

Underwriting the Risky Investment in Community Policing: What Social Science Should Be Doing to Evaluate Community Policing

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America appears to have committed itself to a profound shift in its core policing strategy, from "reform policing" to "community policing." This shift has been propelled by a powerful historical critique of the reform strategy: by an operational movement in police departments; and by political forces. Still unanswered is the question of whether community policing "works"; that is, is a more valuable organizational strategy than the reform strategy. Social science and evaluation research are turning to this question. Implicit in the approach of community policing is a belief that the values of social science should guide social decision making; that this is a specialized task for trained outside evaluators; that "crime" is the most critical performance dimension; and that programs rather than organizations are the proper units of analysis. The authors argue that this framework may hinder the full development of community-policing departments as "learning organizations"; that dimensions other than crime are also important in recognizing the value that police departments contribute to cities; and that the successful evaluation of the community-policing movement requires attention to organizations as well as programs. They suggest a modified social science research agenda.

With the passage of the 1994 crime bill and its elevation of community policing on the national agenda, it is fair to say that community policing has arrived, at least as a rhetorical and political commitment, if not as an operational reality.¹ Community policing is now a *bona fide* movement. Few municipalities searching for new chiefs fail to make a commitment to community policing a condition for hiring; few chiefs fail to swear allegiance to the new school; few cities troubled by poor police performance and poor police/community relations fail to look to community policing for remedy. Society has, apparently, paid its money and made its choice.

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¹ Whether the stated commitment to community policing is in fact matched by the bill's substance remains open to question. The administration's attachment to the *concept*, and its apparent belief in the *popularity*, of community policing is unaffected by the answer.

Betting on Community Policing

While not often acknowledged, this choice is a huge social bet. No one knows for sure whether the commitment to community policing will pay off in reduced victimization, or increased security. An important question is whether this bet is wise. As important, how can we organize ourselves to find out soon if we are on the right track? What roles should social science and the academy play in informing society of its choices on this major strategic decision? And do the differences between traditional policing and the emerging policing hold any implications for the assessment and evaluation tasks that typically form the core of the social science agenda on questions like these?

Critique of the "Reform Strategy" of Policing

The principal justifications for betting on community policing have emerged from a historical and operational critique of our current strategy of policing, not from clear demonstrations that the alternatives would work. Accounts, and critiques, of the operational philosophy that has dominated American policing for most of this century—now called the "reform strategy," or the "law enforcement strategy"—are by now familiar.

Police departments committed to the reform strategy of policing see their principal goal as reducing crime through professional law enforcement. They think of themselves as the first step in the criminal justice system. They concentrate their attention on "serious" crime, primarily to ensure the most effective use of scarce resources, but also to limit their intrusions into private life. For some of the same reasons, they operate reactively, waiting until after a crime has been committed or they have received a call for service before intruding into private life. To produce the arrests that attack serious crime, they rely primarily on three operational tactics: 1) patrol (usually random, but sometimes directed toward particular places and times where offenses are likely to occur), 2) rapid response to calls for service, and 3) retrospective investigation.

Politically, police departments jealously guard their independence from political influence and control, establishing their legitimacy in society's need for fair and impartial enforcement of the law rather than in responding to local community concerns. Administratively, they organize themselves in highly centralized bureaucracies with power concentrated in a commissioner or chief at headquarters. They rely on paramilitary management and administration, with a heavy emphasis on hierarchy and strict supervision. And they grant special units, such as detective, narcotics, and SWAT teams, higher status than patrol officers.

Despite overall coherence and commonsense validity, this strategy over the last ten to fifteen years has come to be viewed with increasing dissatisfaction by both practitioners and scholars. The focus on serious crime led the police to devalue the interests of neighborhoods and communities in controlling fear, disorder, "minor" crimes like prostitution, and other insults to the quality of community life—with negative consequences for community morale, satisfaction with the police, and security.² The linkage to the criminal justice system

² See Skogan, 1990.

meant that the police could only be as effective as the courts and prisons allowed them to be, which seemed less and less satisfactory as the capacity of many jurisdictions became increasingly overloaded. The emphasis on individual incidents made it difficult to get at underlying problems and forced a reactive rather than preventive posture. Experience and research alike revealed that rapid response failed to deliver on its crime control promise, and that motorized patrol generally failed either to deter crime or reassure the public.

Police departments' insistence on autonomy made them appear—and sometimes be—unaccountable and unresponsive; it also cut them off from potential allies and made them solely responsible for crime, fear, and safety problems they could not address alone. Centralized, paramilitary, command-and-control organization and management seemed to vest too much control at the top of departments, a long way away from communities' street-level concerns, and waste the creative potential of most police personnel. Policing's fascination with elite special units devalued the job of the patrol force, and with it the vast majority of the problems with which communities wanted help.

The Alternatives: Problem-solving and Community Policing

Two complementary approaches have emerged as alternative conceptions of better ways to police. One, *problem-solving policing*, enlists analysis and creativity in the service of addressing crime and other community concerns.³ Problem-solving policing refocuses police attention from individual incidents to larger patterns of incidents that become community problems, and from the simple question of whether an arrest is justified by a particular incident, to the more complex question of what might be causing the incidents, and how they could be prevented in the future. Problem-solving policing works to identify why things are going wrong and to respond with a wide variety of often untraditional approaches. The other, *community policing*, explicitly recognizes the importance of communities' concerns and priorities in setting police priorities and the necessity of community support and partnerships if real progress is to be made in reducing victimization and restoring security.⁴ Community policing increases police accountability to neighborhoods and communities, offers neighborhoods the kind of service and attention they desire, and crafts innovative working relationships.

In practice, the two approaches tend to become one: Problem solving, once begun, eventually forces police to attend to community concerns, and cultivate community allies, while community policing forces police to move beyond traditional tactics. *Community policing* has become the dominant label for the new policing, but most departments implementing community policing are in fact doing both, and we will use the term here as encompassing both approaches.

Empirical Evidence of Effectiveness and Feasibility

The theoretical appeal of community policing currently constitutes the principal reason that society should bet on making it the dominant future police strategy. The theory gains

³ See, for example, Goldstein, 1990.

⁴ See, for example, Sparrow, Moore, and Kennedy, 1990.

increased weight, however, from evidence showing that particular kinds of police programs associated with community policing reduce victimization or enhance community security and that problem-solving approaches can reduce specific crime and security problems.⁵ It is also clear that such programs are administratively feasible—that today's police departments can organize and sustain such activities, at least on some scale, and for some period of time. So, society's bet is not entirely ill founded.

Still, the potential of community policing is in no way conclusively established. This fact raises, in many quarters, quite sensible reservations. The historical critique alone is not sufficient reason to believe in community policing, and to make the kinds of investments in community policing that society is currently making. Nor, alone, are accounts of progress toward realizing community policing's new organizational forms, or of positive but isolated instances of success by community-policing-type programs against particular problems. The more commitment, inside and outside policing, to the new strategy, the more important it becomes to have evidence that community policing will *work* and will be more productive than reform policing or alternative approaches, such as strategic policing or investing in courts and prisons.

Hedging the Bets: Learning from Experience

Evaluating the assumptions and operational success of the new philosophy of policing is a natural role for research-funding agencies and the academy, and is one that social scientists are eager to claim as their own. The results of their research and their informed opinions will be important to policing and to the judgments that the less expert in society make about policing. It is important, then, to think hard about this process. What are the right questions for society to be asking? How possible will it be to answer them? What studies or experiments should funding sources be commissioning? What issues should academics and social scientists try to address? Finally, given the common aspirations for improving conditions in the larger society, the profession of policing, and the state of knowledge, what is the right relationship among funding sources, social scientists, and the police profession?

This bundle of questions is important and unexpectedly challenging. In our view, the correct answer forces us to rethink some of our conventional ideas about how society should strike the balance between its desire to act only on the basis of confident knowledge (thereby avoiding errors of commission), and its desire to make progress and to experiment in areas where answers are unclear (thereby reducing errors of omission). It also forces us to rethink our ideas about what sorts of things can and should be the focus of empirical investigation. It also forces us to rethink conventional ideas about the relationship between academics and social scientists on one hand and practicing police professionals on the other.

⁵ For current evidence on the effectiveness of community policing, see Moore, 1994. For an account of several paradigmatic problem-solving operations, see Eck and Spelman, 1987.

The Social Research and Development Model

The dominant frame for academic thinking on these questions is what one of the authors has elsewhere called the "social research and development" model.⁶ This model attempts to place at the service of society the social scientists' strength, and a range of sophisticated methodologies, in identifying and ranking public problems; identifying their causes; devising and testing interventions; and disseminating protocols or ideal forms for proven interventions. The appeal of this model is obvious. In a world in which policy is often driven by aspiration, optimism, and fashion rather than by hardheaded analysis—and perhaps nowhere is this more true than in crime control policy—the social research and development model aspires to inform and discipline policy with hard facts and clear analysis. The riskier the bet society is contemplating, and the graver the stakes both for society and individuals, the stronger the claim that social science should set high standards for contemplated policies. And the more policy seems to be pulled along by faddish enthusiasm, the more appropriate that, in Lawrence Sherman's words, social science should provide protection against "self-delusion about success."⁷

A core feature of this model is the pride of place given to the *scientific testing of interventions* as the most important predicate for designing policy and taking action.⁸ The strong version of this claim is that only the best experimental or evaluative methodologies, applied by outside specialists, are adequate tests for the effectiveness of operational approaches, and that only those operational approaches that pass the tests should be widely adopted. In, again, Lawrence Sherman's words,

Business has a bottom line, but it also has the independent audit. Surgery has the patient's recovery, but it also has the second opinion. Academics write books, but they also must undergo book reviews. Each of these systems is a set of rules for evaluating the results of professional work. The rules may vary in fairness or accuracy of the assessments they produce, but they all insure that the results are judged by someone independent of who did the work. Anything else is a conflict of interest.⁹

Progress in policing, according to this framework, should proceed slowly and carefully, brick by tested brick, as promising operational interventions are subjected to rigorous outside evaluation and gradually accrue into new and more effective strategies. Ideas about new strategies, particularly large and risky new strategies, should be subjected to early

⁶ For a fuller account of this model, see Moore, forthcoming.

⁷ Sherman, 1991:693. This article is one of the best statements of the thesis that strict social science standards should be applied to the new strategies of policing and an excellent example of the passions the subject can arouse.

⁸ This is, it should be noted, not the same as carrying out basic scientific research, which is considerably further removed from practical and policy application.

⁹ Sherman, 1991:693. Sherman himself is not always so demanding; later in this same article, at p. 706, he offers an interesting set of "sliding scales" for deciding when *outside social scientists*, as opposed to *social science principles*, should govern the evaluation of interventions.

testing by the best social science methods. By implication, since social science does not now play this role in policing on any large scale, social science, practiced by outsiders, should gradually come to be a considerably more central and influential part of policing than is currently the case.

This is an attractive vision. Something very much like the social research and development model has indeed been a powerful element in the recent burst of soul-searching and innovation in policing. Sophisticated social science applied to patrol, rapid response, and the detective function helped shake the profession's faith in the effectiveness of its core tactics, and set academics on the path for alternatives.¹⁰ Rigorous experimental methodologies have tested model interventions against serious problems such as domestic violence; insightful qualitative analysis has shed important light on new strategies such as problem-solving policing.¹¹ Both the academy and the profession owe a great deal to the kind of structured, incremental contributions prized by adherents to the social research and development model. It is surely not obviously unreasonable to suggest that social science, and particularly rigorous outside evaluation, should play a more powerful and determinative role in the development of the new policing.

Limitations of Social Research and Development

Still, we are hardly the first to notice that there are some difficulties with at least the stereotyped version of the social research and development model. It is not unreasonable to suggest, for example, that the world simply does not work like this: that large social and institutional changes do not occur because of, and are rarely subordinate to, social science findings. The initiative often comes, instead, from some combination of political ferment and professional experimentation at the edges of current capabilities. The reform model of policing developed in response to powerful political and professional currents, and its strategy, was firmly fixed before rigorous analysis was ever brought to bear. It was justified by a series of reasonable, but untested and even unselfconscious, assumptions.¹² Social science insight and influence often pale beside such forces.

Nor are social science evaluations always as clear and dispositive as could be desired. Debate within policing about the credibility and import of George Kelling's classic Kansas City preventive patrol experiment is still heated. The apparently unambiguous, and widely influential, lessons of Lawrence Sherman's elegant Minneapolis test of mandatory arrest for domestic violence were confounded by his own replication of the experiment else-

where.¹³ Nor do conclusions about policy always flow seamlessly from even the best social science, even when its methods are put to work evaluating specific interventions. Sherman's domestic violence experiments are again instructive. The implications of his work are apparently clear: upper-class offenders should be arrested, since for them arrest reduces recidivism, while lower-class offenders should not, since for them arrest increases recidivism. But policy based on such principles can run afoul of notions of equity, of a desire to use sanctions to communicate a strong social stand against particular offenses, and of concerns about the civil liability of enforcement agencies. Such concerns have little to do with judgments about the *effectiveness* of the intervention on any particular dimension, and everything to do with what society does or should value. More or better evaluations will do little to resolve them.

It is also true that time is, at least occasionally, of the essence and that public policy cannot always wait for the fine but slow mill of social science to conclude its grinding. This is easy to accept when the urgency comes from some kind of crime or order problem: the beginning of a drug epidemic, for instance, or a newer offense like carjacking. In cases like this, the need to nip the problem in the bud, or the claim of public outrage and the need to demonstrate police responsiveness, can go far toward justifying a brisk, even if uncertain, response.

It is less easy to accept—it will indeed be unacceptable to many—that a “window of opportunity” forces us to act when the bet being made is a much larger one: a bet about the *profession* itself. Yet, it may well be that the current willingness of policing to entertain the prospect of major change is relatively fleeting. The field as a whole may not be as open to change as it is now for another generation. It may be that the best way to take advantage of this rare moment of ferment is to forge ahead of the accumulation of knowledge about what works, to maintain institutional momentum at the expense of precision and efficiency.¹⁴

Against the charge that precipitate action is inherently irresponsible, it is worth noting that the standards of the social research and development model are singularly strict ones, notably absent from, for instance, the private sector. There, the requirement that courses of action be justified by scientific proof—or the nearest possible equivalent—is replaced by the requirement that courses of action attract investment and perform well in the marketplace. Failure is *expected* in this realm and accepted as part of an ideology that supports ferment and experimentation as ultimately productive of better results than a more conservative, controlled, and rational process. Where public coin and public authority are being spent, where successful performance is less easily judged, and where none can escape the consequences of policy choices, a much different expectation applies. But if the range of possibilities locates unfettered entrepreneurship at one extreme and the social research and development model at the other, it is by no means clear that the proper standard for

¹³ See Sherman, 1992.

¹⁴ For more on this, see Moore, forthcoming.

guiding an important innovation like community policing lies in following the path marked only by the bricks that science has been able to put in place.¹⁵

None of these considerations alone, nor all of them together, amount to a telling critique of the social research and development model. The world may not proceed according to state-of-the-art scientific advice, but perhaps it should, and perhaps we should do all we can to move in that direction, in part by endorsing and following the social research and development model. Professional biases and public norms may not be responsive to evaluation research, but perhaps they should be, or at least more so than they are now. It may sometimes be necessary to leap before we look, but perhaps those occasions are rare, or could be made more rare through additional investment in social science. Perhaps the only reasonable criterion for large public experiments like community policing is the social research and development test of strict scientific evaluation.

But we think the issues raised above do weaken the claim of the social research and development model. We think other issues, discussed below, do it a great deal more harm. One set of issues has to do with the *possibility*, at least at the moment, of testing community policing according to the social research and development model. Another set has to do with the *appropriateness and desirability* of doing so, at least as usually proposed.

In our view, evaluations of community policing pose significant problems for conventional models of program evaluations. The first problem is that it is by no means clear what interventions should be tested. What is community policing?¹⁶ When can we say it is operating in a particular location? The second problem is that it is not obvious how the interventions should be evaluated. What would it mean for community policing to succeed? Given that the concept of community policing seeks to redefine the ends of policing as well as the means, and the new ends involve many long-term, intangible results such as restoring neighborhood morale, how can community policing be effectively evaluated? In short, social science is handicapped by difficulties in defining both independent and dependent variables. The difficulties are by no means insurmountable, but to evaluate community policing properly, some adjustments of the conventional model must be made.

Problems in Evaluation: Defining Community Policing

We think of community policing as an overall strategy or philosophy of policing rather than any particular program. This makes it both similar to and different from the reform strategy of policing.

¹⁵ One of the few places outside science itself that such strict standards can be found is the testing of new drugs for medical fitness. There, the possibility of serious harm, which may present itself only after some time; the possibility that ineffective treatments may supplant effective ones; and the strong demand for new and innovative treatments have led to high hurdles for acceptance. Interestingly, each of these concerns is weak or absent in policing. While bad policing policy can be very harmful, it will be so in a public and usually immediate way, and tends to be self-correcting. We have, for most crime and order problems, few clearly powerful and effective current approaches, making experimentation with new ones less irresponsible. There is, despite recent developments, weak demand for innovative approaches. Indeed, even new interventions that have been proven to be effective are not routinely taken up across the profession.

¹⁶ Emphasizing, again, that for our purposes *community policing* encompasses problem-solving policing.

Like the reform strategy of policing, the strategy of community policing can be captured in a few guiding precepts. Yet, what makes the few simple precepts for community policing different from those for the reform strategy is that they prescribe general themes and ideas rather than define specific tactics.¹⁷ In Herman Goldstein's words, the need that community policing responds to is for "a broad conceptual framework" that "helps the police build a strong, sensitive institution, with refined methods of operating, that can better transcend the crisis of the day, whether that crisis be labor-management strife, racial conflict, political protest, drugs, or some yet-to-be-identified social problem."¹⁸ As we have written elsewhere, the changes leading to a new policing are designed "to initiate the conditions under which the police *may continue to be adaptive and innovative*" (emphasis in original).¹⁹

Thus, in our conception, community policing cannot be captured simply by listing tactics, such as foot or bicycle patrol. It cannot be captured by listing operations, such as disrupting street drug markets or focusing on hot spots. It is best captured through an accounting of a core set of historically distinctive beliefs: in the problem-solving approach; in partnerships; in accountability and responsiveness; in prevention; and in the creative potential of line personnel. The goal is to create departments that routinely employ analysis and creativity, learn from experience, adapt to new problems and environments, and develop effective operational approaches.

This is in fundamental contrast to the reform model, which relied almost entirely on essentially static organizations delivering a few interventions that were believed to be both powerful and generally applicable. The reform strategy of policing was based on the *strategic innovation* of committing police departments to the goal of crime fighting through the *program innovations* of motorized patrol and rapid response (plus the existing model of detective investigation).²⁰ It is worth noting that the operational programs that formed the core of the reform strategy were very large programs, both in the sense that they consumed a substantial portion of departments' operational assets and capabilities and in the sense that they were believed to constitute an effective operational response to the largest, the most urgent, and the widest variety of the problems to which the police were expected to respond. It is also worth noting that the problems to which the police committed themselves to responding could be aggregated into one relatively homogeneous category: serious crime, or, somewhat more broadly, criminal law violations.

This singleness of purpose and operations goes a considerable way toward explaining the power of the cluster of evaluations that in the late 1970s called into question the efficacy

¹⁷ It is precisely this fact that leads to such frustration on the part of both police officers and evaluation methodologists, both of whom wish to know precisely how to go about their business. To this we would reply that we do not believe that this abstraction makes it impossible either to specify or to measure community policing, points we have addressed elsewhere (see Sparrow, Moore, and Kennedy, 1990) and will develop further in the body of this article.

¹⁸ Goldstein, 1990:xiii.

¹⁹ Sparrow, Moore, and Kennedy, 1990:201.

²⁰ For a discussion of types of innovation in policing, see Sparrow, Moore, and Kennedy, 1990:198-201.

of patrol, rapid response, and investigations. The results of the Kansas City experiments could reasonably be, and *were*, construed as meaningful to the entire profession. Patrol activity, responses to calls for service, and investigations were, for all practical purposes, the primary activities of police departments. The range of variation within and among departments was so small that these tactics and the crime-fighting strategy were effectively one and the same. Inevitably, then, when the effectiveness of these core operational programs was called into question, the field became ripe for a strategic change.

The simplicity and generality of these programmatic activities may have led police departments to focus almost entirely on *routes* and *outputs* rather than *outcomes*. Police departments, in Herman Goldstein's famous phrase, had become like bus drivers that were so committed to keeping to their schedules that they had no time for picking up passengers.²¹ His historic contribution to policing is the insight that this focus on routines is neither desirable nor inevitable. It is possible to create thoughtful, purposeful police departments that seek results through a corresponding operational catholicism. It is even possible to imagine police departments that operate not with a Taylorist assembly-line framework, but as consistently innovative, continuously customizing job shops.²²

In many ways, this philosophy and its core operational and administrative elements are incompatible with traditional policing's structure, management, and tactics. Making patrol officers responsible for problem solving, for example, means granting them status and discretion not easily combined with a tradition of ordering street officers around by radio from headquarters. Developing a departmental capacity to respond in a comprehensive fashion to community concerns—be they drugs, guns, or fear in public housing—cannot easily be combined with a structure that allows specialist squads to respond to problems as they see them, independent of geographic commands. The creativity, flexibility, and initiative that community policing demands cannot easily be combined with the paramilitary hierarchy and often draconian management style that mark traditional departments. Because the points of conflict are many and severe, departments that commit themselves to community policing, therefore, are committing themselves to major change. The cost in money, energy, and—if the thrust toward community policing is mistaken—opportunity will be considerable.

The implications of these points for the proper evaluation of community policing are several. First, while the evaluation of community-policing-like programs, such as foot patrol, neighborhood police stations, or police-led community attacks on graffiti and littering, may give us a clue about the potential of community policing as an overall strategy of policing, they cannot firmly establish the value of adopting community policing as an overall philosophy of policing. The effects of the individual programs could be more or less than the effect of embracing community policing as a philosophy. Trying to evaluate an organization committed to the philosophy of community policing by observing the effectiveness of one kind of operation is like trying to evaluate General Electric by the effectiveness of its lightbulb division viewed at one moment of time. What is valuable about

²¹ Goldstein, 1979.

²² See Moore, Sparrow, and Spelman, forthcoming.

General Electric is its broader capacity to innovate and respond, not the value of any individual project. And so it may be with a community-policing organization.

Second, to gauge the value of a police department committed to the strategy of community policing, we may have to wait awhile, because it will take some time to build organizations that are capable of implementing the strategy. Indeed, for all the rhetoric about community policing, one cannot find a single organization that is now fully committed to this way of doing police business. If we want to learn more quickly about the value of community policing as an overall philosophy, we may have to force the pace a bit by stimulating the more rapid development of organizations committed to this philosophy.

Third, to produce police organizations that are committed to the philosophy of community policing, we have to experiment a great deal with administrative innovations as well as program innovations. We have to develop new methods of selecting, training, and supervising patrol officers. We have to develop new systems for responding to calls and dispatching patrol officers. We have to find new ways of consulting communities about problems that concern them, and of treating those problems institutionally as important new units of work. We have to find ways of authorizing, administratively recognizing, and effectively evaluating problem-solving initiatives of different sizes undertaken by the department.

In sum, the successful evaluation of community policing as an overall strategy of policing requires evaluators to change their unit of analysis. Rather than focusing on particular programs, they must look at the more generalized capacity of an organization to continue to develop new responses to changing demands and circumstances, and at the aggregate performance of those responses. They have to wait for such organizations to develop, or force the pace. They have to learn how to evaluate administrative as well as programmatic innovations.

Problems in Evaluation: Defining Success

Note that there is nothing about this vision of a new policing that necessarily implies a commitment to new ends for policing, an abandonment of traditional tactics, or the accountability and partnership outlook associated with community policing. It is entirely possible to imagine a "learning" police department that is solely interested in serious crime, predisposed toward enforcement and arrest, and has no truck with community partnerships.

Yet, in practice, the focus on responding to community concerns and actually achieving results that comes with problem solving tends to evolve over time into a corresponding focus on new ends and means (and vice versa). Indeed, the research and discussion surrounding the development of community policing has changed the frame of evaluation research regarding the *ends* of policing as well as regarding the kinds of operational programs and organizations we need to police our cities.

Implicit in the current call for assessing whether community policing "works" is whether it will control crime; crime then becomes our dependent variable. This is a very important question. It is not, however, the *only* important question.

Community policing has opened a new normative conversation. For the first time since the solidifying of the reform movement, the ends of policing are being actively debated. Community policing has expanded thinking about policing to include, at the very least,

combating fear and disorder as critical elements of the police function. It has also expanded police thinking about (or, sometimes, served to remind police and scholars about) the values of accountability, responsiveness, economy in the use of force and authority, freedom from corruption and abuse, adaptability, and the acceptability of police behavior to communities. All of these are now credible candidates as dependent variables in evaluating the larger community-policing experiment, since the achievement of any one of these could at least partially justify a shift to an overall strategy of community policing.

We recognize that not all will support the movement to extend policing's ends beyond crime control, or if beyond crime control then beyond attacking fear and disorder. Our own view is that the dimensions we nominate for use in evaluating police performance are not irrelevant to the evaluation of police agencies—any police agencies. Nor can they be understood merely as means to an end. In our view, these dimensions are crucial to assessing whether a community is blessed with high-performing, or cursed with poorly performing, police. If community policing does no better than reform policing to prevent violent victimization, but reduces other sorts of fear and prevents disorder in troubled communities, that would be a net gain in public value—not the only gain we would like, but a gain nonetheless. If it does no better at preventing crime but proceeds in a manner more responsive to communities, less alienating of minorities, and less productive of corruption and brutality, that too would be a net gain, both for society and for policing as an institution.

It is a profound mistake to conclude, as some have, that community policing is not about crime; there is no serious support for community policing, in the profession or in the academy, that is not support for more effective crime fighting. But it is also a mistake to conclude that community policing is *only* about crime. And, in many important quarters, particularly in minority communities, interest in these other dimensions is as or more compelling as is interest in crime fighting.²³

This creates a practical problem. We simply do not have the information systems at either the national or local level that would support comprehensive, routine measurement of the effectiveness of community-policing organizations in producing results on fear, disorder, corruption control, responsiveness, and the like. It is not difficult to imagine how to gather such information. One would have to rely on instruments such as community surveys; focus groups of police and public; after-action audits of problem-solving initiatives; increased police and prosecutorial attention to corruption, abuse of authority, and perjury; and the like.²⁴ But doing so, either intensively at the local level, or broadly at the national level, is a significant undertaking. It would be comparable in scale to the initial development of the uniform crime-reporting system, an effort that took a generation to complete.

A certain progression is likely here, with particular community-policing experiments gathering some data, individual departments designing instruments and systems for more routine local monitoring, and a national system, or systems, following.

²³ See, for example, "Report of the Independent Commission on the Los Angeles Police Department," July 9, 1991, Ch. 5.

²⁴ See, for example, Alpert and Moore, 1993.

It is important to recognize that the capacity of social scientists working alone without the aid of operational agencies is extremely limited. With the exception of special research projects of limited geographic and longitudinal scope, social science must rely, as it currently does for crime and victimization data, on the operating data of local police departments, and the statistics collected at the national level. Local departments and Washington will in practice establish the systems to collect the data relevant to routinely evaluating community policing only if community policing gains a wide foothold. The FBI's Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) and the Justice Department's victimization surveys followed (and helped to sustain) policing's general embrace of crime-fighting ideology. The UCR system depends on the voluntary expenditure of a considerable amount of local energy on the part of police departments; this is now routine and thus unremarkable, but it was not always so. The UCR system's establishment was controversial and for some time its data was of rather questionable quality.²⁵ The Justice Department's victimization effort is among the largest, if it is not the largest, and most expensive of continuing survey research endeavors, and was designed precisely to fill a need clearly defined by the nation's dominant law enforcement and public safety agenda; notably, the shortcomings of reported crime data, particularly underreporting from minority neighborhoods with high victimization rates.

The same will surely be true of information systems designed to support the new goals of community policing at local and national levels. The subject of performance measures and information-gathering methodologies appropriate to these goals is currently being vigorously debated in both professional and academic circles.²⁶ It will be some time before those issues are resolved, and longer still before systems covering the nation or even a large number of sites are functioning. The debate is occurring only because departments are forging ahead with community policing, and the systems will be deployed only if they continue to do so. The Justice Department's victimization survey's structure and methodology could be used to assess, for example, fear, perceptions of disorder, attitudes toward the police, and self-defense activities. At best, however, that will give a broad national picture, unsuitable, as it is now for victimization, for city-level, much less neighborhood-level, analysis. More local data must be supplied by routine departmental, or ad-hoc, project-based, data gathering. It will thus be some time before either national or local data are collected routinely.

It is, of course, possible for this information to be gathered by individual departments without national agreement on dimensions and protocols, or a national effort akin to the UCR; this is, in fact, already occurring. They will do so, however, *consequent to* departmental commitments to community policing. It is extremely unlikely that the academy will be able to win funding, or cooperation from departments, for independent research of the scope necessary to evaluate the effect of community policing on fear, corruption control, and other noncrime dimensions absent a wide commitment to the new strategy. For the most part, information will be gathered on the new dimensions, and

²⁵ See, for example, Kelling and Stewart, 1991.

²⁶ See Alpert and Moore, 1993.

support for special academic research will be forthcoming, because of departments' prior decisions to move into community policing. The conundrum remains: the broad, numerous, and replicated studies necessary to *evaluate* community policing on these important new dimensions are dependent on prior political commitment and administrative actions to *implement* community policing.

Toward an Evaluation Agenda for Community Policing

The emphasis on learning organizations holds important implications for the kinds of social science that would be most useful in helping society size up community policing and whatever the verdict, helping to chart a course toward improved policing. This foregoing analysis suggests that, to the extent that the social research and development model is valid for assessing community policing, it has to date framed the evaluation task incorrectly. The evaluation community has acted as if community policing (the independent variable) can be located in particular operational innovations, and the effect of community policing tested by assessing the crime-control effect of those innovations (the dependent variable). We believe that this is mistaken. We believe that community policing is located in *creative and responsive organizations* and that the proper dependent variable is *these organizations' production of innovative operations that are, in aggregate, effective* not only in controlling crime but also in preventing crime, reducing fear, and increasing community confidence in the police.

Adding weight to this formulation is the tendency for community-policing departments to act in practice as if particular operational interventions, even if powerful, are unlikely to be generally applicable elsewhere, at least without significant customization. A program that works against street drug markets in one neighborhood, or one city, is likely to do so because it was carefully designed in accord with the problems and opportunities those sites presented and either will not work or will need adapting elsewhere.

This obviously weakens the reach of a social research and development model focusing on evaluating operational interventions, since the evaluation findings will only be as generalizable as the intervention itself. Things get worse. Community policing believes that problems are heterogeneous and disaggregated, rather than homogeneous and few; it sees not "rape," as reform departments did, but stranger rape, rape among intimates, date rape, rape associated with bars, rape by repeat offenders, and more; potentially, all these problems are affected in operationally meaningful ways by community sentiments, assets, and conditions.²⁷ It therefore believes in stacking up many customized, and perhaps small, interventions in the hope of making a large overall impact. It seems in practice to "bundle" promising operational approaches into coordinated overall interventions. And it seems in practice to let interventions evolve through implementation based on lessons learned in the doing.²⁸

²⁷ For an account of the application of problem-solving policing to sexual assault in Madison, Wis., see Goldstein and Susmlich, 1982.

²⁸ For an example of an operation illustrating the last two points, see Kennedy, 1993.

The operational requirements for a high-quality community-policing department thus require both police officers and managers to focus on achieving substantive results. They also require broad searches for solutions, not only at the outset of an initiative but continuously as they learn about results and, perhaps, as field conditions change. This focuses considerable attention on outcomes and on the examination of their operations as they proceed. The community-policing framework, therefore, creates conditions that promote assessments.

Note, however, that this kind of assessment does not require, and may hinder, the kind of effort necessary to establish *with authority* that any effects that may occur can be attributed with certainty to the intervention. This weakens the value of these internal assessments, not only for motivating behavior and holding people accountable, but also, more fundamentally, for establishing the validity of interventions as general technologies suitable for exporting to other jurisdictions, and as contributions to the fund of scientific knowledge. This loss has to be weighed against the gain that comes from allowing people the room to adapt as they go along and to keep their focus on achieving results rather than maintaining the consistency of an experiment.

This may seem an outrageous claim, but consider that evaluation research can only assess the different levels of certainty that attach to claims about *what happened* in carefully designed and/or carefully analyzed interventions. There can be, unfortunately, a fundamental contradiction between what is likely to work and what is necessary to strong experimental designs and powerful statistical evaluations. The best experiments are carefully controlled, test only one or a few interventions, and are strict implementations of a structured initial design. Strong statistical evaluations are possible only when artificial or natural conditions approximate these same elements. It may be, however, and much of our experience with promising community-policing interventions suggests that what works may not in practice follow this outline. It may be that what works follows more of a learning-by-doing model: that successful interventions change in process, based on experience and additional information and ideas that emerge during implementation, and bring new operational elements to bear as the intervention proceeds. If this is so, it will be next to impossible for even the most laborious evaluation research to parse out what has actually happened. It is possible, of course, to draw a large-enough frame around the intervention to dissolve this difficulty, to consider the *process* of designing, implementing, and modifying the intervention the independent variable. But the test is then one of "community policing" or "problem-solving policing," not of a particular operational intervention.

All of these considerations make evaluation research of particular operational interventions both more difficult and of less potential return. The more interventions there are, the harder it becomes to evaluate them all. The more complicated they are, the more difficult to disentangle the contribution of particular elements. The more they change during implementation, the more difficult the study design and the less meaningful the results.

It is also true, however, that this picture vastly decreases the risk associated with not having powerful external evaluations. Because the reach of most interventions is intended to be limited and local, and because learning-through-doing is—in theory, at least—designed into the process, it is not so important if departments use relatively weak methodologies, or go astray at particular points in the learning process. This appears to be

a point where Lawrence Sherman went astray in his now-famous critique of the Gainesville convenience-store robbery-prevention project. Much of Sherman's outrage at the Gainesville Police Department's evaluation of its operation stems from his belief that it was a potentially "nationally influential conclusion about effective policing."²⁹ There seems little reason to believe, however, that either the department or Goldstein saw the operation in other than a local light. When such is the case, we can afford to foster enthusiasm, creativity, and organizational development with a tolerance for experimentation and an encouragement of internal evaluations. Much good will come of it, and little harm.

This formulation resolves, to a considerable extent, the tension between inside and outside evaluation expressed in Sherman's critique. It is essential, if police departments are to become learning organizations, that they cultivate an atmosphere that values and rewards innovation, tolerates failure, and fosters a strong commitment to assessing the results of operations. Individual departments have the responsibility to address conditions within their jurisdictions, and if the developing theory of community policing is correct, they will do so through the experimental and differentiated process we have described. It is clearly their job to evaluate their own efforts and to learn from those evaluations.³⁰

These evaluations, however, even if performed by outsiders, cannot accrue to a test of whether community policing as such works. That question can be answered only by examining whether more or less fully transformed departments do, in fact, learn and produce effective interventions, which are in aggregate effective against the range of problems departments routinely face. This is, obviously, still a crucial matter for society and the profession, and one to which the contribution of social science is of central importance. How, then, are we to best answer it?

First, we would encourage the academy to support the design of *performance measures and monitoring systems* appropriate to the new strategies. This can begin with local projects and experiments and with systems for routine local monitoring and expand to national systems and routine national monitoring. Both the profession and the academy need good information on fear, disorder, police misbehavior, community attitudes toward the police, and self-defense behavior. This information will be crucial to individual jurisdictions and to the profession as a whole regardless of the course of the larger national community-policing experiment.

Second, there should be a concerted effort, probably a partnership between the profession, the academy, and the federal government, to *accelerate the development of leading-edge departments into fully fledged community-policing departments*. We simply cannot test the strategy until we have a sample of advanced departments. That sample should encompass a range of cities with some variation in size and type. This endeavor would allow for earlier testing of the strategy, offer guidance to departments at earlier stages of development, and produce a range of operational innovations that could be subjected to careful external evaluation. It would permit, within certain irreducible limits, testing of community-policing departments against other departments pursuing traditional or other new strategies.

²⁹ Sherman, 1990:701.

³⁰ Sherman (1991:699-705) provides an admirable primer for thinking about how this might be done.

Third, evaluation specialists should address themselves to the *administrative innovations and processes of institutional change* that support and promote effective community policing. It is important to know how line officers can be given latitude to exercise discretion without opening the door to corruption; how to create more productive alternatives to the paramilitary style; how to combine rapid response with problem solving; how to implement these and other steps toward the new strategy; and how accurate is the profession's instincts about what works managerially and administratively. The sample of departments suggested above would provide rich research ground, but there is enough ferment in the field as it stands that this work can begin immediately.

Finally, we would encourage external program evaluations of particular operational interventions that are likely to hold promise for the entire profession. We suggest that such evaluations be applied to interventions that are potentially both *powerful* and *robust*—that is, effective against a range of concerns and in a range of circumstances. It was a feature of the reform model of policing that it concerned itself almost exclusively with tactics it believed to be powerful and robust. To date, to our minds at any rate, no new tactics with the reach once adduced to patrol, rapid response, and investigation have presented themselves. But some may, and others with less but still considerable reach will surely arise. Operational approaches of such general applicability should be examined by evaluation researchers.

If we do these things, we will in fact be well on our way to discovering what works, and we will be moving alongside a profession that not only shares that concern, but is busy creating a wide range of new experience from which all can learn. Whatever the eventual verdict on community policing, society, the profession, and social science will be the better.

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