

The Skills of Proactive Policing:

**Sarah J. McLean
Robert E. Worden
Danielle L. Reynolds
Caitlin Dole**

November 15, 2017



The John F. Finn Institute for Public Safety, Inc.

Trade-offs in Proactive Policing

- Social benefits: crime reduction effects of stops
 - Demonstrated through experimental, quasi-experimental, and non-experimental research
- Social costs: detrimental effects on police legitimacy
 - Effects of stops on individuals who are stopped
 - Effects on larger community?
- Police authority as scarce resource
 - To be used as sparingly as possible



Smarter Stops

- Refine Officers' Skills in Proactive Policing:
 - Detecting criminal or potentially criminal activity
 - Investigating suspicious activity
- Sharpen Strategic Focus and Maximize Benefits
- Reduce collateral consequences



Smart Stops Project

- Albany, NY
 - Population of 100,000
 - 20 square miles
 - High rates of crime
- Albany police: 340 sworn personnel
- Long-standing research partnership



Sample & Methods

Identifying Officers

- Sergeant nominations
- Working group member nominations
- Numeric criteria

Methods

- Face to face interviews
- Average 25 – 30 minutes



The Interviews

- How officers form suspicion
- How officers learn the skill set needed for proactive stops
- Motivations for making proactive stops
- Styles of engaging in proactive stops
- Views on the value of initiating stops
- The departmental context for our findings



Sample of Officers

	Population (N = 148)	Nominated by sergeants (N = 15)	Nominated by working group (N = 11)	Numerically identified (N = 15)	Interviewed (N = 31)
Male	90.5%	100%	100%	93.3%	96.8%
White	81.8%	80.0%	90.9%	100%	93.5%
Black	14.9%	13.3%	9.1%	0%	3.2%
Mean length of service	95.3 months	100.4 months	86.8 months	77.3 months	87.5 months
Proactivity level high	17.6%	26.7%	36.4%	40.0%	41.9%
Proactivity level medium	15.5%	20.0%	27.3%	40.0%	29.0%
Proactivity level low	20.9%	6.7%	18.2%	20.0%	19.4%
Proactivity level very low	45.9%	46.7%	18.2%	0%	9.7%
Arrest rate >= 10%	31.7%	60.0%	63.6%	53.3%	51.6%

Forming Suspicion

Indicators

- Behavior
 - The Suspicious
 - The Criminal
- Place
- Person
 - Specific individual – proactive & reactive
 - Type of individual



Learning the Skills of Proactive Policing

- Peers
 - Observe
 - Teach
- Experience
 - Learn by doing
 - Learn norms of an area
- Don't Learn it



Motivation Behind Stops

- Targeted
 - Guns and Drugs Off the Street
- General
 - Fishing to see what you get
 - Have to do something with down time
 - Public safety generally
 - Gather intelligence
 - Get to know the community
- Not Proactive



The Net

- Wide – the explorer
 - Opening line and let it play out
 - Fishing
 - Roll the Dice
- Narrow – the cabbie
 - Make the arrest and move on
 - Enforce the violation/crime you stopped for and any more is extra but not the goal



Value in Making Many Stops?

Yes, More is More

- Direct Benefit
 - Numbers game, playing the odds, bound to turn up something, get one even if by sheer luck
- Indirect Benefit
 - Experience is only way to hone skills and you need skills to turn a stop into a felony arrest

No, Less Could be More

- Quality not quantity



Local Climate of the Work

- Department Neutral on Proactive Policing
 - Silent on the issue
 - Freedom
- Department Discourages Proactive Policing
 - Implicitly
 - Financial incentive taken away
 - Programs promoted by command staff
 - Not pushing for more manpower
 - Aligned with politicians and community
- Natural Consequence of APD Age



Summary Findings

- Majority of officers look for similar cues to form suspicion
 - Depth of knowledge differs
 - Value in stability of assignments
 - Value of crime analysis/bulletins
- Variation in motivation for engaging in stops
- Variation in how officers conduct the stop
- Variation in how officers define a good officer and in value placed on high levels of proactive stops
- Skill-set that can be taught/refined



Implications

- Need to clarify what makes a skilled officer
- Determine comfort with proactive or more reactive approach to forming suspicion and threshold
- Departments consideration of styles of post-stop interactions
- Each decision carries inescapable trade offs and realities
 - Value outcomes other than arrest
 - Not all officers are suited to this work
 - Not all officers are suited to do this work in the same way



Next steps

- Look for differences among nominations types
- Connect interviewed officer to administrative data
- Phase II Review of arrests
 - More on motivations and skills
 - Understand how and why interactions unfold as they do



Acknowledgements

This research was supported by Award No. 2013-IJ-MU-0012, awarded by the National Institute of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice, to the John F. Finn Institute. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Justice or the Albany Police Department, whose cooperation we gratefully acknowledge.



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