

Hotspots and Blind Spots: A Case of Predictive Policing in Practice

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Abstract. This paper reports on an ethnographic study of the use of analytics in police work. We find that the introduction of predictive policing was followed by the emergence of the new occupational role of “intelligence officer”. While intelligence officers were initially intended to merely support police officers by making sense of algorithmic outputs, they became increasingly influential in steering police action based on their judgments. Paradoxically, despite the largely subjective nature of intelligence officers’ recommendations, police officers started to increasingly believe in the superiority and objectivity of algorithmic decision-making. Our work contributes to the literature on occupational change and technology by highlighting how analytics can occasion the emergence of intermediary occupational roles. We argue that amidst critical debates on subjectivity of analytics, more attention should be paid to intermediaries – those who are in-between designers and users – who may exert the most consequential influence on analytics outcomes by further black-boxing the inherent inclusion of human expertise in analytics.

Keywords: Analytics, Algorithms, Predictive Policing, Occupational Change, Future of Work, Data-Driven Work.