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Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences Newsletter

ACJS Presidential Welcome

ACJS President Welcome from ACJS President Stephanie Mizrah

On March 14, 2025, I had the singular honor of accepting the presidential gavel and starting my term as ACJS President. It was one of the most memorable moments of my career, and I would like to start by thanking all who gave me such a warm welcome. Thank you for your support and your confidence in me as I embark on a challenging, busy, and rewarding year. I would also like to take this opportunity to introduce myself, discuss some of my goals for this year, and update everyone on our plans for the 63rd Annual Meeting in March 2026 in Philadelphia.

I am a Professor of Criminal Justice at Sacramento State University, having taught there since the Fall of 2009. Before that, I taught at Chico State for four years. I earned my bachelor's degree at University of the Pacific in Stockton (I won't say how long that has been). I went to law school at McGeorge (1994) and graduate school at Washington State University, where I got my master's and PhD in Criminal Justice. In between college, law school, and graduate school, I served as a prosecuting attorney in rural Washington and an intelligence analyst for the Central Intelligence Agency focused on international terrorism and international narcotics. Today I teach and research in the areas of law, terrorism, homeland security, emergency management, and transnational crime. I have presented in these areas at regional, national, and international meetings including the 2023 and 2024 meeting of the United Nations Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (UN CCPCJ). I have co-authored

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Translational Criminology: Its Origins, Current Developments, and Future

By: John H. Laub

Dear Friends and Colleagues:

I am deeply honored by your invitation to deliver a keynote address at the annual meeting of the 62nd Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences. I am especially grateful to the President of ACJS, Bitna Kim. I consider myself fortunate to be with you today to exchange ideas on the most important topics regarding crime and justice.

This morning I will talk about "Translational Criminology: Its Origins, Current Developments, and Future."

I. Origins of Translational Criminology

Before I begin, a brief note about definitions.

I am well aware that many scholars make a sharp distinction between criminology and criminal justice. Using the classic definition of criminology from Edwin Sutherland, I see criminology as encompassing criminal justice as well as the sociology of law. "Criminology is the body of knowledge regarding ...the processes of making laws, of breaking laws, and of reacting toward the breaking of laws" (Sutherland and Cressey, 1955:3).

In this presentation, I use the word "translational"to refer to the process of taking scientific discoveries and turning them into practical application.

To provide some background, since the early 2000s, I have been deeply concerned about the disconnect between sound research, strong theory, and public policies on crime and justice. Looking at the historical landscape of criminology, there appeared to be far less distinction between theory and practice in the early days of the field. I am struck when re-reading the oral history interviews I did for my book, Criminology in the Making (1983) how prominent scholars like Dan Glaser, Don Cressey, Al Cohen, and Lloyd Ohlin moved easily between the worlds of scholarship and policy.

As individuals and organizations like ACJS and the American Society of Criminology, we need to find ways to become more involved in policy and practice. In my view, coherent theory organizes research findings, sets priorities for future research, and provides influential guides to policy and practice. Despite efforts by many to divide theory and research from policy, the fact is theory, research, and policy are deeply intertwined and central to the lives of everyone involved in explaining crime and advancing justice and public safety.

In 2003 when I was president of the American Society of Criminology, I organized the annual meeting program around the following theme: "The Challenge of Practice, The Benefits of Theory." I did this because I believe a theory/research and policy/practice divide is unnecessary and, ultimately, counterproductive for the field. Furthermore, as I noted, the distinction is inconsistent with much of the history of criminology. We have a strong tendency to favor dichotomies, all-or-nothing propositions, and subsequently we

[1] This paper was delivered as a keynote address at the 62nd annual meeting of the Academy of Criminal Justice on March 13, 2025 in Denver, CO. I thank Rob Sampson and Larry Sherman for their insightful comments on an earlier draft. I also thank Ever Maya Sheplee for her superb research assistance.

are forced to choose, theory or policy. As I wrote in my presidential address, I believe that in order to enhance policy and practice one needs not only sound research, but strong theory (see Laub, 2004).

My Tenure at the National Institute of Justice

After 30 years in academe, I had the good fortune of being nominated by President Barack Obama to serve as the Director of the National Institute of Justice in the Office of Justice Programs in the Department of Justice. After a long wait to be confirmed by the US Senate, I started at NIJ on July 22, 2010.

Created more than 50 years ago, NIJ is the research, development, and evaluation agency in the Department of Justice. The Institute is dedicated to improving knowledge and understanding of crime and justice through science. NIJ provides objective and independent knowledge and tools to reduce crime and promote justice, particularly at the state and local levels. I have had a longstanding belief that NIJ has a unique mission as a science agency focused on policy and practice. Given this position, NIJ faces a twofold strategic challenge: generating research that is scientifically rigorous and disseminating knowledge that is relevant to local and state practitioners and policymakers. The way in my mind that I am able to fuse these two ends, if you will, is the idea of "translational criminology." I first learned about translational research in the field of medicine from my daughter who is a pediatrician. The idea of translational criminology is simple yet powerful. If we want to prevent and reduce crime, scientific discoveries must be translated into policy and practice. As director, I believed that the concept of translational criminology was a stepping stone to what NIJ could and should be in the future.

What Is Translational Criminology?

Translational criminology aims to break down barriers between basic and applied research by creating a dynamic interface between research and practice. This process is a two-way street: scientists discover new tools and ideas for use in the field and evaluate their impact. In turn, practitioners offer novel observations from the field that stimulate basic scientific investigations. This is the knowledge creation process and both researchers and practitioners play key roles here. In translational medicine, this is referred to as T1—taking research from the "bench" (basic research) to the patient's "bedside" (clinical/applied research; see http://www.michr.umich.edu/about/clinicaltranslationalresearch).

A unique aspect of translational criminology is the dynamic interface between research and practice and vice versa. To have this kind of exchange assumes a great deal of trust. It should be recognized that there is skepticism among practitioners about researchers, and researchers do not often trust the observations of practitioners as meaningful and important.

Thus, translational criminology requires something that heretofore has not occurred with much regularity—the research community and the practitioner community working together as equal partners.

Another goal of translational criminology is to address the gaps between scientific discovery, program delivery, and effective crime policy. This is the knowledge application process. This is referred to as T2 in translational medicine—"enhancing access to and the adoption of evidence-based strategies in clinical and community practice" (http://obssr.od.nih.gov/scientific_areas/translation/index.aspx).

Translational criminology thus calls for more data on the implementation process. In particular, we need to know whether the research evidence is being implemented with fidelity. We have spent a considerable effort to find out what programs work and what programs don't work. However, this is not enough. What is needed is an understanding of how to implement research evidence in real world practice settings and to find out why a program works. Unpacking the underlying mechanisms of successful policies and programs is essential in translational research.

Finally, translational criminology focuses on dissemination of existing research results as much as generating new knowledge. What is needed is more systematic study of the process of knowledge dissemination with the recognition that successful dissemination of research findings may well require multiple strategies.[2] We spend so much time and energy on the front end of the research process, but not nearly enough time on making sure that critical research findings make their way into the field in a meaningful way. Without robust dissemination efforts, research evidence will not be used the way it was intended—to inform criminal justice policy and practice.

Recently, Robert Sampson and colleagues (2013) articulated a strategy and a set of principles for translating causal claims into public policy. The key question they raise is "how does policy work within a larger social context?" They contend the answer to this question goes beyond estimating causal effects. According to Sampson and colleagues, there are three domains which must be part of the translational process. The first is the identification of mechanisms and causal pathways. The second is an assessment of effect heterogeneity. And the third is contextualization. The key point they make is that theory is essential to understand the policy implications of any research evidence (see also Sampson, 2010: 491–492 and Laub, 2004).

At NIJ, I sought to infuse translational criminology into all that we did at the Institute. For example, I organized a Translational Criminology Working Group made up of NIJ staff that met monthly. The purpose of this working group was to discuss what translational criminology really means for NIJ's work and how we can use this conceptual framework as we move forward in our grant solicitations and dissemination of NIJ-funded research. By coming together as a collective, I hoped we would be able to articulate a set of questions that would help us not only do research better but ensure that the research evidence generated is brought to bear on policy and practice.

During my tenure at NIJ, there were several ongoing conversations about translational criminology. What I was hearing was that people were talking about translational criminology in distinct and different ways. For some, it was a matter of communicating research results in a more effective way by reducing jargon (better marketing?), which academics—who make up the bulk of our research community—are prone to use. For others, it was about how we were are able to actually integrate the various different kinds of studies into one place so that they were easily accessible for practitioners and policymakers (e.g., see http://www.crimesolutions.gov/).

And, finally, for some, translational criminology was really something much deeper in that it was questioning the very nature of the research enterprise. For example, it is promoting more action research programs, researcher-practitioner partnerships, and engaging the practitioner throughout the research process.

[2] Jolene Hernon was the head of communications at NIJ while I was Director. Jolene used one word to describe NIJ's dissemination efforts: COPE—Create Once Publish Everywhere.

The William T. Grant Foundation produced a large portfolio of research on the use of research evidence covering a wide range of topical areas affecting youth ages 8 to 25 (see http://www.wtgrantfoundation.org/), and that work continues to this day. I believed that there were a number of lessons from that research program that we could apply to NIJ. As one example, research has demonstrated the importance of social networks in acquiring research evidence (Tseng, 2012). The implication of this is that we needed to better understand how it is that criminal justice practitioners and policymakers hear about NIJ research.

In sum, the goal of translational criminology is theoretically driven evidence-based policy and practice.

II. Current Developments: Illustrations of Translational Criminology at NIJ and Beyond

One of my proudest achievements at NIJ was funding the Harvard Executive Session on Policing and Public Safety. In my view, the Executive Sessions are an exemplar of translational criminology. Here the leading police executives and researchers come together on a regular basis to tackle the major issues facing the field. The Executive Sessions recognize in a direct way that practitioners are partners in the research enterprise. It is not about pushing research results out to the field. Rather, it is focusing on practitioners and finding out what research they need to do their jobs. There is also considerable attention being paid to how best to "influence the field" through concerted efforts to transform practice and policy. An impressive crop of papers (jointly written by police chiefs and researchers) are available on topics such as police leadership, race and policing, police culture, police professionalism, rightful policing, and social media and policing. The Harvard Executive Sessions on Policing are foundational both here in the U.S. as well as internationally.

NIJ Updates from 2013 through 2024

After my departure, NIJ actively pursued the idea of translational criminology in a number of ways. For example, in 2014 NIJ made four awards (three grants and one fellowship) directed at cultivating strategies to better understand and improve the use of research evidence in criminal justice decision-making (NIJ, 2014). The recipients addressed topics including the effectiveness of NIJ dissemination efforts and the social networks through which empirical evidence are passed (Award number 2014-IJ-CX-0033), cross-sector research utilization (Award number 2014-IJ-CX-0032), the impact of collaboration between researchers and policymakers on research utilization (Award number 2014-IJ-CX-0035), and the process of defining and implementing evidence-based policies (Award number 2014-IJ-CX-0034). Moreover, each year NIJ funded multiple collaborations between criminologists and criminal justice agencies in an effort to encourage translational research (NIJ, 2014). The hope is that this line of research will help us better understand both the obstacles to and facilitators of the use of evidence in the criminal justice policy world. One of the findings that emerged from this research was government sponsored research, peer networks, and intermediaries were more effective in translating research into practice than academic journals and expert testimony (Pesta et al., 2016).

In 2014, NIJ and the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) launched the Law Enforcement Advancing Data and Science (LEADS) program to support the professional development of law enforcement officers who are interested in conducting research (NIJ Website). Under the LEADS program, awards were offered to police

officers who partnered on a research project or incorporated research into policy and practice within their agency. In 2019, the LEADS program expanded to include an academics to scholars program to advance practitioner-led research and sustain research-practitioner partnerships. NIJ also provides technical assistance to support internal research activities within police agencies. In 2019, the LEADS program expanded to include law enforcement civilians to partner with LEADS scholars. Today there are more than 115 LEADS Scholars in the network.

In 2023, Nancy La Vigne resurrected the annual NIJ conference. The conference theme promoted the Evidence to Action Initiative she touted as NIJ director. The conference theme "reflected NIJ's efforts to ensure the field learns about research, trusts the findings, and is inspired to make evidence-informed changes to improve their policies and practices" (NIJ conference website, August 21, 2023). One of the goals of this initiative was to bring practitioners and researchers together throughout the entire research process, including the early stages of design and implementation (see also La Vigne, 2024).

In 2024, NIJ and the Crime, Law, and Justice Committee of the National Academies of Science organized a seminar on advancing the science of implementation in law and justice.

Implementation science is defined as "the scientific study of methods to promote the systematic uptake of research findings and other evidence-based practices into routine practice, and hence, to improve the quality and effectiveness of services" (Committee on Law and Justice website). It was noted that implementation science in the justice field lags far behind other fields like health and education. One finding that did emerge in the seminar was that culture and organization in police agencies can be barriers to successful implementation of evidence-based policies (del Pozo et al., 2024).

Examples Beyond NIJ

Although not necessarily using the term translational criminology, there are several activities that capture the essence of translational criminology. For example,

• Cynthia Lum and colleagues at George Mason University: Translational Criminology is the official magazine of the Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy. The Translational Criminology magazine was first issued in the Summer, 2011.[3]

• Lawrence Sherman at Cambridge University: Cambridge Centre for Evidence-Based Policing and the Cambridge Journal of Evidence-Based Policing. The goal of this program was for police officers to learn to be "pracademics" (practitioners and academics) in their field and use research evidence in policy and practice. Sherman also served as the chief scientific officer of London's Metropolitan Police from 2022–2024. Currently, Sherman is a for-profit CEO focusing entirely on translational criminology (www.benchmarkcambridge.com).

• Elizabeth Stanko: London Metropolitan Police and the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime in London. The focus of Stanko's work was to improve the police handling of rape cases.

• The Emerging Adult Justice Learning Community at the Justice Lab at Columbia University.

• Jens Ludwig and colleagues at the University of

[3] I was the NIJ director when the Translational Criminology magazine was launched at George Mason University. Many of my colleagues asked me if I was upset that they were using the idea of translational criminology. I said not at all. Thomas Abt, a colleague at the Office of Justice Programs, told me that a measure of success in government is when someone takes your idea and uses it.

Chicago Crime Lab. The Chicago Crime Lab also provides, on a part-time basis, advanced education that includes translational criminology to senior U.S. police leaders.

• The University of Pennsylvania Department of Criminology will award a newly approved degree of Master of Applied Criminology and Police Leadership (MCPL); see https://www.lps.upenn.edu/degree-programs/mcpl.

• Bianca Bersani directs the Maryland Crime Research and Innovation Center at the University of Maryland, College Park.

• Thomas Abt, Center for the Study and Practice of Violence Reduction at the University of Maryland, College Park.

• Liz Glaser, co-editor of Vital City, The Translation Project

In addition, there are translation tools that are being developed and used. For example, NIJ's CrimeSolutions.gov clearing house, the Campbell Crime and Justice Coordinating Group, the What Works Centre for Crime Reduction in the College of Policing in the UK, the Center for Problem-Oriented Policing Services at Arizona State, and the Evidence-Based Policing Matrix at George Mason University.

There is also a book series called Springer Briefs in Translational Criminology that began in 2014 and there is a published book, Translational Criminology in Policing, edited by The George Mason Police Research Group with David Weisburd (2022). Recently, Blomberg, Copp, and Turanovic (2024) in the Annual Review of Criminology examined the challenges and prospects for translational criminology. Finally, there is a small but growing body of papers focusing on translational criminology (see Welsh et al., 2024; Mears, 2022; Lum and Koper, 2017; Telep, 2023 and 2024; Blomberg et al., 2022; Nichols et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2024; and Kim and Kang, 2024).

Indeed, we have come a long way since Larry Sherman's pioneering essay on evidence-based policing published in 1998 by the Police Foundation.

Bringing research evidence to bear on policy decisions requires a cogent understanding of the knowledge application process (Laub, 2012). Primarily, criminal justice policymakers must be aware of research findings in order to use them in decision-making. This point may seem obvious, but a survey conducted by the International Association of Chiefs of Police in 2011 revealed that only one-third of police practitioners consult academic journals when making policy decisions (Lum et al., 2012; Alpert et al., 2013). In a later survey of police officers in three agencies, Telep and Lum (2014) found that officers rarely read academic journal articles, and when they did learn about research it was from their own agency. Moreover, while there was an openness to research partnerships, the officers believed that experience should dictate their police work far more than scientific knowledge.

Other studies reveal that decision-makers prioritize information produced by professional associations or interest groups over empirical evidence from academic journals (Tseng, 2012).

These findings are concerning given that most criminologists aim to publish their research in refereed journals. In order to target policymakers most efficiently, it is essential to identify the sources they utilize to access research evidence. Additionally, it would be beneficial to map the social networks that provide decision-makers with empirical evidence (Tseng, 2012).

In a recent paper, Cody Telep asks, "What works best to translate findings into successfully implemented evidence-based policies and practices? (2024: 37). His answer is to focus on dissemination, research partnerships, influential peers (e.g., research champions), facilitators for learning about research, and reinforcements and incentives (Telep, 2024). In a similar vein in a 2025 paper, Daniel Mears conceptualizes translational criminology through an evaluation framework. Mears argues that by "adapting a translational research approach—especially an emphasis on researcher-practitioner collaborative relationships—to the five main types of policy evaluation [needs, theory, implementation, outcome and impact, and cost-efficiency] identifies the salience of, and creates opportunities for, translational work that can advance criminal justice science and policy."

III. Gaps in the Original Conceptualization of Translational Criminology

The Role of Criminological Theory—"Big Ideas"—in Research and Policy

As I noted, the goal of translational criminology is theoretically driven evidence-based policy and practice. I think in current discussions of translational criminology the role of theory gets lost. When I was NIJ director, I was once faced with an impossible task: I had ten minutes of remarks to honor Herman Goldstein, George Kelling, and James Q. Wilson for their contributions to the field. One point I made about their work was the power of their ideas.

Goldstein, Kelling, and Wilson did not offer a specific intervention per se, nor did they evaluate a specific program.[4] Rather, they created a new research agenda for policing and public safety by focusing on powerful ideas that were foundational in nature. Not surprisingly, these ideas had a huge impact on the field and transformed it as we knew it. Think about it for a moment: police discretion, order maintenance, problem-oriented policing, community policing, fear of crime, social and physical disorder, and broken windows, to name some of the key concepts in the writings of Goldstein, Kelling, and Wilson. It is hard to imagine a world of policing at large where these ideas did not exist. What was also significant about the works of Goldstein, Kelling, and Wilson was that they relied on the power of observation, sober thinking, and good old-fashioned logic. The question that was always at the center of their work was what do the data say regarding the best strategies for citizens and the police that will benefit the community at large.

In a paper on criminology's policy relevance, Richard Rosenfeld called for "raising the level of public debate" (2010: 31). Rosenfeld stated that it is not enough to know whether some policy works or not, but why it succeeds or fails. He goes on to say, "No evaluation should be considered complete until it produces or invokes an idea, what we like to call 'theory,' that situates the success or failure of the extant policy or program in the context of other initiatives based on the same operating principles" (2010: 32). Rosenfeld concludes, "When it comes to increasing consciousness of criminal justice policy and its effects, what matters are organizing ideas, not disconnected research findings" (2010: 33).

John MacDonald has done exactly what Rosenfeld has called for. In his 2022 Joan McCord Lecture to the Academy of Experimental Criminology, MacDonald reviewed both experimental and quasi-experimental evidence and "found that social

[4] George Kelling, unlike Goldstein and Wilson, was best known for two specific policies, one of which he evaluated: preventive patrol in Kansas City and the other called "broken windows policing." I thank Larry Sherman for pointing this out to me. For an important reexamination of the Kansas City Preventive Patrol Experiment see Weisburd et al. (2023).

programs focused on increasing social control (formal and informal) in families, schools, communities, and by the criminal justice system are effective at preventing serious crime" (2023: abstract). MacDonald makes sense of the research using criminological theory within and across distinct substantive areas.

The Role of Lived Experience in Research and Policy

There is a gap in the original conceptualization of translational criminology in that the idea of lived experience is not considered. In current discussions of research and policy, there is lots of emphasis on the lived experience of those involved in the justice system. In my view, translational criminology can easily make room for lived experience in a research to policy and practice model.

My colleague at the University of Maryland, Rob Stewart, was formerly incarcerated and he makes an important point that I think gets lost in our discussions of lived experience. In an interview, Rob said, "I don't believe my expertise comes from my lived experiences, but rather my doctoral training" (2024: 16). In addition, too often we think of lived experiences quite narrowly. Police officers, probation officers, and correctional officers, for example, have relevant lived experiences, too. The point is we want to involve both practitioners and those affected by the policies and practices of the justice system in translational criminology.

IV. Threats to Translational Criminology

In my view, there are both internal and external threats to translational criminology. I will start by identifying the internal threats.

#1 Weak Data Infrastructure

Traditional methods to study crime and the justice system response include the Uniform Crime Reports, the National Crime Victimization Survey, and various self-report surveys. Some of the weaknesses of these crime measures have been highlighted by the Council of Criminal Justice (2023). Larger concerns have been raised about the federal statistical system beyond crime and justice (see American Statistical Association, 2024).

Valid, reliable, and expansive data are needed for translational criminology to be successful. Recently, serious concerns have been raised about the crime and justice data infrastructure. For example, in his 2017 Presidential Address to the American Society of Criminology, Jim Lynch (2018) warned of the increasing use of "big data," defined as open source data (e.g., scraping the world wide web) and administrative records, for research purposes. Lynch asks what is the quality of big data? In contrast, surveys like the National Crime Victimization Survey follow clear protocols for data collection. Along the same lines, Lynch asks what is the sampling error for open source data? Administrative records? The fact is criminal justice research is plagued by weak data. Many see official administrative records as the solution, but the fact is these records are often not suited for research purposes and missing data are a major concern.

In her 2022 Presidential Address to the ASC, Janet Lauritsen argued that "criminology lacks data for many types of crime that are of great concern to society" (2023: 187). These crimes include financial law violations, fraud against governmental agencies, cyber-crime, and identity theft. Lauritsen concludes, "One of the most challenging hurdles to improving crime data is the need to develop a stronger federal coordination and governance role for producing valid, reliable and timely crime statistics" (2023: 195).

#2 A Lack of Descriptive Criminology

Within quantitative criminology there has been a strong shift from research design to statistical methods. So much of our work focuses on the application of statistical methods that we often lose sight of the importance of asking good research questions. Moreover, there needs to be more candid discussion about the validity and reliability of the data we use in our empirical studies.

In addition, I believe we have lost what I would call descriptive quantitative criminology. At times I wonder if we knew more about the nature of crime and the characteristics of offenders and victims many years ago than we do now. Here am I thinking of the groundbreaking descriptive studies of Marvin Wolfgang and colleagues at the University of Pennsylvania. Wolfgang began this tradition with his book, Patterns of Criminal Homicide (1958). Others at Penn examined other types of crime in excruciating detail. Thankfully, the Blocks continued and expanded this line of work studying homicide in Chicago (Block and Block, 1998). Wolfgang and his colleagues (1972) turned their descriptive lens to the Philadelphia Birth Cohort Studies; here we learned enormous bits about the patterning of criminal careers. This descriptive work has appeared again recently with the detailed analysis of the Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development by Alex Piquero, David Farrington, and Al Blumstein (2007). During the 1970s, descriptive studies by Michael Hindelang and colleagues at the State University of New York at Albany informed us about patterns of criminal victimization using the newly created National Crime Survey data on victimization (see, for example, Hindelang 1976). My question is where is descriptive criminology today? Is it possible that we know less about the basics because of our ability to run complicated statistical models with a point and a click?

#3 Time Pressure

It has been argued for a long time that academic criminology and public policy are two distinct worlds governed by inherently different values, goals, routines, and rewards (Caplan, 1979). The gap between research and policy poses two additional challenges to translating criminological research: time and reward structures. With regard to time, the research process is time consuming and demanding when executed properly (Skogan, 2010). Policymaking, on the other hand, happens rapidly, often in response to a crisis. Decision-makers cannot wait for criminologists to conduct an experiment or collect data on a pressing issue; they need immediate answers in order to act quickly. If relevant research on the issue at hand is not available and cannot be accessed quickly, policy decisions will be made in the absence of criminological research.

Here is one vivid illustration of this fact. After the tragic shooting at Sandy Hook elementary school in Newtown, Connecticut in 2012, NIJ responded to multiple requests from Congress, the Department of Justice, and the White House about gun violence. I was asked to review a joint proposal from the Department of Homeland Security and the Office for Community Oriented Policing Services calling for scores of school resource officers to be placed in schools around the country. I asked if there was any empirical evidence that school resource officers reduced violence in school. I was told, "John, good question, but what we need now are answers, not questions."

#4 Fragility of the Evidence

Overall, in evaluation research in criminal justice there are few studies that use randomized controlled trials (RCTs) and as a result, selection issues loom large. Moreover, single-site studies are the norm, and once positive results are found there

is enormous pressure to scale up quickly. When the results came in from a NIJ-funded study of Judge Alm's HOPE program (Hawaii Opportunity Probation with Enforcement) showing large reductions in recidivism, NIJ was under pressure from Congress to implement HOPE in all fifty states!

However, even more RCTs may not solve the problem of fragile evidence. Recently, an important paper appeared by Megan Stevenson entitled "Cause, Effect, and the Structure of the Social World" (2023). This paper is an in-depth examination of the empirical literature, especially RCTs, in criminal justice research. Stevenson offers a number of important observations. She finds that most interventions are not effective; when significant effects are found, they are not sustained over time; and effective interventions are not replicated. Stevenson concludes that stabilizing forces in the complex structure of the social world resist change.

#5 The Overselling of RCTs

Some researchers have strongly advocated moving criminology and criminal justice to adopt the paradigm akin to evidence-based medicine as a solution to the research policy divide (see, e.g., Sherman, et al.,1997). Using the umbrella of "What Works in Reducing Crime," the centerpiece of this approach is the randomized controlled experiment. I am skeptical of this argument because I believe the problem of policy is as much a theoretical issue as the type of research method one employs to study crime.

In 2010, Rob Sampson examined the experimental turn in criminology and the belief that evidence-based meant experimental-based. Sampson highlighted what he called "Gold Standard Myths" regarding RCTs. The myths are "(1) randomization solves the causal inference problem, (2) experiments are assumption (or theory) free, and (3) experiments are more policy relevant than observational research" (2010: 490).

In 2019, Nagin and Sampson argued one should not equate causality with method; indeed, causal explanations require substantive theory (see also Sampson, 2010). Nagin and Sampson asked how can nonexperimental methods be used in policy and practice by focusing on long-term or system-wide impact of treatments being tested in RCTs? To address this challenge, they developed "an analytic framework for integrating causality and policy inference that accepts the mandate of causal rigor but is conceptually rather than methodically driven" (2019: 123).

#6 Failure to Consider Implementation and Context

In response to Megan Stevenson's paper discussed above, Nancy La Vigne argues that Stevenson overlooked the crucial study of implementation in the process of using research evidence for policy and practice (2024a). What is critical in La Vigne's view is whether the program was implemented as intended. This is typically referred to as implantation with fidelity. In addition, La Vigne says one can ask was it implemented in a different setting or context? This takes into account contextual variation. La Vigne offers the Titanium Law of Evaluation: "The less deliberate the implementation of a social program is, the more likely its net impact will be zero" (2024a: 4). La Vigne concludes that we must measure and account for implementation fidelity and local context. One way to do this is to use an "action research model" (see La Vigne, 2024b).[5]

[5] Stevenson was pointing out that treatment heterogeneity can occur even if there is treatment fidelity. I think this is an important conceptual distinction. We need more work on treatment failures/heterogeneity alongside fidelity.

Bottom Line: We Need Multiple Data, Multiple Methods, and Theory[6]

Next, I will identify the external threats to translational criminology.

#1 Public Distrust in Science and Scientific Experts

Perhaps exacerbated during the Covid-19 pandemic, there is an increasing distrust in science and scientific expertise (for recent examples, see Lauritsen, 2023 and Blomberg et al., 2024). In a recent New York Times article, Thomas Edsall (2024) argued that research on public opinion data and trust in science revealed that there is a crisis of public trust in science, especially among conservatives.

#2 Politics of Crime and Crime Control

Too often data and research are ignored by politicians and, at times, policymakers and practitioners. Blomberg, Copp and Thrasher (2022) point out that politics can impede the successful translation of research results. Research can be ignored when it is contrary to ideology or in conflict with professional experience (see also Mears, 2022: 173). Recent examples include research on immigration and crime, crime trends, bail reform, and crime rates. (For specific examples regarding the relationship between immigration and crime, see "Immigrants and Crime," 2024; Goncalves et al., 2024; and Nowraster, 2024.) In a provocative op-ed in the New York Times, Steven Pinker wrote "Trump Says the Country is 'Dying.' The Data Say Otherwise" (October 29, 2024).

In the current era, there is direct opposition to research evidence. Research is not just ignored; it is often distorted and sometimes squashed. Plus, scientists who engage in such research are punished and ostracized through social media assaults and defunding. Witness the history of research on guns in criminology and the aggressive tactics of the NRA and the gun industry to silence gun researchers. Or more broadly, consider research on climate change. In such an environment, all the translation in the world will not make a difference. What does that mean for translational criminology going forward?

#3 Role of Academics Today

When I entered the field as a graduate student in the 1970s, criminology was an exciting field because people were passionate about ideas. Today "career concerns" are center stage in the field—for example, publication counts, citation counts, the amount of external funding generated, departmental rankings, likes on social media, etc., are the new measures of intellectual impact and scholarship. Too often today we are writing more and more about less and less.

There is also a growing direct threat to translational criminology within the academy. Here I am referring to the recent politicization within academia, one that in some corners is taking a direct aim at the entire idea of "cooperation" between researchers and justice system practitioners "working together." For example, see Robert Vargas (2020), regarding the work of Jens Ludwig at the University of Chicago Crime Lab with the Chicago Police Department. Also, see the recent essay in ASC's newsletter The Criminologist on "copaganda" attacking researchers who work with the police (Chagnon and Phillips, 2024; see also Karakatsanis, 2025). In a recent paper, Vargas and colleagues examine police research and conclude that "Academic Copaganda operates more like 'politics-based evidence making' masquerading as 'evidence-based policy

[6]Most of the examples of translational criminology focus on policing. Why is that the case? There seems to be far less interaction between researchers and the courts and prisons.

research'" (Vargas, et al., 2025: 20). There is a growing movement that is not just suspicious, but in fact hostile to the very ideas I am promoting here. These "copaganda" scholars would scoff, for example, at the Harvard Executive Session on Policing and Public Safety for selling out or being co-opted.

#4 Role of Universities: Is Translational Criminology Possible in a Traditional Academic Setting?

The reward structure within academia is also not favorably disposed toward applied research. Instead, tenure review processes are governed by the quality and number of publications on an individual's CV, which often reflect a basic research agenda (Petersilia, 1991). Influencing policy decisions involves a large time commitment and often goes unrewarded unless the experience results in a peer-reviewed publication. The perception that applied research will not advance an academic career deters criminologists, and younger criminologist especially, from engaging in policy-relevant research (Petersilia, 2008; Tonry, 2010).[7]

Adam Gamoran, the president of the William T. Grant Foundation, has called for "reshaping incentives within the university to support faculty research that responds to real life challenges" (2018: 1). Gamoran points out that more than the quality of the evidence, it is the quality of the relationships between the producers and consumers of evidence as well as key intermediaries that determine whether research is actually used to set policy and practice. As Gamoran rightly notes, universities do not typically reward researchers for the time and effort it takes to build relationships in the field. As a result, the William T. Grant Foundation has launched a grant competition for universities to reconsider incentives and reward "engaged scholarship and research-practice partnerships" (2018: 3). The Institutional Challenge Grant "calls on universities to partner with a public agency or nonprofit, develop a joint research agenda, provide research fellows to execute the research, and build the capacity of the agency to use evidence from research in its decision-making" (2018: 3). For examples of the Institutional Challenge Grant awards made so far I refer you to the William T. Grant Foundation website and Institutional Challenge Grant Task Force and Adam Gamoran, 2024).

The Institutional Challenge Grant idea is a possible vehicle to incorporate translational criminology research with existing departments of criminology and criminal justice across the country. Perhaps the National Institute of Justice can launch institutional challenge grants for justice system agencies. (For other concrete steps moving forward, see Laub and Frisch, 2016.)

V. Future of Translational Criminology

In 2012, the National Research Council of the National Academies of Science issued a report, Using Science as Evidence in Public Policy. The report stated that "Science is not the only source of knowledge used in policy argument—beliefs, experience, trial and error, reasoning by analogy, and personal or political values are also used in policy argument" (2012: 8). Thus, while I was at NIJ, I argued forcefully for science to be at the policy and practice table (see also Lum and Koper, 2017). However, I soon recognized that political considerations, personal experiences, and value

[7] In an essay on his work with the St. Louis police department, Rick Rosenfeld makes an excellent observation that age and experience are crucial for making a partnership successful. Rosenfeld states, "I could not have done this earlier in my career" (2014:7). As an untenured faculty, he could not have devoted the extensive time it takes to maintain an active partnership. Nor did he have the confidence in his professional judgment earlier in his career. Moving forward, Rosenfeld recommends pairing senior and junior faculty in order to enhance the likelihood of a successful partnership.

preferences are also present in all policy decisions.

The goal of translational criminology is transformational change in policy and practice. The National Research Council review of the use of research aptly noted that "Although the relative recent approach known as evidence-based policy and practice, focusing on improving understanding of 'what works,' has influenced the production of scientific knowledge, it has made little contribution to understanding the use of that knowledge" (2012: 3). The Board of Science Education of the National Academies of Science recently hosted a workshop to explore how to advance engaged research, which is defined as "research that involves the active collaboration among researchers, policymakers, practitioners, and/or communities throughout the research lifecycle to accomplish shared goals" (May 23, 2024 email). Despite the challenges, students in criminology and criminal justice today, much like the pioneers in criminology, want to have a social impact, and I believe translational criminology is the vehicle to do so. But the hard truth is we have a lot of work to do, especially in this environment where research on selected topics is being shut down, public data are being removed from federal websites, and funds for grants are being frozen.

A useful framework going forward is Larry Sherman's (2013) idea of a Triple T strategy: Targeting, Testing, and Tracking. Targeting is essentially descriptive criminology, Testing is experimental criminology alongside other methods, and Tracking is taking seriously implementation. The weak link here is Tracking. As Sherman told me, "The fundamental problem with translation is we have no theory about how to establish tracking and use it to implement evidence properly" (personal correspondence, January 6, 2025). I call on younger scholars in the audience to consider how best to develop a tracking system for practitioners using or not using—ignoring?—evidence-based policies and practices. How do we change both the behavior of those implementing policies and practices and the organizational culture where it occurs?[8] Perhaps new technologies like GPS and body worn cameras using artificial intelligence can provide some answers here.

In face of threats to shutdown science, both within and outside the academy, we must fight the good fight. We cannot be discouraged and give up. I urge the next generation of scholars to find creative solutions to meet the challenges involved in the politicization of translational criminology and the politicization of science more broadly.

I want to end by noting that "the fundamental principle of science is that evidence—not authority, tradition, rhetorical eloquence, or social prestige—should triumph. This commitment makes science a radical force in society: challenging and disrupting sacred myths, cherished beliefs, and socially desirable narratives. Consequently, science exists in tension with other institutions, occasionally provoking hostility and censorship" (Clark, et al., 2023: 1).

Thank you for listening to this address.

[8] It has been noted that very little research is used in policy and practice across justice and nonjustice settings. In a study of 30 U.S. cities that conducted 73 RCT's with a national nudge unit, DellaVigna, Kim, and Linos (2024) find that strength of the evidence does not lead to adoption. Instead, they identify organizational inertia as the leading obstacle to evidence adoption. Business as usual is very powerful.

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