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Journal of Qualitative Criminal Justice & Criminology • 2020 | Volume 9, Issue 1

The Influence of Traditional Police Culture On the Activities of School Resource Officers

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Published on: Nov 17, 2020

DOI: 10.21428/88de04a1.eb9b5904

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ABSTRACT

School resource officers (SROs) have become increasingly prevalent in U.S. public schools, yet critics suggest that there is an inherent incompatibility between the cultures of police and education. However, research has not examined the extent to which some of the potentially incompatible elements of police culture exist among SROs. This study examines three elements of traditional police culture that are likely to be particularly incompatible with school settings— suspicion, danger anticipation, and unpredictability. Given SROs’ involvement in roles such as teaching and informal counseling that extend beyond the typical duties of police officers, it is unclear whether these elements of police culture extend to SROs and influence their work. The current mixed methods study examines these dynamics using data from 31 surveys, 50 time logs, and 47 in-depth interviews with SROs from two suburban school districts. Findings indicated that SROs did embody characteristics typical of traditional police culture and that these characteristics shaped their daily activities and interactions with students, particularly regarding maintaining security and building relationships. Implications for theory, research, and policy are offered.

Introduction

School resource officers (SROs) have become increasingly common in U.S. schools as a mechanism for increasing school safety. In fact, in the wake of the school shooting in Parkland, Florida in early 2018, Florida's governor promised—among other initiatives—to increase funding for SROs, even proposing that schools should have at least one officer for every 1,000 students in the building (Bousquet, Mahoney, & Klas, 2018). At the national level, the most recent estimates indicate that 70% of students ages 12 to 18 attended schools with some sort of security personnel present, including but not limited to SROs (Musu-Gillette, Zhang, Wang, Zhang, Kemp, Diliberti, & Oudekerk, 2018). SROs are distinct from other forms of security and law enforcement in that they are sworn officers with arrest powers that are assigned to a particular school or set of schools. They typically engage in various activities beyond law enforcement, often including functions as educators and informal counselors (Canady, James, & Nease, 2012). As such, SROs are expected to keep schools safe and become integrated into school communities, build relationships with students and adults in the school, and otherwise provide added benefits beyond their roles as law enforcement officers.

However, scholars have noted that elements of traditional police culture may not fit well in school settings and may lead to negative consequences for students and schools, including the criminalization of student behaviors (Hirschfield & Celinska, 2011; Lyons & Drew, 2006). In particular, because SROs have typically received extensive training and socialization in the world of law enforcement, they are likely “to define, symbolically if not legally, student problems as crime problems demanding a response that emphasizes enforcement over education or capacity-building” (Hirschfield & Celinska,

2011, p. 3). Although this concern linking student criminalization to the potential mismatch of traditional police culture and education has frequently been raised, research has not yet examined the extent to which SROs adhere to elements of traditional police culture in the work they do in schools or in their conceptualization of why they do what they do. Further examining the extent to which traditional police culture shapes the actions of SROs will likely be beneficial for understanding this common critique of SROs.

The purpose of the current study is to provide an in-depth analysis of the activities of SROs and how elements of traditional police culture (Crank, 2014) shape the work that they do in schools. Although police culture is a broad concept that encompasses a variety of aspects of individual and organizational approaches to policing, this study focuses on three elements of traditional police culture that may be a particularly poor fit in school contexts because of the potential for criminalizing students: suspicion, danger anticipation, and unpredictability. The data used in this study come from two suburban school districts in the southern United States. This mixed-methods study draws on time logs and surveys completed by SROs that paint a picture of the most frequent activities in which they engage and in-depth qualitative interviews that illuminate additional complexity and insights into the factors that shape SROs' activities. To our knowledge, this study is among the first to combine the use of qualitative and quantitative data sources to triangulate the roles and activities of SROs and the first to examine SROs' understanding of why they do what they do.

School resource officer activities

SROs are perhaps the most common form of law enforcement in schools today. The largest professional organization of SROs—the National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO)—estimates between 14,000 and 20,000 SROs nationwide (NASRO, n.d.). In the 2015-16 school year, 65 percent of secondary schools had some law enforcement presence, with 90 percent of those schools having SROs (Musu-Gillette et al., 2018). NASRO's *triad model* is a useful heuristic for understanding the typical categories of SROs' activities. The triad model's three components include teaching, informal counseling, and law enforcement and frequently take different forms depending on the individual SROs, needs of the school, and any agreements between the school district and law enforcement agency (e.g., memoranda of understanding). Moreover, there is no expectation that SROs spend an equal amount of time or energy on these three components of the triad model but that officers' roles and activities will be defined by the needs of the school and their individual personalities and experiences.

Existing large-scale surveys have measured the frequency of SROs' activities in somewhat broad strokes. For example, in the most recent national estimates from the 2015-16 school year, the School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS) was completed by a nationally representative sample of school administrators, including 65 percent who had SROs in their schools. Among these schools, SROs were

most likely to be involved in activities related to law enforcement such as coordinating with local police (91%), security enforcement and patrol (87%), identifying problems and seeking solutions (81%), providing legal definitions to school authorities (80%), and traffic control (74%) but were also frequently engaged in recording or reporting discipline problems to school authorities (78%), mentoring students (70%), maintaining school discipline (63%), training teachers in school safety (56%), and teaching or training students (38%; Chaney & Hansen, 2015). Another large-scale survey examined the activities of SROs in more detail, with particular attention to similarities and differences in how SROs and school principals perceived the activities that were being conducted (Coon & Travis III, 2012). This study found that SROs and principals agreed that law enforcement activities were most common (see also Schlosser, 2014) but disagreed about SROs' involvement in other activities.

Despite these findings, large-scale surveys such as these are not designed to provide much depth or understanding in regard to what SROs' activities look like on the ground. Qualitative work has provided more depth and nuance to these broad descriptions used in large-scale survey research. One recurring theme is that SROs may experience role conflict as they attempt to navigate the dual authority structures of schools and police departments (McKenna & Pollock, 2014; Schlosser, 2014). Critical ethnographic work has suggested that the mismatch between a law enforcement paradigm and an educational paradigm may have negative consequences such as harming the school climate and excluding students at higher rates than if SROs were not present (Devine, 1996; Kupchik, 2010; Nolan, 2011). These trends have also seen support in quantitative studies (Fisher & Hennessy, 2016; Owens, 2017; Theriot, 2016). Given the potential that SROs have for shaping school environments and student outcomes, more information is needed about not only what SROs do but what shapes those activities.

SROs and traditional police culture

In communities, police officers' activities are often guided by various elements of "traditional" police culture (Paoline & Terrill, 2014). Traditional police culture refers to the strategies that police use to cope with work-related strains, including maintaining a sense of suspicion, creating distance between themselves and citizens, and focusing on crime-fighting (Terrill, Paoline, & Manning, 2003). Crank (2014) delineated a series of cultural themes that broadly described traditional police culture and linked these themes to common behaviors and activities of police officers. For example, Crank (2014) drew on Rubinstein's (1973) work to link the cultural theme of suspicion to officers' technique of initiating and maintaining eye contact with civilians to probe for signs of ill intentions. Adherence to traditional police culture has also been linked to higher likelihoods of use of force (Terrill, Paoline, & Manning, 2003) and conducting searches during traffic stops (Paoline & Terrill, 2005). However, there is a great deal of variability in the extent to which officers adhere to traditional police culture, and its influence on officer behaviors is also varied (Terrill et al., 2003).

Although multiple forms of police culture and variability exist both within and across departments, elements of traditional police culture remain salient (Paoline & Gau, 2018). Accordingly, traditional police culture may guide why and how SROs engage in various activities. Even though SROs are assigned to schools and often are the only law enforcement officers there, they have gone through a period of training with other officers, often have professional experiences as law enforcement officers in other settings besides schools, and thus may have been socialized to some extent into traditional police culture. In a seminal study describing police culture, Crank (2014) drew on police officers' everyday actions to identify 21 cultural themes. Some of these themes are outward-facing and influence how officers interact with the public, whereas others are inward-facing and shape officers' interactions with other officers, systems, or with the administrative structure of law enforcement agencies. Although the original conception of these themes drew on studies that are now decades old, more recent research has found that some these cultural themes have endured over time (Loftus, 2010) even though there is considerable deviation from elements of traditional police culture (Paoline III, 2003; Paoline III, 2004). Crank (2014) broadly categorized one subset of elements of police culture as "themes of the unknown." These elements help explain how police officers navigate environments in which they believe that the unknown could occur at any given time, something that they must be constantly aware of and prepared for. Applying this set of cultural elements to the school setting is particularly compelling because these cultural elements are linked most closely to the critique of the potential for cultural mismatches between police and schools that could potentially criminalize students. In particular, themes of the unknown may not be particularly relevant in schools that are often characterized by a regular schedule, a high degree of control over individuals' movement, and predictable movements through time and space. Therefore, examining the extent to which themes of the unknown persist for officers in schools may speak particularly well to the salience of traditional police culture in—and potential cultural mismatch with—school settings. As such, this study focuses on the following three themes of the unknown within traditional police culture: (a) suspicion, (b) danger and its anticipation, and (c) unpredictability and situational uncertainty.

One of the most indelible aspects of traditional police culture is the element of suspicion. Suspicion refers to "a set of learned cognitive skills for recognizing potential danger" (Crank, 2014, p. 152) and is often thought of as the part of police work that makes it an art rather than a science. Suspicion develops with officers' sense of what is normal, allowing them to identify aspects of their environment that deviate from that normality. As such, suspicion is a tool that is useful for officers in identifying potential criminal activity. However, officers' suspicion appears difficult to "turn off" even when they are off duty (Carlson, 2002; Crank & Caldero, 2000), suggesting that suspicion is likely to be present in officers assigned to schools. Suspicion may shape SROs' activities as they patrol the building in their capacity as law enforcement officers and interact with both students and adults throughout the day, even in their capacity as informal counselors or educators.

The second theme of traditional police culture is danger and its anticipation (Crank, 2014). Police have jobs that often put them in situations where they could be physically harmed or even killed in the line of duty. Although officer deaths are relatively rare, officers are trained to recognize this threat as a potential reality even in relatively routine encounters with citizens and thus to anticipate and minimize the possibility of danger. Moreover, officers may take cues from individuals and geographies that appear potentially dangerous and confront those situations accordingly. In school settings, the cultural theme of danger and its anticipation may be evident in SROs viewing both people and specific areas of the school grounds as potentially threatening. Moreover, because SROs are expected to maintain the physical safety of their assigned school and the people within it, their anticipation of danger may extend beyond a concern about their personal safety to a broader concern about the safety of the school. As such, the areas of the school where SROs choose to spend their time and the people with whom they choose to interact may be shaped by this theme of danger and its anticipation.

A third, related theme of traditional police culture is unpredictability and situational uncertainty (Crank, 2014). This refers to the common experience in policing in which routine activities are interrupted by unexpected moments of interest or excitement. Unpredictability may be evident in traffic stops, home visits, or any other aspect of an officer's routine in which something out of the ordinary happens. Part of what makes being an officer exciting is dealing with this unpredictability, when tedium quickly turns into "real police work" (Crank, 2014, p. 167) in which officers engage more directly in confronting crime. This theme of unpredictability is likely to characterize SROs' experiences in schools, in which ordinary routines in the school are quickly broken by relatively dramatic instances of nonconforming behavior. In fact, because school days are often so tightly structured (e.g., bells that signal when people will be in hallways versus classrooms, clear times of arrival and dismissal), incidents that break up this routine may be particularly exciting for SROs and lead them to seek out involvement in these situations.

Current study

Given the small but growing body of research that examines the activities of SROs, this study extends the literature in three key ways. First, it focuses mainly on SROs in elementary schools, which is largely underrepresented in the extant literature. The elementary school setting—characterized by very low levels of crime and violence (Musu-Gillette et al., 2018)—may be a particular mismatch for police cultural elements related to themes of the unknown that are typically aimed at detecting and responding to crime. Second, whereas the existing body of research relies on either qualitative or quantitative methods alone, this study uses mixed methods to triangulate information about SROs' activities across data sources. Third, using the lens of traditional police culture, this study examines SROs' understanding of why they engage in the activities they do. The research questions guiding this study are:

- Research question 1: To what extent are the traditional police cultural elements of suspicion, danger anticipation, and situational uncertainty present among SROs?
- Research question 2: How do these elements of traditional police culture shape SROs' activities?

Method

Researcher positionality

Before discussing our data and analytic approach, we briefly mention our positionality as it relates to the research study. Each of the authors of this paper identifies as white, the majority are male, and most come from relatively affluent backgrounds, not unlike the setting of this study. Most of the authors have worked in schools, either as teachers or in other capacities, and one author has worked previously in law enforcement. The project was aided by fieldworkers who collected data, many of which had prior experience working as educators in schools but varied in their racial/ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. While the authors' backgrounds in both schooling and law enforcement provide a potentially balanced approach to the analysis, we nevertheless recognize that our work and analysis are necessarily filtered through our collective backgrounds and experiences.

Sample

The SROs included in this study were based in two school districts co-located within one suburban area in the southeast (one school district covers the county seat and the other school district is county-wide). The school districts were among the highest academically performing in the state, but there was some heterogeneity at the school level. Although White students made up at least a three-quarters of most schools, several schools were majority minority, and a fifth of schools was Title I eligible (i.e., exceeded a threshold percentage of economically disadvantaged students to qualify the school for extra funding from the federal government under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act). The SROs were stationed at all schools within these two school districts, and all SROs reported to the county's law enforcement agency. SROs were hired and trained by the county law enforcement agency but served full time during the school year in a school setting. There were approximately 50 schools and SROs across the districts (rounded to nearest 10 for confidentiality), with each school having one full-time SRO regardless of school level or enrollment.

The SROs in our sample were predominantly male (78%), and almost all were White. In most cases, the SROs had prior experience in law enforcement before taking on the SRO role, though, for a few, this was their first assignment. On average, the SROs in our sample had been in law enforcement about 12 years and had been in the SRO role for almost five years, with many of them taking on the SRO position during the agency's expansion of SROs to the elementary setting in the wake of the Sandy Hook shooting. About 40% of SROs had a background in patrol, detective work, SWAT, or warrants, while another 40% had a background working in the jail, detention center, or booking. The remainder

came from other positions, including those in the SRO role since the beginning of their career. In line with the distribution of schools in the district, about half of SROs worked in elementary settings, while 27% worked in middle schools and 20% in high schools.

As several SROs noted in the interviews, the SRO position was not a good fit for all officers, meaning that the officers serving as SROs likely differed from other officers in the agency in both observable and unobservable ways. Accordingly, it may be possible that SROs are less attached to elements of traditional police culture than officers who are not SROs. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the SROs in this sample were not completely isolated from other non-SRO officers; they trained, regularly attended meetings, and worked over the summer with other officers who were not SROs. Thus, even if the SROs did not subscribe to the same level of traditional police culture as other officers, they were still exposed to those other officers on a regular basis.

Data

The data for this study come from a larger study of school safety and SROs, which sought to understand the process of implementing SROs, the roles and daily activities SROs, and the perceived impacts of SRO presence in study schools. We collected three sources of data used in this study. First, all SROs in the districts were invited to participate in an interview. We conducted semi-structured interviews with 47 of the SROs, representing an approximately 90% response rate. All interviews took place at the school sites in spring 2017. The interviews lasted, on average, 45 minutes. The interviews took place at various school venues, including the SRO's office, conference rooms, cafeterias, and classrooms. Most interviews were conducted during the school day, but some were also conducted during school holidays and after school. The interviews were conducted by the authors and graduate research assistants who were trained on and used the same guided interview protocol. The interview protocol was meant to guide the interview, and interviewers were encouraged to make the interviews conversational. The semi-structured interviews contained many questions about the different possible roles the SRO engages in, their beliefs surrounding these roles, and why they do or do not engage in certain roles.¹ There were questions around the activities of SROs, the perceived threats they face, and the broader school context.

Second, all SROs in the districts were also invited to participate in an online survey. The survey was created using items from several sources, including the School Survey on Crime and Safety administered by the National Center for Education Statistics, Rippeto (2009), and Covert (2007). The survey asked SROs specific questions about their roles and activities in the schools and their purpose for being in their school. SROs were initially invited to participate in the survey in May 2017. The non-respondents were sent follow up emails one week and three weeks following the initial survey invitation and again in August 2017 at the beginning of the 2017-18 school year. The response rate for the SRO survey was 62 percent. A copy of the full survey instrument is available upon request.

Third, all SROs in the districts completed monthly activity reports for their supervising officer detailing the number of times they took part in various school activities in the last month. SROs were told to fill out the activity report as part of their training before the school year began with limited training on filling in the time log. The law enforcement agency shared all monthly activity reports between August 2016 and May 2017 for all study schools (all schools in the districts) with the authors. The time logs included a wide range of potential activities, including arrests, informal counseling sessions, and classroom lecturing. Notably, the time logs do not cover any security-related duties.² In some cases, we collapsed several specific categories into broader categories for analysis.

Analytical approach

This study employed a convergent mixed methods design, leveraging two sources of quantitative data (surveys and time logs) with one source of qualitative data (interviews) and integrating the data sources in the analysis and reporting of results. Given that the survey data and interview data were collected in a similar time frame, the coupling of the qualitative and quantitative data occurred at the analysis and reporting of results stages rather than the data collection stage, reflecting a largely “parallel” process (Fetters, Curry, & Creswell, 2013). We took an iterative approach to data analysis and coupling of the qualitative and quantitative data such that analyses of the qualitative data prompted further analysis of the survey and time log data and, similarly, analysis of the survey and time log data prompted additional readings and interpretations of the qualitative data. This approach reflects a convergent mixed-methods design in which there was both a connected sampling frame and integration in analysis and discussion of findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Fetters et al., 2013).

The qualitative approach generally adhered to a grounded theory approach insofar as it allowed for the emergence of a theoretical perspective rather than explicitly testing a pre-defined theoretical framework (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Strauss & Corbin 1990). In other words, at the stage of protocol and survey design as well as initial analysis, the theoretical framing of police culture was not anticipated. Instead, interview data were coded using a set of broader anticipated themes and themes that emerged from the iterative coding process.

The coding and analysis generally followed the constant comparative method, an inductive approach that allows themes and applicable theory to emerge (Glaser, 1965). Initially, the entire research team coded several transcripts and then collectively discussed coding decisions, emergent themes, and discrepancies in coding. With consensus reached, all interviews were then coded by a minimum of two coders. The research team met regularly (typically weekly) to discuss emergent themes. The process was iterative, such that themes that emerged early in the coding process or on the first coding of a particular transcript were then included in the double-coding by the second coder. All coding took place using NVivo software. The complete set of themes can broadly be categorized into the following

areas: relationships, discipline, perceptions of safety, SRO purpose, SRO roles and activities, subgroups and context, SRO impacts, SRO training/implementation, and other.³

Following this initial stage of broader coding, the research team returned to the coded data for further analysis specific to the roles and activities of SROs and the motivations behind these actions. Multiple members of the research team reread the themes identified under the broad categories of roles and activities. A narrative around the typical day-to-day activities of SROs, divergent activities, and the motivations for these activities was developed and discussed collectively by the research team.

Simultaneous to this qualitative analysis, the research team conducted descriptive analyses of the quantitative data—both time logs and survey responses. Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) were generated for time log and survey data, both in aggregate and disaggregated by characteristics such as school level (elementary, middle, and high) and time of the year. Graphs of the quantitative data were also generated to provide further insights. As noted before, the convergent mixed-methods design brought together the quantitative results from the time log analysis and survey analysis with the qualitative data at the analysis stage. Consequently, emerging findings from the interviews drove decisions about which time log and survey variables to focus on, while descriptive findings from the time logs and surveys resulted in further analysis and interpretation of the interview data.

Through this iterative and emergent mixed-methods process, the applicability of traditional police culture as a framing theoretical perspective emerged inductively. As will be discussed next in the results, it was clear that many SROs were recently arrived from other law enforcement roles, demonstrated elements of traditional police culture, and talked about their daily routines and activities from perspectives that incorporated elements of police culture identified by Crank (2014). Consequently, we organize our results and provide our final interpretation of findings through this perspective.

Results

The study findings that follow are presented in two parts. First, we describe the extent to which each of the three focal elements of traditional police culture (i.e., suspicion, danger anticipation, and situational uncertainty) were present in the sample of SROs. Second, we describe several categories of SROs' roles—derived both from the study's data and the NASRO triad model—and the extent to which those roles were motivated by suspicion, danger anticipation, and situational uncertainty.

SROs and traditional police culture

Traditional law enforcement roles and training do not necessarily prepare officers for the multifaceted challenges of working within a school environment. Police officers normally receive training and

experience over their careers that predominantly focus on developing skills to detect, investigate, and mitigate situational problems and threats. Although there has been a movement to integrate more problem solving and de-escalation into police training, even these curricula remain centered upon preparing police officers for the worst and most dangerous situations. As a result of these conditions, Crank (2014) found that officers from the early stages of their careers professionally develop within a culture that reinforces awareness and suspicion, anticipates potential danger, and prepares for situational uncertainty. We found evidence that these cultural attributes affected SROs within their assignments.

Suspicion

Although heightened awareness and suspicion assist police officers in many aspects of their traditional law enforcement roles, our research found that it created unique challenges when working in the school environment. In fact, nearly 63% of SROs in this study reported that their role as an SRO was significantly different from that of a typical law enforcement officer. This feeling was generally shared regardless of grade level, with 65% of elementary school SROs and 57% of middle and high school SROs reporting that their role was significantly different from a typical law enforcement officer. Many of the officers described the complexity of transitioning into their new SRO roles. One SRO who came from a patrol assignment described initially feeling a level of unease working in the school:

Being in law enforcement, you are always watching people's hands and waistbands ... can I see the outline of a weapon? I found myself doing that a lot with the students. Walking in the hallway, I felt very vulnerable. I didn't like kids coming up behind me. (SRO 103)

This officer's feelings of vulnerability in an elementary school and monitoring of the children's waistbands for potential weapons represent the sort of suspicion that SROs carried into school settings from their prior assignments. We found that the average tenure of the SROs in their current school was less than three years and that 44% of officers had been working as an SRO for less than a year, suggesting that any elements of traditional police culture derived from their prior experiences were unlikely to have simply worn off with time. Several SROs explained that job turnover was often related to officers' inability to adapt to the school setting. One SRO described recent turnover: "there were some SROs that just, couldn't get out of that ah, enforcement type mode" (SRO 101).

Danger anticipation

Many of the SROs prioritized the anticipation of danger and the protection of the school as their most important responsibilities. All of the SROs agreed that one of their primary and most significant functions within the school was to protect against potential outside threats, particularly against a school shooting. The school districts that were the focus of this study had previously seen a rapid increase in the SRO program's expansion. Before 2012, SROs were assigned to middle and high schools

in the district. In the aftermath of the school shooting at Sandy Hook, the SRO program was expanded to include elementary schools. Many SROs explained how events like Columbine and Sandy Hook influenced their role within the school. One SRO explained:

Unfortunately, schools, they are not safe anymore. I mean, look at Newtown, Connecticut. Look at Columbine. I mean, any of these big school shootings ... the world is not what it use to be. ... I have to provide that safe environment. (SRO 110)

One SRO after the next stressed the similarity between their school district and other districts where seemingly unpredictable high-profile school shootings had occurred, demonstrating their anticipation of extreme danger at any particular moment. They viewed themselves as the person most responsible for preventing (or mitigating the damage from) potential dangers such as school shootings. The importance of these responsibilities was described by one of the SROs:

We're their first line of defense [for] these kids, so that's one of our primary functions, their safety. I can speak for myself, and I'm probably speaking for a lot of SROs because when we took this position, I mean, we know there's some inherent risks involved. I wouldn't have a problem laying down my life for any of these kids. (SRO 101)

In fact, district leadership explained to the SROs that a school shooting was a near certainty in the district: "He said, 'look, guys, it's, it's not if, it's when'" (SRO 110). Despite the statistical unlikelihood of a school shooting, anticipation of danger was central to SROs' understanding of their purpose.

Situational uncertainty

Crank (2014) found that situational uncertainty is a particularly complex cultural element in police work because there are often long periods of tedious routine followed by short periods of unpredictable, intense, stressful activity. Many of the SROs described the challenges of remaining vigilant and alert in a day-to-day routine that was predominately mundane. Although the SROs rarely encountered crises, the uncertainty of situations appeared to influence their perception of safety within the school. One SRO explained the importance of remaining vigilant and how quickly a situation can escalate:

At the end of the day, we had an incident. Um, a parent was in the car line and saw an individual walking across the parking lot that had a gun. She called in hysterically ... I ran over there. You know I didn't have any idea where it (the person) was, or what he had ... it ended up being a parent who is also a cop ... it was high stress for about 20 minutes. (SRO 108)

Dramatic incidents like this were rare in the districts, and although some SROs spoke with excitement about these sorts of events, most officers were relatively muted in their descriptions of their

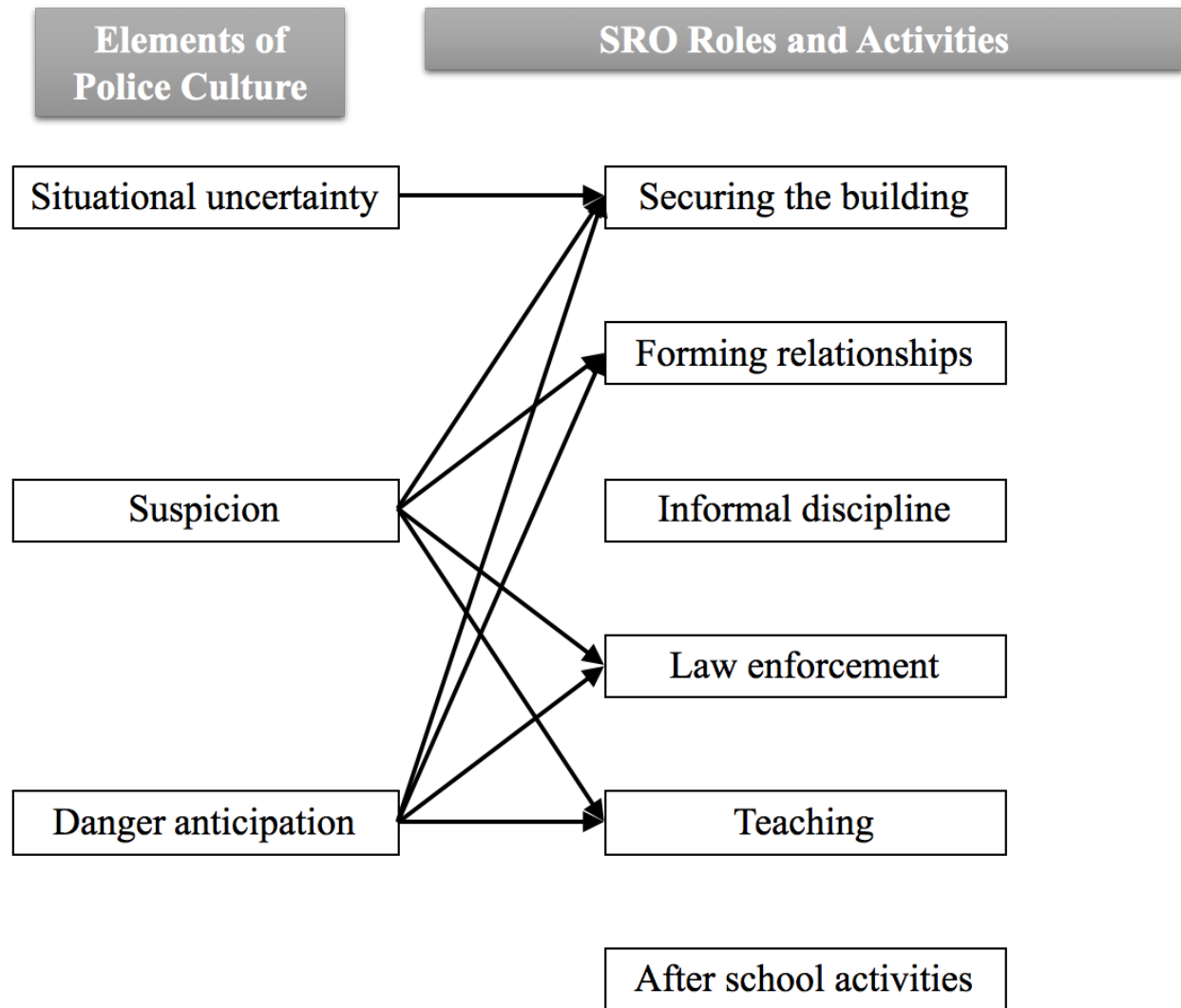
involvement in more serious events. Speaking about arresting students, one SRO said, “if we make an arrest and we’re gonna transport, um, I don’t parade the students out of here in handcuffs or anything, try to do it very low key” (SRO 148). This relative lack of excitement around incidents that broke the ordinary routine was somewhat a diversion from the cultural element of situational uncertainty.

In cases where SROs dealt with uncertainty, they often relied on their training and work experiences before being in a school; 44% of the SROs came from patrol or investigative assignments, and 38% had transitioned from working in a detention center or court security role. Although these assignments did not fully prepare the officers for working in schools, many SROs were able to integrate their prior training and experiences within the school environment, including when working with students whom they viewed as unpredictable or volatile. One SRO who had spent several years working as a property crimes detective described drawing on their prior interactions with teenagers to gain a higher level of confidence when communicating with students within the school. Another SRO explained that “some of the stuff that we, that I, learned (while working) in the jail plays a role in everything I do as an SRO” (SRO 124). This SRO went on to describe how the experience in the detention center provided skills in de-escalating situations. Many of the officers explained that a new officer hired specifically to be an SRO would have a distinct disadvantage without these prior foundational experiences. Even with these prior professional experiences, many of the SROs emphasized the need to have a structured SRO training program to help officers adapt to the situational uncertainty of working in schools. As one SRO described it, “you can’t build an SRO in one day. You need to give them the foundation (to develop)” (SRO 109). Several of the officers described the importance of an SRO field training program in which new officers shadowed senior SROs for several weeks before being assigned to a specific school. One SRO explained that as part of their transition, they shadowed several experienced SROs: “Before I came here, I (field) trained for a month, one week at a high school, a week at a middle school, a week at another elementary school ... same layout but a different school” (SRO 108). The exposure to students and situations in different educational settings appeared to help the officers overcome the initial uncertainty of their new role.

The influence of traditional police culture on SROs’ activities

The previous section provided findings indicating that elements of traditional police culture, including suspicion, danger anticipation, and situational uncertainty were present among officers assigned to schools. In the section that follows, we have identified several activities of SROs—both common and uncommon—and examined the extent to which these three elements of traditional police culture inform how or why SROs engaged in these activities. Figure 1 provides an overview of the connections we found between each element of police culture and SROs’ activities.⁴

Figure 1. Linking elements of police culture to SROs’ activities



Two main goals: Securing the building and forming relationships

The articulated primary goal of the SRO program in our participating districts was to provide safety and security to schools, a goal closely aligned with all three elements of traditional police culture. When asked about their main purpose in the schools, nearly every SRO responded with some variation of the words “safety and security of the building.” This primary purpose was seen in SROs’ survey reports of engaging in various activities. All of the surveyed SROs reported engaging in security enforcement/patrol, coordinating with the police, and identifying problems and solutions. Nearly 90% also reported training teachers in school safety. There was little variation in these activities across the school level. Many SROs articulated that this focus on security was particularly aimed at preventing external threats, underscoring the salience of suspicion, danger anticipation, and situational uncertainty among the SROs.

A secondary goal for both the school district and law enforcement agency was establishing positive relationships between students and SROs. Speaking about the goals of the SRO program, one SRO commented, “there’s several but one of the primary functions here is to establish a good relationship with the students” (SRO 101). Nearly 90% of SROs who responded to the survey reported mentoring students. Likewise, analysis of the SROs’ time logs revealed that mentoring, advising, and assisting students constituted the largest percentage of their reported activities. Over 75% of the SROs’ reported activities were assisting faculty/students or advising students, with elementary SROs tending to do a bit more assisting than advising of students as compared to the higher grade levels. The potential activities listed on the form focused on law enforcement activities, teaching, and relationships with students, teachers, parents, and the community. Because the form did not include security activities as options, we cannot utilize these data to inform the importance of security. Still, we can observe the emphasis on student relationship building as opposed to law enforcement or education.

These two overarching goals of security and relationship building were apparent in the activities of almost all SROs in our study. As a result, although SROs had a substantial amount of autonomy in their daily activities, many of the SROs’ routines were similar. SROs described making an early arrival to the school, often 30 to 60 minutes before students arrived. During this time, SROs engaged in security maintenance, a process largely influenced by their suspicion and danger anticipation. They described making an initial perimeter check of the building, inspecting entrances/exits, and turning on or checking security cameras. One SRO described his morning routine:

I do my rounds. Um, I do security checks, make sure all the doors are secure. Um, I also like to check behind ... We have like the doors that we came in, the fire doors? Always paranoid about those because, that would be an awesome place to hide a weapon. (SRO 103)

The time before student arrival was also an opportunity for SROs to get situated for the day—check emails, check in with school staff, talk to students, and ensure other materials for the day were in order.

As students began arriving at school, SROs shifted to more relationship-centric activities. They commonly reported being present at bus drop offs, car-rider drop-offs, and building entrances. Although their presence at these locations served a security purpose, they more commonly described this time as building connections with students and parents while also supporting school staff. An SRO described this time of the day as:

You know, every morning I go out, and I make sure the kids get out their car, and I greet them every morning, “good morning,” open the doors for ’em, and get them, get ’em out of the cars and we meet the parents, you know, wave and talk to them. (SRO 136)

This process was common among the SROs and emphasized the importance they placed on building relationships with both students and their parents. Although building relationships with students may not reflect the three elements of traditional police culture on its face, several SROs explained that they specifically sought to build relationships with students who had—or whom they suspected to have—behavioral problems of various kinds. For example, one SRO explained, “if I see a kid that I think is troubled a little bit, I’ll pay a little bit more attention to him to see if he’ll open up and talk to me” (SRO 136). The explicit goal of reaching “troubled” students was frequently tied to the goal of preventing problem behaviors in and out of the schools. Thus, this focus on building relationships with students—particularly those deemed at risk of engaging in problem behaviors—suggests that SROs’ were motivated in part by suspicion and danger anticipation.

After students had arrived at school, SROs conducted activities that were both security-oriented and relationship-oriented. They described securing the external doors once all students were in and then completing periodic rounds, either inside the school, outside, or both. As with their rounds in the morning, these movements around the school were primarily described as being about identifying and preventing external threats and often entailed securing doors, being on the lookout for strangers on campus, or for items around campus that could pose a threat. In addition, SROs commonly described spending time in the front office, serving as a visible deterrent to any outside intruder or angry parent that might attempt to access the school. One exception to this focus on external threats, however, was the use of security cameras. These cameras were commonly used to help school personnel deal with internal issues of misconduct, such as property that had gone missing, something that was more likely to occur in middle and high schools relative to elementary schools. One SRO described how the use of security cameras tended to come from requests by faculty that were specific to an incident:

I don’t like to sit in here and watch cameras. It’s not my favorite thing to do. Most of the time I have somebody come to me and say ‘Can you look this up?’ It doesn’t take very long. We can go back, back on any of the cameras and check to see what happens. (SRO 142)

The time during the school day was also an important time for SROs to build relationships with students. Many SROs maintained a presence in the hallway between classes, dropped in on recess or physical education classes, or sat with students during lunch. They used these opportunities to engage in deeper conversations with students. Lunch was a particularly meaningful time for several SROs to build relationships with students. One SRO noted,

I’ll eat lunch with the kids, um, ask them about their day, and just kinda just start getting to know them so they know, “Hey, I can trust this person” and “I see her every day, and she’s really nice” and try to get to know the students too (SRO 109)

In a similar vein, another SRO noted how he merged his security activities with relationship building by taking the time when walking the halls to read student profiles and work that were displayed in the hallway, “they’ll post it out on the walls, and so while they’re in class, while I’m doing my rounds, I’ll be like, alright, so this person’s name is so-and-so. And I recognize seeing them” (SRO 108). Another SRO, embodying the cultural element of danger anticipation, explained that these relationships were key for gaining information about potential threats within the school: “Because if they get comfortable around you they can come tell you things, you know, instead of being afraid of me and they won’t want to tell me something if they see something” (SRO 111). Thus, the work that SROs did to build relationships with students was often done to accomplish law enforcement goals, reflecting the three elements of traditional police culture.

However, there were also other reasons that SROs provided for building relationships with students. For instance, SROs frequently reported the desire to act as role models for students. This goal drove SROs to prioritize mentoring students and functioning as informal counselors. For example, one SRO stated:

Our main concern is the safety of the student body and the teachers here. And other than that I guess I would be more of a mentor hopefully to kind of guide kids in the right direction and be a positive role model. (SRO 141)

Although it was common for SROs to emphasize the general importance of acting as a role model for students, a subset of SROs also articulated two more particular dynamics around being a role model: students who wanted to be police officers and students who needed a male role model.

When SROs discovered that students wanted to be police officers when they grew up, they were flattered and strove to foster relationships with those students to encourage them. One officer shared:

A lot of the kids look at an SRO or myself as a ... like a ... like a hero basically. They’re like, “When I grow up I want to be like you.” And I get cards and stuff like that that some of the kids make me and that’s uh, makes me feel really good, actually. (SRO 150)

Another SRO (SRO 101) explained that he gave a kindergartener a private tour of his squad car because the student was having a hard time at home and expressed interest in being a police officer one day. This excitement around students wanting to become police officers motivated SROs to engage in more activities around developing relationships and acting as informal counselors.

Several male SROs expressed the importance of students having a male role model and saw themselves as filling that role. For example, an SRO explained that

A lot of them maybe don't have that male figure at the house, maybe it's just they live with their mother and they crave, and I think, need that discipline ... When they have somebody with male authority talk to them and, you know, come at them heartfelt but matter-of-fact that, you know, you're messing up and this is why you're messing up and this is what you need to do to not mess up. I think they appreciate it. (SRO 145)

This officer's understanding of students' need for a male role model was not unique. The SRO who gave a tour of his squad car described being approached by a teacher:

But she just said, he just um, he needs a male role, a male figure in his life. Apparently father is not anywhere or been around, I don't know, I don't know the history but um, I know his father is not around and he, he doesn't have any um, any brothers or um, any older friends or anything so he needs a role model. (SRO 101)

The desire to satisfy students' perceived need for a male role model motivated some SROs to prioritize building relationships with certain students, which they saw as nearly as important as—although distinct from—maintaining the safety and security of the building. This goal was primarily motivated by what SROs expressed as genuine concern about the students and not explicitly tied to the three elements of traditional police culture.

School discipline

Perhaps surprisingly, given national estimates, we found that SROs in the sample districts did not engage heavily in formal school discipline issues during the school day. In our survey, less than 10% of SROs reported maintaining school discipline. This meshed with their time log data, in which the average SRO reported addressing less than one incident per year of criminal misconduct like theft, assault, vandalism, or drugs. This lack of disciplinary involvement was driven in large part by the memorandum of understanding between the school districts and the law enforcement agency, which explicitly stated that SROs were not to engage in discipline. One might expect that the salience of elements of traditional police culture such as situational uncertainty may have prompted more SROs to be involved in school discipline given the potential to be involved in more exciting situations. However, the mandate to only be involved in law violations largely prevented this from occurring.

Nevertheless, we did find that SROs engaged, at least occasionally, in informal school discipline. Such roles often looked like verbally correcting students or referring misbehaving students to other school personnel. In other cases, SROs provided a physical presence when students were being interrogated or punished by a staff member or would talk to a student or class about the importance of rule-following and the potential implications if they failed to do so. Although there were a few examples of SROs who engaged more actively in disciplinary situations, their descriptions of their activities mostly aligned with the survey results, indicating that discipline—particularly in more formal forms—was

not a primary activity. Moreover, aside from rule violations that might put another student's physical safety at risk (e.g., running in hallways), the SROs did not view maintaining school discipline as a matter of safety or danger, perhaps explaining why traditional police culture did not have a more salient impact on their involvement in school discipline.

Law enforcement

Although SROs were heavily focused on security and occasionally involved in informal discipline, their role as law enforcers was limited due to the lack of criminal activity, particularly in elementary and middle schools. At the high school level, the average SRO reported slightly less than one arrest per month, with drugs, petitions, theft, and assault being the most commonly reported violations. On a yearly basis, this averaged out to fewer than ten arrests per high school SRO. At the elementary and middle schools, arrests were almost nonexistent. In the few cases where elementary SROs discussed making an arrest, it arose from situations where a student stole a high-value item (e.g., an iPad) from school staff. When SROs described arrests, it was rarely with a tone of excitement that one might expect given the police cultural element of situational uncertainty but rather a matter of duty as a reaction to some offense. One SRO expressed this bluntly: "I don't like arresting kids, that's not what I like to do" (SRO 111). This lack of law enforcement activity was also reflected in the time logs they submitted to their supervisor.

Teaching

An infrequent activity for the SROs was formal teaching. Despite models such as DARE that involve school-based officers in instruction, officers in our sample did very little teaching. Only about 20% of them reported teaching a law-related course. The interviews suggested that these tended to take the form of guest lecturing rather than a formal, ongoing assignment as the leader of a class. Similarly, analysis of the SRO time log data revealed that "classroom lecture or guest speaker" constituted less than 5% of their total activities across grade levels. In many ways, the SROs' approach to teaching illustrated a tension between the two primary goals of the SRO program: security and bridging law enforcement to student relationships. While teaching would, theoretically, be a prime vehicle for enhancing relationships, the SRO leadership viewed teaching as a security liability because it would force the SROs to be in a predictable, known location on a regular basis. Instead, in line with the elements of traditional police culture discussed above, SROs preferred their routines to vary from day to day so that a potential offender could not predict their location. One SRO noted, "So, that's my goal: it's to be seen but then not to know exactly where I am at every—not to develop a pattern" (SRO 120). As a result, teaching was only an occasional activity for the SROs.

Although SROs did not regularly teach, many of them did build relationships with and support school personnel. Most of them maintained relationships with the school administrators and a number

actively supported teachers and staff. These efforts commonly included assisting with bus or car rider lines, being a cafeteria monitor, or responding to faculty requests to engage with students (through counseling, disciplinary discussions, or talking to a class). One SRO noted helping in other ways as well:

I've helped them put bookshelves up before, or helped them fix desks before. We don't have an actual maintenance staff here, so I kind of go around help out with that. Or if the cafeteria staff needs help one day because they're short. (SRO 109)

Another SRO noted:

They have to move the desk somewhere. Do you think I'm gonna let them struggle with the lead desk because ... Is it my job? Not my job. Pick up folders. Not my job. Deliver the field bags. No, it's not my job. It's what I do. It's just something I do to help out. Little things like that makes an administrator appreciate. (SRO 136)

These quotes typify the general attitude among SROs that even though they rarely actively taught in the classroom, they viewed supporting the school's educational goals as an important component of their job, and one that had no clear ties to suspicion, danger anticipation, or situational uncertainty.

After school activities

The regular school day typically ended much as it began, with SROs being present for car rider pickups, bus loading, and other dismissal activities, but many SROs reported additional work beyond the regular school day. About 10-12% of SROs reported attending a school event (such as a sporting event or play). These activities were consistently observed in the survey, time logs, and were discussed in interviews. Although this proportion of activities was fairly consistent across grade level, the qualitative interviews suggested that the *types* of activities varied considerably across grade level. In particular, middle and high school SROs commonly reported being present at sporting events, whereas elementary SROs were more likely to be present at before or after school extended-care, where students arrived early or stayed late until their parents could pick them up. Additionally, some elementary school SROs worked sporting events at middle and high schools, despite not being the SRO dedicated to that school. For the SROs, this extracurricular work had the advantage of banking overtime hours that could be used to reduce the workload during the summer months, and, although their duties at these events entailed maintaining security, they did not articulate motivations particularly tied to suspicion, danger anticipation, or situational uncertainty.

Discussion

Although SROs continue to be a common intervention for schools seeking to ensure school safety, research examining what SROs actually do in schools lags behind. Although some large-scale surveys have identified in broad strokes what sorts of activities are most common in schools (Chaney &

Hansen, 2015; Coon & Travis III, 2012), less is known about how SROs describe their own roles and what factors shape their engagement in various activities. Using surveys, time logs, and qualitative interviews from nearly 50 SROs across two school districts, this study described the salience of three particular elements of traditional police culture (i.e., suspicion, danger anticipation, and situational uncertainty) for SROs and how these elements influenced the activities of SROs. The SROs in this sample reflected all three of these elements of traditional police culture, but the extent to which those elements influenced their daily activities varied. Suspicion and danger anticipation were strong motivators for SROs in their most common activities: maintaining security and building relationships. The SROs described security-related activities as the most common but also spoke at length about their focus on building relationships with students in a variety of ways, reflective of NASRO's emphasis on SROs as informal counselors. The desire to build relationships with students stemmed both from a genuine sense of caring for the students and adherence to a traditional police culture that led the SROs to seek out relationships with students they deemed most likely to offend. The other two elements of NASRO's triad model—educator and law enforcement officer—rarely occurred among the SROs sampled here. Formal education was limited to occasional lectures, and law enforcement issues rarely occurred on school grounds, particularly in elementary and middle schools.

The findings around SROs' most frequent activities complicate NASRO's triad model. In particular, the extensive activities around maintaining security of the school do not fit cleanly into the broad role categories of law enforcement officer, educator, or informal counselor. Although an argument could be made that maintaining school security is the function of a law enforcement officer given the focus on crime prevention, the SROs themselves did not view it as a law enforcement activity. Moreover, most adults in schools would be perfectly capable of engaging in activities such as making sure all external doors are locked, suggesting that the specialized law enforcement training that SROs receive may not be needed for some of the more mundane tasks around school security. As such, we suggest that a fourth component of SROs' roles ought to be added to NASRO's triad model—that of maintaining security. This is not the first study to suggest that the triad model may not adequately capture the full breadth of SROs' roles; the role of social worker has also emerged from prior qualitative research (McKenna, Martinez-Prather, & Bowman, 2014).

Additionally, the limited engagement in law enforcement was a somewhat surprising finding. Presumably, the added value of having an SRO in schools rather than a private security officer, counselor, or social worker, is that the SRO has the training, rights, and responsibilities of a law enforcement officer. In this study's setting, crime was rare, but far from nonexistent, particularly in the high schools. One might imagine that in settings like this where offending is rare, the cultural element of situational uncertainty would lead SROs to dive into those rare instances of offending with gusto, becoming heavily involved during the few times where their expertise was needed. However, the SROs in our study were often content to let school administrators handle these incidents. When

legal action was required, they described it as calm and matter-of-fact rather than dramatic and full of excitement as might be expected in light of traditional police culture.

In fact, whereas the SROs reflected a fairly strong adherence to the cultural elements of suspicion and danger anticipation, there was very little indication that situational uncertainty was a driving force for the SROs' actions. One potential explanation for this finding is that SROs understand their job in a fundamentally different way from officers in the community. Specifically, the SROs in this study articulated time and again that their goal was to maintain the safety and security of the building. This may stand in contrast to patrol officers who are more likely to view their purpose as identifying and stopping misconduct. These slightly different frames—one as maintenance and the other as response—may change the relative influence of situational uncertainty in each setting. Specifically, SROs' efforts to maintain the status quo in their assigned schools (rather than seeking out offending) may have limited their expectation that there would be moments of excitement. When the potential for those moments did arise, the SROs' desire to dive in full force may have similarly been limited.

Another potential explanation for the limited influence of situational uncertainty is that SROs were part of a shared authority structure in schools. Rather than having full control over how crime in school should be handled, they had to respond in concert with school administrators. The exact form of this collaborative response varied across schools, but the mere fact that school administrators were involved as well may have limited SROs' potential excitement in dealing with the rare crimes that did occur. School administrators are likely to have a vested interest in ensuring that criminal behavior remains low-profile to minimize the potential disruption to the school learning environment. This interest in minimizing disruptions may have muted the cultural element of situational uncertainty, suggesting that SROs are likely to find excitement in interruptions to their routine.

A third possible explanation is that certain types of officers may select into and out of SRO positions. At least one SRO in our sample spoke about actively trying to get out of the role of SRO, using it as a stepping stone to get to work he viewed as more exciting. Other officers expressed that they liked their SRO assignment because their school had a relatively low key pace—a feature of the work environment that was particularly good for someone with a family or nearing retirement. As such, the officers who selected into being (and remaining) SROs may be the type of officers who are not particularly compelled by the excitement of situational uncertainty.

Continuing to examine the activities of SROs as well as the factors that shape those activities may be a particularly fruitful direction for researchers evaluating the effects of SROs on students and schools. Critics of SROs have suggested that the institutions of education and law enforcement are largely incompatible (Henry, 2009, Hirschfield, 2008), so further knowledge about the salience of traditional police culture among SROs will be useful for addressing this critique. Additionally, recent research suggests that understanding the activities of SROs is useful for assessing the effectiveness of SROs

(Devlin & Gottfredson, 2017; Fisher & Devlin, 2020; McKenna & White, 2018). As this literature continues to develop, this study's findings suggest that broad categories of roles (e.g., educator, informal counselor, law enforcement officer) may not adequately capture what SROs are actually doing in schools and may mask the underlying motivations. For instance, an SRO who builds relationships with students because of a genuine concern for them may yield very different outcomes from an SRO who builds relationships with students to further their law enforcement agenda. Further probing SROs' activities and motivations appears to be a useful undertaking for researchers interested in understanding the effects of SROs.

Our results also speak to considerations for policy decisions around SRO expansion and use in schools. As states move to expand the presence of law enforcement in schools, as several have done in the wake of recent school shootings, they might look to craft policies that provide clear guidance for SROs' roles while also including supports to SROs for training specific to the school environment (Finn, McDevitt, Lassiter, Shively, & Rich, 2005). Given that we saw in our study that agency-wide policies regarding discipline and teaching influenced SROs' activities, thoughtful attention to the roles that are defined for SROs in state and local policy is important. Additionally, training is specific to school environments might serve to better acclimate SROs to the cultural dimensions of a school environment thereby providing balance to elements of traditional police culture that may be less appropriate for school contexts.

Limitations

This study's findings should be interpreted in light of its limitations. First, although we used three different data sources to understand SROs' common roles and activities, the SROs themselves supplied the data. Thus their responses may differ from what other stakeholders in the schools perceive. Prior research has suggested that SROs and school administrators have somewhat different perceptions as to the extent to which SROs engage in activities in the school—particularly activities outside the realm of law enforcement (Coon & Travis III, 2012). This may be an important consideration for future research examining how SROs affect different stakeholders.

Second, we are unaware of the extent to which social desirability bias may have affected this study's findings. Given the national controversy around the use of SROs, the SROs in our sample may have had a vested interest in portraying themselves in the best possible light, potentially introducing bias in their responses across any and all of the data collection methods. Although the interviewers rarely detected reticence on behalf of the SROs to participate or be fully honest, we cannot guarantee that the findings were without bias.

Third, it is worth noting that the factors that shaped SROs' activities in schools are based on SROs' own perceptions and not objective measurements. Although both types of data are likely to be meaningful,

our findings here should be interpreted only as SROs' own perceptions.

Fourth, it is possible that SROs' descriptions of their roles and the extent to which they connected their current activities with more common police activities could have been influenced by how they were assigned to be an SRO. While we know generally there was a mix of SROs in our sample who described either joining the Sheriff's department to become an SRO or were transferred from another position, we do not have the data to differentiate SROs' career paths and the extent to which they were compelled to become SROs or sought out the SRO role. If we had these data, it might point to significant differences in SROs' activities based on their motivations to become an SRO.

Fifth, we are unable to disentangle the extent to which the influence of police culture on the SROs' activities results from the characteristics of their law enforcement agency's culture, the schools, or the personalities of individual officers. Future research would benefit from exploring why traditional police culture may motivate SROs' actions in schools.

Finally, it is important to note that our data could not explore potential racial/ethnic variation in SROs' activities and elements of police culture. Given a large body of research on the over-policing of communities of color and on implicit and explicit bias in policing, it is possible that elements of police culture may manifest differently in settings that are more racial/ethnically diverse than that of this study or among SROs that do or do not share racial characteristics with the students they serve. Given that almost all of the SROs in our study were white and most schools were majority white, we lacked the data to explore this issue empirically, but we suggest it is an important area for future research to explore.

Conclusion

The interrelatedness of education and policing appears to be poised to grow, with concerns about school violence driving policymakers to expand the presence of law enforcement officers in schools. This study contributes to the growing knowledge base pertaining to SROs, emphasizing what SROs do and the extent to which traditional police culture follows SROs into schools. Our findings offer the possibility of reframing conventional notions about the sorts of activities SROs do, particularly regarding NASRO's triad model, which does not readily accommodate the extensive tasks that SROs undertake in maintaining the security of the building. Additionally, this study suggests that although some elements of traditional police culture—including suspicion and danger anticipation—were strong motivators for SROs' activities in schools, other elements—specifically, situational uncertainty—were less salient. These findings suggest that awareness of and attention to traditional police culture elements may be useful during the process of identifying, hiring, and training SROs to maximize the potential benefits and minimize the potential drawbacks for the schools in which they find themselves working.

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F. Chris Curran is an Associate Professor of Educational Leadership and Policy and Director of the Education Policy Research Center at the University of Florida. His research seeks to improve equity in education, with a particular emphasis on school discipline, school safety, and early childhood education.

Samantha Viano is an Assistant Professor of Education in the College of Education and Human Development at George Mason University. Her research focuses on evaluating policies and assessing school contexts that predominantly affect at-risk or traditionally marginalized student populations and their teachers.

John Skinner is a retired Deputy Police Commissioner from the Baltimore Police Department and Ph.D. student in the School of Public Policy at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. His research focuses on criminal justice policy and evidence-based policing strategies.

Footnotes

1. A copy of the interview protocol is available on request. [↵](#)
2. A full list of categories included on the time logs is available upon request. [↵](#)
3. The complete set of themes (both anticipated and emergent) is available upon request. [↵](#)
4. Following the suggestion of an anonymous reviewer, we examined differences in SROs' roles across school levels (i.e., elementary, middle, and high schools). The roles were fairly consistent across school levels; more detailed information is available upon request. [↵](#)