiar with the people of the neighbourhood." They thought they used this to their advantage because they can easily tell who is out of place and who does not belong. They reported that when they first arrived they thought everyone was "up to no good" but now that they have been around for a bit, they are able to differentiate between the good and bad. **A known drug dealer was walking down the street and the officers yelled to him, "Go home Anton," and he looked back and continued walking away. People on their steps were amused by this and thanked the officers.** (Foot beat #010)

The knowledge accumulated by officers was so extensive that they claimed they could spot subtle changes in criminal behaviour as a result of their presence. Officers described the ways in which drug market participants shielded their activities from the gaze of the police. They told researchers about the 'watchers' who would act as look-outs to inform sellers when the police were nearby, and the 'runners' who worked to draw police attention away from people who were selling contraband. There were also 'lookouts' that would resort to using car alarms, or making siren noises with their mouths to alert dealers to approaching officers.

Officers knew they could provide 'reassurance' (Innes 2004, p. 152) to the 'good' people, and they could tell who trusted them. Older residents were especially appreciative. An officer commented that '[t]hey [older residents] think it's the greatest thing, us walking – it's like back in the day when this is what cops did' (Foot beat #011). When queried by an observer about whether they learned anything by being on foot, officers responded that they gained an understanding of 'good' people's problems, giving them a different vantage point from officers who had never walked the beat. An officer commented that foot patrolling 'helped us to really understand what the citizens want and what they expect of us' (Foot beat #005).

By the officers' calculations, they owed it to the good people of the communities to 'clean up' their beats: 'These are good hardworking people out here; we owe it to them to help clean up the neighbourhood' (Foot beat #041). Despite the fact that officers had been placed in known hotspots of violence, it was disorder, rather than serious crime, that was foremost on the minds of residents. As one observer noted, 'they [police] were surprised at how the residents rarely had crime concerns, but were more interested in resolving quality of life issues (the trash, nuisance neighbours, and unruly youths)' (Foot beat #007). As discussed in the following section, the depth

with which officers understood what was important to a community allowed them to tailor responses to these concerns. The ability of the officers to customise their responses might help explain why, at least in previous evaluations of foot patrol, both foot and motor patrol police reported that policing on foot leads to stronger police-community relationships (Kelling *et al.* 1981).

Officers used various legal and non-legal tools to exert spatial control in the maintenance of order. The choice of tool(s) in any time-space moment was mediated by several factors, including the officers' knowledge of the individual(s) involved; the pressure to 'generate activity' (arrests); and the need to balance law enforcement with building police-community relations. Perhaps the most important factor of all was the styles of individual officers, or officer pairs, which we discuss further below.

Order maintenance and spatial control

Given the 'quality of life' issues in their beat areas, coupled with community requests to focus on disorder, as a group, the foot patrol officers tended to function largely as 'watchmen' (Wilson 1968), centred on peacekeeping and the maintenance of order. However, some officers, or pairs of officers were, in Wilson's terms, more 'legalistic' in style, while others were more 'service' oriented, using informal means to achieve compliance. Regardless of style, officers talked about 'cleaning up' as if it were a figurative logic (Shearing and Ericson 1991) guiding their work. Many of the officers used the insights they had gleaned while on patrol, combined with the input of the communities in which they served, to develop individualised responses to the problems afflicting their beats. The nature of the response levied was oftentimes based on the situation and/or the recipient of the action. At the same time, as the summer progressed, the fact that foot beat boundaries were more artificial than real, and did not capture changing behavioural patterns, caused some officers to reassess whether their efforts were worthwhile in the long term. Nevertheless, it was apparent that, at least at the onset of the experiment, being based in a small beat allowed officers to easily identify places to focus their 'cleaning' up efforts:

[The officers'] main priority was to clean up the park. The park was about 4 city blocks long and 2 city blocks wide, but easy to see from one side to the other during the day. The park also did not have many amenities besides a few benches and dilapidated pieces of playground equipment. The officers said that prior to their foot beat assignment the park was previously frequented by drug dealers, prostitutes, and loitering juveniles, but these groups of people no longer gathered in the park anymore. The officers stated that they focused on quality of life issues, frequently questioned suspicious people, and made sure that their presence was felt in the park. The officers stated that citizens frequently thanked them for cleaning up the park and said that they were happy to see kids playing there over the summer months. They believed that their foot beat was directly responsible for improving conditions within the park. (Foot beat #032)

In the case of this park, officers exercised spatial control by questioning suspicious people and making their presence known. In other cases, making arrests – thereby removing someone from a space for a period of time – was seen as necessary to assert a normative order in their beats. Consider another observation:

They [the pair of foot patrol officers] had made a QOL [quality of life] arrest for a beer drinker, and had transported him to the district to process the paperwork. I asked them

if it made sense to arrest people for this, or if they should be allowed to write summonses in the field. They agreed that it would be more cost effective, but they felt that being brought in sent the message that the police will not tolerate even the slightest of crimes, and that you will be arrested. I asked if that was good for community relations, and they thought it was; “people like seeing that we’re doing something for the neighbourhood.” (Foot beat #022)

Officers used their local knowledge to make ‘situated judgments’ (Thacher 2001, p. 402) about the hard and soft tactics that would work best in a given moment. Some officers prefer to escalate up to more coercive measures once they have first tried acts of persuasion and negotiation. A researcher commented on a situation where officers chose not to write a summons to a male resident who was drinking beer in public. They did, however, run a warrant check on him; the warrant check was negative, and so he was allowed to walk away. The officers reasoned that they wanted to focus on establishing positive relationships with people in the community. If they encountered this person again, however, they would escalate up, most likely writing a summons. Notably, this decision to give him a free pass on this occasion was driven in large part by the fact that he was a known resident. In his field notes, the researcher recorded that ‘had he been an outsider, [the officers] stated, he would have been brought in’ (Foot beat # 048).

Choices of hard and soft techniques of spatial control are influenced by individual policing style. One officer recounted how a fellow officer, with arguably a service oriented style (Wilson 1968), went to great lengths to assist a community member. The person telling the story implied that this policing style can create the conditions for effective order maintenance in the long term:

One of the officers told me that the other [officer], while off duty, came to the beat and picked up a local homeless man, took him to a barber shop, and bought him a haircut and a shave. The officer explained to me that you never know what occurred in somebody’s life that leads them to be in the position that they are in. He said, “The man is homeless, has no job, and begs for money, but I don’t know why he’s like that, and who am I to judge him. I would rather go home and know that I did something nice for somebody that has nothing, rather than lock him up and inconvenience him for something that, in the grand scheme of things, is not a big deal [begging for money].” In being friendly with the man, he states that he is now able to regulate him and where he goes. He explained that now the homeless gentleman knows he should not be in front of stores. He said that he can now “keep him in line.” (Foot beat #007)

Although both hard and soft tactics of spatial control were seen as disrupting or deterring behaviour, officers suggested they were not naïve in thinking they could stop criminal behaviour altogether. Simply put, spatial control is seen as having no permanency when it comes to changing human motivation. It was common for officers to claim that they were shifting behaviours around to different spaces and times. Consider the following comments about managing prostitution once the foot patrol experiment ended:

[T]he officers said that they were able to chase off a large number of prostitutes that previously frequented the area before they started their patrol. One officer suggested that after they were moved to a new district next week the prostitutes would just come right back. He said that there were a few relentless street walkers in the area, and he was sure that these ladies would call the rest back once they knew the cops were not going to

be around to harass them anymore. The other officer compared dealing with prostitution as a “cat and mouse game.” He said, “they move around the corner, so we patrol that area . . . They move a little farther, so we patrol a little farther.” (Foot beat #060)

This view that prostitutes adapt their behaviour speaks to a much broader concern of officers that the spatial control of foot patrol work simply displaces crime. In the minds of officers, displacement would not be such an issue if officers had the authority to move their territorial boundaries:

They [the officers] felt that crime would just move elsewhere, and already feel that the criminal element in the neighbourhood has moved to other locations. They feel that as the criminals moved, so should they, and didn't agree with staying on the same beat for as long as they were. “People catch on, so we should adapt.” They felt that having them focus on certain areas was good for a while, but they think they need to be more mobile (car, bike). (Foot beat #037)

While officers developed an extensive knowledge of their beats, the irony of being constrained to these beats was that both insiders and outsiders could keep an eye on police as well – what one might describe as a kind of ‘reverse gaze’. Officers commonly believed that the offending population quickly became apprised of their patrolling schedules, including the days of the week they were on assignment and the hours of their shifts. Knowledge *of* the police was therefore just as contextualised and nuanced as the knowledge officers had developed:

Though they [the officers] thought that they were a deterrent to crime, they thought that this was only for the time that they are on their beats. “We deter crime for like the 20 minutes we're at a place, but then things go back to the way they were when we leave.” They also thought that people just move to another block. This, they explained, was why they occasionally walk off their beats; “We don't want people to think that we can't leave.”(Foot beat #104)

This perceived lack of permanency associated with their territoriality bred cynicism in some police. Officers generally felt that the motivations of the criminally inclined would not change in the long term. Our observations revealed that this presumption can lead to changes in officer outlook and behaviour over time, such as losing a sense of excitement for the job or adopting the view that police can provide little more than a ‘band aid’ treatment to an area riddled with disorder and crime. Such officer apathy is recorded in the following field excerpt:

They took no police action while I walked with them, and made little contact with the residents. They said that they were sick of seeing and dealing with the same people day in and out. At first they thought it was valuable because they became aware of who the problem residents were and who good people were. Now, however, they said it's annoying to be dealing with the same problems on a daily basis. “Some people just don't want to help themselves, and it forces us to have to deal with them.” (Foot beat # 026)

Some officers expressed little hope for the futures of the ‘good’ people in the community. Gaining such extensive local knowledge of their beat areas thus had the rather perverse effect of saddening officers to the plight of these communities. As one officer put it, ‘nothing changes, we see the same people, deal with the same crap. It gets old’ (Foot beat #117).

It could be that being on foot full time cements this cynicism because officers witness persons being trapped in cycles of poverty, alienation and crime, all linked to what public health researchers describe as the social determinants of violence (WHO 2002). Crime and disorder may therefore seem inherent to a community with little hope. Officers appeared to reflect on this level of despair while expressing their view on alcohol abuse:

I asked if they knew of any other services available to those who are chronic abusers, and they were unsure of any in the area. They didn't think that would really solve the problem because they felt sure that many of them were not interested in quitting drinking and using drugs. I asked why they didn't take it indoors, and they said many are homeless, and those that aren't are out here to hide their problems or escape them. "Look at the houses around here . . . this place is a sh**hole; wouldn't you drink too?" (Foot beat #044)

Depending on officer style, and the grip of this cynicism (or at least frustration), officers would yearn for a different assignment, especially one that got them into cars. Since all of the officers were rookies, however, this might be a function of their newness; Kelling *et al.* (1981), for example, found during the Newark evaluation that younger officers were more likely to seek motor patrol positions. Perhaps ironically, the police organisation contributed to this yearning, because it offers clear and tangible rewards for legalistic policing, especially that which is directed to high level crime. As scholars of police culture have long pointed out (Reiner 1992), a conservative worldview, coupled with a crime fighting mission, helps fuel excitement for 'bandit catching' or 'getting good pinches'. Despite the contextualised community knowledge that is gained from foot patrol work, officers tended to be lured by the prospect of 'real police work' and vehicle patrols, which young officers are more likely to see as 'an exciting, action-oriented assignment' (Kelling *et al.* 1981, p. 108).

The lure of 'real police work'

It was not simply the fixed boundaries of the foot patrol experiment that constrained officers' territorial practices. Officers felt equally constrained by having no access to cars. Underlying this concern was a fundamental view of what constituted real police work. For some officers, but not all, foot patrol falls short of a true police mission. Reiner (1992) characterised police culture as involving a thirst for excitement in catching bandits. For some, being on foot got in the way of getting good 'pinches':

They [the officers] were happy to hear that they would be off foot beats soon, and were extremely excited for new experiences. "I'm excited to be doing, you know, like real police work: going to jobs, making good pinches, in a car. That's what I see as real police work." (Foot beat #041)

This lack of excitement was also expressed by officers as a sense of boredom:

They [the officers] expressed that they were really sick of working foot beats, and that they were extremely bored: "They're [foot beats] boring as hell." I asked what they would rather be doing . . . and they stated that they wanted to be put into regular patrol squads and patrol in cars. They were looking to be involved in action, and believed that,

for the most part, foot patrol did not offer the kind of excitement they could experience in a car. (Foot beat #011)

Culture, however, does not stand on its own; it is reinforced at an organisational level through reward structures, and in particular, pressures to 'generate activity'. Established police performance measurement systems tend to privilege legalistic, as opposed to more informal actions that are usually emphasised as part of foot patrol work. During the Newark experiment (Kelling *et al.* 1981), for example, foot patrol officers received significantly fewer commendations than officers performing vehicle patrols. Even if officers wanted to resolve matters informally, or avoid criminalisation, they were cognizant of a tension between community-oriented foot patrol and 'the numbers game' (Skolnick and Fyfe 1993, p. 125).

They [the officers] did express a concern with their ability to be community oriented while balancing the enforcement activity numbers that their Captain looks for. They felt bad about writing parking summonses to residents, but stated that if they didn't, it would look like they were doing nothing. I asked if they were gauged at all by their interactions with the community or if the Captain or any supervisor had taken notice to the community relations they had, and they stated that nobody has and probably nobody will ever know. Since their activity sheet doesn't include this, they felt the only way to get recognized was to write tickets, make arrests etc . . . Despite this, they tried to balance both, and they both thought that the two aspects were equally important. (Foot beat #055)

The above observation demonstrates that officers are not passive recipients of culture; rather they are reflective about the 'value pluralism' (Thacher 2001, p. 388) guiding their decisions (balancing fairness, justice, and due process) as well as the instrumental imperatives (fighting crime and reducing fear) that comes from headquarters. Ericson (1982, p. 28) reminds us, however, that 'patrol officers are more likely to concentrate on measureable areas of proactive enforcement . . . rather than on more abstract areas of reproducing order, if they are explicitly rewarded for doing so'.

Officers actively worked to negotiate the tension between what they feel they should do (balancing normative and instrumental concerns) and what they are rewarded for doing (instrumental outcomes that are captured quantitatively) by calibrating their peacekeeping and law enforcement roles in ways they deemed appropriate (i.e. making 'situated judgments' (Thacher 2001, p. 395)). Nonetheless, this tension can cause some anxiety for police:

One officer seemed to be very insecure. He complained that the other officers think that they aren't doing anything (in terms of making arrests). [The] officer continued that it's difficult to make arrests because there's not a lot of activity on their beat. [The] officer stated that they focus on maintaining a positive relationship with the community. He would find some residents for me to talk to. I mentioned that the purpose of my presence was not to conduct interviews of residents but to observe. [The] officer continued that he wanted me to see how the residents felt about their presence. Therefore, much of the time was spent seeking residents willing to talk to me about the police officers. (Foot beat #002)

The lure of 'real police work' was undoubtedly stronger for those who self-identified as 'pinchers', but not all police saw the need to be aggressive, even if doing

so could generate more (official) activity. Officers were reflective about their policing styles:

They [one officer pair] were very friendly, much less enforcement and much more community oriented. Though the officers agreed that when action was necessary, they would take it, they stressed that there is no need to be harsh on the residents of the neighbourhood because they are, for the most part, “good people.” They acknowledged that their counterparts they share a beat with [officers on a different shift] were very enforcement oriented, and that the two pairs of beat officers balanced each other out. They did express disagreement with their counterparts in the particular policing style, but conceded that they did not expressly know if theirs was better. (Foot beat #026)

There are clues to suggest that in efforts to expand their spatial control, officers went outside of their foot beat areas. In the minds of officers, the game of cat and mouse had no spatial boundaries, at least as far as criminals were concerned:

I asked the officer why they chose to patrol areas that were outside their boundaries. A number of answers were provided. The first answer was that the area they were assigned to was too small. Next, they stated that they would often check out several areas that were outside their assigned areas but they knew them to be high crime areas. Third, they thought staying in their area made it too predictable to people dealing drugs. Finally, they would go out of their area to follow people that they may have displaced from within their area. (Foot beat #112)

Out of a sense of cynicism surrounding the permanency of their effects – coupled with boredom and a lack of excitement – officers could have reduced the level of dosage (e.g. number of arrests, or number of informal interventions) and modified the boundaries of their territorial practices (e.g. spreading the treatment out to a wider area), a concept related to what Sherman (1990) refers to as crackdown decay ‘crackdown decay’ in this context. Perhaps ironically, the immense local knowledge they gained while on foot led them to believe that such adaptations were appropriate, and indeed necessary. Such local knowledge however, defies the logic of the experiment itself, which established rather artificial boundaries of spatial control, and held these boundaries constant, despite the ever-changing dynamics of human behaviour.

Implications

Our qualitative data reveal both the nuances and ironies of spatial control in a place-based foot patrol experiment. Bittner’s depiction of ‘skid row’ policing remains salient today, although there are some qualifications that relate to the experimental context of this current research. Officers develop extensive local knowledge of the tiny territories to which they are assigned, and as such, learn to perform the craft of policing in ways not possible for officers on motor patrol. Far from perceiving communities in monolithic terms as suggested by Kennedy (2011) and even Bittner (1967, p. 705), they saw humanity in its diversity, beat by beat. Bittner (1967) had observed that officers were ‘in fundamental agreement about the structure of “skid row” life’, adding that ‘skid row is perceived as the natural habitat of people who lack the capacities and commitments to live “normal” lives on a sustained basis’. In our contemporary context, we observed a more refined perception of beats and their

inhabitants. Human capacities and commitments varied, and officers revealed a keen understanding of this variation. There is no generic 'skid row' life, but rather a series of tiny urban segments with their distinct fabrics and textures.

Much like Bittner's (1967) 'skid row' police, the officers involved in our experiment did indeed get to know who belongs and who does not. Officers learned that community members valued efforts on the part of the police to 'clean up' their neighbourhood, including the regulation of 'outsiders'. Our observations suggest that officers acted paternalistically on behalf of the 'good' people in the neighbourhood, contending that these people were 'owed' a home and a neighbourhood that was safe, clean and free of disorder. And yet, despite positive community feedback on such efforts, police still developed a sense of cynicism, and in some cases, despair, over the structural conditions in their beat areas. It seems as though the more knowledge they gained about their communities, the less optimistic they felt about making a lasting difference.

The police appeared to believe that, at a minimum, they could achieve temporary effects. They did so through various legal and non-legal mechanisms for exercising territoriality in their beats. This finding points to the importance of Herbert's work, which helped extend Bittner's (1967, p. 175) depiction of policing by homing in on the fact that 'police officers seek to act territorially, to enact meaningful boundaries to restrict and control the flow of action across space'. Territoriality was of course central to Weber's writings on the state, but place-based policing zooms in on the micro-level dimensions of territoriality. A place-based foot patrol experiment is akin to an intense experiment in spatial control. How officers exercised this control varied considerably, depending on individual style. Each officer worked to resolve the tensions between reassurance policing and the real police work that is rewarded, even if implicitly, by the organisation. Indeed, the individual agency of officers is what, at base, shapes the quality of foot patrol work. Individual agency can, however, conflict with the rigid parameters of an (artificially designed) experiment, especially those parameters which delimit the spatial authority of police.

Listening to, and guiding treatment providers

Our data underscore the importance of listening to what line officers have to say about the realities of police work and the terms of an experimental intervention. With this knowledge, both the nature of the treatment and how it will be measured will be clearer from the outset. Line officers may have clear directives from management about the desired instrumental outcome of the intervention (reduction in violence or other crimes), but they know that other ends must be considered, and other means negotiated. Ways of incorporating the insights of line officers into the design of experiments at the outset might serve to better align managerial expectations with street level knowledge and experience. The question, however, is how precisely this can be achieved given that it is impossible in the world of policing to know exactly what the treatment will be in advance. Yet, Thacher (2001) provides some clues about how an experiment like the one described here could be designed to provide clearer guidance to officers on the treatment they are expected to deliver.

Drawing from previous work conducted by Kelling (1996), Thacher (2001, p. 402) suggests developing an approach whereby researchers work with police and citizens to discuss prototypical situations (vignettes) in order to establish guidelines for

action. In the case of foot patrol work, typical scenarios, involving acts of disorder for example, could be discussed in terms of the range of concerns confronting officers and the means available to address such concerns. Through careful deliberation, participants could agree on what means (or set of means) are suitable given the end goal in reducing violence in the city. Such scenarios would need to be developed with spatial boundaries in mind. For instance, a scenario may involve a drug deal that is taking place a block or two away from a foot beat area. In deciding what guidance to provide foot patrol officers in such a case, police leaders would need to determine whether other officers, not involved in the experiment (such as motor patrol), would respond to such a case so that foot patrol officers stay within the boundaries of the foot beat. Otherwise, foot patrol officers might feel compelled (on both normative and instrumental grounds) to expand their cat and mouse game and enforce drug laws outside of their areas. In discussing what a treatment would look like in such scenarios, 'it is possible', Thacher (2001, p. 402) writes, 'to clarify the considerations that the participants bring to bear on the use of police discretion – especially, which values they invoke and how context affects the way they apply them – and to subject those considerations to critical scrutiny'.

Through such scenarios, forms of practical reasoning of line officers, including the ones discussed in this paper, would become explicit, and police managers could learn whether their own views of the treatment align with those of their subordinates, and if they do not, explore ways of resolving such a tension. For instance, if foot patrol is meant to deliver soft treatments such as informal order maintenance and reassurance, then officers with legalistic policing styles may not be suitable to the task. As well, performance measures which capture the soft side of foot patrol work (e.g. making community contacts, playing with neighbourhood children, solving problems before they happen) would need to be developed as valid and reliable measures of the treatment. Conversely, if 'harder' treatments are desired, then officers need to know what kinds of pinches matter and why. In short, although police leaders and researchers cannot prescribe a treatment entirely, they can work directly with line officers to clarify appropriate forms of practical reasoning.

Given concerns raised over the possibility of 'backfire' (Weisburd *et al.* 2011) during hot spots policing programmes, such as biased or discriminatory enforcement, (Rosenbaum 2006, see also Kochel 2011) these issues seem especially important to address. Although local knowledge can provide guidance for developing tailored responses to community crime problems, it may also contribute to exclusionary policing practices. In using their discretion to focus enforcement or regulatory activities almost exclusively on those perceived to be outsiders, police run the risk of being perceived as discriminatory. Involving police officers in the design of foot beats could help identify situations in which exclusionary policing might occur, or be perceived as occurring, so that prospective remedies or tactical adjustments could be planned. At the same time, police supervisors and commanders could explore oversight mechanisms and reward structures, however modest or informal, that could help reinforce organisational expectations for both reflective thinking and effective action on the part of foot beat officers.

Assessing treatment side-effects

Although the public health analogy guiding criminological experiments may have limits, especially when it comes to prescribing and measuring treatment, it may also have unexplored potential when it comes to conceptualizing and measuring potential side-effects. Just as pharmaceutical scientists test for potential side-effects of drugs, social scientists could more fully explore the intended and unintended consequences of different policing styles and activities (see Burris *et al.* 2010). Both aggressive and community-oriented policing styles have a range of potential costs and benefits for crime reduction and community relations, as well as in terms of ameliorating (or not) the health risk environments of drug users, prostitutes and others caught up in the violence of cities (Burris *et al.* 2004). Expanding such knowledge of the social and health costs of an intervention would be of value to experimental researchers and their audience of practitioners and city-level policy-makers grappling with a plurality of values (Thacher 2001, p. 388).

Whether a legalistic foot patrol officer is more effective than a service-oriented one is a question we cannot properly answer at this point, but obviously different styles have different types of consequences. Being overly aggressive could alienate community members, exacerbate mistrust of police, and undermine flows of local knowledge to police. Furthermore, as public health researchers have shown, police could inadvertently make environments riskier for residents such as drug users who may be dissuaded from using syringe exchange programmes designed to reduce HIV transmission (Davis *et al.* 2005). Further, prostitutes can experience increased risks to their safety and health if police exercise spatial control in ways that move them out of environments with which they are familiar (Brisgone 2004, Weisburd *et al.* 2006).

At the same time, policing that is too soft may undermine the capacity of police to fully exercise territoriality. It may be that certain treatment styles work best in particular city spaces and at particular times over the course of an experiment. Similar to the form of scenario-based planning with line officers discussed above, police administrators could work with their research partners and other city policy-makers to identify which side-effects matter most in different spaces of the city and how they should be measured.

Conclusion

Foot patrol work is arguably the truest of all crafts. It involves the extensive accumulation of knowledge over time. One can only do good work by 'being there' and getting to know the relationship between people and the spaces in which they live, work and play. The need for place-based foot patrol experiments is widely supported, but getting into the black box of such experiments is a challenging process for police researchers and their practitioner partners. Our contemporary glance into the world of foot patrols in micro-spatial contexts reveals that this focused intervention may offer great promise for addressing the problem of inner-city violence. Our observations revealed that officers learned a great deal about the communities they were tasked with policing. This knowledge was used to devise responses tailored specifically to the expectations of community residents and the problems afflicting their beats. Indeed, the knowledge that they gleaned, and the

responses that they implemented, exceeded what would be possible with vehicle patrol.

We found that officers were reflective agents with varying styles. Officers were required to balance their law enforcement role with that of being community oriented. They had to manage in some cases very clear tensions between organisational expectations and reward systems and their perceptions of what was required tactically in particular time-space moments. Furthermore, the artificial boundaries imposed upon the officers due to experimental protocols was seen by many as restrictive. Since the officers worked in the real world, which is dynamic and ever-changing, the officers desired to expand and modify their boundaries to respond to the adaptive nature of human behaviour. Our results suggest that the experimental nature of the intervention, though the most rigorous of evaluation research designs, clashed with the common-sense wisdom of officers.

Since officers are reflective agents, we suggest that there are avenues for more fully considering the nuances of treatment and its effects in real world settings. It is vital to work with police across all ranks to better understand what the elements of foot patrol could look like from the outset and how such elements could be more clearly articulated and measured by police administrators. Scenario-based planning at the outset of an experiment provides one such avenue, but regardless of the specific approach, actively involving officers in the design phase is important to their long-term compliance and treatment fidelity. This is important to the scope and quality of our evaluations, the sustainability of police-academic collaboration and, most importantly, to the communities in these officers are tasked with serving.

We make a similar argument about treatment side-effects. While administrators may be clear about the overarching goal of an intervention, considerations of unintended harms should be explored at the research design phase. Seeing policing, and foot patrol in particular, as a treatment may have its limits in real world laboratories, but applying the public health analogy may bring new opportunities, especially if we are concerned with generating both instrumental *and* normative knowledge about what to do and why.

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Note

1. There were no funds to support observations in the control areas. Foot beat numbers have been changed as a measure to protect the identities of the officers.

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