

#95 (JESSIE HUFF)

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Jesse Huff is a rising scholar in policing research and an assistant professor in the School of Criminal Justice at the University of Cincinnati. We talk about NIBIN, gun crime investigations, Brazilian jiu-jitsu, and how academics can best work with police departments.

I'm Jerry Ratcliffe, and this is Reducing Crime. Before we get into this month's episode, a quick reminder that the deadline for applications to the University of Pennsylvania's Master of Applied Criminology and Police Leadership Program is only a few weeks away. Can you get to Philadelphia for a day and a half once a month? Want to elevate your understanding of evidence-based policing? I want to be taught by actual award-winning faculty and not just hired instructors and adjuncts. And if you are currently in a police leadership role at least lieutenant level, then this might just be the program for you.

My guest for this episode is the awesome Jesse Huff. Dr. Huff's work sits at the intersection of policing, science, and evidence-based practice. Her research focuses on policing and program evaluation with an emphasis on using experimental methods to test where the police programs and policies actually improve effectiveness and fairness. She got her PhD from Arizona State University in 2020 and a short time since then has been a National Institute of Justice, Law Enforcement Advancing Data and Science, that's Leads, Academic, partnering with police agencies across the country to evaluate initiatives ranging from violence reduction strategies and intelligence-led gun crime investigations to body-worn cameras and use of force training. When we chatted in November, she had just won the Division of Policing's Early Career Award and she's also garnered the ACJS Police Section Emerging Policing Scholar Achievement Award and the ASC Division of Policing's Teaching and Mentorship Award.

She's also on the IACP's Research Advisory Committee. Good grief she's all over the place. We chatted at the American Society of Criminology Conference last November. It was held in Washington DC, which I only attended because I'm nearby, given that ASC tends to be the conference where criminological optimism goes to die. However, catching up with friends like Jesse made it more fun than it really should have been, especially as I said, she had just been awarded the early career award from the division of policing. It's the end of the day at the conference. You can relax. Have you done your presentation?

Jessie Huff:

Nope. Tomorrow morning at eight.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Tomorrow morning at eight.

Jessie Huff:

Yeah. Isn't that a lucky slot?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

After the amount of drinking people, it's the only way to get through this conference is to drink copiously.

Jessie Huff:

Yes, true. And I did that last night with Mike Newman and Darren Green, which was a terrible idea.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Oh, good God. You went out with two Queensland police officers and you think that you could actually make it. Did you make it at all to today?

Jessie Huff:

I did. I had an 8:00 AM round table and I was physically present. Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Well, those two buggers will drink you under the table and not even think about it. Yeah.

Jessie Huff:

Yep. Nope. They were upright and still pushing people to stay when I left.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

They're shockers, shockers. I mean, they're Queensland Police Service being proud, but yeah, that's good effort. Well, well done you making at 8:00. You have to make at eight o'clock tomorrow as well. I wouldn't be optimistic of a big crowd.

Jessie Huff:

Fair enough.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Has the conference gone otherwise?

Jessie Huff:

The conference has gone well otherwise. Most of it has been division of experimental criminology activities. We had our sponsored panel, which was four great RCTs all on policing, which I love to see, love to hear. Obviously, Division of Policing reception was great. I've mostly been receptioning.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And you won an award.

Jessie Huff:

And I won an award. The Division of Policing Early Career Award.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Congratulations.

Jessie Huff:

Thank you.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's thoroughly well deserved. So we need to hear the story first. Where did you grow up?

Jessie Huff:

I grew up in Reno, Nevada. So if you're familiar with the show, Reno 911.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah. How accurate is that?

Jessie Huff:

Actually very accurate. So there's a rumor that the writers did time in the Reno Police Department and some of the characters in the show are based on actual Reno police officers. So when it came out, people were watching it and they were like, "Oh my gosh, that's our officer so- and-so."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Part of me is horrified, but there's another part of me like, Okay, that's kind of cool. And if there are police officers with that much character in Reno, I might have to go and visit.

Jessie Huff:

There are, and it's a good place to visit.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Is this what you always wanted to do, involved in the field? What's the story?

Jessie Huff:

No, this is not what I always wanted to do or what I thought I

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Would do. You never always wanted to be an academic. Shocking.

Jessie Huff:

I honestly didn't believe I would graduate college.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Every day's overachieving now, is it?

Jessie Huff:

Yeah. Look at me go, I guess. I went as far as you can. No, my plan was to go into the military, become a military police officer, retire into civilian law enforcement. I had a military scholarship, went to college, took criminal justice, graduated in 2000 and what was 2013. At the time police agencies were not hiring. So that was obviously very different from today. Decided to do a master's because I was like, "I got nothing else to do".

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I think that's a reason a ton of people do master's degrees these days.

Jessie Huff:

Yes. It seems like all my students, that's it.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Cannot think of what to do next, so I'm just going to stay in school because it's convenient. And I don't mean to belittle experienced, but it's a ton of money to do something when you're just not sure what you want to do.

Jessie Huff:

Exactly. But it's nice. I mean, I think for some people it gives them these pathways into other opportunities. Like for me, I wouldn't have thought I'd be an academic, but after going to my master's program, I started working with the police department and fell in love with it.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Where was your master's?

Jessie Huff:

The University of Nevada, Reno.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And then so a PhD seemed like the sensible move.

Jessie Huff:

It seemed like the right thing to do next.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Do you regret that now?

Jessie Huff:

No.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Not

Jessie Huff:

Today. Not today. There are days, but not today.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Tell me about your PhD experience.

Jessie Huff:

Yes. I went to Arizona State University. I was really fortunate. I was assigned to the Center for Violence Prevention and Community Safety under Chuck Katz from day one. He saw my application. I had experience working with police agencies. He had a project at the time, the National Violent Death Reporting System and he needed someone to collect violent death data from police departments across the state of Arizona. And so that was my job. I got to meet every police agency in the state of Arizona.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's fantastic. And Chuck's a good man and he does very interesting work and he's been a stalwart of Arizona State University for many, many years now. So that's great.

Jessie Huff:

Yes, he was a great mentor, great person to work with. Lots of really community engaged research.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So it's interesting how these doors keep opening for you and you put yourself in a position to do some work on your master's degree to work with police departments and that just keeps opening doors for you, right? Yes. Strikes me as more than just luck. It strikes me that you've put yourself out there in a position to actually go and do some work and to work in the field and be engaged with it. What was the appeal of military police?

Jessie Huff:

You can't be a civilian law enforcement officer until you're 21 in the state of Nevada and so I needed to do something for a few years.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So you'd always thought about policing as a career?

Jessie Huff:

I was fascinated by it. Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You weren't one of these freaks that knew what you wanted to do at the age of eight or something, were you?

Jessie Huff:

No, I think at eight I wanted to be a veterinarian and then I realized I would have to put animals down and that was devastating.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Fair enough.

Jessie Huff:

Yep.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Tell me about your PhD.

Jessie Huff:

My PhD is based on a randomized control trial of body-worn cameras in the Phoenix Police Department. I started in 2015 right after the death of Michael Brown and Ferguson.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And that was a whole period of time where the whole of the social justice warrior movements were all about body-worn cameras. They thought body-worn cameras were going to change the whole trajectory of policing.

Jessie Huff:

Yes. It seemed like this was the solution, right? We're going to put cameras on officers and then all of a sudden every interaction's going to be civil, every interaction's going to be perfect, use of force will go down, complaints will go down, this will all be fine and good.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And how did that work out for that crowd? It's not really where body-worn cameras went, is it?

Jessie Huff:

It's not, no. I mean, at first the police themselves were very resistant. They didn't want to wear the cameras. They were really worried about lots of different things, but as they started to wear them, they realized that it was actually good evidence for them. When

Jerry Ratcliffe:

People

Jessie Huff:

Complain the vast majority of the time, the Professional Standards Bureau would pull up the body cam footage and see like, no, actually everything was fine.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yep. I think to this day, the vast majority of police officers think the body-worn camera is the best thing they have because it allows the rest of the world to see, no, actually this guy was being an absolute asshole and he swung his fist at me first. Yeah.

Jessie Huff:

Yeah. It just saves a lot of time, energy, resources, money, all that good stuff. But that's not really what I was interested in with body-worn cameras. I was more curious in this time of Michael Brown in this social unrest, if we put these cameras on officers, is it going to change the way that they police in different areas? Is it actually going to reduce the disparities that everyone was so concerned about in the media? And so it's not just does it reduce use of force and complaints, it's does it reduce use of force and complaints in minority neighborhoods?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

What did you find? So

Jessie Huff:

There are different patterns of policing in different types of neighborhoods, of course. Researchers have found that for a long time, right? Yeah. And in Phoenix, obviously it's a more Hispanic Latino community than we have black community and when we put body-worn cameras on officers, it did kind of change those outcomes in those neighborhoods. Nothing for use of force, but arrests actually went up in black neighborhoods and I believe they went down in Hispanic neighborhoods.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So after that, I know you started working with Justin Nix and the colleagues up at the University of ... Fucking hell.

Jessie Huff:

Nebraska. That's

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It. That's the state I'm thinking about. Sorry, folks. I know it's Omaha, but I forgot the Nebraska, but then you became an NIJ LEADS scholar. Remind me what LEADS is again.

Jessie Huff:

Yeah. The National Institute of Justice Law Enforcement Advancing through Data and Science Program. So initially it was open to LEADS scholars who are all police practitioners from agencies across the United States as well as at least one from Canada.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I mean, we'll let them come down south of the border every now and again, right? Every now

Jessie Huff:

And again.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I mean, you were up in Nebraska. You were damn close to them anyway, right?

Jessie Huff:

Still close to them up in Ohio. So it was expanded to include academics and civilians later on. And this seemed to be a request from the scholars themselves. They said, "We want to do this research. We know there are academics out there doing policing research and we'd like to find ways to partner with them. Why don't we bring them to the table, make them part of leads and sort of formalize those relationships between academics and research oriented police?"

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I don't think people appreciate how important that has been because the community of policing scholars, policing research scholars who can actually work with police departments is still, it feels to me, shamefully small. I mean, we can all get in a moderate sized room at this conference and we kind of know everybody who's in the room, right? Considering how big policing is to have, there are not that many people like yourself who are up and coming scholars who are happy and enthusiastic to work with police.

Jessie Huff:

Yeah. And I agree there's not enough of us because I know there are more police agencies who want to do good research and want to partner with academics, but as you said, there's not very many.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

No. And coming here to the American Society of Criminology Conference is just flat out depressing most of the time because you have to have the will to help police, a lot of them don't and you have to have a skillset to help police and a lot of them don't. So you've also been working on the skillset. What are the sort of skills or that you think are useful for New Scholars trying to listen wants to work with the police? What do they need to know? Because you've been very successful out of hell. We just gave you an award for it.

Jessie Huff:

Yes. I think the first thing you need to know is how to just be a normal person.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Well, fuck, that just rules out 98% of academia at that point.

Jessie Huff:

Exactly. I think that is why it's hard for some to connect with agencies, but really it's about being in the right place and communicating and being honest. So I've been fortunate to work with police agencies because I go to them. I go to the places where police officers are. So if they're having a meeting or if there's some kind of police oriented conference, those are the conferences I prefer. Those are the people who are doing the work. They're talking about the issues that matter to them. That's what we need to hear.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And I don't think people appreciate that enough. I made a joke yesterday that most police officers think they need evidence-based policing like a Labrador needs a law degree because they really, a lot of them don't need us. They kind of do, but they don't know it. And so they're not going to come and hunt for us, seek out scholars that can help them, are they?

Jessie Huff:

No, no. People have to know who you are if you want to work with police agencies and they have to know your value. And so being in those rooms and having those conversations is where you can demonstrate, yeah, you're already doing a lot of great things in your agency, but maybe you should consider evaluating it. Does it work? Is there something you could do more efficient?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So you mentioned it so now I'm going to put you on the spot and you mentioned they have to know your value. So what's your value?

Jessie Huff:

My value is that I'm someone who can work with police agencies to design good studies that will give you meaningful answers. But I think the most important thing that I provide value for is giving them in a way that agencies understand. So it's not just writing some fancy academic paper, taking your data, coming back a year later with a report that's 30 pages long. It's actually working with you to then identify is this thing that we're studying making the impact that you want and what can we do next from there?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Jesus Christ, that's a spot on answer. Can I steal that? I can steal that word for word and just be able to pass it off as my end. That's good. Do you think it took you a while to get to this?

Jessie Huff:

Yes, absolutely.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah, you can't nod, right? It's an audio podcast. I remember.

Jessie Huff:

I remembered halfway.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's nodding at me.

Jessie Huff:

Yeah, it took me a while to get here. I think it took a lot of practice, a lot of going through and making mistakes and learning from them. And fortunately, I've worked with a lot of scholars who work with police agencies and so that's been really helpful to kind of navigate those relationships, navigate that growth and try to be better next.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

What are some of the challenges you run into doing this?

Jessie Huff:

Agency resistance is a challenge for sure.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Just they don't want to do evaluation, do you think? Or just because you don't have a law enforcement background?

Jessie Huff:

Yeah. I think the resistance is partially related to the fact that agencies are concerned. Someone who doesn't have a policing background won't understand the decisions that they have to make. They're out making arrests using force sometimes when it's required and sometimes when it's not, of course, but I've never had to make that choice. And so I think there's a fear that as an outsider, I will view those activities differently and unfairly.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

They worry that you don't understand their world, but you clearly do, right? We've been to a hundred meetings together and you've been working with the police. How did you get your understanding of just how policing works having not done it?

Jessie Huff:

Having not done it, I think the best thing you can do is spend time with officers, whether that's doing ride-alongs, whether that's getting a civilian job or something like that. I have worked in a civilian capacity. I was the administrative assistant to the chief of police at the University of Nevada Reno. That's a great job because you're in all of the executive meetings so you get to hear what's important to the top brass of the department. It's also an interesting job because you are the chief's little appointee, so you're between the officers and the chief. So there's tension there sometimes and there's tension there with civilians as well. But it's an amazing job because you kind of know everything.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And politics is a reality, isn't it?

Jessie Huff:

Yes.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

If you're not aware of the politics that's around policing, you've got to understand the world that they're in because they do work in a very political world, especially in the United States.

Jessie Huff:

Absolutely. And I think as a researcher, that can be hard too. Sometimes you'll start a research project with an agency and then their community will come and say, "Oh, we actually don't want you to do that thing that you said you were going to do." And that can be very challenging.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Or you don't even get to do it in the way you want to. We both love randomized control trials and see the value in terms of how many problems of internal validity that it solves and you've managed to do some, but selling them is hard, isn't it?

Jessie Huff:

It is very challenging, yes. And I think a lot of people don't realize the complexity of police agencies as a whole. So when you're doing a randomized control trial, it sounds really easy like, Oh, we're just going to randomly select officers and we'll give them a survey or we'll give them a training or we'll do something like that. But you have to be aware of the organizational requirements of that department before you go in and tell them who should or shouldn't or is or isn't available to participate in your study. And you only really know that by working with that agency. So whether it's randomizing at the officer level or randomizing at the squad level or shift level or something like that, it's sometimes overlooked how complicated it is to design a study that's feasible for the department.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

What are some of the other things that you've learned about working with police departments?

Jessie Huff:

Yeah, I think it really comes down to communication, transparency and honesty. Just like I don't have a policing background, they don't have an academic background.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And

Jessie Huff:

So in some ways, if you want to work with a police department, you have to educate them about what an academic is and what's required of us.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So that's interesting and we phrase that and otherwise because it sounds a bit too kind of, "Ooh, podcasty speak". I hate podcast speak. That's the challenge, right? How do you educate them as to what academics can do? And this gets to some degree, what do police departments need to know about working with academics?

Jessie Huff:

I think there's different expectations just like researchers sometimes expect a police department to prioritize your research over all else. That's not true. They have a full-time job and your research is not their full-time job. It may be a part of it, but there's other things they have to navigate. And the same is true of academics. I think sometimes I'll get calls from police chiefs at random hours all the time and it's great. I almost always take them. Sometimes I'm in class and I can't pick up the phone and make a meeting right away because there are other requirements that I have as well.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right. For there's police leaders listening to this and they're contemplating working with an academic other than hire you. There we go. That's an easy one. There we go. But what should they look for?

Jessie Huff:

Look for someone who will be honest with you in their communication. They'll tell you that they can't do everything because they can't and we'll talk to you about a timeline. You want to work with someone you're willing to have a coffee or a beer with because you're going to be stuck with this person for a while.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So it sounds like a marriage.

Jessie Huff:

It is kind of like a marriage. If you're lucky, it lasts a really long time and it spans multiple projects.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That means I've been married to the Philadelphia Police Department for something like 25 years and we've had some rocky patches. We've been close to divorce a few times.

Jessie Huff:

I think many marriages have their rocky patches, but the good ones, you come back together through communication, right?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's the same thing. Look at you. You're like a counselor. That's great.

Jessie Huff:

Yeah, I try. Sometimes it's a little like counseling.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Actually, I mean, I made that as a joke, but it actually is a little bit, you're trying to help a police department navigate a pathway through out of some difficulty sometimes.

Jessie Huff:

Absolutely. Yes.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So what else you worked on other than body-worn cameras?

Jessie Huff:

So other than body-worn cameras, I've worked on police responses to gun violence, looking at crime gun intelligence centers, the use of NIBIN or the National Integrated Ballistics Information Network, which is a system that can link the forensic marker of bullets that are collected and recovered from crime scenes or crime guns to weapons that are used in other offenses, looking at whether these types of technologies, organizational strategies can improve things like case clearance and also reduce gun crime overall.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah. Crime gun intelligence centers have become a thing. New Jersey really, I think, sort of pioneered to some degree some, but they've been cropping up all over the place now. Are they worth it?

Jessie Huff:

We'll see. I think there are things that can be done. So Phoenix, for example, created a crime gun liaison program.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Hold a minute. Crime gun liaison program. What the hell is one of those?

Jessie Huff:

Patrol officers who are often first responders to most calls for service are trained to investigate gun crime cases, basically picking up casings, processing firearms for DNA and prints, things that normally would be done by a detective or an investigator. And by doing that, they're able to enhance the capacity of their CGIC, right? So there's really a lot of front end work to make a CGIC worthwhile. So you have to be able

Jerry Ratcliffe:

To- CGIC, that's the Crime Gun Intelligence Center.

Jessie Huff:

Yes. I will stop acronyming it.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

No, no, no. I mean, what are we in policing if we don't have acronyms left, right, and center? But SIGs, we are.

Jessie Huff:

Yeah. Yeah. I'll throw out the CGIC and the NIBIN and other alphabet soup, I'm sure. Yeah. So what they found is that if you do invest in this patrol officer training, you can increase evidence collection. So I think it's not just creating these centers that's useful. You need to think about operationally how you can enhance inputs into these centers so that they can have the intended outcomes, which is reduced crime.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Is that because there just aren't enough detectives or crime scene investigation staff?

Jessie Huff:

I believe so.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Or is it because we've just got too many fucking shootings?

Jessie Huff:

We have too many shootings. That's the true answer is that we have too many shootings. It's impossible to go to all of these scenes. Many times by the time an investigator gets there, it's been a full 24 hours or something like that. Any evidence that could have been collected might have blown away.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah. It got picked up in the tires of a passing car and driven off. Yeah.

Jessie Huff:

Exactly.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's the front end, right? So you've got to get more data into the whatever it is.

Jessie Huff:

Whatever it is.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah. What about the other end? Because you spoke a little bit earlier about coming in and convincing people that you're not just going to write some 30 page report in the next year or two, you're actually going to give them something useful. What are the useful things that come out of crime gun intelligence centers that can actually drive decision making or better policing?

Jessie Huff:

Yeah. Identifying those guns that are used in multiple offenses can be really useful. Where crimes are clustering is something that can be done by a CGIC. I think the place where many agencies seem to struggle is you enter all this information into the National Integrated Ballistics Information Network.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

NIBIN.

Jessie Huff:

NIBIN.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

We can live with NIBIN and that's a bearable one.

Jessie Huff:

Okay. NIBIN and it is. And what you get back is a lead that says this gun is linked to that gun or this crime is linked to that crime. It doesn't generally have a lot of other information in it unless the agency specifically builds a program to provide additional intelligence about those linked offenses to investigators.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

What you get back from NIBIN, and I've seen it, so I know, but I'm trying to describe it for other folk. It is very basic descriptive. That's all you get. It doesn't give you any deep insights. There's a lot of backend work to actually generate useful leads for detectives on the streets, isn't there?

Jessie Huff:

There is a ton. Some agencies are really good at it. They'll bring things in, they'll do social networks analysis, they'll do all kinds of fancy things so that the detectives can actually use that information. Not everyone is doing that, but I think really that's the part where we translate this evidence collection on the street to what we want to see, which is increased apprehension of individuals who are using firearms so that we can get these frequent shooters off the street.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Do you have results yet from your work or were you prepared to stick your neck out with a sort of gut sense of the value or not of crime gun intelligence centers?

Jessie Huff:

So in a general sense, I have a report reviewing the evidence related to crime gun intelligence centers coming out. Basically what I did is I identified with a graduate student who was very helpful all of the evaluations of crime gun intelligence centers and then kind of coded the questions that they asked and the results that they found.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Not a systematic review, but is there a name for it?

Jessie Huff:

Like a scoping review maybe. It wouldn't be as systematic as a systematic review.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I wouldn't

Jessie Huff:

Call

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It that. A scoping review is a good way of coming. Yeah.

Jessie Huff:

Yeah. So kind of a scoping review of these studies and what we did is coded the research questions and the outcomes. Generally what we're finding is many agencies do increase inputs and evidence collection. We're seeing less effectiveness or less consistent results when it comes to things like arrest, case clearance and very few studies have actually measured whether it's reducing crime.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I don't suppose the title of this is paralysis by analysis, is it? Because it kind of smacks of that, right? Which is, we've gathered more data and I'm going, great, but is Mrs. Miggins down on the street corner safer?

Jessie Huff:

Exactly. And I think a lot of people lose that, right? Even with things like ShotSpotter, it's like, oh, it's great. We have this system. We can identify these shootings and these gunshots, but we don't look at, does that reduce crime?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And there's a classic ongoing discussion in my class all the time about inputs. We do more work. Outputs, we generate more knowledge, but not outcomes, which is the outcome as Mrs. Miggins wants to feel safer. The community actually demonstrates safer, reduced shootings. And it's very difficult to translate that because to some degree that's outside of the hands of the Crime Gun Intelligence Center, isn't it?

Jessie Huff:

I agree. And I think this is something where researchers can really add value is just sitting down with police agencies, talking through a logic model, which does not sound fun and sexy and it's not.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's like using the word synergy on this podcast. It's banned, but a logic model is getting awfully close to it. So come on, now you've got to tell me what the logic model ... Don't look at me like that. You opened up this door.

Jessie Huff:

I did. And everyone's going to stop listening to this episode. Ratings will plummet and it will all be my fault.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You'll be responsible for three car crashes at this point where somebody nods off. Come on then. You open this door, you bugger, come on, what's a logic model?

Jessie Huff:

So a logic model is this idea that you come up with something you want to evaluate, like does ShotSpotter reduce crime? The first thing you need to think about is your inputs. What are the people, the resources, the technology that we're going to input into this system? What does it take to get this started? And then you have your outputs, right? So your ShotSpotter alerts, man hours that are dedicated to responding to those alerts. Anything else that you do that's related to the immediate output of introducing this new system. Long-term, you want to see outcomes. That's the crime reduction that you're hoping to see. I think when police departments, and this is true of every organization-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

We're not doing this just to keep busy.

Jessie Huff:

No, we're not. I think a lot of times when something fails, it's an issue somewhere in the middle. People thought about their inputs and their outputs or maybe they didn't. Maybe they didn't actually do all of the things they said they were going to do that would ultimately lead to that outcome of Mrs. Miggins feeling safer. And so if you sit down with a researcher who can talk you through the process from start to finish and then who hopefully will measure the process from start to finish, like, did you do the thing? Is it going well? Is it having these outputs that we need it to have? We need them to be useful and then long-term is it having that crime reduction.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That gap between the outputs, it's like gun buybacks. We file our guns on the table or we did some busts, here's a big pile of money and guns and drugs on the table. That's an output. That shows how hard we worked or police worked, right? But then that outcome towards public safety, you've got to connect that. I like to connect that with the idea of a mechanism. If I put more guns on the table, what's the mechanism that that will make Mrs. Miggins safer? I think that's a key part that's often missing. That's the part that a lot of my students struggle to figure out.

Jessie Huff:

And I think we often forget about it. So I have a paper that's under review. So maybe it'll be out by the time this comes out, so I'll talk about it.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

If this ever comes out.

Jessie Huff:

If It ever

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Comes out,

Jessie Huff:

If it's a useful conversation. I have a paper that's under review. Hopefully we'll be out by the time this podcast

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Is done. I'm sure it will. You write good stuff

Jessie Huff:

Thank you. I appreciate that. It's actually a meta analysis looking at the impact of gunshot detection systems on crime.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Oh, I've done some work on that. It didn't go well.

Jessie Huff:

It didn't.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I mean, the paper came out and the project was good, but the system wasn't very good and it's not shot spotter before anybody starts fricking outting me.

Jessie Huff:

I too have done a gunshot detection evaluation that was not shotspotter. So there are other companies out there. Yes, but part of that paper, and I think probably maybe even more than the meta analysis that I think is valuable is I created a theoretical model that would link shot spotter or gunshot detection systems of any kind to crime reduction. So there's your deterrence idea, right? Like we have this system now individuals will become aware of the system and then they will stop shooting. Or at

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Least reduce shooting.

Jessie Huff:

Right. Shoot less. Yes. And then there's this other arm of incapacitation, right? So this is the idea that a gunshot is detected. Someone goes out, they either identify the shooter or the victim or they collect evidence, right? Whether that's a casing they can enter into NIBIN or they get a witness statement. All of that can help them identify and apprehend the shooter and by identifying and apprehending the shooter, that person is out of the community and that would reduce crime. So there's kind of these two arms of it. Both of them require intervening mechanisms, right? Like you either need the community aware of this if you want deterrence to work or you need to make sure that you are achieving those outputs, getting the evidence, you're getting the arrests, you're getting the prosecutions.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I think this is a really valuable contribution to the field because I don't think people think through the logic model or the mechanism for so much of what goes on well enough. I know you and I were both at the International Association of Chiefs of Police Conference, which is a far more fun conference than this fricking academic thing that we've got going here if only because there's a lot more open bars paid for by somebody else. But there's also that massive toy store, which is the huge exhibition hall and there are a gazillion companies selling all sorts of tech and electronic gizmos and everything that's going to apparently be the silver bullet to save every police department. But I'm looking at half this shit going, I cannot think of the logic mechanism, how this is going to make anybody safer. Does it change anything the community cares about?

And I just don't see it in half those things. It's just a bunch of shiny toys.

Jessie Huff:

I would agree with you. And I think that if we pay more attention to these mechanisms, which requires I think a researcher, I mean, there's plenty of really smart ... I'm actually just going to stop talking because I don't know where I was going and I hated it. So I don't want you to be like, you have to have a researcher. You don't. The marketing at IACP is very good. They're very good at selling you technology. I don't think people think enough about the outcome. And part of this might be because when you look at performance metrics in police departments, it's easy to measure things like arrests, cases- It's all clear. It's all outputs.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's

Jessie Huff:

All outputs and that's how we measure officer performance as well. So are you very productive or are your cases falling through the cracks?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Are you a detective? Are you clearing a bunch of cases, but are they the right cases? The easy low hanging fruit cases may not be the serious repeat offender who's actually causing the most chaos in the neighborhood.

Jessie Huff:

Exactly. And that's something the community would care about, but there's kind of this disconnect because the community often does it doesn't

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Know

Jessie Huff:

Anything

Jerry Ratcliffe:

About it. They're not training this either. Coming back to what you were talking about earlier, which is finding the right way to give people the results, finding the right way to communicate with people. I don't think academics are good at that part either. I agree. Here's my 30 page report two years later. When the average tenure of a police chief is three years and change, it's like that's way too late.

Jessie Huff:

Yes. And it's not helpful. It's not helpful to show up at a police department, take a bunch of data, disappear, come back with this report when people have forgotten you, they've forgotten about your research, they don't care about it and they're probably gone.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So what do you do?

Jessie Huff:

I provide a lot of interim reports and I'm consistent in communication. Here's where we're at with the project, this is what I know. Most of what I do involves both a process evaluation. Are we implementing the technology or the strategy? How is that implementation going? And so what's helpful about that is I can give a six month update, one page, not front and back. It is one page

Jerry Ratcliffe:

All

Jessie Huff:

On one side. It is often mostly a chart or a picture, but that just reminds them like, this is the research, this is what's going on and here's where we're going in these bite sized pieces that are useful.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

When I spoke to Alex Piquero and he was a guest a while back on the podcast, a few episodes back, he recounted telling me about the time when a senator said to him, "Alex, if it's got a paperclip or a staple, nobody's reading it."

Jessie Huff:

It's worked well for me and I think it's worked well for agency partners as well. More people look at it.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right. And you do this every six months or so?

Jessie Huff:

Every six months or so. The best thing you can do as a research partner is ask how they want their findings, whether they want the report, whether they want a brief report, if they want a presentation. I've had agencies who want the results presented to their city councils. Being willing to offer that shows that you care about the partnership and the relationship.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

These are all important things to learn because I think academics really have to manage their relationships with police departments, don't they?

Jessie Huff:

Yes. And not enough attention is paid to the impact of academics on the police agencies they work with.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Most academics don't have any impact on police departments.

Jessie Huff:

I think one of the other barriers for police agencies to working with researchers is that many departments have been burned in the past. And this is something that researchers should care about too. If you fuck up your relationship with the police department, they're not going to be willing to work with any other researcher.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right. And I know of some quite famous researchers who their reputation is not great and it gets around, doesn't it?

Jessie Huff:

It does. And it doesn't help you. It doesn't help you and it doesn't help the field.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You've also been working with St. Paul Police Department, which has helped me where that is. It sounds like it's in one of those states that I spend a lot of time flying over. Sorry, people in St. Paul.

Jessie Huff:

Minnesota. And this is actually an interesting relationship because I've never been to St. Paul. This is a partnership that was formed purely out of the NIJ Leads program, which is why it helps to be in the right room, how opportunities come about.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right. And that means going to conferences, meeting people, just getting those opportunities. So you haven't been there, but what's it about?

Jessie Huff:

My colleague, co-author, Lieutenant Sean Zahar, he is a Brazilian jiu-jitsu guy.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Now that's not an aggressive form of shaving, is it?

Jessie Huff:

It is not.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

No. Okay. Different kind of Brazilian. Different

Jessie Huff:

Kind of Brazilian, yes. Yes. One that won't leave you with a burn.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You know I'm going to have to cut that bit out.

Jessie Huff:

Oh, I'm sure. But it's a good joke. Anyway, Sean has this background in Brazilian jiu-jitsu. So it's kind of a martial art that's more-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's not that half dancy one, that's Kappawera, isn't it?

Jessie Huff:

That's Kapuera. And I honestly don't know if that's a real martial art or is it a dance? I've seen it perform.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Or it could be more than one thing. Yeah.

Jessie Huff:

It could be.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I don't know.

Jessie Huff:

I don't know.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I don't see anybody defending themselves vigorously on the streets with Kapawera, but all things are possible.

Jessie Huff:

I would love to see it. I would love to see that. I would love to see an officer take on a Kapuera street person. Show me that body cam footage. I want to see it. Okay. So yes. So Sean's a Brazilian jiu-jitsu guy. So martial arts approach to some doing suspects. So St. Paul had a issue with use of force that was occurring in their city that was within their policy but looked not great. And officers and civilians alike were getting injured in these incidents. And so what he and some of his colleagues in St. Paul did is they created a new response to resistance and aggression program that was founded predominantly in Brazilian jiu-jitsu. And the reason for this is as they were reviewing use of force incident videos, they saw that officers were escalating levels of force because they weren't confident going hands-on. And so Brazilian jiu-jitsu allows you to redirect individual's momentum.

You don't have to be a physically huge officer to use these techniques. We found that it was more effective for women. When they're trained in this, they become more confident and more able to subdue suspects hands on than they were prior to this program.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So I have watched some Brazilian jiu-jitsu and it looks like the thing that I wish I'd been taught about 40 years ago because it does actually look like it's much more about just very quickly getting hands on and controlling somebody

because like yourself, everything's on YouTube now and I see some police officers in the street and I'm going, and I'm just sitting there saying, "What the fuck are you doing?" I just don't think people are good at going hands on anymore.

Jessie Huff:

Yes. And I don't think they're confident doing it because sometimes when you go hands on in something that you're trained in, it doesn't work. Using kind of a Brazilian jiu-jitsu approach or a martial arts approach, it teaches you how to pivot and techniques that you can use with other officers. So you have multiple officers coming together, trained in the same skills, approaching the issue in the same way. And as you mentioned, when they use these techniques, we found they were able to subdue suspects much faster.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You've got documented positive responses from this?

Jessie Huff:

Yes. Positive responses documented. There's a published article, but I think what's more important probably is there's a police chief article on IACP's new evidence to action. They have a summary of the study findings. So if you don't want to read my boring academic article, you can read either the magazine article, which is much shorter, or you can go to the evidence website for IACP.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right. So IACP, this is for people listening, International Association of Chiefs of Police and they have a new research initiative. It's led by David Snivale and Megan Stoltz and where they're pulling together a whole bunch of interesting research things and putting them into a two pages. We'll let them do two pages, right?

Jessie Huff:

They're allowed.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah, they're allowed. And so you have one of these covering Brazilian judicial that's available.

Jessie Huff:

Yep. Available on the website so you can go look at the results for yourself.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And rather than read that instead of your article, what people should really do is read that and your article, right? Because you've got some more details in that.

Jessie Huff:

I would love that, yes. Read that, read the article. We're doing a follow-up study now. Lieutenant Zahar has recently shifted organizations. He's at a much smaller police department and so we're in the process of replicating that study and seeing how we can translate it.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Ton's going on. You've just won an award. You've got a pile of research going on. What's next for you?

Jessie Huff:

So right now I'm in the final stages of wrapping up a project with colleagues at the University of Cincinnati. It's a statewide assessment of police retention efforts in Ohio along with Corey Haberman, Brad O'Guinn, and we have two grad students on it who've been great. Trey Bussey, Brenna Dunlap.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

This is starting to sound like an Oscar speech. Yes.

Jessie Huff:

They did all the real work and I'm just going to put my name on it now. So what we're trying to do is identify things that organizations can meaningfully do to retain their staff and to increase job satisfaction within the field. Money is certainly part of it, but it's not everything. I think there's more in organizational culture and other programs.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And that's the old trope, isn't it? People don't leave bad jobs, they leave bad bosses.

Jessie Huff:

Absolutely. I think we've all done that.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yes. Well, look, congratulations. You're obviously a rising star in the policing research field, even though we've just agreed that the field is really small, so that sounds kind of crappy. Well played, Jerry. Oh my God. But yes, you're a rising star. Things are going really well. You just won an award thoroughly well deserved. So thanks for spending some time and chatting to me.

Jessie Huff:

Yeah, thank you for having me.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That was episode 95 of Reducing Crime recorded in November 2025 in Washington, DC. If you teach DM me for multiple choice questions for every episode and you can find a transcript of this, well, transcript of every episode at

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Be safe and best of luck.