

#21 (PHIL GOFF)

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Jerry Ratcliffe:

I'm Jerry Ratcliffe here with reducing crime, a podcast featuring influential thinkers in the police service and leading crime and policing researchers. Philip Atiba Goff is the inaugural Franklin A. Thomas professor in policing equity at John Jay college of criminal justice and an expert in the area of racial bias and discrimination. Find out more in this episode at reducingcrime.com and on Twitter @_reducingcrime.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

My chat with Phil Goff is coming in a moment, but first some housekeeping. I was going to be leading police commanders' crime reduction courses, and Sayreville New Jersey and Rochester, New York, over the next few weeks, and Australia and New Zealand during July and August. But obviously the coronavirus pandemic will likely delay these activities. For the latest information about all of these courses, please keep an eye on the Twitter feed @_reducingcrime, and at reducingcrime.com/events, because things are obviously a bit of a shambles right now. In the meantime, wash your hands frequently and follow the advice of scientists, not random Dunning-Kruger blokes with room temperature IQ's, whose opinions only appear online or down at your local bar. Stay safe and keep others safe.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Philip Atiba Goff is the inaugural Franklin A. Thomas professor in policing equity at John Jay College of Criminal Justice. He's the co-founder and CEO of the Center for Policing Equity and an expert in contemporary forms of racial bias and discrimination, as well as the intersections of race and gender. Dr. Goff's work has been supported by a host of prestigious grant and philanthropic organizations. He was a witness for the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing, and is presented before members of Congress and congressional panels, Senate press briefings, and White House advisory councils. Phil is one of three principal investigators for the US Department of Justice's National Initiative for Building Community Trust and Justice. His work explores the ways in which racial prejudice is not a necessary precondition for racial discrimination. Instead, his research demonstrates that situational factors facilitate racially unequal outcomes, and this is the main topic of our discussion.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Phil demonstrates that he's an accomplished tenor, recounts when he experienced a backfire effect with police implicit bias training, and explains why science still needs a storyteller. I end up with a nagging suspicion that he basically thinks I'm Doug from a marvelous Saturday Night Live, black jeopardy sketch.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

A couple of final points before we dive in. If you are listening at home or in the car, be advised that there is some language in this episode that you definitely don't want your kids hearing. Also, Phil and I discuss police involved shootings, an emotive area that we both agree needs addressing. Police use of force, especially lethal force, is traumatic for communities and everybody involved, and it's important that we strive to reduce the number of incidents as much as possible. I mention some estimated numbers in the episode, and it was only after we recorded the episode that I checked my math and found that while my numbers are technically correct, they do not tell the entire story. And I think clarification is important to prevent misinterpretation. I've therefore got a blog post available where I discuss the sources for those numbers, and the limitations of both the data and my comment. You can find that blog post at reducingcrime.com.

Phil Goff:

You good? Do you want me to go ahead and do a sibilance check? And the sound, and the fury.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

What a melodic voice you have.

Phil Goff:

Oh, I don't know that we ever got into this in the midst of the NAS mess. Yeah, I have a former life as a musician.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Really?

Phil Goff:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). And I was actually doing session work in state college, driving to Philly and New York to do gigs and session work. I played bass and I sang, and used to teach voice to people who were sexier than me, but couldn't sing a lick. I mean, I'm going to either do the academic thing full bore, or I'm going to do the music thing full bore. Turns out I did neither of those, I did this nonprofit thing.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You definitely should have done both. All right. I'm never doing karaoke with you, because you're going to wipe the floor with me and everybody else in the room. But I definitely want to see that. There you go, show them how it's done. Nice, well that confirms the machine works, and we can dive in here if you're up for that.

Phil Goff:

Sure.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

One of the things I'm really interested in is just your central role in how implicit bias has become this huge and important thing in certainly, American policing. Why was it never an issue some years ago? Where has it come from?

Phil Goff:

So, the implicit bias conversation, to do it justice, to do it right, you have to do two parallel histories. So there's one history in social psychology, which is we realize that social functions, those things are cognitive. So just like memory is a thing, we got to bring that in.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I'm losing mine rapidly, but I get it.

Phil Goff:

Fair enough. We want to know things like when you see color, that's a neurological element as well as a social element.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I love that question when I see a color, do you see the same color?

Phil Goff:

Right. And you should check the box on the crayons, that's how you manage that. So there are answers to that, that's kind of the point. And that's happening at exactly the same time that Amadou Diallo gets shot 41 times just up the road from here. And the important thing about the Amadou Diallo shooting is not all the technical elements of there's a backslash, and the bullets really were flying back out. It's that they said they saw a gun, and in fact what was there was a wallet. So that's the kind of error, if it wasn't resulting in somebody dead, psychologists love that kind of cognitive error. So all of a sudden you have a real world application for these group of people who have never been outside of a laboratory, and mostly don't like to talk to humans. So they're like, "I can be useful? Yes, give me more."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

The extrovert psychologist is the one who's looking at your shoes, not his own, right?

Phil Goff:

Yeah. So all of a sudden, there's this rush to start doing work that matters in that space. And implicit bias is one of the social cognitive things that we've been talking about. And the fact that you can do it in a laboratory, and it's super controlled, which means that therefore it must be good science. You can do it with a population of officers, and then

you can start to really see logically how it makes sense out on the street. It created a kind of rush, not just from a science perspective, from a policy perspective too, like this is a big deal, we see big effects of it. We got to get to it.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right. So it became a known thing, but then the challenge becomes what the hell do we do about it? Because it's got these two components to it, which I think is, firstly, it's got this very non-lab necessity for application area. And that's a huge issue, because in the lab you try to control as much as possible, all the different variables so you can minimize down to the one you're interested in, and that's definitely not street policing. But then the second side to it, is it's implicit. Which means, am I right in saying it's largely functioning at a sort of subconscious level for many people?

Phil Goff:

It's hard to know when it's functioning, and you usually are not able to introspect about it that much. I use all those qualifiers, because it used to be that people said, "You don't know you got it, and you can't introspect," not true. On your implicit biases, you're not that wrong, but you can't introspect in the moment. So yeah, it's harder to get at then, hey, what do you actually believe? And you can reason about it. The problem is it's such a big deal in the lab, and it's such a powerful experience to find out what your score is. You can literally take your racism test and be like, "Oh, I got a 65. I didn't do that great"

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I take it this is a test you don't want to win, right?

Phil Goff:

I mean, it depends on what you consider winning.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Can we reverse code it, help me out here?

Phil Goff:

So in those situations you feel like, "I thought I was this way. I find out I'm this other way," that's an emotional experience. You know what it's not? A translation into what it does in the world.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right. I've done the Harvard implicit bias test and all those kind of things, I do it with my class all the time. If I'm going to have my class do it, I'm going to do it. And it comes out with slightly different responses each particular time, but it feels very divorced from when I was a cop in the East end of London, rolling up a car and doing a traffic stop. It's not blowing through the back of my mind at that particular point.

Phil Goff:

Yeah. And I think this is the fatal translation flaw in implicit bias into policing, is that you had people who were really good at the lab, who were not doing stuff in the world, and didn't take the time to do the translation properly. And that means that people who are amateurs in the science but experts in policing, or people who were experts in the science but amateurs in policing, they've tried to take it and run with it. And it gets to a place where you have to then disavow where it's gone.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Really?

Phil Goff:

Yeah. So let me be really clear: I have never, ever thought that training was the biggest lever we have to change the culture of policing.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Because I'm starting to read some of the research on the training in other fields like nursing and things like that, and finds that the training doesn't seem to be having the effect that people hope it would have.

Phil Goff:

And I want to be clear: none of us did those trainings. Those are trainings where you'd be like, "Well, that's stupid. You should definitely not have done that." We know that that won't work.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I've also worried that there's a bit of a backfire effect, especially with police officers, that you run the risk that you get a bunch of grizzled old cops, don't get the nuance of the science, they see it and they go, "You calling me a fucking racist?" And at that point they start to push back.

Phil Goff:

So, we've done, we at the Center for Policing Equity, have done two analyses of a very popular training that I cannot mention because of the context of where we did the analyses, and we see the backdraft effect.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So it's a real thing?

Phil Goff:

It's a real thing. I want to be clear it's not a real thing in every training, we don't have any sense of that. But at least in two populations, one of the most popular ones actually makes you higher on implicit bias, higher on threats to your manhood, higher on implicit dehumanization, and worse, higher on explicit bias. You just say, "I'd like black people less having done this training." I'm pretty sure whatever the goal of the trainings are, that isn't it.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I would love to come up with a scientific academic response, but the best I could come out with is, holy shit. I've had people say that they suspect there's a backfire effect, but you've actually legit found it.

Phil Goff:

We found it. The samples are relatively small, but they're decent pre-post design.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's enough to be worried about it.

Phil Goff:

So, I'm very worried about it. But here's the deal, it's because we've gotten the science wrong to begin with. Here's what I mean: implicit bias is not a trait that just exists in you. It's not your secret hidden racist that you need to find, examine, and then exterminate. Because racism, isn't a defective hearts and minds, racism is about behaviors and attitudes. If you're a psychologist, you know attitudes are weak predictors of behaviors, implicitly or explicitly. They explain about 10% of behavior at best. So what the fuck is the rest of it? I'm allowed to curse on this, aren't I?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Sure, shit yeah. I've got about 20 podcasts episodes to scrub for about 80% of everything I say, if that becomes an issue. Fucking hell.

Phil Goff:

Then we're about to get a lot saltier for the next 45. All right, so the deal is the other 90%, that's chronic situations. My guess is that you know somebody that you think of as a liar, right? Politicians and ex-girlfriends aside.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I've still got a few people left after that.

Phil Goff:

Think about whether or not, did they lie with everything that came out of their mouth? Literally everything?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

No, of course not.

Phil Goff:

Right. Because if they did, we'd call them opposite truth tellers, they'd be most reliable people we ever met.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah.

Phil Goff:

Liars lie when they have a motive, they think they can get away with it, or the punishment will be relatively slight. It's like routine activities theory, but for lying. You know who else does that? The group of people known as every fucking body.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah, right. It's a defensive mechanism in some cases, you don't hurt people's feelings, there are things you want to deceive people a little bit, and you just want to nuance situations. Whole bunch of different reasons.

Phil Goff:

I've got to say, you have so much of a positive outlook towards humanity. Everybody does that. So the people that you know of as dispositional liars, you may have chronically encountered in the situations where anybody would have lied. So if you really want to change behavior, shift the situation.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Okay. So now, is there a way to translate this, in Philadelphia I'm sure you're aware we had an issue with like 72 officers with Facebook posts, and racist Facebook posts and other associated posts. The question then becomes, does it matter what they post? Because isn't it how they behave on the street?

Phil Goff:

It is behavior, speech acts are behavior. So, I was doing a set of interviews in one of the departments where we work, it's very early on, like the third year we were doing this. So a guy walks in, looks me up and down and says, "I just need you to know something straight off the bat. I don't like niggers and I don't like spics."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Well, he seems nice.

Phil Goff:

Right. Which is basically what I said. I was like, "Okay. Probably me neither, depending on what you think. You want to have a seat, can I get you a coffee?" And he goes on to explain, he says, "Well, a Latino guy..." He goes on to explain that he wanted to make clear, that you have good people and bad people in every group. Now, that's not what he was trying to do.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

No, that's not what he said either.

Phil Goff:

No. And what he was trying to do was to get a rise out of me, cause he thought maybe he was going to get accused of something. So I guess he was trying to beat me to the punch. The point is that speech act, it's a behavior. The Facebook posts are a decision to act in the world, and we can use that. Anybody who wants to say, "I don't like those groups of people," I didn't want to say it again, that's behavior. And so people should be held accountable to that behavior. But we're so close to thinking that, oh yeah, that's just what you think. That's just you're voicing your opinion. The voicing part is a behavior. But what we got to make clear is, I've been black my entire life. I have never, ever felt the sweet relief of justice, because someone thought they were going to feel better about me. I want them to treat me better. No one's marching in the streets for feelings, it's behaviors. And behaviors you can measure and you can regulate.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Because otherwise, we're trying to get into the minds of people, and honestly, a lot of the people I don't want to get anywhere near the inside of their mind, it's quite a terrifying and dark place. We can't do that, but we can change just how they behave to everybody else kicking around. Yeah, absolutely on board with that idea. That makes sense.

Phil Goff:

Yeah, I don't want to police anybody's thoughts. I really don't. Even the people whose thoughts are abhorrent to me. I don't want to police them, I want to mock them. I want to ostracize them.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Absolutely, this is what we have Twitter for.

Phil Goff:

That's right. And that's why I'm an academic, is because my job is to be the smartest person in this area. So I love doing that.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Is that the job?

Phil Goff:

That's so much the job.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I'm screwed. I can pretty much only be the smartest person in a phone booth.

Phil Goff:

I'm the smartest person in my home when my wife's away. But I don't want to police it, I do want to say every organization in the history of the world that's been an organization, says, "These are the outcomes we want. Let's track

it, measure it, and then hold ourselves accountable to it." Why do we not do that with racism? Implicit bias is a risk factor, that when you're in a certain situation, you're going to end up engaging in discriminatory behavior. That's it, it's a risk factor. That's how we should be thinking about implicit bias, the trainings don't, and our popular conversation about it doesn't. It's as if, hey, I know what's in your heart better than you do, because I'm the scientist, and I'm now going to teach your heart the thing that you don't believe. So you want to know what's going to create a backlash? Exactly that shit.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So how do we, I mean, if the training is probably not going to function, I'm sure we'll go through for the next decade, myriad variations of it. Because I kind of get it from a police chief's perspective, "Can you give me something that makes it look like I'm really trying to make an effort with this?" I get that, and there's probably a place for that. So, if it doesn't work in the current iterations, where do we go with it?

Phil Goff:

So, I want to be clear: I don't want to abandon training. Training is a really important signal that says, "These are our values and we're going to do that." I think that we can produce trainings that in the same way you baby proof and apartment, you can bias proof certain situations. We know what some of the risk factors are, we teach you what those risk factors are, how to identify them, and we have you practice how you get out of it. Just like you do for real good training.

Phil Goff:

The other piece is policing is worse than the broader society, because you want to know some of the risk factors are for engaging in discriminatory behavior for everybody? Black, white, and other? When you have to make split second decisions, when you are overtaxed because you were multitasking, called cognitive depletion.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Pretty much every day for me, but yeah.

Phil Goff:

But even before you were an academic, right? When your identity is tied to something that's stereotyped as negative. Number one stereotype of law enforcement in the United States, that they're racist. So all of those things accumulate, and then you've got to make decisions about what's good for somebody else. And when your social calculations are exhausted, even more so. So the way we set up law enforcement is almost exactly the way we would set up an experiment to make you engage in more discriminatory behavior.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's interesting you say that, but also law enforcement scores some of the highest ratings when you look at any kind of group in terms of public perception of the police as well. It's a very contradictory kind of business.

Phil Goff:

There's a general positive feeling. There's also, "Hey, these are the people that run towards the danger, yay and thank you. And for the most part, I am safe because America is a very safe place right now." That positive rating though, it matters what neighborhood you're going into.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Absolutely. The stereotype then... I'm not sure where I'm really going with this. I'm the worst person to be talking about race probably in anywhere in academia, because I'm not American and I'm white and it's-

Phil Goff:

Trust me. You can't possibly be, because I've been having these conversations with academics for years.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah. But I've been here nearly 20 years, and in the last 20 years one thing I've really kind of figured out, is that America is terrible about talking about race. I speak to so many different people, which I think is great, but honestly, half the time my topic knowledge, I mean, I'm basically a cop from the East end of London with delusions of academic grandeur. So I mean, I'm out of my depth most of the time, but America is terrible about talking about race. And I've never really understood how it goes about talking about race, the change with things like Black Lives Matter and that kind of stuff coming in. So for all those changes, police are still shooting and killing about a thousand people a year on average, across the United States. And when you take away the people who are armed, that's more than 500, then what you're left with is a bunch of people wielding samurai swords and other things. And my only ever off-duty arrest for murder was a guy who beat his friend to death with a length of scaffolding pole.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So once you add in all those kinds of things that are legit weapons that one blow will kill me, you're down to two, 300, probably a bit less than that. So you look at the number of black people who are unarmed, shot and killed by police every year, and it's between about 70 to 80. And then you look at the number of interactions that police have with the public in the United States every year, and it's about 70 to 80 million. We should get down to zero, but what's a reasonable target given we're trying to change now, the behavior in what is fundamentally a one in a million incident, that could take place anywhere with one of 800,000 cops across one of the largest countries in the world?

Phil Goff:

My answer to that would be to ask you about Ice Road Truckers, because that's my answer to pretty much everything. What you've been hearing, especially in the last six, seven years since Ferguson, is the job of policing has never been safer. Now you talk to cops all the time all across the United States, and part of the reason why the job has quote unquote, never been safer in their imagination is, they look at the fatality rates. And Ice Road Truckers, that's a shrimp boat captain, salmon captain, that's a really dangerous job.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right. But I think the difference to some degree is that nobody's deliberately trying to kill them.

Phil Goff:

That's the point, exactly that. Part of the reason why it's so much safer is because they're better at violence than the people trying to do violence at them. And the other part is it doesn't feel safe. We're talking about mortality and fatality, that's not the same thing as safety. So you said you've reduced the number, and at some later conversation I'll push back on whether or not 70 to 80 is the right number to be complaining about. But I get the point.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

No, no, no. To be entirely up front, I'm talking about those times when they're fatalities, there will be a lot more times when unarmed people are shot and not killed, and I totally get that.

Phil Goff:

But not even that, there are ways to push back on whether or not you need to kill somebody who's wielding a kitchen knife. It's going to kill you if they get close to you, but you showed up at the door and they're in the other room. But besides all of that, communities aren't feeling the 70 to 80, they're feeling the one in five adults who has contact with law enforcement. Each one of those that feels in black neighborhoods, like it could have been fatal. The rudeness is the intimidations, the contact with kids. Those are the things that feel like I'm not here being protected, I'm here being occupied. So to reduce it down to that 70, the mistrust, it's intergenerational. And remember, maybe not remember, my mother was born in Greensboro, North Carolina. When she was born, she was not allowed to attend school with white people. She has two Master's degrees. Her mother, same thing, has a Master's degree. Her mother, college educated, my mother's grandmother, college educated. Her mother was legally prevented from reading and writing.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So here's the thing that now then, poses a challenge. So, equally I went to an all white school, but that's because I grew up in Scotland. There was one black person in Scotland, and we never knew where he was, I think he was in Aberdeen. He was probably, poor blokes wandering around going, "What the fuck am I doing here?" So I come here, you know where Temple is, it's in North Philadelphia. And going to community meetings, speaking to people, speaking to cops, white and black cops. One of the things I discovered is that, what academia has told me is all the stuff that matters, like data and facts and knowledge and science and reason, those statistics and percentages don't mean anything. It's my experiences, what my family has experienced. If I'm a police chief, what do we do? How do you change that?

Phil Goff:

No, see, I don't think that's right. I get how that can feel that way, I've been to the same meetings that you have. What I'm trying to say in terms of my mother's great grandmother was born a slave, whose job was it to make sure that she stayed that way? So it's not the question of it's stories over data, it's the right storyteller with the data.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Oh, I'm useless for that kind of stuff. I mean, listen to me for crying out loud, before you even see me, listen to me.

Phil Goff:

That works if you have just shown us kind of Love Actually or something, because black folks love that movie. The same way that academics, you show up and you're not able to talk the talk of statistical analysis, then that means that there are political scientists you'll never be able to get to. If you're not a jerk, then economists will never take you seriously. There are real disciplinarian cultures around this stuff. And we cue on the signals more than we cue on the substance, across the board. Academics do it too. So they're just doing what all humans do saying, "Are you one of us? And can we trust that your values are not against us?" And they've got lots of strong priors that anybody who's not one of them, their values are against them. Including black folks who are not from that part of the town.

Phil Goff:

So the fact that this is not, this is my professor voice I'm talking to you, not my West Philly voice. Because born in West Philly, I speak with a different accent. I code switch, I'm able to send the right signals, and it's authentic. And people have a good nose for authenticity around these types of things. So if you have been lied to by statistics over and over again, by people who are expert in statistics, over and over again, you're going to need something else that convinces you it's real: historical and cultural fluency.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So how does that then kick into the current zeitgeist at the moment, which is the debate around algorithms in the criminal justice system? I feel like I'm in a very minority voice, being one of the people saying algorithms might be actually a good way to start to readdress some of this balance that we see with judges having racist decision-making, probation and parole racist decision-making, and sentencing racist decision-making. And we see all of this evidence in the existing system, where have we screwed up in terms of taking this discussion about algorithms?

Phil Goff:

So, we'll continue our so far pattern of question with question. Do you think it's a good idea in any black community in the United States, for a group of white people to decide how they're going to be sentenced without talking to them?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Oh, I've long ago figured out I'm not in a position to make any decisions for anybody in the United States, but yeah. The simple part of that sounds terrible.

Phil Goff:

And yet that's the way that algorithms are frequently feeling like they're getting rolled out.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And at that point we'll be shooting the messenger for being the person that created the algorithm?

Phil Goff:

The point is, there is a process by which you have to move towards a more sophisticated way to make these decisions. And the process has been infused with all of the same ignoring black communities, as the previous generations. So one of the cues that black communities have about whether or not something's going to be good for them, is whether or not they got to have a voice in it. And if they didn't, I'm not going to fucking trust that.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But some of the times I've been to community meetings on projects and just stuff hanging around Philly and Camden, New Jersey and places like that, the tricky part is what do you then do when you give people a voice, and they articulate for something that you know doesn't work and is actually harmful?

Phil Goff:

So there's two things: one, if you give somebody voice so late in the process that it's impossible to make a change, you didn't really give them a voice. So I have God-kids and I'm like, "Hey, where do you guys want to go for dinner tonight?" We're in the car already, I know where we're going. And sadly, they're not old enough to be like-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

We're a bit late for our Open Table reservation.

Phil Goff:

Exactly, they're like, "Uncle Phil, where are we going?" They don't want to have that conversation, because that's patronizing. So that's one part of it. The other part I'll take from international relations, has changed every relationship I've ever had. It's fucking genius, and I wish I could take credit for it. It's the difference between a position and an interest. You want to articulate and listen for interests, but not for positions.

Phil Goff:

Now, what is the difference? A position is, "When you come in you will remove your shoes," and interest is, "Hey, I got a little bit carpet here and it's a pain in the ass to clean. Would you mind?" Now almost anybody can find seven or eight different ways to not fuck up my carpet. But if for whatever reason, you got holes in your socks, your feet are smelly, you just like your shoes, you don't want to take off your shoes, now you say no. And we got to have a fight because I got to protect my position. Interests usually are not in conflict, but positions often are.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I love that. That makes a lot of sense to me. Could you have told me this a few years ago before I got divorced?

Phil Goff:

Sadly, no. But I'll tell you, it works for marriages too. It's the best thing ever for me and my wife, like, "What's the interest here?"

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Too bloody late for me, you bastard.

Phil Goff:

But not too late for American democracy.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That still exists?

Phil Goff:

I don't know. We're in a democratic recession globally. I don't know what the heck we're going to do. It's all awful, it's all awful. The worst part about it, when you've been living in black skin for a long time, you actually see people already have these tools. They just don't know how to use it with you.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So is that where your center is going then? I mean, you're still planning on finding ways to tweak and change training, but also thinking very much about situations, then.

Phil Goff:

I think we're known for doing the training because everybody wants the training, but that's actually a very small percentage of what we do. Most of what we're doing is we're taking police behavioral data, we combine it with census data and crime data, and we give back to communities and law enforcement, not racial disparities, which are not all that interesting, but the portion of the disparities that belong to things that police probably can't control, like crime and poverty, and the portion of it that that's where you go and look, if you want to do something about it.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I always have concerns about the idea of using underlying populations of an area, because it has its limitations. But if we still want police to be proactive, actually seeking to try and do something about a crime problem, then the population they're interested in doesn't necessarily exactly reflect the underlying population, because it's about people who have engaged in street crime and robberies, walking down the street and worried about being shot or robbed.

Phil Goff:

100%. We include both violent, and depending on where we are, we're looking at property crimes as well. We include single headed households. It's a host of the set of things that we know from other research literature, predicts both crime and contact. And the point of it is not to say, "And this is where you're racist," I'm not interested in doing a racism

test. I don't care about that. I am interested in saying crime and poverty are not sufficient to explain these set of outcomes. So if they're not, and those were your two best guesses as to why it wasn't your fault, if 20% that's left over is possibly you, and it's really highly suggestive here where you're dealing with the homeless, like in Minneapolis, or here where you've got foot pursuits like in Las Vegas, or here where you're doing low level enforcement, like in Baltimore, those types of things, we don't like racial disparities. It looks like if you can do anything about it at all, you can do it here.

Phil Goff:

And pretty quick you get some detectives who say, "I think I know why that shows up that way, and I think we can change something about it." When you stop making it about character, which is where we started this whole conversation, you can actually start talking about, "Hey, I know you're a good person. Your policies end up with this unfortunate outcome in this area, it seems like."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Changing the situation is something that we can do. We can't change the underlying hearts of men.

Phil Goff:

No. Not unless we're artists or cult leaders, those are the two best ways to do that. And since neither of us-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You be the artist, can I be the cult leader?

Phil Goff:

You should feel free, but what's the cult going to be organized around? So no, I don't want it to be my job to change your heart. I am interested in saying, "These outcomes are bad. Come with me, let's not have those outcomes anymore."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I think the biggest contradiction is that, again, it's does it pass the sniff test, that real world test? Because it's very easy for organizations, staffed by second year law students, to go, "This is the population of the city. This is the population and the police are stopping. There is a massive problem here. Thank you very much, can you give us more money?" But the reality is the cops are saying, "That it's not the population that we worry about. There is a smaller subgroup of that population that commit a lot of robberies and shoot people." And that population unfortunately, is also that the population that gets shot and robbed as well.

Phil Goff:

Yeah. And if criminologists took it seriously, I think we'd have made significantly more progress than we have. John Mummalo just published a paper last year, I think, basically doing what we've been doing at CPE, but formalizing it and doing a brilliant job with it. Which is you take the estimates, using the actual crime data, using the rest, say, "All right.

So this looks like it's an overall amount given the amount of crimes that are being reported," so you do your fancy math to predict that estimate. And then that estimate is what you put into your use of force calculation. There are ways that science can help us do better and better at figuring out this benchmark problem.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It sounds a little bit like we're trying to move away from a direct blame approach to this. I'm a pilot in my spare time, and what I really like about how aviation has advanced over the last 100 years, is to this day if I make a mistake, I can go to a webpage and I can confess my sins. And as long as I haven't done anything egregious, I basically won't get into trouble for that, because they're looking to create a system where you don't get blamed, but still the system can learn and improve. I think many people, they just get wrapped up in the idea, it's just easier if I blame somebody, and then discipline them, and then it looks like I did something about it.

Phil Goff:

Because we think the problem is character. The biggest intervention that we do at CPE is be like, "Fuck all about your character. Fuck your feelings, but from the politically left side, like we care about racism but fuck your feelings. I don't care about your feelings. Again, I've been black my whole life, I've never cared. We can do this about behavior, and the behaviors can be motivated by genuine things. You want to reduce crime? There are 17 different tactics you can take on, and you don't know which one's going to work best in that neighborhood, so you try them all. And if one of them does bad things in the neighborhood, you're like, "Oh shit, we should stop doing that," but didn't make you a bad person. It means that you guessed wrong.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

We need to spend a little bit more time measuring the potential for unintended consequences. All the graduate students who work with me get a vest, and they go out, and they go and see police officers turning up to victims' homes, they go and see where their data come from. But I think there's so many students nowadays, crime data is easy. You download it. It's from open data sources, and that's how they do their work. And you can't do it that way. Or unfortunately you can do it-

Phil Goff:

You can but you shouldn't. But as much as that matters, I think what you said, there's a hidden element that the folks who are doing this kind of work, both who were out in the field working in law enforcement, and the folks who are our academics around it, what does it feel like to live in a community where we didn't bother to measure what the State did to them?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right. Well, and that's my point, which is what we don't do a great job of measuring, is what are the consequences of this? Because sometimes we might we're surprised. We might find the community are like, "That's great, you guys. Do that, do more of that," but we don't know because we don't measure it.

Phil Goff:

Right. And the result is you can't do a cost benefit analysis on some of these things. There is no cost component. And what you're seeing in terms of mistrust from black communities, is black communities have been bearing those costs that have gone unmeasured, unaccounted on. The number of folks I invite up here who are like, "Oh, I've been studying crime my whole life. I'm an established I'm an award-winning criminologist," who don't have anything interesting to say about race. The field shouldn't let that be possible. That's not required in the field, and so the field has not yet earned the trust of black communities.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I kind of find all this kind of stuff fascinating. As I say, the tricky part for me is growing up in Scotland. So coming here, and 20 years of trying to really understand what's going on. How does America talk about race? And then how do we talk about race in the context of policing? I think it's tricky for black guys in policing as much as white guys in policing.

Phil Goff:

If not more so. Yeah. I just gave a talk a couple of weeks ago, on exactly, it is the hard conversation that makes it worse. That doesn't mean it's people's job, I don't feel it's my job, to make people feel comfortable talking about it. Because that's not how power works, but it's because we think that the conversation is going to reveal something about character. The consequence of that is if you say something like, "Oh, I just feel like all lives should matter," I think you probably are aware enough that that's a landmine that you just stepped on.

Phil Goff:

But why? Why is all lives matter such a big deal? Because in the context where we're talking about Black Lives Matter, when you say all lives, you are erasing something. It's like saying, "Well, this rainforest is on fire," and be like, "All forests matter." "But this one's on fire." "Yeah, well screw that one. All of them are on..." Well, that doesn't make any sense. But it feels like you said, impenetrable, because we haven't had that fluency. And more importantly, every mistake, that's an indicator of character. It's treated that way, and frankly, it's hard to tell people in my position who've grown up through it, not to do it.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

What do you do then in the reverse situation, where somebody is inarticulate and ineloquent, but their actions are less toxic?

Phil Goff:

So, Patton Oswalt has a lovely little comedy routine on exactly this. And have you ever seen, do you watch Saturday Night Live ever?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Getting so old that I'm falling asleep, but I do love Patton Oswalt.

Phil Goff:

So Saturday night Live, they have it on YouTube, just the clip. They have a recurring theme, black jeopardy.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Oh, I love that. Yes, even not coming from America originally, that is funny as hell.

Phil Goff:

It's genius.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And it's Tom Hanks in it.

Phil Goff:

The Tom Hanks one.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Shit, am I Doug?

Phil Goff:

No, the point is he's massively inarticulate, but he got the right answer for all these. "Skinny woman can do this for me? What is not a damn thing." "You're damn right, Doug!" I loved it, it was a genius thing. Because so often we imagine that these worlds can't possibly come together. They really are very, very close, in values, in preferences and that kind of stuff. But it ends with these lives matter, and you're like, it's been a good run, Doug. So I think there's room for that. I think there's lots of folks who understand that there are people who are inarticulate, who are not fluent just in their culture, they mean well. And so when they say something that's really off-putting, they have a sense of character, and they're like, "I think you mean this. That's kind of hurtful, let's manage."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And at least learn from that. How do we take the field of criminology and get it to sort itself out?

Phil Goff:

I don't have a solution for that. I just know that there might be explosions necessary. Not literal, but the reviews that I see both for myself and for other folks when we're talking about race, those reviews that actually, that could get you punished in other disciplines where race is a central figure. You couldn't write that in sociology, political science or psychology. It's so racially illiterate as to be embarrassing, but there are no consequences for that. So who as a criminologist, has had real professional consequences for how racially illiterate they were? Who's ever won any awards for how racially literate they were?

Phil Goff:

So I don't know how you change a culture where there are no incentives to make that happen. I do know that if the culture doesn't decide it wants to change, it will become less and less relevant, to exactly the space that it most wants to serve.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And it has a lot of very well meaning people who want to serve in that space, but they're not necessarily doing the kind of job that's necessary to have those conversations. And that's not pandering to have the easy conversations, just get on board and be woke, but that's having the tough conversations about how do we actually move forward?

Phil Goff:

I've been in rooms with, everybody is an award winning, tenured faculty member who does criminology at a serious institution, and none of them, not a one of them knows anything about race. No exaggeration. They know they don't know the people, they don't remember that George Washington Carver invented the peanut, they never heard of W. E. B. Du Bois, they think that King's best accomplishment was plagiarizing his PhD thesis. These folks are massively illiterate and not thinking that that's going to be a problem. The Jimmy Baldwin quote is, "I can't believe what you say because I see what you do." And to me as a black person, that was so formative.

Phil Goff:

That's part of the reason why I'm a social scientist, is because I want to see what you do, and I want to say, that's the thing that going to have an issue with. And I don't care why, because that's a conversation for your family and for your religious groups, that's a Sunday conversation. I'm not here on Sunday. The Monday through Friday conversation is what are you doing? And in the Academy and in policing, that's why I like police better than I like the Academy. Because I get people who will tell me what they want to do, and then they're actually going to go and do it.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I see police departments that are really good at articulating these desires, but not expressing them in actual action.

Phil Goff:

Because they're American. And in the United States, that's what we're really good at, is the principle of equity and the reality of oppression.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And no place do we see it better than on Twitter.

Phil Goff:

I mean, red lining first, then Twitter. I mean, it's actually also the discussion we've been having. Because it's all the, "Hey, we're going to do this in a way that makes sense economically. And we're not going to talk about race, except please, these people, they can't get houses." That's that's been the system the whole way through.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And it's 40 years, the implications are still rippling through the country.

Phil Goff:

Absolutely.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Amazing. Depressing, I mean not amazing as in awesome, but as in good grief.

Phil Goff:

Well, awesome in the Greek sense, of it inspires awe at the capacity for something that chills you.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Terrifying. Phil, as always, it's great to see you and it's been a pleasure.

Phil Goff:

And far too short a conversation. You have to come back next time when I can get you cold beverages instead of hot ones.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Awesome.

Phil Goff:

All right.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You've been listening to episode 21 of reducing crime, recorded in New York City in February, 2020. Other episodes lurk at reducingcrime.com or the usual podcasty places. New episodes are announced on Twitter @_reducing crime. Be safe, and best of luck.