

Manhattan Institute

Fourth Annual George L. Kelling Lecture

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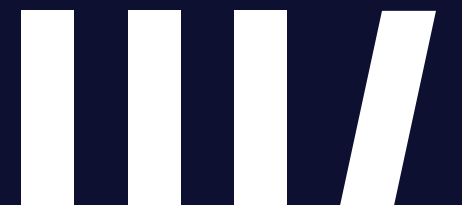
Policing as Public Health: *A 2024 View of Broken Windows*

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George Kelling

Visionary and Mentor



George Kelling

- Conducted highly influential field experiments in policing
Kansas City Preventive Patrol, Newark Foot Patrol
among others
- With James Q. Wilson, developed the idea of “Broken Windows”
- Provided me with two valuable insights...
 1. Get out of your office, work in the field
 2. When police pay attention to problems, the community benefits



Broken Windows

A Perspective on Crime, Disorder, and the Decline of Neighborhoods

(Wilson and Kelling, 1982)

Social incivilities (e.g., loitering, public drinking, and prostitution) and **physical incivilities** (e.g., vacant lots, trash, and abandoned buildings) cause residents and workers in a neighborhood to be **fearful**.



Fear causes many stable families to move out of the neighborhood and the remaining residents isolate themselves and avoid others.

Anonymity increases and the level of **informal social control** decreases.

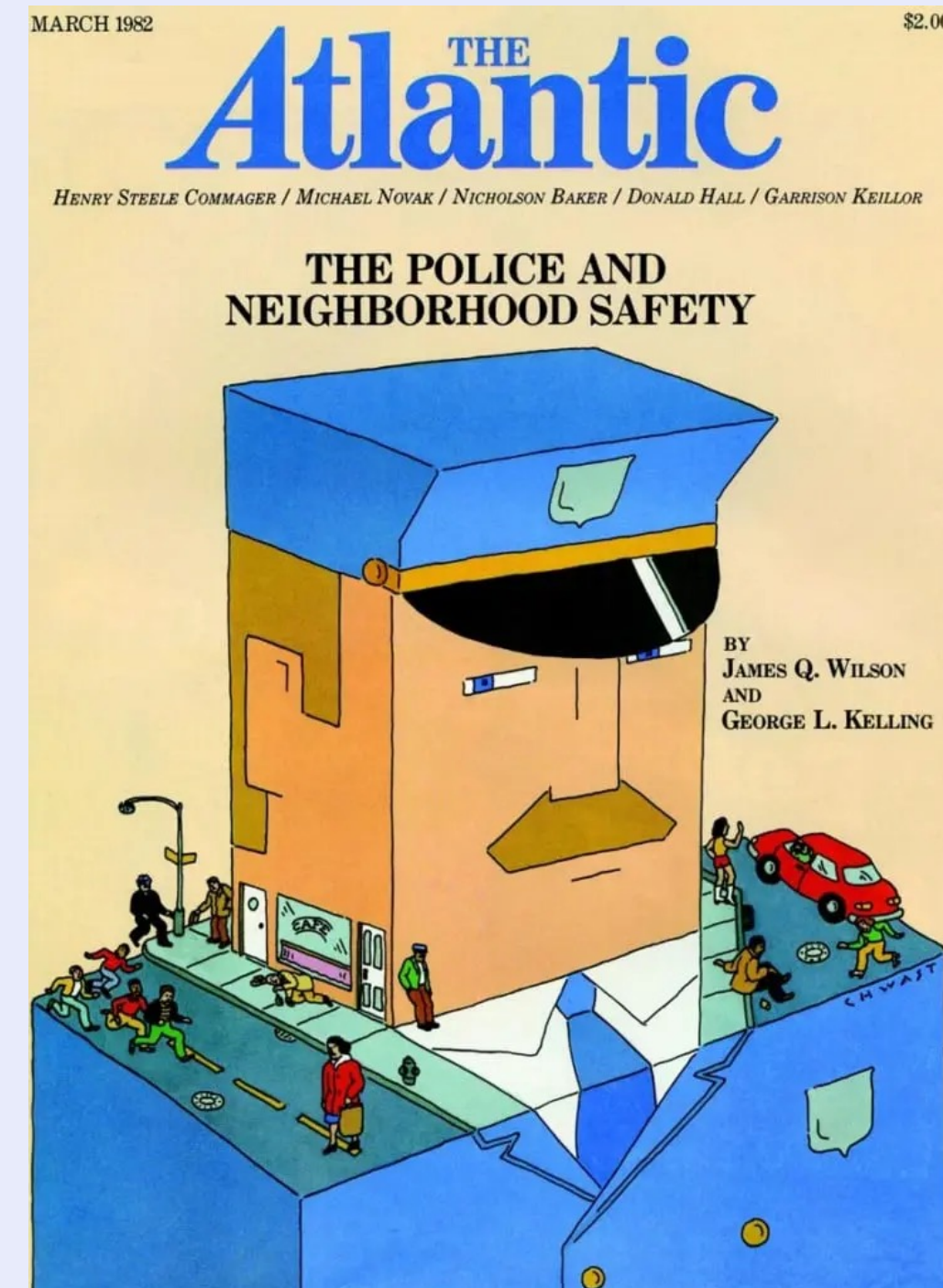


The lack of control and escalating disorder **attracts more potential offenders** to the area, and this increases serious criminal behavior.

- Serious crime developed because police and citizens did not work together to prevent urban decay and social disorder.
- “Epidemic” view of crime: crime is contagious and can spread to an entire community via environmental features.

Broken Windows as Community Problem Solving

- 1982 *Atlantic* article provided little guidance
 - Police maintain order to support informal social control
- 1989 *Atlantic* update, 1996 *Fixing Broken Windows*
 - Idea supports community and problem-oriented policing
- 2015 *JRCD* essay on broken windows
 - “Metaphors are powerful... but they are abstract and prone to misinterpretation.”
 - On making numerous stops and arrests: “What? We never said or intimated that.”

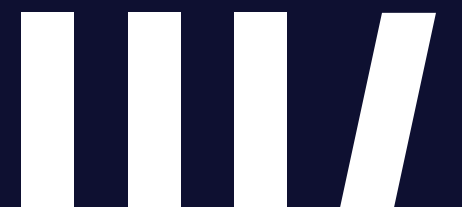


Changing Place Dynamics, Not Just Arresting People

- Policing Crime and Disorder Hot Spots in Lowell, MA
 - RCT testing “shallow” problem solving in hot spots
 - -20% calls to police, no displacement
 - Situational modifications (large effects)
 - Misdemeanor arrests (small), services (null)
- Systematic Review of 30 Controlled Studies of Policing Disorder
 - Policing disorder reduced crime (violent, property, and drug)
 - Community problem-solving strategies focused on places worked
 - Unfocused aggressive misdemeanor arrest strategies did not work



Public Health as Public Safety



Strengths of Public Health Approach

- Comprehensive – Include all relevant stakeholders
- Epidemiology – Understand underlying risk factors to develop responses
- Declaring “Public Health Crisis” – Activates more partners, less threatening
- Concerned with harm reduction, avoids blame

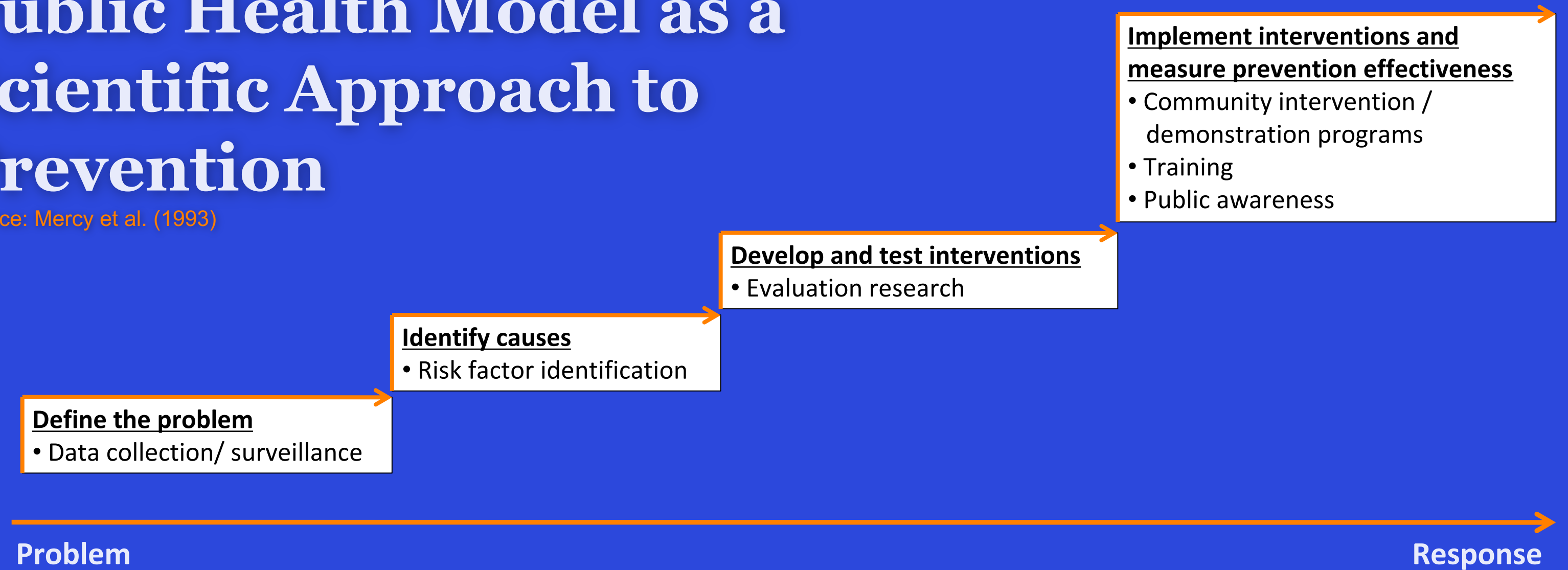


Limits of Contemporary Public Health Practice to Address Violence

- Usually excludes criminal justice system, especially police
- Preponderance of “root causes” responses with questionable efficacy
- Short term response efficacy:
 - CVI, street outreach – conceptually murky, mixed effects (often ignores focused deterrence)
 - Hospital intervention programs – no solid evidence yet
 - Greening vacant lots – effective... but old wine in new bottles

Public Health Model as a Scientific Approach to Prevention

Source: Mercy et al. (1993)



Look familiar? The same action research model guides POP intervention!

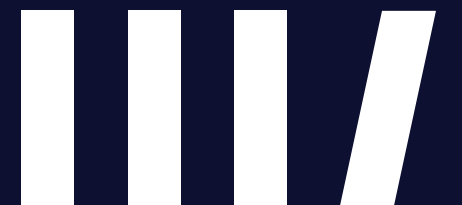
Scanning → Analysis → Response → Assessment

Policing and Public Health as Complements

- Public health interventions need the police and CJ system
 - Drunk driving – police key part of public health response
 - Philadelphia – hasn't been able to “green” its way out of gun violence
 - Police have relevant data, deep experience working in communities
- Police benefit from embracing public health concepts
 - Reinforces community and problem-oriented policing
 - And, therefore, the idea of broken windows!
 - Mobilizes more partners
 - Promotes thinking about harm reduction
 - Minimize racial disparities, overuse of punishment
 - Maximize lawful, procedurally just encounters




Conclusion



Fixing Broken Windows as Public Health

- People want orderly, safe environments and expect police “to do something”
- Disorder and serious crime are correlated; in many places, disorderly conditions drive violence
- Informal social control matters; police reinforce community capacity
- Police need to support communities without causing unintended harm
- Persistent challenges: Getting low-level cases accepted for prosecution, adequate police staffing to implement community policing
- Broken windows is relevant today and enriches policing and public health



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