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Place-Based Policing

By David Weisburd

Police practices are focused primarily on people and often begin when people call the police. They are focused on identifying offenders who commit crimes, and end with the arrests of those offenders and their processing through the criminal justice system. Police attention is also directed at times to broader community problems and "community caretaking" (Kahan and Meares 1998; Mastrofski 1999), and the police are expected to play a role in securing communities in emergencies and more recently in response to homeland security threats (Waddington and Neyroud 2007). But despite the broader mandate of the police, the core practices of policing assume that people, whether victims or offenders, are the key units of police work.

Police professionals might take exception to this portrait of policing. They will argue that police in recent years have begun to think not only about offenders and victims but also about the situations and places that are the context of crime. To bolster this argument, they might note that police agencies throughout the country have begun to focus in on crime hot spots and that crime mapping has become a central feature of cutting-edge law enforcement (Weisburd and Lum 2005). Moreover, they could argue that the location of crime is a key component of many recent police innovations, such as Compstat (Silverman 1999), hot spots policing (Sherman and Weisburd 1995; Weisburd and Braga 2006a), and problem-oriented policing (Eck 2003). In this sense, many forward-looking police agencies have begun to

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recognize that places as well as people need to be considered if police are to do something about crime and other related problems.

It is still the case, however, that catching criminals and processing them through the criminal justice system remains the predominant police crime prevention strategy, and this is true even, for example, when innovative approaches such as problem-oriented policing are employed (Braga and Weisburd 2006). Moreover, despite interest in crime mapping, information systems in policing continue to be centered on victims and offenders. Databases in American policing tell us little about the context of crime, despite the fact that police have begun to focus on such contexts as hot spots of crime. In turn, despite important strategic innovations in policing, like Compstat that demand that the police attend to problem places, policing today continues to be geographically organized into units such as police precincts or beats that have little to do with the crime places that recent research has identified as central to understanding crime.

In this essay, I am going to argue that police should put places rather than people at the center of police practices. My point is not simply that places should be considered in policing but that they should become a key component of the databases that police use; of the geographic organization of police activities; of the strategic approaches that police employ to combat crime and disorder; and in the definitions of the role of the police in urban settings. My essay will show that place-based policing, as opposed to person-based policing, is more efficient as a focus of police actions; provides a more stable target for police activities; has a stronger evidence base; and raises fewer ethical and legal problems. These benefits of place-based policing suggest that the police should shift their primary focus from the people involved in crimes to the contexts of criminal behavior. This is no longer a radical idea for police administrators who have fostered and developed innovations that are concerned with the context of crime (Bratton 1998; Bueermann 1999; Maple and Mitchell 1999). Police scholars in turn have pointed to the importance of places in crime causation and crime prevention for almost three decades (Eck and Weisburd 1995; Sherman, Gartin, and Buerger 1989; Sherman and Weisburd 1995; Spelman and Eck 1989a, 1989b; Weisburd 2004; Weisburd, Bushway, Lum, and Yang 2004). Place-based policing in this context represents an evolution in policing even if it demands a reconsideration of the key organizing units of police practice.

Recognizing that it is not enough to simply argue in favor of place-based policing, I will conclude by suggesting practical ways in which the police must change to effectively implement these practices. Of course, in advancing new approaches, the police in the field will adopt and innovate as they identify new problems and opportunities. My suggestions in this regard should be seen as ideas for implementing policies that can advance the policing industry. Police over the last two decades have shown a remarkable degree of interest in innovation to advance police practices (Skogan and Frydl 2004; Weisburd and Braga 2006b). Place-based policing represents a natural progression in this process.

What Is a Place?

Before we turn to the benefits of place-based policing, it is important to begin by defining what I mean by place. Place-based policing is not simply the application of police strategies to units of geography. Traditional policing in this sense can be seen as place-based, since police have routinely defined their units of operation in terms of large areas, such as police precincts and beats. In place-based policing, place refers to a very different level of geographic aggregation than has traditionally interested police executives and planners. Places in this context are very small micro units of analysis, such as buildings or addresses; block faces, or street segments; or clusters of addresses, block faces, or street segments (Eck and Weisburd 1995). When crime is concentrated at such places, they are commonly called hot spots.

Two illustrations of crime places are useful since they point to the different ways that place may be important in understanding crime and in police interventions. In the Minneapolis Hot Spots Experiment (1995), Lawrence Sherman and I identified street segments or street blocks for increased patrol presence (see Figure 1).

We used street blocks in part because they represented a unit of analysis that was easily identified by police and could provide a natural setting for police interventions. But we also recognized, as have other scholars, that such factors as the visual closeness of residents of a block; interrelated role obligations; acceptance of certain common norms and behavior; common, regularly recurring rhythms of activity; the physical boundaries of the street; and the historical evolution of the street segment make the street block a particularly useful unit for analysis for policing places (Hunter and Baumer 1982; Taylor, Gottfredson, and Brower 1984).

In the Jersey City Displacement and Diffusion Project (Weisburd, Wyckoff, Ready, Eck, Hinkle, and Gajewski 2004; Weisburd, Wyckoff, Ready, Eck, Hinkle, and Gajewski 2006), my colleagues and I also sought to identify a discrete place for police attention. But in this study we sought to examine specific types of criminal markets. Such markets often spread across street segments in a larger area of criminal activity. Figure 2 illustrates the boundaries of a prostitution market identified for intervention in Jersey City.

Included in this case is a group of city blocks but, importantly, this is still much smaller than the neighborhoods or police precincts that have often been the focus of police interventions and scientific study of crime. The displacement project and the Minneapolis experiment illustrate more generally the ways in which units

Figure 1: Place in the Minneapolis Hot Spots Experiment

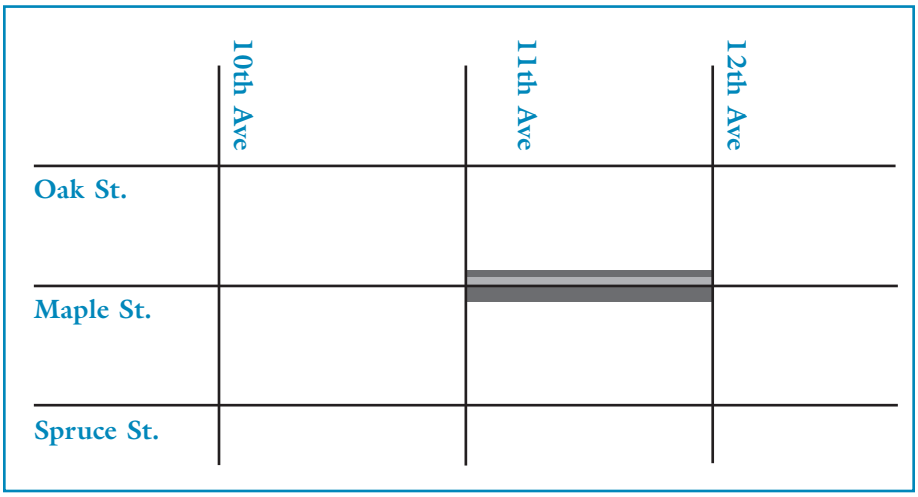
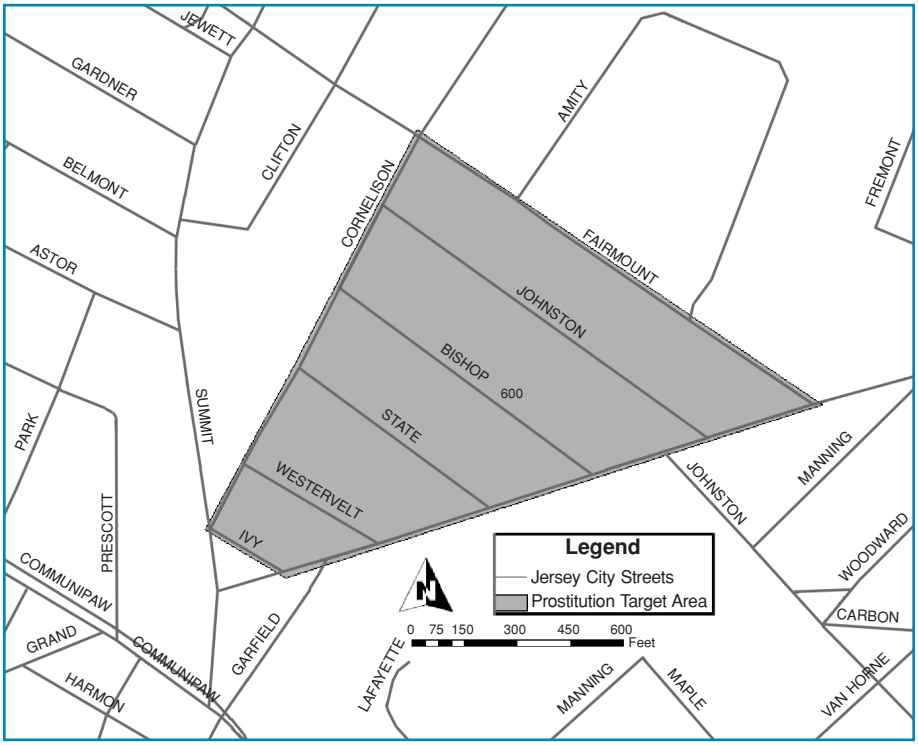


Figure 2: Place in the Jersey City Displacement and Diffusion Project



of place might differ depending on the interests of the police and the underlying structure of crime problems. This issue of defining units of analysis for place-based policing is one that certainly will demand more attention if police adopt this approach on a large scale (see also Weisburd, Bruinsma, and Bernasco, forthcoming).

What Is Place-Based Policing?

While my intention is to explain why policing places should become a central focus of modern policing, it is useful to define initially what is meant by place-based policing. At its core is a concern with focusing in on places where crimes are concentrated and it begins with an assumption that there is something about a place that leads to crimes occurring there. In this sense, place-based policing is theoretically based on "routine activities theory" (Cohen and Felson 1979; Felson 1994), which identifies crime as a matter of the convergence of suitable targets (e.g., victims), an absence of "capable guardians" (e.g., police), and the presence of motivated or potential offenders. Of course, this all must occur in the context of a place or situation, and accordingly place-based policing recognizes that there is something about specific places that leads to the convergence of these elements (Brantingham and Brantingham 1981, 1984).

The strategies of place-based policing can be as simple as hot spots patrol, as was the case in the Minneapolis Hot Spots Policing Experiment, where the police intervention involved placing more patrol resources at places where crime is concentrated (hot spots). But place-based policing can also take a much more complex approach to the amelioration of crime problems at places. In the Jersey City Drug Market Analysis Project (Weisburd and Green 1995), for example, a three-step program (including identifying and analyzing problems, developing tailored responses, and maintaining crime control gains) was used to reduce problems at drug hot spots. In the Jersey City Problem-Oriented Policing Project (Braga, Weisburd, Waring, Mazerolle, Spelman, and Gajewski 1999), a problem-oriented policing approach was taken in developing a specific strategy for each of the small areas defined as violent crime hot spots.

In place-based policing, "place managers" are often central figures in trying to do something about crime and crime-related problems (Eck 1994; Eck and Weisburd 1995). For example, the way in which bartenders and bouncers regulate behavior has been found to be strongly related to violence in drinking establishments (Homel and Clark 1995). Place managers, such as business owners or managers, bartenders, doormen, or simply people who live and work at places, can be an important resource for policing places (Scott 2005). A related approach to place-based policing involves the use of civil remedies to "persuade or coerce non-offending third parties to take responsibility and action to prevent or end criminal or nuisance behavior" (Mazerolle and Roehl 1998: 1). In such cases, the police might use nuisance and abatement statutes to induce landlords and property owners to aid the police in controlling crime at places.

The Advantages of Policing Places

Having defined what I mean by places and provided some initial examples of place-based policing strategies, I want to turn to why place-based policing makes sense as a central strategic and practical approach to policing. The basic and applied research evidence strongly supports a greater focus on places. As I detail below, place-based policing provides an approach that is likely to be more efficient than person-based policing in terms of the allocation of police resources. It also provides a focus for police interventions that is relatively stable across time and more easily targeted than offender-based crime prevention. Perhaps most importantly, as I will show, there is convincing experimental evidence for the effectiveness of place-based policing.

The Efficiency of Place-Based Policing

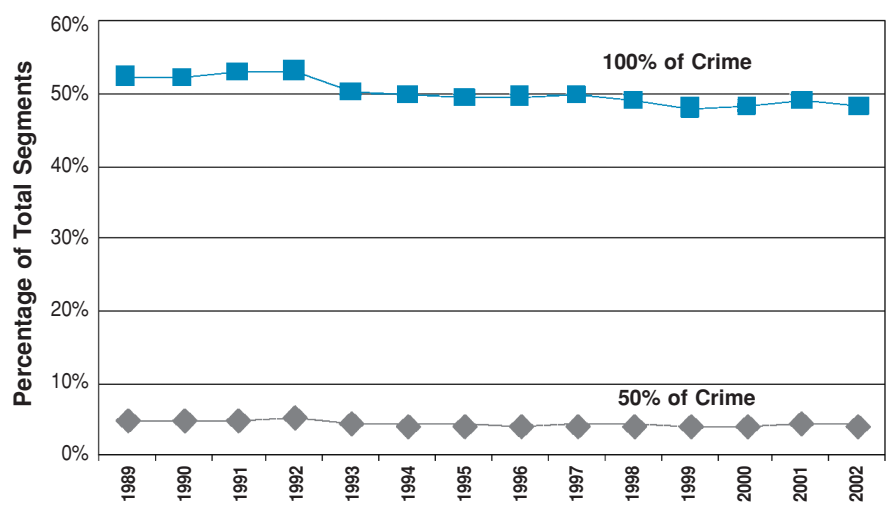
The efficiency of police strategies can be defined in a number of different ways, depending on the features of policing that one might want to maximize. I think it is reasonable to begin with a definition of police efficiency that suggests that strategies are more efficient to the extent that they offer police the same crime prevention value with a smaller number of targets. Such a definition implies that more efficient tactics are also more cost effective. Of course, this would be the case only if the strategies used are similar, irrespective of the targets identified, a point I will return to later. Efficiency is important in policing because police resources are limited.

To the extent that crime is concentrated among a small number of potential targets, the efficiency of policing can be maximized. In the case of places, basic research has pointed to a tremendous concentration of crime at place. The first major study to point this out was conducted by Lawrence Sherman in the late 1980s. Sherman examined crime calls to the police at addresses in Minneapolis and found that about 3.5 percent of the addresses in Minneapolis in one year produced about 50 percent of the crime calls (Sherman, Gartin, and Buerger 1989). More recently, my colleagues and I (Weisburd, Bushway, Lum, and Yang 2004) have shown not only that a similar level of crime concentration exists at street segments in Seattle, but also that the concentration of reported crime incidents at micro places is stable over a fourteen-year period (see Figure 3).

There are, in turn, a series of studies that suggest that significant concentration of crime at micro levels of geography exists, regardless of the specific unit of analysis defined (Brantingham and Brantingham 1999; Crow and Bull 1975; Pierce, Spaar, and Briggs 1988; Roncek 2000; Sherman et al. 1989; Weisburd and Green 1994; Weisburd, Maher, and Sherman 1992). This concentration seems to be even greater for specific types of crime. For example, my colleagues and I found that 86 street segments out of 29,849 account for one third of the total number of juvenile crime incidents in Seattle (Weisburd, Morris, and Groff, in progress).

It is important to note that such clustering of crime at small units of geography does not simply mask trends that are occurring at a larger geographic level, such as communities. Research has shown, for example, that in what are generally seen as good parts of town there are often streets with strong crime concentrations, and in what are often defined as bad neighborhoods, many places are relatively free of crime (Weisburd and Green 1994). The extent to which crime at micro units of place varies from street to street is illustrated in a recent study of hot spots of juvenile crime (Groff, Weisburd, and Morris, forthcoming). Using geographic statistics that identify spatial independence, Groff et al. show that street segments right next

Figure 3: Concentration of Crime Incidents Across 30,000 Street Segments in Seattle, Washington



Source: Weisburd, Bushway, Lum, and Yang 2004

to each other tend to have very different levels and patterns of crime over time.

Having said that crime is concentrated at place, it is important to note that crime is also concentrated among offenders, a fact pointed out in research by Wolfgang, Figlio, and Sellin (1972) more than thirty years ago. Is crime more concentrated at places than among offenders? We tried to make this comparison using crime incidents from Seattle over the 1989 to 2002 time period. Our results suggest that when using targets as a criterion, places are indeed a more efficient focus than offenders. Using this approach, we found that on average about 1,500 street segments accounted for 50 percent of the crime each year during this period. During the same period, 6,108 offenders were responsible for 50 percent of the crime each year. Simply stated, the police have to approach four times as many targets to identify the same level of overall crime when they focus on people as opposed to places.

The Stability of Place-Based Targets

The discussion so far ignores a major issue in assessing the overall efficiency of police strategies. Stability of police targets is an important consideration in developing police practices. If there is high instability of crime across time at a unit of analysis, then police strategies will be less efficient. For example, let us say that criminals vary in offending greatly over time with a very high peak in one time period and very low activity in subsequent periods. Investment of resources in incarceration of such offenders may have little real crime prevention benefit, though of course it may satisfy important considerations of just punishments for criminals. Similarly, if it is very hard to identify and track targets for crime prevention initiatives, the efficiency of strategies will also be challenged.

There is perhaps no more established fact in criminology than the variability and instability of offending across the life course. A primary factor in this variability is the fact that most offenders age out of crime, often at a relatively young age (Blumstein, Cohen, Roth, and Visher 1986; Wolfgang et al. 1987; Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990; Tracy and Kempf-Leonard 1996; Laub and Sampson 2003). But there is also evidence of strong instability in criminal behavior for most offenders even when short time periods are observed. This may be contrasted with developmental patterns of crime at place, which suggest much stability in crime incidents over time. In our Seattle study of crime trends at places (Weisburd et al. 2004), we found not only that about the same number of street segments were responsible for 50 percent of the crime each year, but also that the street segments that tended to evidence very low or very high activity at the beginning of the period of study in 1989 were similarly ranked at the end of the period in 2002. This is illustrated in Figure 4, where street segments are placed in crime trajectories using group-based trajectory analyses developed by Nagin and colleagues (Nagin 1999; Nagin and Tremblay 2001). While there are developmental trends in the data, what is most striking is the relative stability of crime at place over time.

This stability in turn suggests that place-based policing will not only be more efficient in terms of the number of targets but also in the application of police strategies to specific targets. Places, simply put, are not moving targets. A police strategy that is focused on very high crime rate hot spots is not likely to be focusing on places that will naturally become cool a year later. The stability of crime at place across time makes crime places a particularly salient focus for investment of police resources.

Places are not moving targets in another important sense in that, unlike offenders, they stay in one place. The American Housing Survey from the United States Census Bureau shows that Americans move once every seven years (American Housing Survey Branch 2005). It is reasonable to assume that offenders move even more often than this. Studies have often noted the difficulty of tracking offenders for survey research (Wolfgang et al. 1987; Laub and Sampson 2003), and it is a common experience of the

police to look for an offender and find that he or she no longer lives at the last known address. Place-based policing provides a target that stays in the same place. This is not an insignificant issue when considering the investment of police resources in crime prevention.

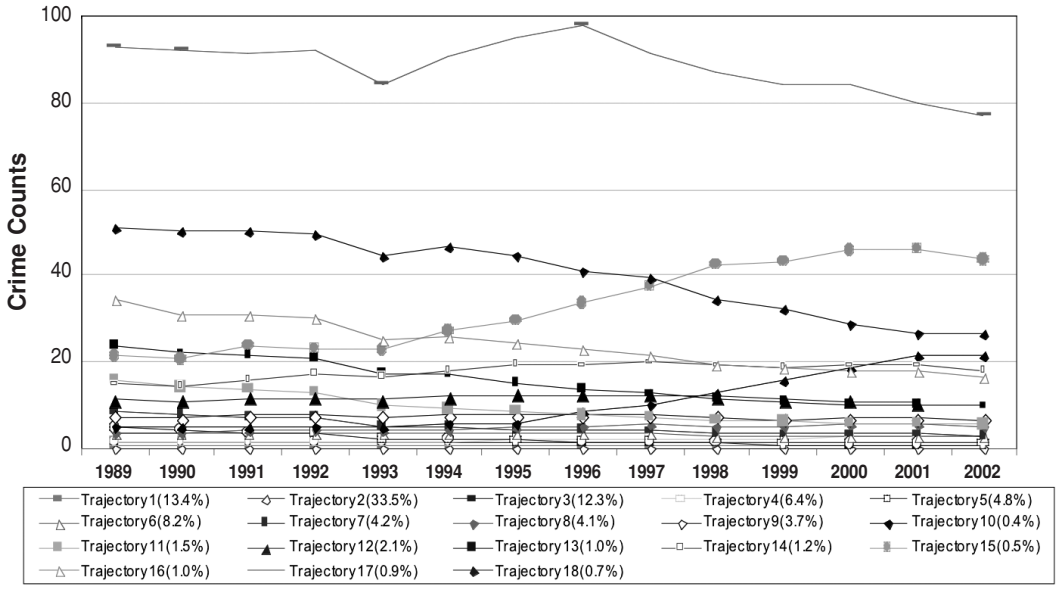
The Effectiveness of Place-Based Policing

Although tradition and experience often provide the only guidance for criminal justice practitioners, there is a growing consensus among scholars, practitioners, and policy makers that crime control practices and policies should be rooted as much as possible in scientific evidence about "what works" (Cullen and Gendreau 2000; MacKenzie 2000; Sherman 1998; Sherman, Farrington, Welsh, and MacKenzie 2002). This trend is perhaps most prominent in the health professions where the idea of "evidence-based medicine" has gained strong government and professional support (Millenson 1997; Zuger 1997), though the evidence-based paradigm is also developing in other fields, including crime and justice (see Farrington and Weisburd 2007; Nutley and Davies 1999; Davies, Nutley, and Smith 2000). Using evidence as a criterion, there is substantial support for place-based policing. Indeed, the National Research Council, in its careful review of police practices and polices, concluded that ". . . [S]tudies that focused police resources on crime hot spots provide the strongest collective evidence of police effectiveness that is now available" (Skogan and Frydl 2004: 250).

The National Research Council conclusions are based on a series of nine studies examining place-based policing over the previous decade (Braga 2001). Of these, five studies were randomized experiments, which are generally seen as representing the most reliable evidence of program effectiveness (Campbell and Boruch 1975; Shadish, Cook, and Campbell 2002; Weisburd 2003; Wilkinson and Task Force on Statistical Inference 1999). Five studies also looked at the problem of displacement of crime as a result of crime prevention efforts at specific places. One long-standing objection to focusing crime prevention geographically is that it will simply shift or displace crime to other places not receiving the same level of police attention (Reppetto 1976). Such spatial displacement represents a threat to the overall crime prevention value of place-based interventions, since there is little value in crime prevention at very small units of geography if crime will simply move around the corner.

Importantly, eight of the nine studies (and all of the studies using experimental methods) reviewed by Braga (2001) and the National Research Council panel showed statistically significant crime prevention

Figure 4: Trajectories of Crime for Street Segments in Seattle (1989–2002)



Source: Weisburd, Bushway, Lum, and Yang 2004

benefits for the place-based policing approach. None of the studies examining spatial displacement found evidence of significant displacement to other places. Indeed, four of five studies examining this problem found evidence of a "diffusion of crime control benefits" (Clarke and Weisburd 1994), meaning that areas close by the sites receiving the intervention actually showed crime prevention gains despite the fact that they were not the focus of police strategies.

Given the common assumption of spatial displacement, it is worthwhile to note a recent Police Foundation study that focused specifically on this question and that was referred to earlier when I discussed the definition of places (Weisburd et al. 2004; Weisburd et al. 2006). Unlike earlier studies, the Jersey City Displacement and Diffusion Project was not designed to assess the impacts of particular police interventions. Rather, it was singularly focused on examining to what extent there was immediate spatial displacement as a result of hot spots policing strategies. The findings in this study follow earlier results that were developed in the context of tests of program outcomes at targeted areas (described above). There was no evidence of immediate spatial displacement. There was, however, strong evidence of spatial diffusion of crime control benefits.

That study provided us with the advantage of qualitative data collection to understand why place-based policing has target impacts without the type of spatial displacement outcomes that are commonly assumed. We found that offenders did not perceive all places as having the same opportunities for crime. For example, easy access for clients was a critical criterion for drug dealers, as was the presence of relatively few residents who might call the police about prostitutes. The need for special characteristics of places to carry out criminal activity meant that crime could not simply displace to every place in a city. Indeed, the number of places evidencing such characteristics might be relatively small. In turn, spatial movement of offenders from crime sites often involved substantial effort and risk by offenders. As one drug dealer told us, ". . . [Y]ou really can't deal in areas you aren't living in, it ain't your turf. That's how people get themselves killed" (Weisburd et al. 2006: 578). Moreover, offenders, like non-offenders, come to feel comfortable with their home turf and the people that they encounter. As a prostitute explained, "In my area, I know the people. Up on 'the hill', I don't really know the people at that end of town" (Weisburd et al. 2006: 579).

Whatever the explanation for the lack of spatial displacement outcomes, these research results reinforce the evidence base for place-based policing. As reported by the National Research Council, place-based policing is supported by the strongest evidence that policing scholars have yet to develop for a crime prevention approach.

Legal and Ethical Concerns

Police often complain that their hands are tied in doing something about criminals. While the extent of legal constraints on policing are the source of much debate (Bittner 1967; Ohlin and Remington 1993; Skogan and Frydl 2004; Vollmer 1933; Wickersham Commission 1931; Wilson 1950), it is clear that place-based policing offers a target for police interventions that is less protected by traditional legal guarantees. The common law and our legal traditions have placed less concern over the rights of places than the rights of individuals. It is not that police can do what they like at places. Rather, the extent of constitutional and procedural guarantees has at times been relaxed where places are targeted.

When it is established that places are crime targets or deserve special protection, it becomes easier to legally justify enforcement in regard to individual offenders. For example, Dan Kahan and Tracey Meares (1998: 1172) note that law enforcement officials "needn't obtain a warrant or even have probable cause . . . to stop motorists at sobriety checkpoints or to search all individuals entering airports or government

buildings." This means that at certain places, where issues of public safety are a central concern, it is possible to justify policing activities that would be unacceptable if carried out against individuals in other places. Places where crime is concentrated are often seen to meet this criterion, as is the case in many cities that have designated drug market areas for special attention. Safe school zones are another example of the identification of places that allow special activities by the police, in this case because of the vulnerability of potential victims. The constitutional issues here are complex and do not simply justify intrusion in every case. Nonetheless, politicians, judges, and, indeed, ordinary citizens have an intuition that police should be allowed appropriate discretion to police certain places that exhibit specific problems, such as concentrated crime, when there is the support of residents.[1]

Place-based policing, accordingly, provides a target for police that may lead to fewer constraints in terms of the development of crime prevention strategies. But, importantly, it also suggests an approach to policing that may lead to less coercive and, in the long term, more humane crime prevention practices. To be successful in place-based policing, it is often necessary for police to expand their toolbox to take into account the fact that their targets are places and not people. The civil law rather than law enforcement is often the most successful method for interrupting crime at place (Mazerolle and Roehl 1998). As Cheh has observed (1991: 1329), "Police and prosecutors have embraced civil strategies not only because they expand the arsenal of weapons available to reach anti-social behavior, but also because officials believe that civil remedies offer speedy solutions that are unencumbered by the rigorous constitutional protections associated with criminal trials." Whatever the reason for the shift in tactics from ones that rely on the criminal law to ones that rely on civil or administrative law, the end result is crime prevention strategies that are less reliant on traditional law enforcement practices that often lead to the arrest and imprisonment of offenders.

Increasing Prevention while Decreasing Incarceration

Over the last two decades, we have begun to imprison Americans at higher and higher rates. Spending on prisons has increased at more than double the rate of spending on education and health care (Hughes 2006). The moral cost is that fully 2.3 million Americans everyday are in prisons or jails (Sabol, Couture, and Harrison 2007), institutions that are often dehumanizing and degrading. Policing places puts emphasis on reducing opportunities for crime at places, not on waiting for crimes to occur and then arresting offenders. Successful crime prevention programs at places need not lead to high numbers of arrests, especially if methods are developed that discourage offenders, for example through "third party policing" (Mazerolle and Ransley 2005). In this sense, place-based policing offers an approach to crime prevention that can increase public safety while decreasing the human and financial costs of imprisonment for Americans. If place-based policing was to become the central focus of police, rather than the arrest and apprehension of offenders, we would likely see at the same time a reduction of prison populations and an increase in the crime prevention effectiveness of the police.

What Must Be Done?

In my comments so far, I have tried to establish that place-based policing increases the efficiency of policing and focuses police resources on more stable targets; has a convincing evidence base regarding its effectiveness; and provides a focus for policing that can reduce legal barriers to police strategies and lessens the long-term social and moral consequences of person-based policing. But as I noted at the outset, many police practitioners would argue that policing already is concerned with places. What

[1] I am indebted to Tracey Meares for her insights on these issues.

must change to implement a broad program of place-based policing?

It is important to start out by recognizing that places have indeed always been a concern for the police. As Carolyn Block (1998) has noted in discussing interest in crime mapping among police, "Crime maps are nothing new. Pin maps have graced walls behind police chiefs' desks since pins were invented." Moreover, over the last decade, hot spots policing approaches have become a common staple of American policing. In a recent study, Cynthia Lum and I (2005) found that 62 percent of a sample of 125 departments with 100 or more sworn officers claimed to have adopted computerized crime mapping. Of these, 80 percent claimed to conduct hot spots analysis and two-thirds use hot spots policing as a patrol strategy. Compstat has also been adopted widely by larger American police agencies over the last decade (Weisburd, Mastrofski, McNally, and Greenspan 2001; Weisburd, Mastrofski, McNally, Greenspan, and Willis 2003). And though Compstat is an innovation that seeks to concentrate police efforts on specific goals and increase organizational control and accountability, it has encouraged geographic analysis of crime as one of its innovations.

But my position is more radical than simply advocating that police add a new strategy to the basket of police interventions. For place-based policing to succeed, police must change their unit of analysis for understanding and doing something about crime. As Lawrence Sherman has quipped, "Why aren't we thinking more about 'wheredunit' rather than 'whodunit'?" (Sherman 1995: 37). Policing today continues to place people at the center of police practices. This is reflected in how data are collected, as well as how the police are organized. Place-based policing demands a fundamental change in the structure of police efforts to do something about crime and other community problems.

For example, police data has developed historically out of a system that was focused on offenders and their characteristics. Indeed, the addition of a place-based identifier was not initially a source of much concern in incident, arrest, or police call databases. In the late 1980s, researchers who tried to analyze the locations of crime using police databases were often frustrated by an inability to identify where a crime occurred. There were often multiple names given to similar addresses, some based on the actual address and some on the names given to stores or other institutions at that address. Such name identifiers often included scores of possible permutations, and address identifiers often failed to identify whether the address was in the south, north, east, or west of cities with such designations. Over the last decade, police have become much better at identifying where the crime is located, in part because of significant advances in records management systems and in part because of advances in geographic information systems. But it is striking how police in most jurisdictions have failed to go very much beyond the simple identification of an address in their data systems.

In the case of arrest databases, it is common to collect data on age, gender, and often education and other demographic characteristics of offenders. But it is rare for such databases to tell us much about the nature of the places that are the context of police activities. A successful program of place-based policing would require that the police routinely capture rich data about places. We should know as much about the places that are hot spots of crime as we do about offenders who commit crimes. Such data should be regularly available to police when they decide to focus interventions on specific places. The failure to collect such data routinely, or to gain such data from other agencies, limits the ability of police to develop effective place-based policing strategies. Carolyn Block and Lynn Green (1994) have already suggested the importance of such databases in what they have called a GeoArchive.

The failures of traditional person-centered policing to develop data sources relevant

for place-based policing is also evidenced in the lack of interest of police executives in knowing where the police are. While technologies for tracking the whereabouts of police, often termed automated vehicle locator technologies, have been available for decades, not a single police agency in the country has used these technologies to try to understand the routine relationships between police patrol and crime. We need to know not only where crime is but also where the police are. This information would allow us to identify how police presence affects crime at place and to design more effective patrol strategies. The Police Foundation, with Elizabeth Groff, Greg Jones, and I, has just begun an innovative program in collaboration with the Dallas Police Department with this aim in mind. But it is in some sense indicative of the failure of police to take a place-based approach that this technology has only now begun to be applied to practical crime prevention.

The geographic organization of policing today also fails to recognize the importance of places in developing police strategies. By arranging police in large precincts and beats, the police have assumed that the common denominator of crime is found at large geographic levels. While it might be argued that precincts and beats are seldom fit for even larger geographic units such as communities, they are particularly ill fit for place-based policing. Perhaps police should consider dividing patrol according to micro places that have similar crime levels and developmental trends over time. Such a reorganization of police around places would focus strategic thinking and resources on solving common problems. The reorganization of police for place-based policing might also take other forms, but it is clear that today's precincts or beats do not take into account what we know today about the geographic distribution of crime and its concentration at relatively small crime places.

In policing places, there must also be a shift from arresting and prosecuting offenders to reducing the opportunities for crime at place. The idea that police were too focused on law enforcement is not a new one, and indeed was a central concern of Herman Goldstein when he introduced the idea of problem-oriented policing in 1979. Goldstein and others have for almost three decades tried to influence the police to be less focused on arrest and prosecution of individual offenders and more focused on solving crime problems. But these calls have at best been only partially heeded by the police, and there is much evidence that law enforcement and arrest of offenders remains the primary tool of policing even in innovative programs (Braga and Weisburd 2006). But why should we be surprised? In a police culture in which person-based policing is predominant, it is natural for police officers to continue to focus on offenders and their arrest.

Place-based policing provides an opportunity to finally shift this emphasis, because it places the crime place rather than the offender at the center of the crime prevention equation. It changes the central concern of police to improving places rather than simply processing offenders. Success in this context must be measured not in terms of how many arrests the police make but in terms of whether places become safer for the people who live, visit, or work in such places. As noted earlier, policing places requires the expansion of the toolbox of policing far beyond traditional law enforcement.

In this context, place-based policing requires that police be concerned not only about places, offenders, and victims but also about potential non-police guardians. If the goal of the police is to improve safety at places, then it is natural in policing places to be concerned with what Eck and others have termed "place managers" (Eck 1994; Eck and Wartell 1996). "Third party policing" (Mazerolle and Ransley 2005) is also a natural part of place-based policing. But, more generally, place-based policing brings the attention of the police to the full range of people and contexts that are part of the crime problem.

In advocating place-based policing, it is important to note that police should not abandon concern with people involved in crimes. Indeed, I am not suggesting that people should be ignored, but rather that they should be seen in the context of where crime occurs. Saying that people should not be at the center of the crime equation does not mean that they are not an integral part of that equation. The difference is in good part how the police should organize information and crime prevention efforts. Moreover, there may be some crimes that are better understood by focusing on people rather than places, and this should also be a central component of our understanding of place-based policing. Though there is as yet little solid scientific evidence that repeat offender or victim crime prevention programs are effective (Weisburd and Eck 2004), it is clear that very high-rate criminals or victims should be the subjects of special police attention.

Conclusion

My discussion has centered on the benefits of place-based policing. As I have illustrated, basic research suggests that the action of crime is at very small geographic units of analysis, such as street segments or small groups of street blocks. Such places also offer a stable target for police interventions, as contrasted with the constantly moving targets of criminal offenders. Evaluation research provides solid experimental evidence for the effectiveness of place-based policing and contradicts the assumption that such interventions will just move crime around the corner. Indeed, the evidence available suggests that such interventions are much more likely to lead to a diffusion of crime control benefits to areas nearby.

Research accordingly suggests that it is time for police to shift from person-based policing to place-based policing. While such a shift is largely an evolution in trends that have begun over the last few decades, it will nonetheless demand radical changes in data collection in policing, in the organization of police activities, and particularly in the overall world view of the police. It remains true today that police officers see the key work of policing as catching criminals. It is time to change that world view so that police understand that the key to crime prevention is in ameliorating crime at place.

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