



Remember the People between the Dots

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Criminologists have documented that as young law enforcement officers progress through their careers, there is a tendency to develop cynical views toward the general public. **The public primarily calls the police when things have gone wrong and, therefore, officers are over-exposed to negative events and to bad citizen behavior. As a result, officers can often begin to lump all citizens together and view them all in a negative manner that reflects their experiences with those in the community prone to criminality, dishonesty and violence.**¹

Intelligence-led policing strategies may have also exacerbated this phenomenon as an unanticipated side effect of these policing strategies. Intelligence-led policing, sometimes referred to as “putting cops on dots,” emphasizes proactively deploying law enforcement officers to high crime locations at peak times for criminal offending. The aim of this strategy is deterring crime before it occurs. It is indisputable that intelligence-led policing strategies have been very successful at reducing actual crime.² One negative side effect, however, is that since officers are deployed directly to locations where criminal offenders operate at times when these offenders are most likely to engage in crime, officers increase their exposure to the bad guys. Additionally, **the fact that crime hot spots tend to be clustered nearby each other in specific neighborhoods makes it very easy for officers to stereotype everyone found in the area as a criminal.**

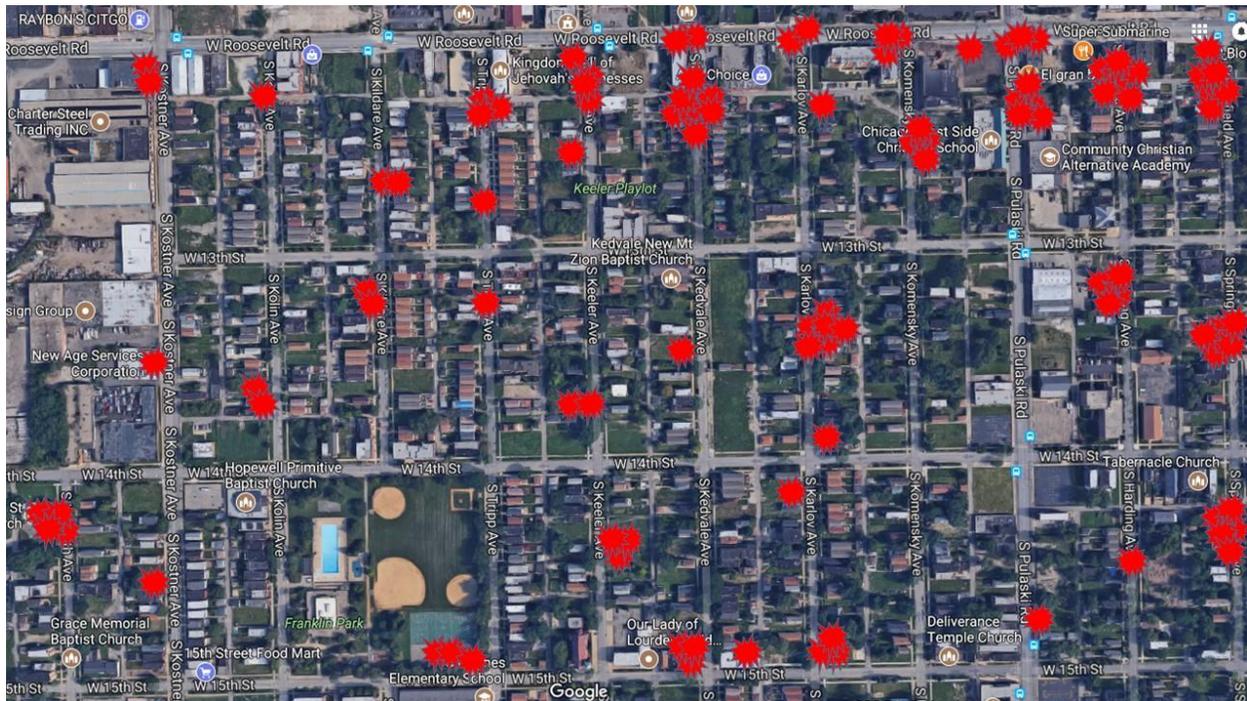
This phenomenon can be reversed, however, if officers take proactive steps to familiarize themselves with the law-abiding citizens that frequently live in between these hot spot locations. Between these hot spot dots live many law-abiding people who suffer the effects of the crimes occurring nearby. These unfortunate people live in fear of the criminal element within their neighborhood, frequently become victims of crime and disorder, and are sometimes subjected to police stops and searches because officers have difficulty differentiating between the criminal and the law-abiding residents of the neighborhood.

They Are There

Some extremely cynical officers may argue that there are very few law-abiding people living within the most high-crime neighborhoods, especially on blocks with multiple crime hot spots.

The evidence, however, suggests otherwise. Consider, for example, Beat 1011 in Chicago. This small patrol beat is composed of about 50 blocks, is less than a square half mile in area, and is estimated to have a population of around 6,000 residents. According to the *Chicago Sun Times*, Beat 1011 has the highest violent crime rate in Chicago for the first half of 2017.³ According to statistics from the Chicago Police Department, 1,815 criminal offenses were reported within this beat during 2016, and 4,537 calls for police services were generated from this beat. In the first six months of 2017, gunfire in Beat 1011 produced 10 murders and 19 non-fatal gunshot victims. **This is an example of a neighborhood experiencing some of the most extreme amounts of crime imaginable, and it would be easy to think that everyone in this beat is a criminal – but that would be incorrect.**

The photo below is a Google Earth image of the largest portion of Beat 1011. Superimposed over this photo are red dots that indicate the addresses of all of the crimes reported to the police in this area for a period of two-and-a-half years. At first glance the seriousness of the crime problem is obvious, but a closer examination reveals that the crime is concentrated at specific addresses – hot spots. **There are numerous homes visible that have not been the scene of a crime of any sort over the last three years, despite the high level of overall neighborhood crime.**



While almost every block has at least one crime hot spot, there are many, many homes and apartments between the dots where no crimes have been reported. Even at the red dot locations, there are still law-abiding people. One example is an incident that occurred within this beat in 2016 when a 59-year-old woman, flanked by her 25-year-old daughter and 19-year-old nephew, attempted to get a group of gang members to leave her porch. Gunfire erupted, the woman’s windows were shot out, and she was wounded after being hit in the head by a bullet.⁴ Not in a financial position to be able to sell her home and buy a new one, she must remain living amidst this neighborhood. She wishes someone would help make her block safer.

Another example of the level of law-abiding people within these neighborhoods comes from a study presented this year at an economics conference at the University of Chicago. This interesting study involved intentionally making a delivery error of a letter to 180 impoverished addresses and 180 wealthy addresses in one large city, to see who was more likely to return the letter to the post office. The letter was made to look like it had been mailed to a young man by his grandfather and contained either \$15 or \$60 in cash, or a gift card. The note and the envelope were thin enough that one could see there was cash or a credit card-like object inside when held up to the light.⁵

The letter, addressed to someone else, was intentionally delivered to 180 residential addresses in a neighborhood with a median household income of \$25,000, and another 180 addresses in a neighborhood with a median household income of \$2.5 million. To give perspective on these two neighborhoods, the median household income of the entire city was about \$52,000 and the median home value was about \$300,000. While the researchers did not report the crime statistics of these two neighborhoods, one can easily assume that the poor neighborhood (at less than half the city average household income) experienced significantly more crime, especially when compared to the neighborhood of millionaires.⁶

The researchers found that 80% of the letters delivered in the rich neighborhood were returned to the post office or forwarded to the rightful addressee. Approximately 40% of the letters in the poor neighborhood were returned to the rightful addressee. While this is far below the rate for the wealthy neighborhood, its significance should not be overlooked. Four out of every ten people in this very poor neighborhood, people who could desperately use an additional \$15 or \$60, did the right thing and returned the letter to the correct addressee.⁷

Over the last half century, criminologists have demonstrated that the overwhelming majority of crimes and calls for police services (about 80%) occur at a very small proportion of addresses (about 5%).⁸ Further research has revealed that the primary thing that makes these hot spot locations concentrations for crime and disorder is that they are commonly frequented by the small number of individuals that generate the vast majority of crime.⁹ One study in Toledo, Ohio revealed that 347 individuals (0.1% of the city's population) accounted for all robbery, aggravated assault, and burglary arrests in the city over a three-year period. Additionally, only 1.5% of all Toledo residents were cited or arrested for any traffic or criminal offense over a three-year period, suggesting that 98.5% of the city's population routinely avoids police enforcement contacts.¹⁰

Research indicates that the criminal element in any community is relatively small, but very active, making it appear as though a whole neighborhood is crime infested.

Reaching the People between the Dots

Even in Chicago's Beat 1011 there is time between calls and enforcement action to reach out and get to know the law-abiding folks that live between the dots. Beat 1011 had 4,537 calls for service in 2016, which is 12.4 calls for service per day, or about one call every other hour. This means that even in this highest of crime beats there is still time to spend 30 minutes or so every shift getting to know a law-abiding citizen or two on that beat.

Ten studies have found that proactive, non-enforcement, contacts with average citizens reduces fear of crime and increases public satisfaction with the police.¹¹ These contacts are not public

relations fluff, but rather real police work activities focused on maintaining order, detecting crime, and making citizens feel safe.¹² In Houston, for example, police targeted a couple of high crime blocks and required patrol officers to stop twice during their shift to meet residents at their homes, or business people at their stores or offices. During these brief contacts (usually less than 10 minutes), the officer introduced him or herself, said the purpose of the visit was simply to get acquainted and learn whether there were any problems in the area the citizen felt the police should know about. The officer then left a business card. Neighborhood citizen satisfaction surveys that were conducted before and after officers were ordered to make these contacts revealed that fear of crime fell substantially in the neighborhoods targeted, and citizen satisfaction with the police rose.¹³

The Portland Bureau of Police in Oregon has mated this strategy with its intelligence-led policing efforts. The computer-aided dispatch system assigns officers to conduct these non-enforcement contacts at specific crime hot spot locations at specific hot crime times. If officers see illegal activity while at the hot spot, they take appropriate legal action. If they do not see illegal activity, they use that time to talk with people in the area and get to know them better.

Additionally, researchers in one large city surveyed 977 residents of public housing apartments. The survey contained questions about a variety of different city services, but included questions about fear of crime, satisfaction with the police. These residents were surveyed about how often they saw police cars, foot patrols, or had informal face-to-face contact with police officers. The residents who reported having had informal face-to-face contact with the police in the last six months had the lowest fear of crime and the highest satisfaction with the police.¹⁴

Regardless of the picture the mainstream media tries to portray, the evidence strongly indicates that most of the people living between the dots want help and appreciate police protection. They do not appreciate being stopped and treated like a suspect because of where they live, but they want the police to address the crime on their block. **They live in fear and need your help, but most do not know you by name, and it is likely you do not know them either. Maybe it is time to have some out-of-car experiences and get to know the people living between the dots.**

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⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Andreoni, J., Nikiforakis, N., & Stoop, J. (2017). Are the rich more selfish than the poor, or do they just have more money? A natural field experiment. *Working Paper 23229. National Bureau of Economic Research.*

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Brantingham, P., & Brantingham, P. (1999). Theoretical model of crime hot spot generation. *Studies on Crime and Crime Prevention*, 8, 7–26; Patten, I. T., Mckenlden-Coner, J. M., & Cox, D. (2009). A microspatial analysis of robbery: Prospective hot spotting in a small city. *Crime Mapping*, 1(1), 7-32; Sherman, L. W., Gartin, P. R., & Buerger, M. E. (1989). Hot spots of predatory crime: routine activities and the criminology of place. *Criminology*, 27(1), 27-56.

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¹⁰ Author's unpublished research as part of a U.S. BJA Smart Policing Initiative grant with the Toledo Police Department.

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¹² Ibid.

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¹⁴ Salmi, S., Gronroos, M., & Kreskinen, E. (2004). The role of police visibility in fear of crime. *Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies and Management*, 27(4), 573-591.