

#44 (JASON ROACH)

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Jerry Ratcliffe:

Reducing Crime features influential thinkers in the police service, and leading crime and policing researchers.

Dr. Jason Roach is a chartered psychologist, professor of psychology in policing, and director of the University of Huddersfield's Secure Societies Research Institute. We discuss offender self-selection and trigger crimes, nudging crime prevention and learning directly from offenders.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Welcome to Reducing Crime, I'm your host Jerry Ratcliffe. In that brief window when COVID looked like it was starting to wane, I had a chance to speak at the University of Akureyri's Annual Policing and Society conference hosted by former British police officer Andy Hill. Akureyri you say? Yeah, it's in Iceland, the second largest city in fact. Iceland's a fantastic place to visit, and I hadn't been in 30 years so I couldn't say no. It also gave me a chance to catch up with Jason Roach.

Jason is professor of psychology in policing, and director for the Secure Societies Research Institute at Britain's University of Huddersfield. He's also a chartered psychologist, and editor in chief for the Police Journal. Prior to joining the criminal justice field, Dr. Roach worked in psychiatric wards and mental health hospitals in the north of England, which probably prepared him pretty well for a career in and around policing. For some time, he was a crime analyst for the UK's Home Office before moving to academia. His research interests include investigative decision making, cold case homicide and evolutionary psychology in crime. And he's written four books, including a key work in 2016 called Self-Selection Policing co-authored with the British crime prevention legend Ken Pease. In the podcast, we talk about some of his current projects, including criminal decision making, nudging and influence in crime prevention and learning from offenders. For some strange reason, he also drops references to Al Capone, why Jason is the Grim Reaper of police colleges, Highwayman Dick Turpin stealing a handsome cock, and why Liam Gallagher from Oasis is like he is....Yeah....

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So your work really is almost as a very applied criminologist.

Jason Roach:

I don't call myself a criminologist because I really never had a qualification in criminology, I'm purely a psychologist that works with police.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

How do you feel about being a crime scientist there or a practical criminologist?

Jason Roach:

Well, I should say I'm a crime scientist, shouldn't I? Because I was one of the first ones to graduate from UCL with a PhD in crime science. I don't get hung up on labels and what they are really, I just go with whatever the problem is. I mean, I'm forever frustrated with people that say, "Well, I don't do qualitative research." Well, it depends what you're looking for.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right, yeah.

Jason Roach:

Or I don't do quantitative, I don't like stats.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I try and do whatever is necessary to answer the question.

Jason Roach:

Exactly. You've put in the cart before the horse by saying, "No, I don't. I'm not going to use that. I'll do whatever you want, but I'm not using that method."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right, yeah. But I think a lot of people end up that way because they don't want to learn a new method or they decide that those methods are difficult or a little esoteric. But the method has to match the problem, you can't force the problem to match whatever methods are available at your fingertips.

Jason Roach:

No I don't. And I'm all for evidence based policing and I really am, but I can see why we talk to cops and they are put off because they do think it's all about randomized control trials because that is, heralded is the gold standard.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It is, but I think most people who work in that space now and certainly myself included see a variety of analytical methods as being relevant to that field.

Jason Roach:

I think it was more of a publicity thing that needs to be promoted-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Well, they had the most internal validity and that's what really helps them, but we can't exclude some of these other methods simply because they don't reach that elaborate standard at top. I mean, I think there's a lot of research we can be suspicious of or suspect, or there's a chunk of stuff that we can consider to be promising, but we need to be a little bit more encompassing, and I think that's only right.

Jason Roach:

I'm not dissing randomized control trials, I'm just saying that from talking to cops, and I do a lot, sometimes they have incredibly good ideas and they're a little bit off by almost the awesomeness of evidence-based policing, and they're a little bit worried about if my idea doesn't come up with some statistical significant value then it was a bad idea and that's where we need to focus now. Is that, all ideas are good and some of the ideas they come up with are fantastic so I wouldn't want to see them fall by the wayside.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah. And they can be piloted and trialed in small ways, we definitely need to expand the field beyond these big super experiments that everybody's heard of and leave space for some of this innovation at the local level.

Jason Roach:

No, but some people would say that's because that Roach fellow's never done anything that's been a randomized control trial, or even at that standard. And I admit that so it's not sour grapes completely.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah, no, I'm not feeling it at all. [laughing]

Jason Roach:

No, no, not at all. Though it might be nice to ask how I fell into this world because I don't really know, but I can try and articulate it. It was nothing I chose to do let me put it that way.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I mean, you talk about falling into this career and I had a mountaineering accident and fell into it. I literally fell-

Jason Roach:

Did you get clever? Did you bang your head?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah. Hit my head and missed my brain by about five feet.

Jason Roach:

I seriously didn't get clever until about 31, I don't know what happened. You know Liam Gallagher? He's supposed to have fallen out of a tree.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

From Oasis, yes.

Jason Roach:

He's supposed to have fallen out a tree when he was 12 and that's made him the person that he is.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah, that kind of body gesture that you just did there works really well in podcasts.

Jason Roach:

It hadn't even started yet.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Well, I've actually pressed the button.

Jason Roach:

Ah, well, you could have said.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's nice to see you here anyway.

Jason Roach:

Well, thank you in Iceland.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

In Akureyri of all places, the second largest city in Iceland with a population of 20,000.

Jason Roach:

That's right and most of your British listeners will think it would be the supermarket chain, but it is actually the country. Lovely.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You did the smart thing because you flew here from Reykjavik and I drove and it starting to get into the winter, there's no shortage of snow around, but it was a struggle to get up and down those hills in my little Kia whatever it was, Kia Hamster with all the power of a leaf blower, but got here eventually. But you flew over the mountains, that must have been fantastic.

Jason Roach:

We did, our plane was marginally bigger than your car so you might have got the better end of the deal there to be quite honest.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And it's probably still the second largest aircraft in the country too.

Jason Roach:

Probably, yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You've got a book coming out next year, *Practical Psychology for Policing*, how did you get into this whole gig?

Jason Roach:

It wasn't by design.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Well, it never is for the most interesting people.

Jason Roach:

No, I've never been a police officer, I thought about it when I was about 18, but there was two things that were prohibitive. One, I didn't do hierarchies at 18 and 19 and two, I didn't really want to swear allegiance to the queen because I was into the Smiths and everything else.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Maurice has got a lot to answer for keeping you out of policing then, right?

Jason Roach:

So much to answer for and all the Smiths fans will get that one. Yes, kept me out the police which is a good thing in retrospect, and I went off and did a psychology degree and I came out with a psychology degree and what became a wife.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Are those things mandatory? You always come out with the two together?

Jason Roach:

No, but when I looked at what course to do I noticed that the ratio of men to women on the psychology degree was like 20% men, 80% women and I figured that love might just be around the corner.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

See that's a level of tactical thinking we could have really benefited from if you joined policing.

Jason Roach:

I don't think it was a conscious thought, I think it was of a primate level. And ended up working in a psychiatric hospital, at least I think that was the purpose I was working there.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You could tell the difference between inside and outside?

Jason Roach:

I could tell the difference between patients and staff by the length of the cigarettes they smoked because staff smoked smaller cigarettes and that was about the only difference. And then I started working in the community in a hostel with people with mental health problems and drug issues. And I thought I was going to be a clinical psychologist, but by then I'd had enough of listening to people's problems and I'm not proud of that, but it really is very person orientated. No one ever says, "How are you feeling today Jason?" It's always-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah. It's a one way gig, isn't it?

Jason Roach:

It is.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's like when people call the police, nobody ever calls police to say, "Hello, officer. Hi. No, everything's absolutely rosy today, everything is going fabulous, I just thought I'd call to say, I hope you are having a lovely day."

Jason Roach:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's just always dealing with drama.

Jason Roach:

So I needed a job and I ended up gravitating more towards criminal behavior and I ended up somehow working for the home office when do you remember the regional crime directives that were set up?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Well, it was one of those initiatives that lasted a little bit until somebody new came along, and what's the phrase you like to use? Killed all the cubs.

Jason Roach:

Killed all the cubs. Yeah, that was politically came and killed all the cubs, but I milked it for a couple of years. And then I ended up working at police college up in lovely North Yorkshire, which I could see the writing was on the wall for the police college because it cost about a million pounds of funding and it wasn't in London. You didn't have to be Sherlock Holmes to work out that that one was next for the chop, so there is, there just seemed to be a pattern doesn't it?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But I'm also thinking here we are the University of Akureyri which is the five hour drive from Reykjavik so what does it say about the future or the longevity of the police college here?

Jason Roach:

I am like the Grim Reaper of police colleges obviously. It doesn't matter where it is in the country or in the world in fact, once I've been there it gets shut down. Yeah that shut down, and I somehow managed to... I don't think 'blag' is probably a strong word, but I managed to get a position as senior lecture at the University of Huddersfield where I've been 16 years.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And your PhD is from where?

Jason Roach:

UCL.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

University College London, what a fine institution.

Jason Roach:

Yes, I think it's still in the top 10 or at least the top 15. I was working at government office and we had a coach trip, someone organized a coach trip to go out to Lancaster Farms Young Offenders Institution. I mean reeks of freak show, "let's go see the naughty boys".

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah I was a geographer, at least our field trips were to the countryside.

Jason Roach:

Some of Manchester's finest young people were residing there. So it was about 20 of us in a coach and the coach driver couldn't find the place and I thought, well, if I was coming to visit my friend/relative who was in here, then what would I do? Would I really get the three buses and 14 taxis from Liverpool or Manchester, or would I perhaps borrow a car?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Euphemistically borrow.

Jason Roach:

Borrow a car, which I don't think is a crime in Iceland because to be insured on someone's car they literally just have to back you up, don't they?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's an incredibly trusting place.

Jason Roach:

It is.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

We have discovered in a couple of days that if you're going to commit crime anywhere, commit crime in Iceland.

Jason Roach:

Yeah. It's a nice place for committing crime even so today at this conference when it's full of police officers.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I've lifted a couple of wallets, I've turned this into a profit.

Jason Roach:

I don't doubt that for a minute. Oh yeah so I straightaway ask security, "Do you have many stolen vehicles turning up here or being left here?" And he said, "Not especially." And the governor was showing us around so I said to him can I do a little bit of research about what's going on here? One thing led to another and I'd met Mike Barton I'm sure you've heard of.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah, former Chief Constable of Durham Constabulary. Lovely man.

Jason Roach:

Yes, and a very, very forward thinker. So I said, "Well, can we do some research on visitors of Lancaster farms because I think they might be committing crimes on the way there, as well as trying to smuggle drugs in." And he said, "Well, actually we do that sporadically and we send a team and we literally take the cars to pieces to see if they're roadworthy as well." He says, "It causes all kinds of havoc, but it sends out a really good message." So I thought this is great. So they did 10 operations in 11 months and the first one, they ended up arresting something like 19 people as a consequence so I was very popular with the police.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah. I'm sure.

Jason Roach:

Never reached those dizzy heights again, but that was my thinking around-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You're like the offender whisperer.

Jason Roach:

It was, I didn't know what it was called, but that was my self-selection policing angle to which this rather strange man who used to turn up at the government office Northwest every now and then with no shoes or socks and used to walk

around, and I was reliably informed it was one professor Ken Pease. So got the courage to email him, and he sent me his phone number back within five minutes and said, "This is brilliant. We need to talk about this." And I met him about week later and he said, "Oh, you're doing a PhD at UCL, by the way."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah I'm not sure I'm going to leave in the podcast your recommendation that just random people and random students email people they've heard about or read about-

Jason Roach:

Well maybe not random. If they've perhaps emailed that Jerry Ratcliffe fellow.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah, that's definitely not standard. Yeah, my email address is Jason.Roach@ where are you?

Jason Roach:

That isn't my address actually so you're okay, you can give that one out if you like. People think that I encourage Ken's curve ball ideas, but it's really the other way around and I'm not proud of that. He's more like almost like my intellectual midwife, so he said, "What you thinking about now? And I'll tell him and some he'll go, "Oh yeah, that's absolute rubbish." And other things he'll say, "Well, we can work that."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Whenever you work somewhere it's important to have some kind of intellectual critical mass, because people contribute ideas from different places. And sometimes it's shooting down ideas because they've seen shit that just isn't going to fly, and they can stop you going down dead ends and I think that's really useful. I always have some sympathy for academics who work in very isolated environments because they just don't have that critical mass.

Jason Roach:

No.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And it's a little bit like police officers who are forward thinking and innovative, if they're in very traditional departments it's incredibly isolating. That's why I always say they should join societies and get out to conferences and meet other people who they can start to bounce ideas off, but now they can find their tribe.

Jason Roach:

No, I think it's even more necessary than that, I think it's like being in therapy. So all therapists have a therapist and I really think that's what you need, and I admit that I've probably got imposter syndrome anyway from all this.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I think many of us have that, because I think many of us are aware of how much we don't know about the field.

Jason Roach:

Yeah. Which is why you need to see yourself as you're not the finished article. I mean, I never send anything in for publication and assume it'll just sell straight through.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Well, nothing in mind sells straight through, but that's because I'm a shit writer.

Jason Roach:

While I was sailing around there I was trying to be optimistic for your podcast, but that's when the therapy comes in. When you've got a mentor or mentors and you say, "Well, what do you think? Am I banging my head against a brick wall with this? Or does this have legs?"

Jerry Ratcliffe:

The offender self-selection work, that I find really fascinating because I think it's something that's lost a little bit in the current debate about policing. Where we are getting a lot of people trying to dissuade policing from engaging as much in a number of places in the post pandemic, post George Floyd world. There isn't a lot of thirst for proactive policing, but the offender self-selection work really feeds into some of that.

Jason Roach:

Yeah, it is nondiscriminatory it's because somebody has committed an offense that you've identified as a trigger offense that's good for uncovering more serious criminality. So it isn't that they're black or a certain religion or they're a certain gender, it's the fact that they've committed that minor offense. So I think it circumvents a lot of the shaking of the usual suspectry, which contravenes human rights. I mean, I may have committed an offense of burglary 25 years ago, but should I really be dragged in because I'm on record for using a suction cup 25 years ago and that's what was used?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So explain the underlying idea behind offender self-selection.

Jason Roach:

Well, I haven't decided whether I'm going to actually have a tattoo with this on or put it on my gravestone should I have one?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I've heard you have other tattoos, but we can't get into descriptions of those on the podcast.

Jason Roach:

No, you told me to keep it clean so I will do, and that is that those that do big bad things also do little bad things. Look at it as a Venn diagram with serious crime circled one side overarching minor crime. We're looking at those in the middle, we're looking at those in the intersection, we're looking at those that do both. And the evidence that we've

compiled over the years has been the versatility is there, offenders are not homogenous, they do not just commit one type of crime. They might prefer one type of crime, of course they might gravitate towards burglary, but the Jacquelyn Schneider study, for example, when she talked to incarcerated burglar. They burglarized if that's a word once a fortnight, once a month even, but they were shoplifting three times a week and she said basically you should see burglar as shoplifters on their day off.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

The challenge with this is that there's a drive to ask the police to de-emphasize the small crimes, but you are finding not just with Jacquelyn Schneider's work, but with your work and other people's work a lot of evidence that offenders can bring attention to themselves in a small way. And that's a great way to flag up to police officers that you are increasing the likelihood of running into somebody who's a more serious offender, right?

Jason Roach:

That's true. Finding the trigger crimes is the hardest point because of all the millions of minor offenses. I mean, Ken's classic first one and the parking illegally in a disabled bay.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah, explain that one.

Jason Roach:

The story goes that he was in Huddersfield actually, he was going to up to Sainsbury's [supermarket] and he parked, and there wasn't any parking spaces, but he saw somebody in a rather nice sports car come and park in a disabled bay. And when they got out they didn't limp and he looked on the car and they didn't have any blue badge as we have over here.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

A disabled parking sticker or license plate, yeah.

Jason Roach:

Yeah. And then when he looked there were actually other places that were quite close so that he thought I could understand them doing that if they're just going to the cash point or popping in to buy cigarettes and they'll only be two minutes and there's nowhere else to park. But the fact that there are other places now to park-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Just a couple of slots away.

Jason Roach:

Yeah. It's just like a low level disregard, impoliteness if you like.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Just a little hint of a fuck you to everybody else.

Jason Roach:

Well, yeah. This played in his mind for a bit and he decided to pull in a few favors at Huddersfield Police Station and said can you perhaps get some information from traffic wardens that we used of then, and keep an eye on people that are parking in disabled bay illegally around Huddersfield and take the numbers down on them and then we'll trace them afterwards. So 50 odd percent of them when they put the number plates through the police national computer Ken uses the phrase excited police attention.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Really? Well, hello.

Jason Roach:

I pointed out to him that that didn't necessarily mean that the person that the car was registered to was actually driving to which he told me shut up we couldn't possibly find that one out. But again, that the beginning of the thinking well, if you've got a high level disregard for the law are you really going to stop and say, "No, I can't park on it?" Unless you are actually in the act of committing a serious offense then you don't want to consciously draw attention to yourself.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So when people are parking illegally in a disabled bay when they had other opportunities, it's much more likely that they will also have other indicators that police will be interested in?

Jason Roach:

Yes.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's a really good example. Are there any other?

Jason Roach:

Oh, there's lots. How long have you got?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I edit it don't worry.

Jason Roach:

I went right back to Dick Turpin. You remember the notorious Highwayman?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Indeed. I mean, not personally.

Jason Roach:

Well no, even before your time. Well, forget folklore stories the bloke was a complete utter bastard who'd murdered people, and he was caught stealing a horse which went down as stealing a handsome cock.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

We'll say no more about that.

Jason Roach:

We won't. It's not a poultry offense, neither a sex offense. And he was in prison and he made the mistake of writing a letter to his brother and said, "Dear brother, I'm in prison for stealing a horse thank God they don't know I'm the tourist Highwayman Dick Turpin." He was banking on the jailers not being able to read, but he probably had the only literate jailer in the whole of the country who read it and he was subsequently hanged as the notorious Highwayman Dick Turpin. Contemporary ones, one of the Madrid bombers was stopped speeding on route and if they'd looked in his boot they would've found one of the bombs.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's one of the biggest terrorist attacks that's taken place in the European mainland.

Jason Roach:

Yeah. There's all sorts of missed opportunities. My favorite one is, it's my favorite only in the sense that it's quite sensational and all the students love it because it involves a serial murderer.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

The Yorkshire Ripper?

Jason Roach:

Yeah. The Yorkshire Ripper was identified really because he had false plates on his car trying to conceal his identity. And Daniel Rifkin who was a serial murderer I think was in American, it might have been Australia, we'll look him up or even Canada. For the point of this story, it doesn't matter.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Well, I think we can pretty much say he's not from Iceland.

Jason Roach:

No, he's not from Iceland. And he was stopped for having a faulty tail light, and when they looked in the back of his van he had the body of his 13th victim.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I think you're talking about Joel Rifkin the American serial killer who got sentenced to 203 years in prison for the murder of nine women.

Jason Roach:

That's what I wrote.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

How many Rifkin murderers there are? I think that's offender self-selection right there, is your last name Rifkin? Yes. I think we're going to pull you over for a search.

Jason Roach:

Sorry to anyone called Rifkin, but be aware of your relatives.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah. I think we've pretty much discovered and decided that you're all just a family full of murderers. How can police use this?

Jason Roach:

There is a big distinction here though I have to draw with police officers sometimes, because when I talk about self-selection they see it as a way of almost harassing or making it difficult for someone.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right, there's got to be a degree of proportionality creeping in here, right?

Jason Roach:

So one police officer and she'll remain nameless said oh we do that. We're watching a major drug lord or something and we want to inspect his car and we just break his back light and knock on the door and say, "You've got a broken back light."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Oh good grief, really?

Jason Roach:

I mean it's a bit like Al Capone being put away for tax evasion. That's not self-selection, everyone knew who Al Capone was they just could only get him for tax evasion.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right. Your getting into, at least for the first example, very murky... It's not murky at all.

Jason Roach:

No, no, no, no.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's entirely unethical.

Jason Roach:

And I wouldn't advocate that at all, nor would I prescribe what the police officers do with the person that they've stopped. We're not saying if you stop them for speeding you have to give them a ticket, I'm not taking their discretionary away. All we're saying is just think methodically probably what you should be doing anyway and dig a little bit deeper.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah.

Jason Roach:

Having said that I do have a recurring dream/nightmare where I'm pulled over by the police for having a faulty back light, and they keep me by the roadside for two and a half hours. And then I realize that actually I should be happy because someone's actually read something that I've written.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah. Two and a half hours seems strangely specific in terms of timeframe, is this a recurring nightmare or a memory? You weren't call Rifkin in another life were you?

Jason Roach:

Yeah, maybe no it's a recurring dream, my just desserts dream I think to be quite honest, but the thing about self-selection policing is that we've said this from the beginning that it has to be as least intrusive as it possibly can into people's lives.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yes, but there's a huge, false positive rate in that.

Jason Roach:

There is. We haven't found yet one better than the disabled bay one because it would complete painless because the people that were parking in disabled bays illegally were going off into the shops and they were having their number plates checked while they were out. If there was nothing untoward they didn't know, and it's really hard to find those ones.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

What's also nice about that is that it probably taps into a lot of public support for that, because disabled people get thoroughly pissed off when they can't access bays that are designed for them. And also the legitimate public users of parking lots and car parks get pissed off when other people are essentially cheating the system. And so the fact that they have earned and self-selected, I think that's the key part. We're not targeting you to pick on you for any issues of, as you say, race or demographics or any part of your history, you self-selected into this. You chose to be a bit of an asshole and park in the disabled bay when you're not disabled.

Jason Roach:

I did a study a couple of years ago where I was looking at people who drive whilst disqualified from driving. Are these people who are self-selecting themselves as serious criminals anyway? Or are they people who are hapless or what have you where they're late, I'm going to drive because the kids are late for school and drop them off and they're actually otherwise law abiding? And I managed to get access to some data in West Midlands police over a 10 year period, just looked at 50 people that were charged with, I think it was an over a five year period and they were charged with driving while disqualified. And I thought that out of the 50, if I had 15 that I would be happy. It was 43. 43.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's amazing.

Jason Roach:

I spent three days there going through all the information but I only had booked a hotel for one day. And these were random 50, so I suppose I could've picked another 50 and it wouldn't have been as high, but I didn't pick them they were just randomly picked. And I don't think anyone would disagree with police keeping an eye on everybody that's banned from driving on their patch for example.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Just on principle alone.

Jason Roach:

Exactly and it's a safety issue.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Because you know they're not insured and it's safety issue, but the fact that it's also an indicator of potential serious criminality in other areas.

Jason Roach:

It is. I mean, I'd like to go back if there's any correlation between what that person did to get banned in the first place. So do people that accumulate three points over a short space of time, are they less likely to be identified as serious offenders than someone that gets a ban instantly for doing 100 miles an hour or is drink driving or do you know what I mean?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Do they accumulate their ban over time, or more likely to just get it in one day?

Jason Roach:

Exactly.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You have a psychology background, and your forthcoming book, *Practical Psychology For Policing* looks at the psychological components that are useful for policing. What are the psychological reasons that drive offender self-selection? Where they're self-selecting into the attention of police.

Jason Roach:

There are different points at which they could commit a minor offense, so they can do it nowhere near a serious offense and those are the people they don't think for one minute that a police officer is going to put them parking under a double yellow line together with they're a serious criminal.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah.

Jason Roach:

They actually think that the officer is going to think that they're just somebody's who's parked in a double yellow line.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Most cops think that too yeah, they don't think that way.

Jason Roach:

So that's the psychology, the risk doesn't even enter their minds because the connection's not there.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right, but just on a fundamental level they're more leaning towards being rule breakers to begin with.

Jason Roach:

Exactly, wouldn't even think about it. I mean, if you are engaged in heavy duty offending, are you really going to be bothered about parking in the disabled bay and upsetting all the poor people that can't park there that should park there? No you're not, it's an underlying disregard for other human beings and they will take more care over in not giving anything away when they are close to or committing a serious offense for obvious reasons. But their guard will be dropped when they're not, and they will commit minor offenses far more frequently than commit the serious. So the opportunities are there to identify them, it's whether police take them or not.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I think you only have to look at serious repeat offenders and look at their criminal histories to see it's all over the place most of the time you do.

Jason Roach:

You do, but the problem is they fall through the crack though. So Rifkin, Daniel, whatever his name was.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

We'll call him Steve from now on just to confuse everybody.

Jason Roach:

I don't think when he was in court they read out all the list of charges of nine or 13 bodies or whatever it was people that he killed, and then went, "Oh, by the way, you had a faulty taillight so were giving you a fixed penalty notice." So it's really hard to pick these up the novel way that Peter Sutcliffe was identified as Yorkshire ripper. I don't think he was ever charged with having false plates officially, on his record it won't appear because they uncovered him as the-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I can't believe the police let them off with that. I mean, how many murders did they charging him with, but they let him off with having false license plates?

Jason Roach:

13 plus a false plate.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Shocking leniency.

Jason Roach:

Yes it is, isn't it? But that's the difficulty of picking these things up retrospectively is they're probably not recorded.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right. What is nice about this notion of offender self-selection is a little bit of a push back against this notion that when people say, "We just want the police to target the most serious crimes." Which from an uninformed lay perspective makes sense, right? We just want the police to focus on these things, but how on earth do you think we're going to start looking at these people? They don't just drive down the road saying, "Hey, stop me. I'm known for doing bank robberies."

Jason Roach:

Yeah. In this case we should sweat the small stuff because it is indicative of the big stuff, but not for absolutely every crime of course.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

No, some sense of proportionality is important.

Jason Roach:

I mean, some of the stuff we've done recently and not got to write up yet, but animal cruelty and repeated animal cruelty. And that could be anything from people in gangs with dogs that basically they treat them awfully so that they fight, and dog people that are involved in dog fighting and all kind of that thing. It comes with the persona and the gang

persona, and so people that are committing animal cruelty quite often engaged in all sorts. I don't want to say this the evidence base isn't there yet, but if you're violent to animals you're likely to be violent human beings as well.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right. You have a callousness about how you approach life.

Jason Roach:

Yeah. A coldness, a kind of instrumental violence approach to whatever it is that you're doing. I always find frustration when I uncover these things, because you'll find that RSPCA who mainly do charge people with animal cruelty-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, yep.

Jason Roach:

That's right. Don't speak to the police, they're not joined up.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And yet there's one thing British hate is cruelty to animals.

Jason Roach:

Well, that's right. I used to do a lecture on, a couple of lectures on offender profile in an undergraduate course and used to show them a True Crime series if you remember that it was somewhere in the nineties about Colin Ireland who was nicknamed the Gay Slayer. He was a man who decided he was going to become a serial killer be careful what you choose if you knew he was resolution that was his-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah, there you go.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And he killed five gay men-

Jason Roach:

I love choices when you're going to become a serial killer, it's a very conscious decision making process.

Jason Roach:

Yeah, I suppose. And he killed five men, five gay men by the end of that year so he was true to his-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Good grief.

Jason Roach:

His resolution, so to speak, which is awful. It's not that graphic, but they show that he's tying people up and the stuff like that.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah, those television programs love all the lore-y details.

Jason Roach:

And he'd sit there with the body until the morning, so as not to arise suspicion. So he would leave eight or nine o'clock in the morning when everybody else was so it wasn't really... And the students are desensitized to violence, they watch it on the TV until on one murder he killed the cat and laid the cat next to the man that he killed. Oh, they were up in arms about that.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right.

Jason Roach:

That's it, he's overstep the mark and I thought, yeah, that is where your British barometer of violence is. So yeah, I think that one would have legs.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Not just four of them.

Jason Roach:

No, the animal cruelty one. But again as I say wherever you look computers and databases don't speak to each other, so sometimes when you do find a link for self-selection the practicalities and the setup making it almost impossible to police if you see what I mean.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah. You've also started doing work in other areas of the psychology of policing, and especially around crime prevention. You were talking here at the conference here in Akureyri about using nudges as ways to encourage crime prevention. And I think there's a tendency for people to think too much about crime prevention as target hardening, and surveillance systems, but there's a lot to be said for I think when you're talking about the value of just encouraging people to do the right thing sometimes and creating that kind of environment. Can you tell me a bit more about nudging?

Jason Roach:

Yeah. I'm working on trying to dispense with the nudge label if you like, because that's very much tied with social policy type things, health and getting people to eat more healthily.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So we're in a post nudge world then are we?

Jason Roach:

We are, so I'm trying to rebrand it as a wider psychology of influence. And it works much better with those who are victims or are potential victims i.e us because we live such busy lives and we don't think about things and we make ourselves a vulnerable on occasion when we needn't do it's just down to lack of foresight or what have you. But I've been looking at, I've been doing a lot around well, how can you encourage people to take a bit more of a care about their own personal security? So whether it be the study that we did where people were leaving, their cars unlocked unwittingly.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I think across half of America we have a problem with people getting their handgun stolen from unlocked cars. It's such a simple thing, lock your damn car or even take the gun inside, but yeah, crazy.

Jason Roach:

Yeah, simple things like that. I think generally it's a mistake, a situation crime prevention cure might be quite clunky and it'll be a massive campaign about lock your cars. So you've got to be much subtler and it ties in with the problem, orientated policing problem solving approach you've got who is it you're trying to communicate with? You're generic things don't work, generic messages don't work so you need to tailor the messages and the messenger to the specific target group that you're trying to encourage to be more security conscious.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah. You were giving an example about changing a leaflet campaign based on even down to the individual roads today, weren't you?

Jason Roach:

Going back to the study of people leaving their cars open, it was a rather nice area of the country, of a nice town and people were just they were on their driveways. People seem to think that once you park your car and it's safe on your driveway.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's magical on the driveway as opposed to on the street eight feet away.

Jason Roach:

That's right, that means that the risk has been minimized. And I've done it myself, the kids are making a lot of noise, you're trying to rush them into the house and fewest casualties as you possibly can and you forget to zap it and that's what was happening. Because I always try to speak to the people that commit these crimes, it's invaluable, I'm not a massive data person who can come up with all sorts of things from a massive data set, I actually like talking to human beings.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I think that's lost a little bit on so many police officers. Even they just do a quick interview to get a confession, but they never actually spend time just sitting and chatting to offenders to learn about their world and why they're doing what they're doing and how they're doing what are doing. And the crime prevention value of learning how and why is huge.

Jason Roach:

Again, before COVID I was doing that with all sorts of prolific car thieves. So you speak to these people, I mean, they might tell you a load of all rubbish, but not always and it's not always rubbish. And I've not perfected, but I've got a good way of getting them to relax into it so instead of you saying, "Well, how do you do it?" You talk in the abstract. And I always say, "Well, if I was thinking of becoming a car thief what three things do you think I need to think about first?" I went there to interview some burglars once in prison and they wouldn't say anything, so I went home and I went back the next day and said, "Okay, if you're giving your mum some security advice about what she should do with her flat or a house what would you do?" "Well, you don't want those French doors because you can easily get into those and..." And so they will talk to you.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But it sounds like the value of it is depersonalizing it.

Jason Roach:

It's depersonalizing it.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Because you don't want to make them face up to the consequences or thoughts about what they've done?

Jason Roach:

Well, I think it's more that they don't want to incriminate themselves. I say I'm not a police officer, how the hell do they know that? How do they know I'm not wearing a wire? And sometimes I say, "Can I record it?" So that's even I'm front with them. But many of them they're not bothered about it, it's not like they're giving you trade secrets away, they're not safe crackers that are telling you how they've got this new device.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's right. And they know that they have to change what they do-

Jason Roach:

Well, they've also already been banged up so it's not like they got away with it.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

No. And they know that when they go out and they're not banged up for long, but when they go back the game's changed anyway because there will be some new device that's been... It's an arms race, isn't it? Between those that would want to protect, and those that would want to take.

Jason Roach:

Yes, every time we introduce some new crime prevention measure they find a new way to overcome it.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah. I mean, they were telling me about the devices that you can get off the internet because most of them told me that everything they know is from the internet. You literally can get anything from the internet about cars, whatever you want.

Jason Roach:

The old half a tennis ball trick to get into BMWs.

Jason Roach:

Or the key that opened every Cortina. Now they've moved on since then, and they got-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You're showing your age, mate. You're talking about Ford Cortina's bloody hell.

Jason Roach:

Well I'm old, what do you want me to talk about?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That was like the first model that came out of the model T, wasn't it?

Jason Roach:

You're not far off with that. Yeah. So what was I talking about? So they have these devices now that they get off the internet and they can order them probably by Amazon like everybody else, but other distributors are available and it picks up the frequency of the zapper.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah, the car opening device.

Jason Roach:

[inaudible 00:34:21] and there you go, they've got it. But those are the ingenious ones, and then of course I talk to ones that just get a brick and throw it through the window and they're old school. [laughing]

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah. But talking to different ones will give you different perspectives on crime prevention as well.

Jason Roach:

Oh, definitely.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah.

Jason Roach:

Definitely. I did ask one if he'd heard about situational crime prevention and he said, "Oh yeah, that's the 25 techniques thing, isn't it?"

Jerry Ratcliffe:

No really? That's fantastic.

Jason Roach:

In the same way that Colin Ireland that serial murderer that I told you about, he'd read all the FBI manuals on profiling so that he knew that they would think that he was an organized offender because of the way he left his crime scene. He says in my life I wasn't organized at all, I just knew they'd be looking for this certain type of person so they do read this kind of stuff.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Offender counter intelligence.

Jason Roach:

That's right. I mean, I'd love it if I met someone that's changed the way they do things because they'd read Self-Selection Policing. That would make me so happy.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

There you go, not a police officer. I was a more successful offender because of what I learned from you, I'm not sure that's a net gain mate.

Jason Roach:

I've changed my ways, which is why I don't like zero tolerance policing because the whole self-selection thing would fall down. I mean, going back to your original question, horse's mouth. So there's a gap for the likes of me and you and you do this as well to go in there and say, "Well, this isn't going to go anywhere other than in a paper that no one will read."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's right, yeah.

Jason Roach:

No fear there don't worry about it, you're safe. I can even put your name and no one will know.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

If I'm lucky this will be cited four times in some obscured journal, a Bangladeshi journal of sheep stealing and criminology.

Jason Roach:

Oh no, I only got high impact. Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Don't knock that journal you know, a great editorial book.

Jason Roach:

And that's it, and I can't see why people aren't doing that all the time and that's how it all started all the crime prevention stuff. To do that there was a lot of talking to offenders and that just doesn't happen as much now and I don't know why.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Well, I mean, I think people have stopped talking to offenders as much and they've stopped talking to police officers as well. And I think a lot of it's too much taking the economist approach of downloading a data set, writing a paper and then doing a quick analysis to support the paper you just wrote.

Jason Roach:

That's true. And going back to your original question which is about the psychology of it all and what I'm trying to add to that, I've been picking up little tacit knowledge tips, so how police officers do things. And that was based on the fact that like you, I go out with police officers. I always have to qualify that as I'm not a stalker, I do go out legitimately with police officers and just watch what they do.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

No, I'm a policing stalker. I don't mind owning up to that.

Jason Roach:

All right, I can only speak from myself. And I was out with some oh about five or six years ago and we were in the car and I was in the back and they forgot to let me out because you can't get out the back of police unless they open it.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

They did that deliberately mate, I didn't want to tell you that.

Jason Roach:

They went and talked to these two lads. They came back and I said, "What was all that about?" And they said, "We don't really know them, but we were just checking that they weren't up to no good kind of thing because they're hanging around here and what have you." So I said, "Well, what did you do? Did you ask for ID?" "No, we just asked what their names were." "Okay, and did you ask their..." "Yeah, we asked their addresses." And I said, "Well, did you do any checking or anything?" "No, no, no need to, no need to." So this didn't sit right with me for a bit and I thought, well, they could

have been telling them anything do you know what I mean? So I decided to do a quick study again, it was with students admitted, but I know at least three of the students in there had quite a good criminal record so they weren't all squeaky clean-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Always handy, right?

Jason Roach:

There was one of them was out on license. So I thought and I said right, here's an experiment where you've been stopped by police officers and I want you to write down your name, a false address, including post code, which I believe is zip code for your American listeners.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Look at you, world traveler.

Jason Roach:

I know, I've learned. And then I want you underneath to write your real address-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

In Iceland, they don't have addresses, you just deliver it to Ollie.

Jason Roach:

Well, yeah, there's only three people so it doesn't matter. And they don't deliver over daytime we found that out as well.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah. When package deliveries on the daytime in Iceland, very smart crime prevention.

Jason Roach:

That's great.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

They know everybody's at work so they only deliver packages between what's it, 5:00 PM and 10:00 PM?

Jason Roach:

They don't deliver in the middle of a Team's meeting that you're on. And so I gave them 15, 20 seconds I think it was, and I asked them to work out where they thought that generation of that false address had come from. So I had all sorts of wonderful, weird, some of them were saying, "Oh, it's it was my old address." Great. Well, retrospectively if I'm a copper, I've got you. My favorite was two girls had put, "This is the address of someone I hate." Well, if that's reciprocated by the person you hate they'll go, "I know who it is because they hate me." And it turned out random generation was quite... It was difficult.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Everybody gave away some kind of a clue.

Jason Roach:

Yes, yes. Even if it was the right number or a person had gone to the extent of changing everything, but the key was the zip code/postcode. People are rubbish at generating a false postcode that exists.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right.

Jason Roach:

When I checked about 90% didn't exist.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right.

Jason Roach:

So if you have a police officer who stops people and asks them for their postcode as well and has access on their Palm top, whatever it is to the straight away you could say, "Well actually that's not right."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah. I had a case when I stopped a guy who was wanted and we put him on the spot and just said, "What's your name?" And he had to make up a false name at that point and he ended up basically using his brother's false name. So he used a lot of his own details because he wasn't smart enough to fabricate something, and of course it's actually difficult to randomly fabricate something and he gave his brother's name. So we're having this conversation of course his brother didn't come back wanted, and all I did was change the first name from Andrew to Collin and it came back wanted. And he said, "How did you know it was me?" I said, "We're not rocket scientists mate." He was wearing a necklace with a name Collin on it, that was a clue there.

Jason Roach:

As a top cop once said to me, if you're looking for Mariatis you're in the wrong game. So my advice to police officers was ask people about their postcode. Now if they say, "I don't know," it all falls down, yeah?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah.

Jason Roach:

But why would you feel the need to lie about your postcode unless you were trying to hide something?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Have you told that to the police? How do the police respond when you tell them that there are clues based in the lies that people give?

Jason Roach:

Mixed response, depends how much experience the person's got and the police officers got. And those that have been out doing the job on the streets for 15 years go, "Well, yeah we kind of know that. We don't always ask post codes, but we know how to reverse our questions and stuff like that."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right.

Jason Roach:

And a chief constable who should remain nameless, and he said, "When I was on the beat, the kids underage trying to get into clubs and drinking and stuff like that." And he said, "And used to ask them their age and they used to give us their brothers or whatever it was."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah.

Jason Roach:

He said, so I cut out the signs of the Zodiac and the dates that correspond with them out of a woman's magazine and I used to have that in my pocket. So I used to ask them their date of birth, but I used to ask them for their Zodiac sign.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Oh, blimey, that's fantastic.

Jason Roach:

So they were never prepared for that and he said, so I knew immediately. I said, is that a common... At the training center is that passed on? No, that's not passed on. And that was my tacit knowledge in the brain drain thing when people retire there's 30 years experience, they don't plug them into some computer and download all their experience and their knowledge and everything. They just say-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

See you later.

Jason Roach:

Here's a bottle of whiskey.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Thank for your service.

Jason Roach:

Here's a bottle of whiskey, goodbye.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Oh, I never got bottle of whiskey when I left. I did 11 years, I probably didn't earn a bottle of whiskey.

Jason Roach:

You're lucky you've got-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Probably got a miniature.

Jason Roach:

Bottle of martini you're lucky if... 11 years I mean, you're still a boy. The uniform was the same one you started with.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah. All that knowledge kicking around in there, or those little tips that could make small differences, right? We're not looking for massive wins, but the little small things could just tilt the balance a little bit more back in the favor of law and order or the good and the bad and the ugly or whatever.

Jason Roach:

Yeah. The cumulative effect of them may be quite significant, but unfortunately these are the things that they don't get passed on.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Well, look for making all the effort to fly all the way to Akureyri in Iceland just to speak to me I can't tell you how honored I am.

Jason Roach:

Well, and so you should be. It was a pleasure.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Cheers, Jason.

Jason Roach:

Thank you.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That was episode 44 of Reducing Crime recorded in Akureyri, Iceland in October, 2021. If you follow @_Reducing Crime or @Jerry_Ratcliffe on Twitter - don't forget the underscore - you will learn when new episodes are released. And if

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