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Science and Politics in Police Research: Reflections on Their Tangled Relationship

By
SAMUEL WALKER

Police research in the United States has been heavily influenced by external politics. This influence is agenda-setting rather than truth-suppressing. Agenda-setting influence occurs where external political influence causes researchers to undertake research on a subject or subjects they had previously neglected. The influence of politics on research has, in some very important respects, greatly enriched social science research on the police, forcing scholars to confront subjects and methodological issues they had previously neglected. The relationship between police research and the external political environment is extremely complex and is by no means simple or one-directional. There are also some important examples, notably, community policing, of where research findings have influenced the political agenda.

Keywords: police; research; politics; police reform

As a member of the committee that produced the report, reading the final version of *Fairness and Effectiveness in Policing: The Evidence* (Committee to Review Research 2003) and having a chance to see it whole proved to be a curious experience. I take considerable pride in having contributed to what will stand for some time as the definitive review of what we know about policing. I am also proud of the fact that the report elevates concern for fairness to a level coequal with effectiveness in policing. This is a significant and overdue shift in emphasis compared with previous reports that have attempted to provide a comprehensive picture of American policing (President's Commission 1967a, 1967b; National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals 1973).

Reading the report, however, brought a nagging sensation that something important is missing from it. I finally concluded that the missing element is the dynamic aspect of police research in the United States. Although chapter 2 pro-

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vides a comprehensive review of the nature and development of police research (Committee to Review Research 2003, 20-46), it now strikes me as missing an important aspect of how that research has developed over the years.¹ The driving force behind much police research has been the influence of external politics. The police stand at the center of several issues that touch raw nerves in American politics, most notably, race relations and the tangled relationship between race and crime, and public concern about these issues has greatly influenced police research.

Whether police research is more or less influenced in this regard than, for example, research on public education, family policy, or public welfare is an interesting question that merits examination. It is quite possible that research on all politically sensitive social issues such as crime, education, employment, and others is heavily influenced by the political environment. It is also possible that this is an inevitable feature of social science research and one that sets it apart from research in the natural sciences. These questions, however, go far beyond the scope of this article, which focuses on the nature of political influence on police research.

The relationship between police research and the external political environment is extremely complex and is by no means simple or one-directional. I will argue in this article that while external political factors have heavily influenced police research, it is also true that research findings have shaped the public discourse about policing and the direction of public policy. In addition, and perhaps more controversial, I will argue that the influence of politics on research has, in some very important respects, greatly enriched social science research on the police. I will develop my argument by positing four basic propositions and then illustrating them through discussions of a few selected episodes in the history of police research.

The observations in this article are in part a response to an unjustly neglected article by Lawrence W. Sherman (1974), which raised a number of important issues about the relationship between police research and police reform through the mid-1970s. Unfortunately, Sherman's article provoked no noticeable response, and the issues it raised have not been addressed in the intervening years. As a result, our understanding of the relationship between politics, research, and public policy is not as well developed as it might have been.

The idea that political influence could have a positive effect on police research, or any social science research for that matter, will undoubtedly strike many people as outrageous. The history of research in the entire criminal justice field is filled with stories of improper political influence. Completed studies have been suppressed by their sponsors (Martinson 1974), findings have been subtly or not-so-subtly designed to serve a political agenda or to make them politically palatable (National Institute of Justice 1983; Fyfe 1983), and studies where the researchers have deliberately avoided investigating certain issues or asking certain questions because the results would probably not please the sponsoring agency and/or the agency granting access to the data.² Indeed, self-censorship on the part of researchers may actually be a larger problem than overt censorship by public officials. A full-scale review of the various forms of improper political influence over

research in criminal justice research would be a valuable and overdue contribution to our understanding of the enterprise of research in this politically volatile field.³

The political influence that I discuss in this chapter is of a very different sort. My discussion involves *agenda-setting* influence rather than *truth-suppressing* influence. As the case studies discussed below illustrate, agenda-setting influence occurs where external political influence causes researchers to undertake research on a subject or subjects they had previously neglected, with the result that the agenda of research is significantly altered. Agenda-setting influence in no way distorts truth (although it undoubtedly shapes research in certain directions with undoubted political ramifications), but as I will argue, it has in fact often enriched the study of policing in the United States.

The Argument: Four Propositions

Police research in the United States involves a complex interplay between science and politics. To make sense of this complexity, I posit four general propositions.

Proposition 1: External political factors have had a major impact in shaping the agenda of police research. That is to say, many of the important research questions in policing that have preoccupied social scientists over the past half century have been, in the first instance, prompted by external political concerns.

This model of research is different from what might be considered the model of “normal science” as defined by Kuhn (1962) in his famous and enormously influential book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. In the normal-science model, scientific inquiry is driven by the internal logic of science itself; research raises unanswered questions that stimulate further inquiry. Kuhn (1962, 43-51) further argues that scientific research is guided by a dominant paradigm that defines problems and directs scientific inquiry. A scientific revolution occurs when the prevailing paradigm is replaced by an alternative paradigm that redefines problems and redirects scientific inquiry. In my interpretation of the development of police research, external influences have introduced new topics for research, but only one change in police research in the past sixty years—the American Bar Foundation (ABF) Survey of the 1950s (discussed below)—rises to the level of a genuine paradigm shift (Walker 1992).⁴

Proposition 2: Once a question or set of questions is introduced into police research—for example, the exercise of discretion by patrol officers, alleged racial or ethnic discrimination in traffic enforcement—the process of normal science begins to operate. Research findings raise unresolved issues that stimulate further scientific inquiry that may answer some questions but also generates new unresolved issues and additional inquiry. At this point in the process, the external

political factors, while still present as part of the environment in which research is conducted and disseminated, cease to be a motive force.

Proposition 3: The impact of external political influence on police research has often been extremely beneficial and has enriched it in important ways. External factors have forced researchers to confront important issues they had previously neglected and to wrestle with complex and methodological issues that often have broader application. The most recent and notable example of this impact is the current controversy over racial profiling, which I discuss in the next section.

Proposition 4: In several subtle but nonetheless important ways, police research has influenced the external political environment and played a significant role in shaping public policy. Much police research produces essentially negative findings, in the sense that certain ideas, assumptions, or policy recommendations are not supported by empirical evidence. (Indeed, many readers will be struck by the recurring refrain in *Fairness and Effectiveness* that the evidence on various points is “inconclusive.”) The external audience is often highly frustrated by this outcome. It much prefers what might be called positive findings, for example, a finding in the medical arena that a certain treatment has a significant impact in preventing or treating a major illness.⁵ As I will argue in detail later, a number of important studies, including the Kansas City Preventive Patrol Experiment (Kelling et al. 1974), undermined conventional assumptions about policing and as a consequence opened the way for creative new thinking about public policy.

Case Study 1: The Racial Profiling Controversy

The current controversy over racial profiling (Harris 2002) is a classic example of the extent to which external political factors have shaped the agenda of police research. This subject serves as a useful starting point for several reasons, even though it is out of chronological sequence with respect to other examples discussed here. The impact of external political factors in this example is both very clear and very strong. In this respect, the case provides a useful illustration of propositions 1, 2, and 3. In addition, the controversy is a matter of immediate concern and will be familiar to virtually all readers of this chapter. Subsequent case studies, on the other hand, involve events in the past with which not all readers will be as familiar. Finally, depending on how the response to the racial profiling controversy develops, it could eventually illustrate proposition 4 as well.

Racial profiling burst onto the national political and legal agenda around 1999, largely as a result of court cases in Maryland and New Jersey alleging systematic racial discrimination in traffic enforcement by state police officers (American Civil Liberties Union [ACLU] 1999). Law professor David Harris (1997) popularized (and possibly coined) the phrase “driving while black,” first in a law review article and then in a report published by the ACLU (1999). The phrase—graphic and

potent in its imagery—struck a nerve with the public, and with surprising speed, the issue of racial profiling became a national political issue.⁶

In part because of the key evidence introduced in the Maryland and New Jersey cases, civil rights activists made traffic-stop data collection their principal strategy for reforming the police and reducing racial discrimination in traffic enforcement (ACLU 1999). This choice of strategy involved rejecting other possible reform strategies, such as improved police training or administrative rule making (Police Executive Research Forum 2001, 49-114; Cohen, Lennon, and Wasserman 2000; Walker 2001a). The basic assumption underlying the data-collection strategy is that systematic data on traffic enforcement (including traffic stops, searches

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“driving while black.”*

of vehicles, and the various outcomes of arrest, citation, or warning) will reveal whether a pattern of illegal discrimination based on race or ethnicity exists. Legislative bills to require data collection by law enforcement agencies were introduced in Congress (U.S. House of Representatives 1999) and a number of states. State laws with varying data-collection requirements have been enacted in an estimated fourteen states.⁷ Meanwhile, beginning with the San Diego (CA) Police Department (2000), several hundred law enforcement agencies have undertaken voluntary traffic-stop data collection. Police chiefs undertook these voluntary efforts to be responsive to the minority communities in their jurisdictions (San Jose Police Department 1999; Walker 2001a).

The mandated and voluntary data-collection efforts have already produced a small flood of official traffic-stop data reports and promise to produce still more.⁸ The data-collection movement presented police researchers with some formidable challenges, both scientific and ethical.⁹ Some researchers have been directly involved in data collection and analysis efforts, including writing official reports (Missouri Attorney General 2002; San Diego Police Department 2002). Meanwhile, many other scholars have been asked to comment publicly on specific traffic-stop data reports or on the issue generally.

Traffic-stop data collection has forced police researchers to confront the basic question of what kind of data are sufficient to prove or disprove that a pattern of illegal racial or ethnic discrimination in enforcement exists. This question was not chosen by the research community but forced on them by the data-collection strat-

egy itself, namely, the civil rights activists' assumption that enforcement data will reveal patterns of discrimination. The debate among researchers quickly narrowed into a consideration of what data could serve as the proper benchmark (or denominator or base rate) against which traffic-stop data can be analyzed (Fridell 2004; General Accounting Office 2000; Home Office 2000; Police Executive Research Forum 2001, 115-44; Walker 2001a). There are also related questions involving exactly what data on traffic stops are necessary and, most important, whether data on individual officers are needed.

In the politically driven rush to collect traffic-stop data, few people paused to reflect on the nature of the data entered in the Maryland and New Jersey cases and on the implications of the methodology used. As developed by John Lamberth (2000), the research design in those cases involved direct observation of driving patterns on the highways in question and collection of data on the racial composition of both the total driving population and those drivers observed to be violating a traffic law. In both cases, the Lamberth-based data were sufficient to persuade the courts that patterns of racial discrimination did exist (Harris 1997, 1999, 2002). It is important to enter the qualification that the evidence was persuasive to courts and, apart from expert witnesses on the other side, not to peers in the scientific community. Without entering the controversy over "junk science" (Huber 1991), it is sufficient to say that courts might not accept as persuasive much of the data that have appeared in official traffic-stop data reports.

The official traffic-stop data reports, however, have used official census data on the resident population as the benchmark or denominator (Missouri Attorney General 2002; San Jose Police Department 1999, 2000). Scholars and other commentators, however, wasted little time pointing out that census data are not a proper benchmark for proving or disproving the existence of a pattern of race discrimination in traffic enforcement. Census data do not represent the at-risk driving population by race or ethnicity, in terms of either the overall driving population or the observed law violators (General Accounting Office 2000; Home Office 2000; Walker 2001a). Thus, while virtually every official report has found racial disparities in persons stopped, relative to the resident population, none has been able to make a persuasive case that a pattern of racial or ethnic discrimination exists. In fact, it is questionable whether such data would be persuasive to a court of law, much less a peer-reviewed journal.

The racial profiling controversy has enormously enriched police research in several ways. First, it has forced police researchers to study traffic enforcement, a subject they had virtually ignored for decades. The one major previous study of the subject was John Gardiner's (1969) book. The implications of this neglect of traffic enforcement were heightened by release of the Bureau of Justice Studies (Langan et al. 2001; Schmitt, Langan, and Durose 2002) study of police-citizen contacts (itself a product of the external political forces), which found that half (52 percent) of all citizen contacts with the police occur in traffic stops.

Second, the debate over the proper benchmark or denominator has been intellectually extremely rich. It spawned a flurry of special conferences and sessions at regular scholarly meetings including three at the Northwestern University's Cen-

ter for Public Safety, one at Harvard University Law School, regular sessions at the annual meetings of the American Society of Criminology, and most recently, a conference at Northeastern University that brought together most of the major researchers involved in the subject (Northeastern University forthcoming). The Police Executive Research Forum, in the process of developing two reports on the subject (Police Executive Research Forum 2001; Fridell 2004), has held several meetings bringing together academics and law enforcement officials. The International Association of Chiefs of Police held two national meetings and issued a formal policy statement (International Association of Chiefs of Police 2000).

Scholars and law enforcement agencies have wrestled with a number of alternatives to the basic census data on residential populations. In perhaps the first such effort, Harris (1999) attempted to develop estimates of licensed drivers by race. The San Jose Police Department (1999, 2000) offered an interpretation using a combination of official crime data by police district and police officer deployment patterns by district. Other efforts have sought to use traffic-accident data as a surrogate measure of the driving population by race. Walker (2001a, 2003) has proposed an internal benchmarking approach that compares officers with peer officers. In addition, the debate has prompted scholars to develop explicit theories that would explain racial profiling (Engel, Calnon, and Bernard 2002). A comprehensive discussion of alternative benchmarks is forthcoming from the Police Executive Research Forum (Fridell 2004).

In sum, the advent of the racial profiling controversy illustrates propositions 1, 2, and 3. It was forced on the research community by external political factors and has greatly enriched research on the police. Scholars have been forced to direct their attention to an important but neglected aspect of police-citizen interactions and have been forced to address difficult methodological issues related not just to the study of traffic enforcement but, far more important, to the larger issue of racial and ethnic discrimination.

While it is a bit premature to predict how events will unfold, the current research activity on racial profiling ultimately may illustrate proposition 4. It is entirely possible that the criticisms of census-population-based data-collection efforts may eventually convince policy makers that alternative approaches to addressing the problem of alleged racial profiling are appropriate.¹⁰

Case Study 2: The ABF Survey and the Creation of the Modern Paradigm

Sustained social science research on the police began with the ABF Study of the mid-1950s.¹¹ The operative word here is *sustained*. Westley's (1970) study of the police subculture in the Gary, Indiana, police department, which is generally recognized as the first academic study of the American police (Sherman 1974), was essentially stillborn. Although rich in provocative insights (even though one of the

most important findings rested on two interview questions involving thirteen and fifteen officers, respectively!) (Westley 1970, 113-14), it stimulated no immediate research and was rediscovered only in the 1960s as a consequence of the police-community relations crisis.¹² Research interest in policing began to develop largely as an outgrowth of research on juvenile delinquency, one of the major concerns of criminology in the 1950s, and the impact of police actions on juveniles. Westley's study, in fact, is one of the few major police studies that would fit the model of normal science as defined by Kuhn (1962). It originated out of an ongoing body of research, in this case the sociology of occupations, and sought to extend that field of inquiry to a previously neglected occupation.

The ABF Survey originated outside the academic community for reasons related to political and legal concerns (Walker 1992). Leaders in the legal community became convinced in the early 1950s that a "crisis" in the administration of criminal justice existed. In light of the great crime increase and police-community relations crisis that began in the 1960s, their notion of a crisis seems almost laughable today. Nonetheless, their real concern that something was wrong prompted them to act. With funding from the Ford Foundation, the ABF undertook field studies of criminal justice agencies in three Midwestern communities as a pilot project that would set the stage for a more comprehensive study. The field studies involved the collection of qualitative data through direct observation of officials at work in law enforcement, prosecution, and the courts. These field studies represented the first systematic study of routine police work.

The field observations stunned the members of the research team with respect to their richness and complexity and soon forced a complete revision of the project.¹³ Plans for further research were cancelled, and the pilot project became the final project. In a very Kuhnian (1962) sense, the observations shattered the paradigm of criminal justice under which they were working and prompted the development of a new one. A summer seminar with a number of scholars was organized to discuss and try to make sense of the observations (Walker 1992). This seminar led not just to a series of publications that were enormously influential on subsequent research (Goldstein 1977; LaFave 1965; Newman 1966) but to a new paradigm for criminal justice research.

With respect to the police, the new (and still prevailing) paradigm holds that the police are called upon to respond to a wide range of social problems, only some of which involve law enforcement in the strictest sense; that the police exercise very broad discretion in handling these matters; that this discretion is (or was at the time) almost entirely unguided; that the exercise of discretion reflects a variety of situational, personal, and bureaucratic influences, with arrest and prosecution being only one goal; and finally, that much police behavior is of questionable legality (Walker 1992).¹⁴

In part because of its association with the University of Wisconsin Law School, where that perspective had taken root, the ABF findings emerged within the framework of the "law-in-action" perspective. This perspective shaped not only the publications that emerged directly from the survey but also several other extremely important studies. These include Skolnick's (1965) classic study *Justice without*

Trial, arguably the second major study of the police after Westley (1970), and Reiss's initial explorations of the mobilization of law (Reiss 1971, x). (It is important to be sensitive to the contingency of historical events. There was nothing inevitable about how the ABF Survey developed. Under different influences, it could have taken a very different direction, with an unknowable impact on the development of police research.)

The paradigm that emerged from the ABF findings has guided the research that is summarized in *Fairness and Effectiveness in Policing* (Committee to Review Research 2003). Indeed, it is difficult to imagine the present field of police studies without ultimate reference to the ABF Survey. In this respect, the story of the ABF Survey illustrates propositions 1, 2, and 3. The survey, which was prompted by forces external to the research community, redefined the research agenda in policing (proposition 1). Once that occurred, the process of normal science took hold and much of the subsequent has been driven by the internal logic of scientific

Research interest in policing began to develop largely as an outgrowth of research on juvenile delinquency, one of the major concerns of criminology in the 1950s.

inquiry (proposition 2). All told, this process has enormously enriched research on the police, forcing scholars to address both substantive and methodological issues of major importance (proposition 3).

One intriguing question is why social scientists had ignored the police prior to the ABF Survey. Why was Westley's (1970) earlier study stillborn? Why did the process of normal science not take hold, despite the important questions his study identified and the obvious limitations of his methodology? To be sure, there was some nascent interest in policing as a consequence of research on juvenile delinquency during the 1950s, but this was largely an adjunct of the criminologists primary concerns about juveniles. These questions, however, are beyond the scope of this article and would require some review of and reflection on the sociology and political science professions and their respective priorities in the 1950s.¹⁵

Another profound impact of the survey was not on police research, broadly defined, but on the specific issue of the police role. This impact can be traced in the work of Herman Goldstein, who began his career in policing as one of the ABF Survey field researchers. Goldstein played a major role in disseminating the idea that the police role involves not narrowly focused crime fighting but a far broader

and more complex role as peacekeepers and problem solvers who are asked to respond to an infinite range of social problems (Goldstein 1977). He advanced this view in chapter 2 of the President's Crime Commission *Task Force Report: The Police* (President's Commission 1967b, 13-41) and the American Bar Association's *Standards for the Urban Police Function* (1980, 1-1.1) and then in his book *Policing a Free Society* (Goldstein 1977). The basic insight about the complexity of the police role moved from an exciting new finding in the late 1950s to the conventional wisdom a decade later. Goldstein pressed forward on the implications of this point, and his thinking ultimately led to the idea of problem-oriented policing, which along with community-oriented policing is the most important new idea in policing (Goldstein 1979, 1990).

The line of thinking that flows through Goldstein from the original ABF Survey to problem-oriented policing illustrates our proposition 4 regarding the impact of research on public policy. Evidence emerging from research called into question the prevailing assumptions about the role of a major social institution and set in motion thinking that eventually led to a reconceptualization of that role. This development, however, is only one part of the larger story involving the development of community policing that is discussed in the next section.

Case Study 3: The Origins of Community Policing and Problem-Oriented Policing

Our third case study, which illustrates proposition 4, involves the development of community policing (Greene 2000), which, along with its first cousin problem-oriented policing (Goldstein 1979), is arguably the most important development in policing in the past quarter century (Bayley 1994).

Often described by its advocates as representing a "new era" in policing, community policing rejects the professional model that dominated policing since the early 1900s (Kelling and Moore 1988). The community policing idea had its origins in a twofold crisis of legitimacy for the police. On one hand, there was a loss of public confidence in the ability of the police to control crime. At the same time, the police faced continuing problems with respect to racial and ethnic minority communities. Although there were only occasional civil disturbances after 1968, virtually every police department faced allegations of race discrimination, involving unjustified use of deadly force, excessive physical force, failure to provide adequate police services, and employment discrimination. The two prongs of the crisis of legitimacy coalesced in the politics of "law and order," with some Americans demanding more aggressive anticrime activities (and with fewer procedural restraints on police actions) and with others demanding greater restraints on the police to reduce discrimination and police misconduct (Walker 1998).

The crisis of legitimacy led to a major rethinking of the police role and took the form of what we know as community policing. For the purposes of this article, the

important point is that the specific content of community policing was heavily shaped by the accumulated research on policing. The influential research findings were both negative and positive in nature: negative in the sense of undermining basic assumptions at the core of the professional model of policing, and positive in the sense of pointing in new directions for police policy.

Three studies with negative findings were particularly influential in shaping thinking about the police. The Kansas City Preventive Patrol Experiment found that changes in the level of routine patrol had little impact on crime (Kelling et al. 1974). Studies also found that decreasing police response time produced no benefits in terms of either more arrests or greater citizen satisfaction (Kansas City Police Department 1977; Spelman and Brown 1981). Finally, the RAND study of criminal investigations found that traditional investigation activities were highly unproductive, that the most powerful determinate of solving crimes were factors associated with the crimes themselves (and independent of police effort), and that the prospects for increasing clearance rates were very dim (Greenwood, Petersilia, and Chaiken 1977). These studies had a devastating impact in undermining the basic assumptions surrounding the professional model of policing. Particularly important was the impact of the Kansas City patrol study in undermining assumptions about the role of routine patrol that had guided police thinking since the days of Robert Peel.

At the same time, the development of the community policing idea was influenced by certain intriguing findings from other studies. The most important of these findings involved the heavy influence of citizens over police work. Citizen requests for service through the 911 system were found to be a major determinant of routine police work (Reiss 1971). Citizen preferences were found to be an important factor in influencing arrest discretion (Black 1980). Eye witnesses identification, from either victims or observers, were the critical factors in solving crimes (Greenwood, Petersilia, and Chaiken 1977). Finally, and particularly intriguing, the Newark Foot Patrol Study (Police Foundation 1981) found that while increased foot patrol did not reduce crime, it did decrease citizen fear of crime and improve public perceptions of the police.

These findings coalesced into a more general insight that the police do not function as independent professionals who bring to bear their special skills on problems. Rather, the police are heavily dependent on citizens for the problems they face, how they respond to those problems, and the success of some of their most important functions. This insight eventually formed the core component of community policing: that to be successful, policing needs to be community oriented and that police departments need to develop the appropriate organizational and programmatic strategies to enhance their relations with communities and their residents. (Again, it is important to be sensitive to the contingency of historical events. The crisis of legitimacy that struck policing in the 1970s could have led in a very different intellectual and policy direction.)

The development of the community policing idea, in short, illustrates proposition 4. Insights from an established body of police research played an important role in shaping the development of public policy and, in this case, a complete reori-

entation of the role of a major social institution. To be sure, the demand for a redirection of policing was primarily a product of external political forces, but research findings played an important role in demolishing the assumptions of the traditional model of policing and developing an alternative model. This is no small accomplishment and one in which the police research community can legitimately take pride. When skeptics ask what useful purpose is served by the investment in social science research on the police, the case of community policing provides an eloquent reply.

Notes on Other Chapters in the History of Police Research

Space does not permit a full discussion of all of the relevant cases involving the interplay of external politics and police research. Nonetheless, several additional examples deserve brief discussion because they amplify aspects of our four propositions.

Race relations and the police

It almost goes without saying that the ongoing problem of relations between the police and racial or ethnic minority communities has been a major influence on police research. The police-community relations crisis of the 1960s had an enormous impact on police research at the time, defining issues for research and directly spawning innumerable studies. Indeed, this crisis led to the rediscovery and eventual publication of Westley's (1970) pioneering but neglected study of the police subculture. It is safe to say that the focus on fairness and legitimacy in the National Academy of Sciences report is a product of this influence. The racial profiling controversy and its impact on police research represents the latest chapter in this story. These events illustrate our proposition 1.

At the same time, in an illustration of proposition 4, it should be noted that the police research community has had some impact on public policy with respect to questioning the effectiveness of many and perhaps even most of the programs designed to improve police-community relations. As the police-community relations crisis of the 1960s unfolded, civil rights leaders and their political allies advanced three major reform proposals: employing more African American police officers, creating special police-community relations units, and establishing external civilian review boards (National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders 1968; Walker 1998).

As the *Fairness and Effectiveness* report makes clear, there is no strong support for any of these propositions. Most notably, there is no convincing evidence that increasing the number of racial or ethnic minority officers—in and of itself—improves police-community relations. (Improving police-community relations is a different goal than complying with equal employment opportunity laws).¹⁶ Nor is

there any research demonstrating the effectiveness of special police-community relations units (U.S. Department of Justice 1973). Nor have there been any studies even investigating whether external civilian review boards do a better job of either investigating citizen complaints or reducing officer misconduct (Walker 2001b).

In sum, the police research community has responded to external concerns about the crisis in police-community relations, and there is substantial research documenting the nature and depth of that crisis. Research has also played some role in not confirming the effectiveness of some of the most popular reform ideas.

The police and domestic violence

The case of research on police response to domestic violence is particularly complex. The impact of external political factors, in this case the women's movement, has been very strong. There was little interest in the issue prior to the 1970s. The first published study of police response to domestic violence was Raymond Parnas's (1967) article, which was based on the ABF field studies. Morton Bard's (1970) crisis-intervention experiment was one of the most highly publicized reforms of the late 1960s and early 1970s and reflected the 1960s popularity of reducing the formal role of the criminal justice system.

Research on police response to domestic violence took a dramatic new direction in the late 1970s and early 1980s, largely as a result of the women's movement. The women's movement not only defined domestic violence as a major social problem but also effected a 180 degree reversal in the thinking about the appropriate police response. The movement identified police failure to arrest as a major contributing factor to repeat violence. (The extent to which studies such as Black, 1980, contributed to this is not clear.) Litigation and advocacy soon led to the popularity of mandatory arrest, or arrest preferred, as the preferred policy goal (Loving 1980; Sherman 1992). These events established the context for the Minneapolis Domestic Violence Experiment designed to test the deterrent effect of arrest for domestic violence (Sherman and Berk 1984).

The saga of the Minneapolis experiment is well known. The study found a deterrent effect for arrest (Sherman and Berk 1984). The highly publicized findings are believed to have contributed to the spread of mandatory-arrest or arrest-preferred policies (Sherman and Cohn 1989). Replications of the Minneapolis experiment produced very mixed findings, however. For this and other reasons, many people in the domestic violence reform movement have serious questions about the wisdom of mandatory arrest or are now opposed to it completely (Sherman 1992, 124-53).

For our purposes, the domestic violence issue contains two important points. First, the impact of external politics in the form of the women's movement on both policy and research agenda seems quite strong. Second, the impact of research on policy is far more complex and particularly intriguing. The impact of the Minneapolis experiment sparked a serious debate among scholars about the wisdom of basing social policy on a single study. Some critics argued that this is a very unsound way to develop social policy and argued that scholars should exhibit greater humil-

ity with regard to the policy implications of their research (Lempert 1984, 1989; Meeker and Binder 1990; Sherman and Cohn 1989).

This case of the impact of research on policy is more complex. There is good reason to argue—consistent with our first proposition here—that the emergence of mandatory-arrest policies (and statutes) was a response to political forces that were at work before the Minneapolis experiment and would have continued to influence policy even if the experiment had never been conducted. The published study added a nice scientific gloss to a political agenda but was not itself a crucial factor in policy making. The doubts about the deterrent effect of arrest that have been raised by the later studies have not notably affected public policy. Arrest-preferred policies appear to have remained in place across the country. A possible interpretation is that the political audience that eagerly received the initial Minneapolis experiment findings has been disinterested in contrary findings.

Discussion

In his review of the relationship between police research and police reform, Sherman (1974) argued that there should be a fruitful partnership between the two domains. He was careful to emphasize that each domain has its own responsibilities the other should respect and that social science research would betray its mission if it were wholly subservient to the interests of practitioners. The best result, he argued, would be a process in which researchers would address issues raised by police practitioners and police practitioners would value and use the fruits of scientific research.

Looking back over the intervening quarter of a century since Sherman's article, during which there has been a veritable explosion of research on the police (as the *Fairness and Effectiveness* report makes clear), I would argue that in some complex and imperfect way, Sherman's model has been achieved. The essence of proposition 1 is that police researchers have responded to issues raised by the external environment. And as proposition 4 asserts, the external world has, in some important respects, responded to the findings of police research. What Sherman did not anticipate in his article, however, is the beneficial impact of politically driven research issues on the research enterprise that I have defined in terms of proposition 3.

One important distinction between Sherman's article and my analysis needs to be made. When he talked about "police reform," he referred to people who were directly active as police administrators and others with some close relationship with them. My analysis broadens the picture to take into account the much larger political environment, which includes both elected officials and, particularly important, political activists who help to shape the political agenda. I would argue that the police administrators that Sherman cites are as affected by major developments in the political realm as are police researchers.

What, then, is the larger meaning of the analysis contained in the four propositions offered here? I think several observations can be made.

The first observation is that external political influence in shaping the agenda of police research is not only pervasive but probably inevitable, given the salience of policing and the volatile relationship between crime and race in American society. The intriguing question is whether policing (and criminal justice generally) is a special case in this regard. As I suggested at the outset, it is entirely possible that research on all politically sensitive issues is similarly influenced. These issues include, most notably, public education, employment and income, social welfare programs, and health care. In this regard, we should probably accept the fact that social science research will probably proceed in a very different way than does research in the natural sciences. I could be wrong on this and readily concede that I

The women's movement not only defined domestic violence as a major social problem but also effected a 180 degree reversal in the thinking about the appropriate police response.

know little about the enterprise of natural science research. Several years ago, I read and enjoyed Richard Rhodes's (1986) prizewinning book *The Making of the Atomic Bomb*. One point that comes through most strongly in that book is the extent to which science has been mobilized to serve military ends. This is not to say that political considerations (war being politics by other means) shaped the agenda of research in physics, but it would be difficult to ignore the enormous influence of government funding in the sciences. A thorough review may find that perhaps the worlds of social science and natural science are not completely different with respect to agenda setting.

A second observation involves the different forms of politically driven agenda setting in police research. We should distinguish between two very different forms. The racial profiling controversy represents one form, where controversies in the streets or the courts thrust an issue onto the national political agenda and then onto the research agenda. A second form involves a conscious effort to promote certain policies by a presidential administration through the use of federal research funds. The Clinton administration (1993-2001), for example, made an enormous investment in police research as part of its effort to promote community policing. Other administrations, both past and current, use federal funds in a similar manner. Lyndon Johnson used both the Crime Commission and the Office of Law Enforce-

ment Assistance to further criminal justice programs consistent with the larger assumptions of liberal social policy (Walker 1998). Ronald Reagan pursued different criminal justice policies. These efforts represent the legitimate prerogative of government officials to shape the direction of social policies they were elected to implement. We might disagree with the policy orientations of the Reagan or Clinton administrations, but I do not think we can question their right in a democratic society to advance their policies.

A third observation, involving proposition 4, is that despite the heavy influence of external politics on the research agenda, the case of community policing seems to indicate that research can shape public policy. This is a matter of considerable significance, particularly for all those involved in producing *Fairness of Effectiveness in Policing: The Evidence*. The underlying assumption of the report, and of the National Academy of Sciences itself, is not only that scientific research should guide public policy but that it can do so. One of the common refrains among social scientists (and among many critics of higher education) is that published studies remain buried in obscure academic journals with no readership—much less impact—beyond professional peers. My discussion related to proposition 4 suggests that in certain circumstances, some of the best scientific research in policing has had some notable effect on the external world and on public policy.

Concluding Thoughts

The relationship between police research and the external political environment has been extremely complex. In this article, I have attempted to sketch the main themes. While the word *politics* generally has a negative connotation, one of my main arguments has been that with respect to agenda setting, political influence on police research has often been highly beneficial. At the same time, research findings have had an important influence on the external world and on public policy. This is no small achievement.

This article has raised a number of important questions that merit further inquiry. Particularly important is the question of whether the agenda of police research is more heavily influenced by external political considerations than is the research agenda in other politically sensitive fields such as public education or social welfare. The impact of government policies (and war in particular) on research in the natural sciences is another intriguing question. Finally, the entire relationship between research and public policy and the larger political environment merits a far more detailed discussion than has been possible here.

Notes

1. As a member of the committee, I have to accept my own responsibility for whatever I now find missing or inadequate in the final report.

2. The highly influential Harvard Executive Sessions on Policing, which played a major role in advancing the idea of community policing, managed to avoid almost any mention of police misuse of force, corruption,

or racism. This neglect finally prompted two participants to write an additional paper raising these issues (Williams and Murphy 1990). This author has always speculated that the omission was due to the fact that these topics were unpalatable to Attorney General Edwin Meese whose agency not only funded the project but actively participated in the sessions.

3. A related issue involves the actions by the current Bush administration in controlling the dissemination of research findings to advance specific policies. Some previously available reports have been removed from agency Web sites, while in other agencies, all research reports are now reviewed by politically appointed agency officials.

4. Even a study as important as the Kansas City Preventive Patrol Experiment (Kelling et al. 1974) would not qualify as effecting a paradigm shift, because the findings discredited prevailing assumptions about patrol but did not question its central role in policing.

5. Examples are listed by Sherman (1992, 55) in his discussion of controlled experiments on police response to domestic violence.

6. Harris (personal communication, 2003) recalls first hearing the phrase from a law client and possibly seeing it in an article by Henry Louis Gates in *The New Yorker* magazine. In any event, his journal article (Harris 1997) undoubtedly deserves credit for popularizing it among social scientists.

7. The most current data, including legislation and reports, are at <http://www.racialprofilinganalysis.neu.edu>.

8. There are now more reports than need be cited here. The most current source for these reports, together with other relevant materials, is the Web site maintained by Northeastern University: <http://www.racialprofilinganalysis.neu.edu>.

9. Space does not permit a full discussion of the ethical issues raised by data collection. In brief, however, the key issue is whether a social scientist should participate in a study where he or she believes the nature of the data cannot answer the question under investigation (e.g., the methods used in a study are not capable of determining whether a pattern of discrimination in traffic enforcement exists).

10. This author is not a disinterested party in this process, having published criticisms of the use of census data and advocated the internal benchmarking alternative (Walker 2001a, 2003).

11. The National Research Council report tends to underplay the influence of the American Bar Foundation (ABF) Survey and trace the beginnings of sustained research with the President's Commission (1967a, 1967b) in the mid-1960s.

12. To be sure, there were some studies, notably, the neglected and virtually forgotten Kephart (1957). But they do not represent the kind of sustained field of study that we associate with normal science (Kuhn 1962).

13. The original field reports and the commentaries on them by Frank Remington are fascinating to read. The original materials are available at the University of Wisconsin Law School Library.

14. With respect to the entire criminal justice system, the new paradigm may be summarized as follows: the administration of justice can be conceptualized as a system, involving a series of discretionary decisions, influenced by a variety of situational and organizational factors that only partly represent strict matters of law.

15. Donald Newman, who was only later brought in to write the book on plea bargaining based on the ABF field research, provided a telling anecdote. He wrote his sociology dissertation on plea bargaining at the University of Wisconsin. In later years, he recalled members of the sociology department, including some members of his committee, asking, "But is this Sociology?" Many sociologists now believe that the field ignored criminal justice in those years because of its association with police training and lacked sufficient theoretical rigor.

16. Similarly, there is no evidence to support early assumptions that female officers would be more effective than male officers because, as women, they would be less likely to use force and be more skilled at negotiating conflicts.

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