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Not “That Kind of Cop”: Exploring How Officers Adapt Approaches, Attitudes, and Self-concepts in School Settings

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KEYWORDS

School resource officers; policing; self-concept; police attitudes; police roles

ABSTRACT

Prior research indicates school resource officers (SROs) perform an array of nontraditional police tasks and work in settings culturally distinct from street patrols. To thrive in SRO programs, police must adapt to these new roles and settings, likely affecting how they view themselves and their work. The present study examined how SROs view and respond to their work in schools through interviews and observations of 20 participants in four states. Findings revealed participants adopted policing strategies that facilitated communication and rapport. They generally viewed citizens positively and felt being an SRO made their work meaningful. Participants further described identities at odds with authoritarian stereotypes. Findings lend support to the notion that attitudes and self-concept are dynamic and suggest positive changes in attitudes and identity are related to the ways officers approach their work. Such changes show promise for realizing the community policing goals of many SRO programs.

Introduction

While scholars have identified similarities in the cultural experiences of police officers, policing varies considerably throughout the United States and across the world. Officers encounter different situations and environments whether they work slow suburban beats by day, patrol inner-city streets at night, or serve communities in rural America. Though officers in the United States nearly always start their careers in patrol, they may later move into specialized units bearing little resemblance to their previous work environments, which likely influences how they perform and perceive their work. History and research are full of examples in which individuals' attitudes and behaviors change as they move from one environment to another. In fact, because the environment can be so powerful, habit researchers suggest that desired changes in behaviors (e.g., weight loss, increased exercise) are most easily established around major context changes or life transitions (Barrett, 2007; Wood & Runger, 2016; Wood, Tam, & Witt, 2005). Similarly, police officers assigned to schools are exposed to new social institutional environments with norms, roles, and players that differ from police patrol settings. As police officers are pulled from their familiar street environments and moved into school settings, we are interested in how they adapt and respond to their work in school environments, and especially the ways their identities in schools influence how they approach their work.

Police who transition from street patrols to school assignments must learn to function effectively under different social conditions, perhaps by adapting their cultural beliefs and attitudes to school norms and role expectations. Because officers in schools can significantly affect, positively or negatively, students, school staff, and parents, it is critical that we have a better understanding of how officers adapt and function in school resource officer (SRO) positions. For example, SROs may deter criminal activity, help solve school problems, and enhance police legitimacy (Johnson, 1999; Wolfe, Chrusciel, Rojek, Hansen, & Kaminski, 2017); however, they may also engender an oppressive environment where minor deviance is treated harshly and students are more likely to be arrested (American Civil Liberties Union, 2008). SROs who successfully perform their work in schools

may provide guidance on how to better implement progressive policing strategies in the community (e.g., community policing, intelligence-led policing).

To understand SRO responses to school assignments, we conducted qualitative interviews and observations with officers that have transitioned from patrol to school settings. Before turning to our findings, we briefly review how police socialization typically influences officer attitudes, identity formation, and policing strategies. We then discuss how school environments and the community policing goals of many SRO programs may influence SRO responses and approaches to their work, while considering implications for officer transition into school settings.

Literature review

Police culture and socialization

Scholars have extensively examined the occupational culture of policing and the impact of culture on roles and identities of police officers. Police culture is an assortment of shared values, attitudes, and behaviors that members adopt as they learn the accepted practices and beliefs of their co-workers and interact with their occupational environment (Crank, 2004; Paoline & Terrill, 2014). Many cultural themes within policing have been identified, and these themes overlap and are interdependent (Crank, 2004). Skolnick (1994), for example, argued that police officers develop a “working personality” formed in response to perceived threats in their work environment and their authority to force others to obey their commands. Contributing to this working personality are perceptions of danger and a sense of authority that make officers highly suspicious of others, and particularly distrustful of citizens. Further, officers feel isolated and no longer identify with ordinary citizens who treat them differently because of their occupation. Thus, officers tend to identify more with other police officers who share the same status, perform the same work, and will support one another when necessary (Skolnick, 1994).

Themes of danger and authority are well-established in prior literature (e.g., Bittner, 1970; Brown, 1981; Rubinstein, 1973; Wilson, 1968). Paoline (2003) has developed a useful framework for conceptualizing cultural themes depicted in classic studies of police. He identified themes of perceived danger, an ability to

coerce others to comply, supervisor scrutiny, and role ambiguity within the occupational and organizational environments of policing. In response to these stressors, officers remain highly suspicious of others, attempt to maintain control over their beat, avoid drawing attention from supervisors, and narrowly define their role as crime fighters (Paoline, 2003). Officers' responses to their work environment engender isolation from civilians and greater trust in their fellow co-workers (Paoline, 2003).

Despite similarities in cultural themes across police agencies worldwide, individual officers hold these dominant attitudes and roles to varying degrees. In his investigation of police in eight cities, Wilson (1968) identified three types of police agencies; differentiated by which role the agency emphasized (i.e., watchman, legalistic, and service). Different cultural belief systems have been noted between line-level (i.e., "street cop culture") and middle or upper command officers (i.e., "management cop culture;" Reuss-Ianni, 1983). Further variation has been found across precincts (Hassell, 2006; Klinger, 1997; Sobol, 2010), shifts (Haarr, 2001; Paoline, 2001; Sun, 2002), work groups (Ingram, Paoline, & Terrill, 2013), and individuals (Brown, 1981; Paoline, 2004).

Once selected, new recruits undergo extensive training and socialization before working independently. Socialization facilitates the transfer of organizational and occupational norms and shared beliefs to new members (Chappell & Lanza-Kaduce, 2010; Conti, 2006; Van Maanen, 1975). At each stage of police training, recruits adapt to the formal and informal guidelines of their assigned agency and units (Ford, 2003; Haarr, 2001; Van Maanen, 1975). In an early study, Van Maanen (1975) found that recruits' motivation to work hard decreased during the first month as an officer in accordance with departmental values. In another study, recruits' views toward policing strategies were measured prior to the academy, after the academy, after field training, and at the end of the first year (Haarr, 2001). Recruits became more supportive of community and problem-oriented policing during the academy, and less supportive of those strategies after working in the field. Other studies have noted similar changes in recruits' beliefs and values (Barker, 1999; Ellis, 1991; Oberfield, 2012; Reuss-Ianni, 1983). Thus, there is support for the

development of a police “working personality” through which similar cultural values and “distinctive cognitive tendencies” about police work are adopted to help officers make sense of their work experiences (Skolnick, 1994, p. 264). Because this “working personality” forms in response to job demands and structure, it may also change or evolve as those everyday demands and structures shift.

Policing in schools and resocialization

Research has predominantly focused on socialization during police academy and field training; however, socialization continues throughout one’s career, and especially during moments of transition (e.g., promotion or reassignment; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Officers in the United States nearly always begin their work in patrol units; however, they may be reassigned or promoted to positions where early cultural beliefs are less applicable and more innovative policing strategies are expected. Officers assigned to school positions work in social environments that are culturally distinct from the typical police beat in many ways.

The development of SRO positions originated from community policing philosophies that emphasized partnerships between police and members of the community, requiring a radical change in professional era views of police work (Kelling & Moore, 1988; Greene, 2004). While SRO programs have continually evolved and some have become more punitive under zero-tolerance policies (Curtis, 2014; Hirschfield, 2008; Mallett, 2016), schools represent a clear area where community policing can be effective. Community policing strategies are intended to engage community members as officers focus on citizen concerns and integrate citizens in the process of solving persistent problems (Kelling & Moore, 1988; Skogan & Roth, 2004). In schools, SROs encounter a more predictable, less dangerous environment in which varying levels of authority are shared among school staff. SROs are expected to be visible by directing traffic, monitoring hallways or lunch rooms, and attending school functions throughout the day. SROs are also known to teach classes, participate in extracurricular activities, and attend community events. The position allows SROs to focus more on service and order maintenance issues while working closely with members of their community (i.e., parents, teachers, administrators, and students) to

address and prevent problems.

The decentralized structure of SRO programs may also promote community policing goals as officers are assigned to relatively permanent locations and exercise greater decision-making within their assigned beats (Greene, 2004). This structure may allow SROs to become more knowledgeable about the community, establish relationships and partnerships with citizens in their beats, and increase trust between police and citizens (Greene, 2004). It is relatively common for SROs to develop lasting professional relationships with some students, parents, and school staff (Johnson, 1999). Similar relationships may be more difficult on the street. While patrol officers become intimately familiar with their beat, they spend much of their time patrolling (usually by car), responding to calls for service, and occasionally stopping suspicious people. Patrol officers may have passing knowledge of a few “frequent fliers” and, in progressive departments, may occasionally step out of their car to speak with residents or business owners. Yet, even patrol officers who strive to connect with citizens have limits to their time and aspects of the social environment remain unknown.

SRO assignments require officers to spend most of their time working around juveniles, which is important for several reasons. First, students are young, impressionable, and still developing. Though questions remain about how SROs exercise discretion in schools, school assignments necessitate greater use of discretion and understanding of youth behavior. Cultural values within schools emphasize improving student outcomes, rather than just punishing misbehavior, so officers may be incentivized to consider long-term effects of responses to student issues. Second, SROs must be aware of their image and how actions may be interpreted in light of school policies (e.g., obscene language or jokes, and aggressive or disrespectful behavior are not allowed; Clark, 2011). Third, SROs must be knowledgeable about legal protections and codes that apply only to juveniles, while navigating the different legal standards for police and school administrators. Citizen preferences for arrest or leniency are known to influence officer discretion (Wilson, 1968), and school administrators may pressure SROs to handle student issues either informally or formally through arrest. Given that SROs work

closely with school administrators, citizens may have more influence on officers in school settings.

Not only do SROs work closely with citizens, but they are also more removed from other officers, depending on assignment variations. An SRO may be assigned individually to one or more schools, though larger SRO units, which are more common in large urban school districts, may hire a team of SROs. The expense of hiring full-time sworn officers means that many departments rely on only one SRO per school or per district. Placement of an individual officer in a school is a significant change from patrol units where an officer checks-in before, during, and at the end of shifts. Officer solidarity is a core cultural theme within policing, yet SROs have fewer opportunities to interact, receive backup, or discuss decisions with other officers.

Finally, SROs perform a wide range of functions that include nontraditional roles (Rhodes, 2017). While SROs continue to enforce the law, maintain the peace, and perform security-related activities, schools often expect SROs to also teach classes, engage and mentor youth, connect individuals in need to community services, and perform many other tasks that are not necessarily law-related. These functions necessitate ongoing socialization to reorient officers to the roles and tasks of SROs.

The available literature on officers' transition into SRO programs suggests that there is a selection and socialization process similar to the stages that precede entry into policing. Generally, police agencies and school districts work together to select SROs, though specific processes vary across cities and schools (Finn & McDevitt, 2005). Once selected, SROs may receive specialized training or begin immediately. Similar to entry into the policing field, socialization into specialized positions likely happens, in part, through training and initial work experiences. SROs funded through grants (e.g., COPS) may be required to attend training provided through local, state, or national agencies (American Civil Liberties Union, 2008), though some officers receive no training prior to school assignment (May & Higgins, 2011). The focus, extent, and methods of SRO training may vary according to policies, resources, and philosophies of individual departments and school

districts. While some schools assist SRO transition, training requirements remain inconsistent (or nonexistent) across U.S. schools (American Civil Liberties Union, 2008; Martinez-Prather, McKenna, & Bowman, 2016).

Current study

Given police strategies and identities are closely tied to occupational environments, the nature of school settings and the SRO role may change how SROs approach and perceive their work, which has important implications for their influence on schools. Scholars and citizens are somewhat divided on whether police are beneficial or harmful additions to schools. On the one hand, SROs are thought to deter crime, improve police-citizen relations, increase police legitimacy, and provide additional positive role models for youth (Johnson, 1999; McKenna, Martinez-Prather, & Bowman, 2014; Wolfe, et al., 2017). Though a few available studies suggest police presence may reduce levels of school crime and disorder (Jennings, Khey, Maskaly, & Donner, 2011; Johnson, 1999; Schuiteman, 2001), other studies have found a limited or mixed impact on crime (Maskaly, Donner, Lanterman, & Jennings, 2011; Na & Gottfredson, 2013). There is also reason to be concerned that police presence in schools may criminalize nonserious youth deviance and increase disproportionate minority contact with the juvenile justice system (Hirschfield, 2008; Kupchik, 2010, 2016).

Further research may improve understanding of the conditions that promote positive or negative outcomes, and such research is critical given that SRO programs continue to receive local and federal support (Davis, 2016). A focus on SRO perceptions of their work in schools may reveal both positive and negative themes that are important to explore because of the impact of officers' decisions on youth. Further, although community policing approaches are the formal standard for SRO programs (Girouard, 2001), it is unclear the extent to which these principles are actually being adopted and how exactly they are realized, especially given inconsistent training requirements and methods across programs. For example, SROs who adopt the cultural views of school staff may be less suspicious and more trusting of citizens, and thus better able to establish relationships and increase

police legitimacy. However, if officers do not adapt effectively to the school culture, they may have a harmful effect on youth or the school environment. The more we understand about officers' attitudes, approaches, and beliefs in the school context the better information we will have to inform both future research and SRO training.

In the current study, we set out to gain a better understanding of how police adapt to their work in schools and explore the relationship between their self-concept and their policing approach. Just as officers on patrol develop "working personalities" to help cope with their work (Skolnick, 1994), we wanted to explore the working personalities of SROs and how they may be similar or different to those generally discussed in classic police literature. To explore this question, the lead author conducted in-depth interviews and observations with SROs, asking them to describe their experiences as SROs and to reflect on emergent themes.

Methods

Study design

Qualitative data used in this study come from interviews and participant observations with 20 SROs in the Midwest. These 20 SROs represent a subset of volunteers at the last stage of a larger survey project. Though interview and observation data are the primary focus of this article, some information from the larger survey sample is included here to provide context for the subset of interviewees.

The first stage of the larger project involved surveys distributed to sworn police officers serving in SRO positions in four states (Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas, and Missouri). To identify SROs in these states, we employed a systematic search of school and police agency websites.¹ A total of 498 SROs were identified and contacted to complete an online survey focused on the roles and culture of SROs.

¹Searching websites was time-intensive, so we limited our search to public schools in cities with a population of 4000 or larger. Very small towns and private schools are less likely to employ SROs. It is possible some SROs were excluded due to the selection criteria and or to outdated information on websites; however, we were usually able to determine accurate contact information by comparing city, county, and school websites.

The 182 officers who responded (a response rate of 36.5%), were invited to volunteer for follow-up interviews and observations using a separate link on the survey to provide contact information. The 20 officers included in this study came from the list of those that volunteered to participate². Subjects within about a four-hour drive ($n = 12$) from us were interviewed in-person and observed on the job. The remaining 8 participants were interviewed by phone. Follow-up interviews were completed with 14 participants, 6 of which were in-person. A total of 104 hours was spent either interviewing or observing participants. Though the small number of interviewees and their self-selection to participate are limitations of this study, in-depth interview responses and observations of school environments provided rich information about SRO perceptions of their work and identities that were not fully evident in the survey data. Further, we were able to reach saturation across many of the themes presented in the results section below.

Participant characteristics

The initial surveys from which our interview participants were drawn were anonymous and thus we were unable to match surveys directly to interview data. The findings presented later in this paper are focused specifically on the qualitative interview and observation portion of the study; however, we do provide information here on the demographic characteristics for both the larger survey sample and the interview and observation subsample, for purposes of comparison and context. Characteristics of interviewees and survey respondents are presented in Table 1.

During interviews, we collected general information about participant demographics, such as sex, race/ethnicity, age, and length of employment. Most participants were male (85%) and white (85%). They ranged in age from 36 to 68 with most falling between 40 to 49. On average, they had been employed in policing for approximately 16 years with an average of 7 years spent in schools, though

²In total, 54 officers provided contact information. However, due to project resources and time constraints, we were only able to follow-up with 20 officers.

there was wide variation ranging from 1 to 16 years as an SRO. Half of the interview subjects requested to be an SRO and 17 (85%) received additional training for the SRO position, including local-level classes and training available through the National Association of SROs (NASRO). Additional city and school data collected from the U.S. Census Bureau (2010) and the National Center for Education Statistics (2013) are provided in Table 1. All but two subjects worked in a high school or in multiple schools within a school district. Interviewees worked in schools with an average student population of 1060 students and a mean of 74% white students.

In comparison, the larger sample of survey respondents was mostly male (82%) and white (89%). The remaining nonwhite individuals included those of any other racial group (e.g., multiracial, Hispanic/Latino/a). The average SRO in the sampled Midwest region was 43 years of age, had been employed 17 years, and spent six years assigned to a school. A greater number of survey respondents (71%) said that they requested to be assigned as an SRO. Nearly 90% of respondents received some form of additional training for their SRO assignment (ranging from a one-week, 40-hour NASRO course to advanced SRO training, active shooter training, DARE instructor training, and other special topics). Most worked in a high school (41%), middle school (30%), or in multiple schools, including K-12 or multiple middle and high schools (24%). The average student population reported by SROs was roughly 1200 students, of which an average of 70% of students were white. Notably, there were no significant differences in sex, race/ethnicity, age, or length of employment between the subset of 20 interview participants and the larger survey sample of 182 SROs.

Procedures

Participants were interviewed using loosely structured, open-ended questions following an active interview technique outlined by Holstein and Gubrium (1995). Active interviewing views the process of speaking to participants as interpretive, open to creative expression, and largely guided by the participant to draw out in-depth responses. This technique is useful for qualitative exploration, in

which new ideas and information may emerge. Open-ended questions targeted SRO experiences, perceptions, activities, and roles, but participants directed the flow of conversation to express their experiences and how they made sense of their experiences. For example, subjects were asked to describe themselves

Table 1. Sample demographics.

Demographic	Interview sample (<i>n</i> = 20)			Survey sample (<i>N</i> = 182)		
	<i>N</i> (%)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>Range</i>	<i>N</i> (%)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>Range</i>
Male	17 (85%)	0.85 (0.37)	0–1	149 (82%)	0.82 (0.38)	0–1
White	17 (85%)	0.85 (0.37)	0–1	162 (89%)	0.89 (0.32)	0–1
Age					43.01 (8.29)	27–63
20–29	0 (0%)	0.0 (0.0)	0–1	7 (4%)	0.04 (0.20)	0–1
30–39	5 (25%)	0.25 (0.44)	0–1	52 (31%)	0.31 (0.46)	0–1
40–49	11 (55%)	0.55 (0.51)	0–1	67 (40%)	0.40 (0.49)	0–1
50–59	3 (15%)	0.15 (0.37)	0–1	38 (23%)	0.23 (0.42)	0–1
60–69	1 (5%)	0.05 (0.22)	0–1	4 (2%)	0.02 (0.15)	0–1
Length of employment as police officer		15.63 (7.44)	3–40		16.69 (8.21)	2–36
Length of time as SRO		7.28 (5.02)	1–16		5.70 (4.89)	0–23
Requested SRO Position ("Yes" = 1)	10 (50%)	0.50 (0.45)	0–1	122 (71%)	0.71 (0.45)	0–1
Received additional SRO training ("Yes" = 1)	17 (85%)	0.85 (0.37)	0–1	162 (89%)	0.89 (0.31)	0–1
City type						
Rural	3 (15%)	0.15 (0.37)	0–1	1 (<1%)	0.006 (0.08)	0–1
Town	5 (25%)	0.25 (0.44)	0–1	29 (17%)	0.17 (0.38)	0–1
Suburb	8 (40%)	0.40 (0.50)	0–1	58 (35%)	0.35 (0.48)	0–1
City	4 (20%)	0.20 (0.41)	0–1	80 (48%)	0.48 (0.50)	0–1
City population		44,480.00 (41,135.27)	4,200–127,000			
School type						
Elementary school	0 (0%)	0.00 (0.00)	0–1	9 (5%)	0.05 (0.23)	0–1
Middle school	2 (10%)	0.10 (0.31)	0–1	50 (30%)	0.30 (0.46)	0–1
High school	13 (65%)	0.65 (0.49)	0–1	69 (41%)	0.41 (0.49)	0–1
Multiple schools	5 (25%)	0.25 (0.44)	0–1	41 (24%)	0.24 (0.43)	0–1
School student population		1060.10 (530.06)	322–1841		1242.61 (734.09)	40–2700
% White, non-Hispanic		73.84% (25.38)	24–97%		70.04 (25.73)	1–95%

Note. Measures of interviewee age are estimates for approximately a quarter of participants. City population data for interviewees were obtained from the 2010 U.S. Census Bureau data (survey respondents provided estimates). City-type categorizations and school population data for interviewees were obtained from the National Center for Education Statistics data from the 2012 to 2013 school year (survey respondents provided estimates). For SROs assigned to multiple schools, data are presented for the officer's main school.

before and after becoming an SRO, to compare working in the school setting to their prior experiences in patrol, and to discuss others' expectations of them (e.g., school and police administrators, staff, etc.). Phone interviews took approximately one hour. The in-person interviews took place throughout the course of

observations allowing for a natural progression through the interview topics. Follow-up interviews were used to provide clarification when needed. All interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis.

Participant observation took place in schools, police agencies, and patrol cars. The goal of participant observation is to collect thoroughly detailed descriptive information to provide a richer understanding of the phenomenon under study, which strengthens internal validity. While interviews were the primary data source in this study, observations provided contextual information on the different environments of each participant. During observations, school characteristics, areas of school activity, types of activities in which participants engaged, and participant interactions were documented. The length of observations varied from 3 to 9 hours at a time. Observations were documented using shorthand notes that were fleshed out immediately after each observation. Observation notes were combined with interview transcriptions for a total of 1003 pages of material.

Analytic approach

Thematic analysis was used to identify emergent patterns and themes in transcribed interviews and qualitative field notes. MAXQDA was used to aid analysis, which involved several stages of coding. Though the study was designed to explore how SROs adapt and respond to school environments, we did not begin with a priori assumptions or codes. Analysis began with an inductive process of open coding, and later analysis involved focused coding and documentation of recurrent themes. Qualitative themes are supported by subject quotes, though it should be noted here that all participant names are pseudonyms to protect their identities.

Results

Analysis of interview transcripts and participant observation notes revealed patterns of change in participant approaches to policing, attitudes toward work, and self-concepts. Collectively, SROs in this sample adopted policing strategies that emphasized rapport, approachability, empathy, and cooperation. Participant

attitudes toward work focused largely on the people they served in the school environment. In addition to interview statements, observations of daily interactions with citizens suggested SROs place a fair amount of trust in school staff and students. Participants also felt a strong sense of ownership over their beat and investment in their position. Finally, participants viewed their identity as less of a hardened authoritarian, and some thought of themselves more as educators or guardians. These three themes – changed approaches, attitudes, and self-concepts – suggest that working in schools has an influence on SROs, and findings potentially establish important differences between SROs and patrol officers, in line with previous research (Rhodes, 2015). Each theme is discussed in more detail below.

Changes in policing approach

As participants began working in SRO positions, they discovered the importance of developing rapport with employees and students at their assigned schools. Every participant in this study emphasized the need to establish professional work relationships, particularly with school staff and students. Though many SROs referred to a stage of “on-the-job training,” where they essentially learned how to perform their work on their own, participants described how they learned to navigate their school setting, identify their roles, and resolve conflicts. Officers reported having to learn how to read others’ expectations and situations, how to communicate with others, and how to respond in an acceptable manner, which was accomplished by using effective communication techniques to create rapport with co-workers and students.

Rapport could be developed through everyday tasks (e.g., monitoring school perimeters, walking the hallways during passing periods, and chatting with people during lunch). During interactions, which participants actively and routinely sought, they often incorporated humor, showed interest, commiserated, or offered advice. SROs routinely checked in with students about their classes and personal life, and they spoke with school staff during their rounds to gather information and maintain their relationships. Rapport-building gained further

importance to participants, because nearly all were isolated from other police officers, as evident in the following quote by Officer Chavez.³

You know the one downside about this position is the lack of interaction with other law enforcement officers, 'cause I'm just not there every day. I'm not out at roll call in the morning and that's the time we get caught up on it. I miss that aspect. I've bridged part of that with my relationship with [the Principal] and [the Assistant Principal]. Got a great rapport with each other. You know, we talk about things.

Some participants struggled to develop rapport but recognized its value. In a large urban school district, Officer Michaels handled repeated school issues every day, during which the principal or an assistant principal was nearly always present. Michaels initially "buted heads" with the school principal, because he felt that he was treated "like a subordinate" who was called in for inappropriate tasks, including minor school violations. It took nearly six years, but he and the school principal developed a collaborative work relationship where Michaels often led questioning of students. Michaels referred to the principal, saying, "If I'm heading in a certain direction [while talking with a student], he knows," meaning they had established a relationship so close they could read each other's body language or tone of voice and respond accordingly.

Rapport not only allowed SROs to work with school staff, but participants believed establishing professional relationships with students made policing in schools more effective. Officer White discussed how he actively communicated with students to change their perceptions of officers as authoritarians and to gain access to respond to future issues.

We want to spend time with the kids. We want to engage in their everyday life. ... If I'm just walking down halls and not saying, 'Hi,' you know, the uniform itself speaks for itself. [It's about] what comes out of it, when dealing with kids. ... A lot of times too, if you know the kids then you know the parents. Then you can take it to the next level. ... If you know them and

³Pseudonyms are used to protect subject identities.

you know there might be an issue [at home] it's easier to take care of. That rapport building is already gone. It's already established.

SROs who were observed in schools actively engaged with students using many strategies to develop and maintain rapport. Some spent time in school lunch lines or at tables, some spoke to students in hallways throughout the day, and others participated in extra-curricular activities to get to know students. Officer Parker had two to three student helpers each semester who mainly completed homework in his office, joked with him, or otherwise helped him with school functions. Humor was often used regardless of whether students were just visiting the officer or the officer was responding to student misbehavior. As Officer Delaney explained,

[Humor] earns me a lot of points [because I am] able to joke with kids. ... [Even the seniors I] catch cussing all the time ... [I say,] 'Watch your damn mouth!' and they'll giggle and say 'Okay, sorry.' ... [or] 'Hey, do you kiss your mom with that mouth?'

Several participants discussed the importance of communication with students. Officer White said, "The thing is it's also about being an approachable officer – not one who's just there to fill the position." Officer Allen added, You have to be able to put yourself out there. You have to develop relationships with students. You're not gonna survive very long here and you're not going to enjoy the job.

... [You're] much like a teacher [here]. ... You have to be open to some different ideas and have to be pretty knowledgeable about juvenile law. As a police officer, [we] mostly deal with adults. ... [Being an SRO means] being aware of and understanding [juvenile law] ... You have to have flexibility at times.

To be approachable and flexible, participants had to maintain an open and friendly demeanor. Officer Michaels described how he changed his demeanor in schools. On the street, he had his "game face on," which was a neutral, unreadable facial expression, sunglasses covering his eyes, arms crossed, and substantial physical distance from any citizens with his gun holster pointed away from them. In

schools, however, he had a relaxed, friendly expression. He would stand within normal speaking range of students, had no fear of someone grabbing his gun, and he knelt for shorter students to avoid being “imposing.” As on the street, Michael’s body language was a tool to communicate with others, even before speaking with them.

Other participants explained that, to be effective, SROs must possess, “... patience, reasonableness, and empathy ...” As Officer Delaney explained, “It’s all about empathy. ... A lot of officers miss that ... [You have to] put yourself in their shoes ... to get their perspective. ... [You] don’t just walk in with an iron fist.” Related to these points, participants noted the importance of interpersonal communication skills. Officer Parker said,

I think it’s just your personality. In this type of environment [it is all about] people skills, people skills, people skills. ... Anybody with a certain amount of police training can take a call, handle a crime, or resolve a situation. I don’t think police training teaches you to be an SRO. ... [You must] be on their level - not ‘I’m a police officer up here talking down to you.’

Though all participants eventually recognized the need to be approachable to develop rapport, not everyone demonstrated these characteristics initially. Officer Lee was recently assigned as an SRO, and he stated his original goal coming into the school was to keep people at a distance to establish his authority. He said, “When I first got hired here, I was the asshole cop.” He was standoffish and purposely avoided being friendly to students, which worked to keep students from talking to him, though they did not necessarily show respect (e.g., by going to class when told to do so). Later he realized, “I also don’t want the kids to feel like they couldn’t ever say something” or to feel uncomfortable approaching him, so he began actively talking with students, particularly those who skipped class or were sent to his office. While Lee had mixed feelings about his approach, he recognized that a more open, approachable demeanor would allow him to better address problems.

Another participant, Officer Hall, explained how he learned to avoid using the aggressive techniques he had become accustomed to using on his previous

overnight shift. He said,

I go from that - working stabbings, beatings and robberies and bar fights and everything like that – to going to a high school setting that is ‘kumbaya.’ ... It was tough that first few months ... To go up to the high school and not tell a kid ‘You’re going to shut your fucking mouth now and you’re going to listen to me.’ ... [Y]ou just can’t do that at high school. Hands-on. You go from 0 to 60 so fast on nights, from going from just standing there to going hands on, put somebody in cuffs so quick, that at the high school level, to not go that route was kind of tough to get used to. You have a kid standing there saying ‘Shut your mouth. I’m not listening to you Po-Po.’ And to not grab them, spin them around, throw them to the ground and put them in handcuffs like that fast ... There’s a way to work through this. Verbal judo, let me work my verbal judo here.

Hall began his first position in a high school but later worked in a middle school. Early on, he received a call from the county attorney who complained that he was arresting too many students for minor offenses. Hall specifically mentioned citing a student for disorderly conduct for saying, “butt” in class, though he learned this was an inappropriate response. The stark contrast between his past and current responses to student issues was evident during an observation. While classes were in session, a student ran down the hall past the front of his office yelling, screaming, and banging on lockers. Hall quickly but calmly stepped out of his office and spoke to the student in a quiet calm voice. The student willingly walked to his office. They discussed why she was upset and what she wanted to do, during which Hall was empathetic and nonaggressive. They agreed that she would go to a separate study room, supervised by staff, where she would feel more comfortable. Like Officer Hall, participants generally adopted less aggressive and more empathetic, citizen-centered, and relationship- focused approaches to policing, which they believed were most effective in schools.

Changes in work-related attitudes

After reflecting on their time as SROs, participants noted some changes in

how they thought of citizens and viewed police work. Because much of their time in schools was spent actively building and maintaining relationships with others, adopting communication skills to be more approachable, and focusing on student outcomes, it is unsurprising that participants reported mostly positive perceptions of citizens and their work. While not all police officers distrust citizens (Paoline, 2004), negative attitudes toward citizens are a cornerstone of research on police culture (Paoline, 2003; Skolnick, 1994; Van Maanen, 1978).

Participants repeatedly noted that patrol officers disapprove of handling juvenile calls. SROs felt patrol officers view dealing with juveniles as “cumbersome,” and police are frustrated when juvenile offenders do not receive the punishment that would justify their time on the calls. For example, Officer Lee said officers in his department would rarely cite youth, because it was a waste of time. He said, “On the street, we know that [the courts] don’t do anything with juveniles so we try and avoid juvenile stuff at all costs.” However, in schools, the majority of interactions are with youth, as noted by Officer Davis when he said, “It’s different than working the streets. Ninety- nine percent is juvenile, not adult.” While officers on the street may wish to avoid responding to juvenile issues, SROs must work to resolve ongoing student problems that, if not properly addressed, could linger and lead to further disruptions for the student and school. Thus, the nature of working in schools likely influences SRO views of their work.

Given officer views of juvenile calls in the community, one might expect SROs to hold unfavorable views of youth, and this was the case for some SROs when they first started their position. Officer Tucker described how he was initially distrustful of students after his assignment, because his experience on the streets showed that youth were manipulative and unpleasant. He said,

My concept coming into the school was that kids are jerks. At first, I was guarded. The first week by myself there was a kid standing behind me making oinking noises. I thought he was messing with me and snatched him up and took him to the principal.

Tucker later learned the student had no intention to mock him and simply did not see him. In time, the two became friendly and they still talk over Facebook. He said,

“Because of my experience on the road, I [interpreted it] as a big negative. When that kind of stuff happened, I had to question myself ... He was not being an asshole but was a decent individual.”

While some participants reported negative views of students coming into the SRO position, participants believed their interactions with youth were mostly positive and SROs were frequently observed engaging with youth in noncrime- or punishment- related ways. These interactions were also associated with SROs’ tendency to view youth positively. As Officer Parker explained, “for every negative interaction I probably have 100-200 positive interactions,” while a patrol officer might have “10 positive contacts.” Officer White described how students at his elementary school treated him “like a rock star” – they shout his name, give him high fives, and run up to hug him when they see him. Officer Tucker also noted that he runs into former students who are happy to see him. He mentioned how he recently spoke with a student from his first year as an SRO. By then, the woman was 33 and married, and she approached him smiling to reconnect with him. He said, “You get that aspect. And she’s not the exception. She’s the rule. You get that positive thing. It’s guaranteed the cops on the road don’t get that.”

In support of participants’ statements, observations revealed that SROs would strike up friendly conversations with students nearly every time they stepped outside of their office, and, for experienced SROs, it was common to see students wave at or greet the SRO by a title or nickname. In interacting with youth in these ways, SROs interpreted their relationships with youth in a positive way. They felt most youth were trustworthy, had good intentions, and that it was not a waste of time to develop relationships with them.

To illustrate that most students were basically “good” kids, participants remarked on how nearly all of the students were “good” or “troubled” but generally good kids, though a few SROs acknowledged that they did not know all of the students in their schools. However, participants also noted that a small subset of youth were “bad kids,” “knuckleheads,” “problem kids,” or even “evil.” As Officer Davis explained, a subset of people on the street cause police the most problems, and the same generally applies to school settings. He said,

Okay, when I was a deputy, the general rule of thumb was 10%. ... 10% of the population one way or another chooses not to play by the rules. Or the rules do not apply to them ... The 10% also works here in school. ... That 10% just sit there in class and just listen to their iPhone. But they listen to it so loud that the teacher has to stop teaching [to deal with the student]. While the teacher's messing with this kid, what's happening? Ain't nobody learning anything.

Others used similar language, explaining that between 1% and 10% of youth were labeled the "problem" kids. These were youth who were consistently called to the office or stopped by the SRO, who refused to accept responsibility for their actions or show remorse, and who had the potential to become hardened criminals. While these views of students were more negative and suggest that SROs label youth in much the same way as patrol officers label problem citizens (Van Maanen, 1978), the label was applied less broadly in schools.

In addition to views of citizens, participants also noted changed attitudes about their work. In schools, participants believed that they positively influenced others' lives and thus their work became meaningful for them. While some SROs were ambivalent about their position (e.g., those recently assigned), the majority felt being an SRO was rewarding, made a positive difference in the community, and they felt ownership and investment in their position. Officer Delaney explained that he enjoyed being an SRO much more than working patrol because,

it feels like I'm making a difference [in schools, but] out on the street, working the road, [there are] rare instances to feel like I'm making a difference ... It's a much slower process [and you usually] don't see the impact of your actions.

Most SROs believed that they reduced school problems (e.g., fighting and theft), reduced harm to students (e.g., by monitoring the roads before and after school), improved student views of law enforcement, or made a difference in student's lives by advising and interacting with them. While SROs may not be formally trained to counsel or advise students, their relationships with students affected how they viewed their work. For example, Officer Parker viewed his

position as extremely rewarding and kept a record of his influence on the suburban middle school where he has served for over 13 years. In his office closet were five three-inch binders packed with cards, pictures, letters, news articles, and school awards. He said a “road cop” would find these mementos “stupid,” but he found it rewarding to see that people appreciated his work.

Participants reported taking ownership of their beat, which is common among street-based officers who often become territorial over areas they patrol (Crank, 2004). Yet, SROs described how their rapport and their changed approach to policing in schools seemed to heighten their sense of accountability to school members. Officer Michaels discussed how he came to value developing relationships with youth after a tragic incident. One day after his school shift, Michaels responded to a rescue call in the community reported as a “party with head trauma.” He was the first to respond, and he found one of his students dead from a self-inflicted gunshot wound. He realized that he recognized the student but did not know him personally, saying, “I remember how I felt that day ... it was horrible.” He decided that being an SRO “wasn’t just my duty for the day” and took a more active role in students’ lives to prevent someone else from committing suicide. Other participants said that they completed their work more thoroughly than a patrol officer might, and observations revealed that SROs often turned to other school staff or community resources to address underlying causes of behavioral issues.

Changes in self-concept

Related to changes in how participants approached policing in schools and how they viewed their work, SROs repeatedly said that they had a “different mentality” compared to the average patrol officer, though this was more common among SROs who had been established in programs for many years. While acknowledging that “police officer” was still their dominant role, many participants distinguished between their self-concept and the way they believed patrol officers viewed themselves. Officer Johnson described the typical “cop mentality” as an officer who thinks, “I’m the boss, I’m in authority, and you should listen to me. ... I’m

the cop dammit!” Other participants also referred to the “stereotypical cop” or the “asshole cop,” which were similarly authoritarian. An officer’s mindset was displayed in her or his demeanor toward others. Participants believed the “asshole cop” was stern, rigid, aggressive, controlling, and callus. They possessed an inflated ego, had a limited way of seeing the world (i.e., “in black and white”), and did not like youth. Officer Parker noted that some officers possess the wrong mentality for working in schools, such as his field training officer (FTO) who “was a great role model as far as learning how to be a cop” but who would be ineffective in a school setting. While training, Parker’s FTO received a stack of coupons to distribute to improve community relations; however, the FTO refused and thought it emasculating. Parker liked the idea of distributing coupons but felt pressured to agree with his FTO. Parker said, “He was that kind of cop. ... Cops have to fight the macho stereotype [but it’s] way too easy [to fall into that mentality].” Parker’s self-concept was as a service provider willing to relate to citizens more respectfully as equals.

Others described becoming less hardened, less cynical, and more emotionally invested in their role, and this was especially common among the SROs who had been assigned to schools for many years. Officer Johnson, for example, viewed a change in his identity only after several years in his position. Early in his assignment, he avoided sharing personal information or bonding with students. Now, during class presentations, he explains his life story – how he had a troubled home life as a child and two MIP arrests during high school. During an observation, he told a class, “Everyone in this room is struggling with something.” His comments demonstrated that he saw a connection between his experiences and those of the students in his class. Like Officer Johnson, other participants, particularly those with several years of experience, described how they were hardened as patrol officers but became more empathetic in schools. Because patrol officers sometimes have negative interactions or see unpleasant aspects of life (e.g., people who have been seriously injured or killed), they often develop a “crust over their emotions.” In schools, participants said that they cared about juveniles in ways they did not before their assignment. Officer Delaney spoke of how school incidents can leave him emotionally “drained,” which happened after his student

mentee was caught selling prescription pills at school. When confronted, the student broke down in tears, said his father would beat him, and threatened to kill himself. Delaney responded by getting the student to a medical center, but it took an emotional toll on him. He said,

At least on the street, you kind of harden yourself to that ... [but there is a] stronger emotional tie being in the schools. ... [The] role you're in is completely different ... [you have a] vested interest [in the outcome]. ... On the road, you intentionally try not to have a vested interest.

Similarly, Officer Tucker felt deeply connected to his role as an SRO. In describing his views of students and police work, it was clear that he saw himself as something akin to a parent or guardian. He said,

I think I got the best job in the world. ... To be honest when I first went into it, I wanted to work Monday through Friday and have weekends off. ... [But] when I was there I began to connect with the school itself and really started to be concerned with everybody there. ... I don't want anything to happen [to the people here]. ... It becomes personal. Almost like family. ... Like high school dances. I always make sure I'm there 'cause I know the kids. If there's an issue, I want to handle it. They're my kids. Over the years I've adopted them as family.

Participants differentiated themselves from typical officers who were seen as more controlling. Rather than trying to control one's environment, most participants wanted to help their students and schools. Participants believed positive relationships and student outcomes, such as school attendance and graduation, were at least as important as controlling student behavior. As Officer Allen described his approach to policing in schools, his response indicated a change in the way he viewed himself and his purpose.

It's more about developing relationships [and] long-term management [of relationships] that you have. That's where I think you also have cops that get on for the wrong reason, [such as for] power ... [That's] exactly the wrong person to be here. I think it shows. It's hard to develop a relationship if you come in here and you want to be the Sheriff in town. 'I'm setting the rules.'

That makes it almost impossible for them to get to know you on a human level. [And they expect that.] 'I'm the law and I'm what happens when you break the law.' [But] it's an educational setting. There is no, 'Think about how would you do this differently? How is this gonna affect you later?' ... I want to educate the kids more than I want to punish the kids.

Officer Allen's quote not only emphasizes why aggressiveness and authoritarian approaches in schools are ineffective in his view. He also believed that he served to help students make better choices and learn from their mistakes. His self-concept was less of an authoritarian and more of an educator.

Finally, while some participants entered the SRO position with a self-concept that was compatible with their work in schools (e.g., Officer Parker had wanted to be a teacher and worked with kids long before becoming a police officer), others changed their self-concept in order to function more effectively. Self-concept can be stable over long periods, but it can also be relatively dynamic and change in response to different environments or through interactions with others (Markus & Wurf, 1987; Oyserman, 2001; Stryker & Burke, 2000). A revised self-concept was particularly evident for Officer Hall, who explained that he had to adjust his "mentality" each time he was reassigned. He spent roughly 3 years as a patrol officer, worked 6 years as an SRO in a high school, spent another 3 years on patrol, and had returned to an SRO position at a middle school for 5 years. As noted earlier, Officer Hall was initially too aggressive when dealing with students and he gradually learned to rely more on "verbal judo" to listen, identify, and resolve students' problems, which he did effectively during observations. Explaining the change in his mentality, he said,

It was tough that first few months that I was on my own up at [the high school] after [the previous SRO] had gotten promoted and I was by myself. To get that night mentality out of my head ... was tough because that's how you get – I don't want to say respect – but that's how you got the attention of the people you talked to on nights. ... to not go that route was kind of tough to get used to. Then I left [the high school], having just gotten into that mentality. ... I went and worked nights for three more years. I fell right back

in that same trap, where I was on nights. I was working around some bad people. When I came here, I had to remind myself and especially [with] even younger kids. These kids are not the freak shows that I was working around on nights ...

Officer Hall's self-concept was related to his approach to policing and his views of citizens. As a patrol officer on the night shift, he believed that he worked with "the dirtiest dirties you can deal with," requiring an aggressive, coercive response. However, in schools he was a different kind of officer. His self-concept was more caring and empathetic, which also influenced the way he performed his work and viewed students. Though Officer Hall's experience was rather extreme, it illustrates that, for some individuals, working as an SRO required a complete shift in their approaches, attitudes, and self-concept.

Discussion

While police have been present in schools since the late 1930s (Brown, 2006) and SRO programs are now widespread (Roberts, Kemp, Rathbun, Morgan, & Snyder, 2013), existing research on SROs has yet to fully examine how officers function in school settings. The goal of this study was to better understand the experience of being an SRO. We uncovered a pattern of officers adopting new policing strategies to work effectively in schools, new attitudes about their work, and transformations in officer self-concepts. Essentially, officers described new "working personalities" (Skolnick, 1994) to help them better navigate the environmental features and realities of the school setting. Participants recognized the importance of rapport with students and school staff to perform their work effectively, and they described making an effort to be approachable and to build relationships with citizens. SRO attitudes about their work indicated that they held generally positive views of citizens and felt their work in schools was more rewarding and meaningful than their time in patrol work. Finally, participants described their self-concept as less authoritarian and more empathetic in comparison to both other officers and their previous selves.

Findings from this study, pose implications for understanding the police

occupational culture. Discussions of police culture have included a number of themes that are believed to be generally similar across members of the police occupation (Crank, 2004; Paoline, 2003). While there are remarkable similarities in police values, norms, and structures across most police organizations, it is also important to recognize the variation across agencies and within organizations. Scholars have criticized prior depictions of one “monolithic” police culture and argued for a nuanced understanding of subcultural variation in officer attitudes and beliefs (Paoline, 2001). Collectively, findings from previous work suggest officers are more likely to share the attitudes of individuals within (as opposed to those outside) their precinct (Hassell, 2006), shift (Paoline, 2001), and work group (Ingram, et al., 2013).

Results in this study were in line with prior research that has identified subcultural variation among officers. Findings also extend prior work by showing that police culture is not fixed or static, but rather officers’ cultural beliefs may change in new organizational environments. In this study, participants adapted their cultural attitudes and roles to transition and function in school settings. Changes in individuals’ cultural beliefs were likely facilitated by diminished interactions with other police and closer work relationships with students and staff. The SRO assignment distanced participants from other officers, and they became more reliant on citizens in schools. Subsequently, they viewed the goals of their work and interactions with others differently (i.e., they became supportive of building relationships with citizens and had more positive interactions). Changes in individual attitudes and beliefs about themselves and their work also support symbolic interactionist perspectives of culture. These perspectives suggest culture is dynamic and interpretative, being constantly renewed through social interactions (Blumer, 1969; Geertz, 1973).

With regard to SRO programs as a whole, officers who change their policing approaches, attitudes, and self-concept may be able to implement evidence-based policing strategies, such as community policing, problem-oriented policing, and intelligence-led policing, more effectively within and outside of schools. In this study, many of the SROs became embedded in community life and, to maintain

functioning partnerships with schools, it was necessary to be more approachable and actively address citizen concerns. SROs who develop long-term, positive interactions and seek to resolve problems rather than control student behavior may promote innovative policing goals and assist in creating a supportive school climate.

Finally, results from this study may suggest ways community policing and problem-oriented policing could be more effectively adopted in other police positions. The nature of the SRO position supported changes in policing approaches, attitudes, and identities in keeping with the tenants of community policing (Greene, 2004). The findings of this study should be viewed cautiously, considering we did not strictly evaluate the effectiveness of SRO policing strategies. Though subjects in this study frequently employed tenants of community policing (e.g., citizen engagement and collaborative problem solving), we cannot say that SROs addressed the problems most concerning to citizens or provided equitable outcomes (see, e.g., Eck & Rosenbaum, 1994 for criteria to evaluate police performance). However, with additional research on SROs, it is possible to learn how experienced SROs can assist training of patrol officers or learn what aspects of the SRO assignment could be mirrored for patrol officers. SROs in this study became easily accessible because of their location and active presence in the school, and their long-term assignment to schools allowed them to form lasting relationships with others. Interactions with others were generally positive, because most conversations were not crime-related. Patrol officers are much less accessible in their patrol vehicles and must respond to calls for service, but they may have opportunities to attend community meetings and events. More shift time could be devoted to talking with citizens in officers' beats (e.g., business owners, neighborhood watch members). Further, reward structures within police departments could focus on rapport and legitimacy building activities rather than stops and arrests. Because the occupational attitudes of individual officers are most similar to those in their immediate work group (Ingram, et al., 2013), leadership within precincts and crews may also influence officer attitudes toward community policing activities. Future research can examine whether the experiences of officers in specialized, community-based positions, such as SROs,

may be useful when training new recruits or promoting organizational change within departments.

Limitations and future research

Despite the contributions of this study, some limitations of this work must be noted and may be addressed in future work. First, as is often the case with in-depth qualitative research, our sample size is small and cannot be expected to fully represent the larger population of SROs. Interview and observation participants were volunteers from a larger survey research project of SROs in the Midwest. Specifically, study participants were slightly skewed toward smaller suburban and rural SRO programs. Those that opted into the interview portion may have been qualitatively different than other SROs, possibly being more positive about their transitions to the school environment and more likely to adopt community-policing types of approaches. Though it is not possible to generalize findings to larger school districts in urban areas or to smaller schools outside the Midwestern region, participants in this study are likely similar to many SROs across the United States given the majority of police agencies nationwide are relatively small (Weisheit, Falcone, & Wells, 2006).

One perceived limitation of observing culture among a small subset of a population is that researchers are observer-dependent, which may introduce bias and limit generalizability (Crank, 2004; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). While the meaning of social events and experiences is inferred from subjects, the interpretation of meaning is always influenced by the observer. The interviewing and observation approaches in this study acknowledge that both the subject and researcher actively construct knowledge and that results are context-dependent (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Spradley, 1980).

The changes that officers experienced as a result of their transitions were communicated, after the fact, through their own recollections of experiences. It is possible that recall was not always accurate or that meanings were adjusted through the process of reflection. That said, self-concept is a product of reflection on past and present experiences. Further, though our findings point to changes in

officer approaches, attitudes, and self-concept, the timing of those changes and whether a change in one leads to further change in the others cannot be pinpointed with our data. Future research should focus on capturing multiple points of data (pre/post) around transition periods such as that from patrol to an SRO or other specialized position in order to fully represent that process.

Finally, a limitation which lends itself to future research is the lack of student and staff perspective in our study regarding officers' interactions in schools. The lead author observed a number of situations and interactions which supported participants' views that they developed rapport and positive relationships with students. SROs who develop rapport with students may improve perceptions of police legitimacy, which was one of the goals of many participants in this study. Police who maintain trusting relationships and treat students respectfully are more likely to be viewed as legitimate, and citizens who believe in the authority of police may be more likely to cooperate and assist officers (Higginson & Mazerolle, 2014; Sunshine & Tyler, 2003). However, because observations were focused on SRO perceptions (rather than student or staff perceptions) and were limited to days and not weeks or months, the full picture is not available. It is possible that police presence in schools diminishes police legitimacy for some students, such as those who are arrested or who believe they have been treated unfairly. Additionally, the influence of school disciplinary structures and the level of disciplinary collaboration between school staff and SROs deserves further study. Officers who are directed to strictly enforce minor school deviance or simply maintain order are less likely to achieve the level of community engagement described by many subjects of this study. In some cases, SROs may focus on addressing the concerns of school staff to the exclusion of student or parent concerns. If school staff and administrators see the role of the SRO as simply one of enforcement or control of students, the goals of community policing and rapport-building may be less likely to be realized and the criminalization of minor deviance may be more prevalent. Thus, future research should also incorporate the perceptions of students, parents, staff, and administrators in schools where SROs are present.

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