BEHIND THE BLUE LINE: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF POLICE CULTURE IN RURAL KANSAS LAW ENFORCEMENT

A Thesis by

Joshua J. Davis

Bachelor of Arts, Wichita State University, 2008

Bachelor of Science, Wichita State University, 2008

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The following faculty members have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content, and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in Criminal Justice.

Michael L. Birzer, Committee Chair

Szde Yu, Committee Member

Carolyn M. Shaw, Committee Member

DEDICATION

To the Glory of God from whom all blessing flow,
may this bring glory to You and Your kingdom

We're here to protect and serve, but we have an opportunity to really serve the citizens of this community, but it doesn't mean we are going to make everyone happy.
– Officer Paul, Sunflower PD

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ABSTRACT

This thesis reports the results of a qualitative study using an ethnographic approach. The study examined rural law enforcement culture in one rural Kansas law enforcement agency. In-depth interviews and non-participant observations (ride-alongs) were conducted to construct and interpret the culture of rural law enforcement through the lens of officers working in one rural law enforcement agency. The study describes the complexities rural law enforcement officers face at this research site, including enforcing the law, the nature of crime, community interactions, and how outside pressures from the community, the governing authority, and increased concern for citizen's safety affect these rural law enforcement officers' daily lived experiences. The implications of current theory to fundamental practice are discussed along with new findings not present in the current literature on the role of the chief of police.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BIPOC	Black, Indigenous, and People of Color
KLETC	Kansas Law Enforcement Training Center
KSCPOST	Kansas Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training
PD	Police Department
SWAT	Special Weapons and Tactics

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

In today's era of 24-hour cable news, any action seen as wrongdoing or misconduct by law enforcement is often on television or social media within hours of the event. Before authorities start an official investigation, many citizens have viewed the event and determined if an officer acted correctly or not. Political pundits often appear on the news telling the television audience what the law enforcement officer was thinking, if and how the officer messed up, and suggesting a list of reforms. Americans are met with rhetoric that those sworn to protect and serve cannot adequately do their jobs and should be investigated (Chatterjee & Ryan, 2020). Politicians on both sides of the political aisle quickly introduce legislation in state legislatures and the United States Congress. Often newly created federal commissions make recommendations on how to fix misfit members of law enforcement, how to stop this problem from occurring again, and how to make the best law enforcement agencies. Often this rhetoric causes officers to feel there is a "war on cops" and they cannot adequately protect and serve the community they are sworn to protect (Nix, Wolfe & Campbell, 2018).

The United States Congress, state legislatures, and many federal agencies have created a list of reforms over the years. For nearly 100 years, the federal government has issued reports with recommendations on what law enforcement officers should be doing (Biden, 2022; Executive Office of the President of the United States, 2020; National Commission on Law Observance and Environment, 1931; Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2015; President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing, 2015; U.S. Department of Justice & National

Institute of Justice, 1967) and even Kansas has recommended reforms on law enforcement (Kansas Governor's Commission on Racial Equity & Justice, 2020).

Proposed initiatives of police reform typically lack the perspectives of active law enforcement officers who patrol the streets. Senior law enforcement officials, often from large urban law enforcement agencies, are typically invited to participate and, sometimes, chair these commissions. However, rural law enforcement officers who work the streets daily are sorely missing from these committees. Their perspectives may be beneficial in tailoring police reform strategies to rural communities.

Law enforcement agencies must often handle the responsibilities of implementing the recommendations of different commission reports. Law enforcement agencies must develop new training procedures, train the officers, and communicate with other law enforcement agencies to maintain a balanced and uniform approach to enacting changes in operational strategies. Agencies typically face little funding to implement new policies and minimal guidance on implementing a policy into a fundamental practice. The lack of guidance and funding may cause recommendations to fail at implementation. Often, another report or law comes along so quickly that it replaces the previous report before implementing all the new recommendations, and the reform cycle starts again. The revolving door of new recommendations can impact rural communities differently due to a small workforce and less departmental funding.

Recently, after several high-profile lethal encounters between law enforcement and citizens across the United States, some have called for law enforcement reforms while others have called for defunding law enforcement in urban areas. In the past few years, protest rallies across the United States have included chants of "defund the police" and have been heard by many. However, some have called for the elimination of law enforcement to establish

"community-based crisis response teams made up of local community members trained to deal with potentially volatile situations without relying on violence" (Vitale, 2021, p. 231).

The public often does not understand law enforcement training, procedures, or actions. So, citizens constantly question law enforcement's effectiveness and accuracy when law enforcement needs to keep information confidential during investigations to protect the rights of all involved. Politicians have recently expressed their opinions on officer-involved shootings, and Presidents of the United States have also spoken on these matters.

Meanwhile, the men and women of law enforcement continue to do their jobs daily. The front-line patrol officers are often not consulted regarding what reforms might work best in policing. Consultants on police reforms often include executive-ranking urban law enforcement officers and professionals from research firms. However, these recommendations must also apply to a rural patrol officer's life when the commissions hardly know rural law enforcement challenges. Nevertheless, the rural patrol officers who work the street daily would better understand how implementing new laws and policies would affect their job duties and the citizens they interact with daily. During the past few years, law enforcement agencies have had trouble recruiting applicants into the profession, resulting in critical shortages of law enforcement personnel (Linos & Riesch, 2019; McLean, Cherry & Alpert, 2022). The shortage of new officers in the field strains those already doing the job. Since law enforcement agencies are understaffed, typically offer poor wages, and are constantly asked to reform their operations and procedures, this likely affects the individual officer.

Law enforcement officers are often tight-lipped about how they feel about anything and rarely talk to outsiders. Skolnick (2002, p. 7) referred to this as the "blue code of silence." Moreover, he argues that as an outcome of the "blue code of silence," a police culture develops.

Officers typically only speak to other officers, not relying on their families or outsiders. They do not usually talk with others due to the stigma associated with outside help (Rose & Unnithan, 2015; Skolnick, 1994). Officers have developed ways of dealing with their thoughts and feelings individually or within the rank and file within the law enforcement agency.

Rural law enforcement agencies are also not immune to the lack of understaffing that their urban counterparts face and the lack of understanding from citizens of their communities. Rural communities also tend to safeguard the information that affects their citizens and operate under their norms and standards. Rural law enforcement agencies are similar to their urban counterparts and are typically closed off, as suggested by Skolnick (2002). It is nearly impossible to fully understand a rural law enforcement agency's daily operation unless one belongs. Fewer studies of rural law enforcement agencies are produced compared to their urban law enforcement counterparts, perhaps due to the closed nature of these agencies.

Because of the dearth of studies on rural law enforcement culture, a one-size-fits-all approach to law enforcement reform may not be conducive to rural law enforcement. Examining a rural law enforcement culture may foster a more informed understanding of their inherent culture.

1.2 Positionality

This study focuses on rural police culture. Creswell and Poth (2018) point out the importance of a researcher acknowledging their own "self-understanding about the biases, values, and experiences that he or she brings to a qualitative research study" (p. 229). To obtain that level of transparency, the reader must know that the researcher was a rural law enforcement officer for several years. However, the agency this researcher worked for differs from the one in this study. The personal experiences and culture of the law enforcement agency this researcher

worked for could have shaped the perceptions of the law enforcement agency and law enforcement officers in this study. However, this researcher aimed to keep his lived experiences separate from the study participants through self-reflective memo writing. It is also important to note that the makeup of the community in which the researcher had previously worked and the community in which the law enforcement officers were studied, at face value, are different based on population numbers, ethnic diversity, and proximity to other urban communities. These differences should separate the researcher's lived experiences from the law enforcement officers in this study and their lived experiences. However, all rural law enforcement shares some commonalities, and the researcher saw everyday situations that align with his lived experience.

In this study, the researcher was a non-participant observer. However, during the ride-along portions of the research, if an officer had required assistance in a life-threatening situation as a trained law enforcement officer, this researcher would have intervened to help the officer. If a situation involving illegal law enforcement activity had developed but did not involve life-threatening actions, the actions would have been documented and reported to the Sunflower Chief of Police and KSCPOST [Kansas's Commission on Peace Officers Standards and Training]. However, no such incidents occurred during the commission of this study.

1.3 Problem Statement

As discussed previously, over the past few years, many incidents involving law enforcement officers and the public at large have taken place. There have also been calls for defunding of law enforcement agencies, along with federal reports, speeches, and executive orders issued by the Presidents of the United States attempting to initiate police reforms (Biden 2022; Biden 2023; Executive Office of the President of the United States, 2020; Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2015; President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing,

2015; U.S. Department of Justice & National Institute of Justice, 1967). Kansas Governor Laura Kelly also issued Executive Order 20-48 in June of 2020, which created a Commission on Racial Equity and Justice. Governor Kelly directed the Commission to "study issues of racial equity and justice in Kansas, focusing first on policing and law enforcement…" (Kansas Governor's Commission on Racial Equity & Justice, 2020, p. 38). These reports are replete with recommendations regarding reforms for law enforcement agencies, officers, the Kansas Legislature, and KSCPOST for operations and training.

It is unknown whether current calls for police reform have affected rural law enforcement officers. Furthermore, a study on Kansas law enforcement culture has not occurred since many have publicly demanded reforms for law enforcement. Researchers have previously conducted studies on police culture and its effect on different aspects of policing (Cordner, 2017; Demirokl & Nalla, 2019; Kutnjak Ivković, Haberfeld & Peacock, 2016; Paoline, 2003; Paoline & Terrill, 2014; Trautman, 1990). However, few studies have interviewed rural law enforcement officers directly, in their own words (Adams, 2019; Kochel, 2022; Parsons & Jesilow, 2001). Studies in Kansas centering on ethnographic interviews of rural law enforcement officers regarding their perspectives on police culture are sorely lacking. This study, in part, fills that void by focusing on law enforcement members in one rural Kansas law enforcement agency, which was the site for this ethnographic study.

1.4 Purpose Statement

Using an ethnographic approach, this qualitative study examined current rural police culture through the eyes of Kansas law enforcement officers serving in one rural agency. By applying an ethnographic narrative interview approach and direct observations, the research describes and interprets police culture through the eyes of current Kansas law enforcement

officers using narrative stories. As described by Creswell and Poth (2018), narrative stories highlight an individual's experiences and "shed light on the identities of individuals and how they see themselves" (p. 69). By analyzing the officer's stories, a collective lived experience tells the story of the officer's culture. Previous studies on police culture have lacked first-hand accounts from active rural law enforcement officers constructed using robust qualitative research methods. This study used in-depth interviews of active law enforcement officers from a rural Kansas community to explore their perspectives and lived experiences. In addition, this ethnographic study entailed several ride-alongs [observations in the field] of law enforcement officers. By conducting multiple interviews with Kansas law enforcement officers in a rural Kansas community and through non-participant observations by riding with officers, this research constructs a portrait of one rural agency's current Kansas law enforcement culture.

1.5 Research Question

This research describes rural police culture from the perspective of select Kansas law enforcement officers serving in one rural Kansas law enforcement agency. The central research question: What is police culture as described and constructed by rural Kansas law enforcement officers? This study explored the following sub-questions:

1. What experiences in law enforcement officers' work exemplify police culture?
2. What is the core structure and/or stages of police culture?
3. Do forces like the news media, politics, and agency or community leadership affect police culture?
4. How do officers' ethnographic descriptions of police culture relate to existing theories?

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Organizational Culture

Ethnographic research involves looking at the culture of a group (Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to Grover, Halinski, and Duxbury (2016), "organizational culture refers to the normative beliefs, values, and shared behavior expectations in an organization that are created through member interactions" (p. 567). In addition, Grover, Halinski, and Duxbury (2016) argue that while research has been conducted to establish how to overcome many obstacles, for an organization to change, this often requires cultural change. Resistant employees of an organization can be a barrier to effective organizational change. Not only will this organizational change not happen, but it is also why most reforms fail (Grover, Halinski & Duxbury, 2016).

It should not be surprising; organizational culture also exists in law enforcement agencies. Grieve, Harfield, and MacVean (2007) argue, "all organizations have cultures, but the police are a unique organization because officers are empowered to enforce the law" (p. 116). Moreover, they point out two theories of police culture.

The first theory is that individuals with high ethical standards choose a career in law enforcement. Law enforcement is a career that requires fast and ethical decisions to be constantly made. Public trust will erode if law enforcement officers do not uphold the profession's standards. Law enforcement will not be effective if these standards cannot be sustained. It is, therefore, fitting that those who already exhibit these standards will keep them in their daily life and will continue to uphold them in their professional life as well.

The second theory is that "behaviors and attitudes are learned and socialized in the nature of police work" (Grieve, Harfield & MacVean, 2007, p. 116). The second theory can be

described as an officer learning the culture of the officers with whom they work. Officers with a negative or positive view of the job can influence other officers. If an officer or group of officers feels at odds with the community or that others are out to get them, this could affect the outcomes of law enforcement effectiveness. It can also influence the culture of the law enforcement agency. This culture does not exist solely in one form in law enforcement agencies; it can even be different between agencies. Echoing a similar theme, in his classic work on the police, Reiss (1971) suggested that members of a police organization are "sworn to duty and allegiance to the department" (p. 121). He argued that mere membership in a police organization "generates an occupational culture of policing that affects police standards of law enforcement and justice as well as their conduct at work" (p. 121). A negative organizational culture can affect law enforcement officers' work. Agencies with poor work ethics will affect the quality of the citizen relationships with law enforcement, and law enforcement agencies may turn more inward, solidifying the organization's culture.

According to Sierra-Arévalo (2019), organizational culture in a law enforcement agency begins with the general occupational culture or law enforcement culture. It is contended that "norms and values are shaped by the shared demands of police work" (p. 634), and this defines the organizational structure of a law enforcement agency. This organizational structure then becomes dependent on the external factors occurring outside of the department. These factors include but are not limited to the news media, politics, current events, scandals in the community or other law enforcement agencies, and even local or departmental leadership views. Because of this focus, officers "draw on police culture as a resource for navigating their occupational environment" (Sierra-Arévalo, 2019, p. 634). Law enforcement work can be a complex environment to navigate. How officers are taught in the academy might not always be how law

enforcement agencies operate. The officer typically defaults to the written and unwritten rules of the law enforcement agency instead of what an officer has learned in their law enforcement training.

2.1.1 Law Enforcement Training

Law enforcement training can be divided into three categories, initial law enforcement training at a law enforcement academy, the field training that takes place after a law enforcement officer has graduated from the law enforcement academy but before being on the streets independently, and continued training for officers (National Academies of Science, Engineering & Medicine, 2022). Law enforcement training is "knowledge and skills necessary to support the rule of law and protect their public" (National Academies of Science, Engineering & Medicine, 2022, p. 1). However, law enforcement training is not a simple task of just training law enforcement officers, as many outside forces come into play in the law enforcement training environment.

Politics, culture, and current events often play a role in law enforcement training, and societal developments can cause academies to adapt and adjust their training procedures based on need and societal outcry. In prepared remarks for the 2023 State of the Union address, President Joseph Biden called for law enforcement to undergo more training. This was in response to recent law enforcement violence in Memphis, Tennessee (Biden, 2023). However, law enforcement training can develop its own stigmas and culture that law enforcement officers typically carry into the field when engaging in law enforcement activities. Skolnick (2002) claims that loyalty to one's fellow officers is established through law enforcement academies or law enforcement training, which is constantly reinforced throughout an officers career. Law enforcement agencies tend to lean towards more militaristic and bureaucratic ideals, which

become evident in the structure and culture. This culture is prevalent in law enforcement academies (Chappell & Lanza-Kaduce, 2010). Chappell and Lanza-Kaduce (2010) report that "new recruits must endure an intense training and adult socialization process to prepare them for the realities of potentially dangerous jobs that incorporate the use of force" (p. 189). Their study found that the law enforcement academy structure does not always agree with the principles of community policing that law enforcement officers need to be well versed in to work in the community. Law enforcement academies promote an "us vs. them" mentality commonly found in a military force organization (p. 207).

The study also concluded that paramilitary policing was equal to "'real' police work" (Chappell & Lanza-Kaduce, 2010, p. 209). Many militaristic themes were also present in law enforcement training. Including how recruit officers were allowed to address instructors, how they dressed, were disciplined and their behavior, and the telling of war stories by instructors (Chappell & Lanza-Kaduce, 2010). The environment in which law enforcement receives training promotes its own culture that can be contrary to an individual law enforcement agency. The Police Executive Research Forum (2022) states, "police academy training is often presented in silos" (p. 22). Training in law enforcement academies has been reduced to checking specific requirements off a list. However, law enforcement officers only receive training to complete particular tasks and not connect all the boxes. The officers are also well-trained in the culture of the profession. The Police Executive Research Forum (2022) reports, "the culture of a police academy has ramifications beyond what happens during initial training" (p. 17). In other words, what an officer learns in the academy can and will make it back to the streets of their hometown. The Police Executive Research Forum (2022) continues, "if the academy culture is demeaning

and controlling, then new officers may be more likely to model those traits in the community when they graduate" (p. 17).

Once officers graduate from the academy, they typically complete a field training course. The field training program was instituted under recommendations of the U.S. Department of Justice & National Institute of Justice Commission report in 1967. The Police Executive Research Forum (2022) found that "academy and field training can contradict each other" (p. 26). However, these training contradictions mainly deal with procedural issues and how to approach a problem. A survey of 389 law enforcement agencies asked respondents to rate how closely the academy's culture matched the respected law enforcement agency's culture. The survey reported that 329 respondents, or 84.5% of those surveyed, said the academy's culture is closely or very closely aligned with the law enforcement agency's culture (Police Executive Research Forum, 2022). Police culture is initially cemented in law enforcement academies, which may influence law enforcement officers and agencies in the field. In essence, what the literature centering on police training seems to suggest, is that new police recruits begin to be shaped into the culture of their organizations from the first day in the training academy.

2.2 Citizen's Views on Law Enforcement and Law Enforcement Culture

After the death of George Floyd in 2020 at the hands of Minneapolis police officers, much research has been conducted on the public's views of law enforcement officers and how those studies have shaped public perception. In a Pew Research Center study conducted by Kennedy, Tyson, and Funk (2022), law enforcement support has fallen recently. Looking at a four-year trend from November-December 2018 to the same time frame in 2021, the study found law enforcement was down a 10% drop, from 30% in 2018 to 20% in 2021, when the public was asked if they have "a great deal of confidence" in law enforcement. There was a one-point

increase from the 2018 to 2021 when the survey asked citizens if they have a "a fair amount of confidence" in law enforcement. However, the survey peaked at 54% in 2020 and fell to 49% in 2021 for this category. Those citizens who held "not much confidence" and "no confidence at all" were up 4%. The two categories combined showed 21% in 2018 and 31% in 2021. While most individuals support law enforcement, the paradigm has been continually shifting toward less support for law enforcement.

Freilich and Chermak (2022) compiled a list of studies that reflected the "public attitudes and discussions" (p. 5) that followed the protests in the summer of 2020 after the death of George Floyd. A study by Baranauskas (2022) found that individuals who viewed news media online determined if an individual supported "law-and-order policies" or "protest violence" in policing, depending on what news source individuals view. These issues include a person's social network, the news media, and personal experience. The news media was found to have been a popular influencer of public beliefs during the protests (Nix & Pickett, 2017).

Vaughn, Peyton, and Huber (2022) found that the public was less likely to support efforts to defund the police and allocate money from law enforcement agencies to other ways of policing than reduce funds and support social service ventures of policing. The public generally trusts law enforcement officers. This is consistent with a study by Huey (2010) investigating the CSI effect on law enforcement. The CSI effect is the term given to the number of police procedural shows showing law enforcement officers or other investigators solve complex crimes in minutes. The concern is that such procedural justice television would negatively affect law enforcement. However, while some members in Huey's study found members of the public to "express feelings of frustration" (p. 65) towards law enforcement based on what the public sees on television, this was not the typical experience. People tend to view procedural television

shows positively and henceforth consider law enforcement and those who would attempt to solve crimes in a positive light. It should be noted that some law enforcement officers in this study found the public irritated with law enforcement members. Still, the study concluded this was not significant enough to discredit law enforcement's positive effect.

Eterno (2023) argues that "police must work in an environment in which they have limited power" (p. 55), so this requires law enforcement officers to build community trust with those they protect and serve. This community support is critical for the police to be successful. Law Enforcement officers must aim to create community alliances and build trust with the citizens. If law enforcement fails to do this, they will not be seen as a "legitimate authority" (Eterno, 2023, p. 60). To have legitimate authority, officers must always aim to be servants to the public and be together in partnership. Law enforcement officers and agencies must have this be part of their culture to serve the people in their community correctly. Eterno concludes, "honesty and integrity must not merely be a motto; it must be rooted in the culture" (p. 65).

Similarly, Scott (2023) comments on the BIPOC [Black, Indigenous, and People of Color] views on law enforcement and policing. She reports that many individuals support some version of limiting police funding or restructuring different agencies of police authority. Scott claims that white or minority police officers who have assimilated into the blue culture of radicalized policing" (p. 144) do not work well in BIPOC communities.

The law enforcement community must encounter this divided structure daily. There is no one-size-fits-all view of law enforcement held by the public. Furthermore, it is unclear if communities with a larger minority population face more battles with law enforcement than communities with predominantly white origins. The research points to those communities that identify with more ethnic diversity generally supporting law enforcement. However, when

looking at early studies, it was also evident by Huey (2010) that not all individuals supported law enforcement. The CSI effect did not result in a positive light for all community members. It can be inferred that the division is evident in those who support law enforcement and those who do not.

2.3 Rural Law Enforcement Officers

Rural Law enforcement agencies have their own set of challenges. Officers often work alone and rely on assistance or backup from nearby town or county law enforcement agencies. The officers typically patrol by themselves in a vehicle and, for the most part, get to decide what tasks they complete every day. Liederbach and Frank (2003) surveyed small-town and rural law enforcement officers. Their study found that rural law enforcement officers have a more comprehensive range of activities during their shifts. In addition to their law enforcement duties, it was found that law enforcement officers may provide citizens with different "service functions, crime prevention, and problem-solving" (p. 57). This was also present in other studies. A somewhat dated but relevant study by Cain (1971) found that law enforcement in rural areas, while not as busy, spend more time interacting with the public in their shifts. Also, a study by Flanagan (1985) found that the citizen determines law enforcement duties, and the community size decides how law enforcement meets the community's needs. In other words, the citizen interacts with officers and gives them the duties or issues they want the police to complete. These duties may range from a crime report to a wild animal complaint or a neighbor with too many weeds in their yard. Moreover, law enforcement did more than solve crimes. This is one small part of a complex job.

Officers are often tasked with citizen interactions and community policing initiatives such as presentations and service events. One chief requires his officers to be involved in

volunteer activities outside of their law enforcement activities to understand better the community in which they live (Weisheit, Wells & Falcone, 1994). Officers also must be quick to change a flat tire or provide other resources to citizens at their request. Liederbach and Frank (2003) found that law enforcement only spent 1.2% of their time away from the public during an officer's eight-hour shift. This means that rural officers tend to spend more time with the citizen of the community (Kuhns, Maguire & Cox, 2007; Liederbach & Frank, 2003; Pelfrey, 2007; Weisheit, Wells & Falcone, 1994).

Weisheit, Wells, and Falcone (1994) remain at the forefront of knowledge on rural law enforcement; when investigating the community policing practices of rural areas, the study found that rural law enforcement officers have better relationships with their fellow citizens. However, working so well in the community has certain drawbacks for law enforcement officers. One such drawback is that a law enforcement officer has no privacy. In their study, the team spoke to several officers. They write, "one chief and a number of others had observed that when off duty, they could not have a beer at the local bar without starting the rumors in the community" (p. 566). The officers rarely have downtime in a rural community. They are always on duty, even when they are not on shift. From time to time, citizens will contact officers during their off-duty hours. That is, hours officers are not on active patrol or an assignment. For those with a listed phone number, this may come in the way of phone calls during off-duty hours to report criminal activity. Citizens in rural communities will also contact off-duty law enforcement to report crimes and ask for information. This always watching one's back mentality leads to stress (Ricciardelli, 2018). Officers who cannot get away from their job and this inability to escape causes additional career stress.

Ricciardelli (2018) concluded that rural officers need a "greater work-life balance" (p. 443). In a theme throughout the literature, officers are always on guard when they live and work in their community. Law enforcement officers are required to watch their backs constantly. The officer's ability to do their job safely can be put in danger, and there is a tremendous strain on the officer that may undermine their ability to do their job. This strain can come from a lack of resources, demands by administrative forces, and legal consequences if something happens and there is no law enforcement coverage (Ricciardelli, 2018). This impact can and does cause officers to leave the profession. Ricciardelli (2018) states, "constrained policing conditions leave officers with very little downtime, which impacts their emotional and mental health, relationships at or outside work, and can lead to stress leave." (p. 434). It is unknown if these conditions also cause rural law enforcement to have impaired judgment in their duties.

Stress is not the only reason officers often leave the profession. In August 2014, Ferguson, Missouri, encountered several days of riots following the death of an 18-year-old African American male by the actions of a white police officer. Adams (2019) studied rural law enforcement officers to see how the Ferguson, Missouri events in 2014 affected rural officers in Virginia. He found that law enforcement constantly conflicted with the public perceptions of law enforcement and their trust after Ferguson. In addition, Adams (2019) identified other themes in the post-Ferguson study. They included perceived racial division, and white officers who were part of black communities could not interact with citizens who were not white without perceptions of wrongdoing. The study also found that the media may have influenced citizens to rush to judgment on the officer and question law enforcement's legitimacy. Finally, the law enforcement officers faced underappreciation by their leadership. Since the events of Ferguson, Missouri, many other incidents involving citizens and law enforcement have occurred. Given

these incidents, it is unknown if law enforcement officers have adjusted how they serve their communities. Furthermore, it is unknown with the calls and efforts to reform law enforcement if these added stressors affect law enforcement officers today or if they have adapted and overcome these stressors.

Rural law enforcement deals with more specific types of crime when compared to urban officers. One study focused on offenses and the type of calls rural law enforcement deals with daily, and found, on average, that rural law enforcement officers are more likely to encounter crimes such as property offenses, drug-related crimes, violent crimes, and domestic violence situations (Kuhns, Maguire & Cox, 2007). This same study concluded that property offenses were a rural law enforcement officer's most challenging aspect of crime investigation.

Individuals may also think that rural law enforcement is community policing. Pelfrey (2007) asserts that while community policing and rural policing share many of the same aspects, they are very different. Community policing happens to hold many of the elements that it takes for a rural police officer to be successful in the community they serve. However, rural law enforcement has more requirements for the job than their urban counterparts, such as patrol, investigations, and community and problem-oriented policing while maintaining effective time management.

2.4 Law Enforcement Sub-Cultures

Police develop their own sense of police culture. For example, Trautman (1990) found that "officers feel a strong sense of togetherness and comradery, [and] use words and terms other people don't understand" (p. 158). This bond between officers allows them to develop their own social norms and ways of doing things. Roberson & Azaloa (2023) state, "officers realize how dangerous their jobs are, but 80% of them don't think the public understands the risk and

challenges that the officer faces daily." Due to the feelings of camaraderie and friendship and thinking the public does not understand officers, law enforcement has developed a police culture. According to a 1960s ethnographic study by Myrdal (1964), attitudes toward racial minorities correlated with the number of use-of-force incidents conducted against individual members of minority communities. However, through additional research, other areas of police culture have come to light over the years. Cordner (2017) concludes that "police culture is not problematic, it is not monolithic, and it is substantially organizational, not simply occupational or a matter of individual personal differences" (p. 21). Positive and negative cultures can influence the individual law enforcement agency, which has a view of the influence of the legitimacy of law enforcement; however, this view is not absolute. How a community views a law enforcement agency is subjective to the community in which the law enforcement agency resides.

Culture can differ from agency to agency. However, specific sub-cultures develop amongst officers when looking at law enforcement agencies and law enforcement as a whole. According to current research, current officers can fall into a particular sub-culture of law enforcement. These sub-cultures or identities, help govern the primary culture of a law enforcement agency or officers. In the following sections, these sub-cultures will be discussed; however, this is not an extensive or comprehensive list, and other sub-cultures may exist.

2.4.1 Law Enforcement Officers' Identities

Birzer & Roberson (2007) described law enforcement identities. These identities help law enforcement officers navigate the complexities of their law enforcement careers. Officers who hold similar identities are often attracted to one another. These identities can exist in small groups or consist of the entire law enforcement agency. Identities can be psychological or behavioral. They break these identities into two categories: syndromes and typologies.

Syndromes describe individuals who want to enter law enforcement because some aspect of the job attracts individuals to the job. There are five syndromes. The Wyatt Earp syndrome focuses on the weight of the badge. These individuals like the job because they feel masculine. Next is the John Wayne syndrome. These individuals are task-oriented and focused on the job at hand, and they can come off as not being friendly people. In the Doc Holiday syndrome, individuals are suspect of everyone they encounter. The Custer syndrome describes officers who defend the work of law enforcement yet go against the grain of the established culture of the law enforcement agency. Finally, the Parker syndrome describes the individuals who defend the law enforcement agency and profession at all costs. They will have the backs of their fellow law enforcement over that of the citizens they protect (Birzer & Roberson, 2007). These syndromes describe the individuals who typically become law enforcement officers. They focus on characteristics that emphasize the bravery and ego of the person and not necessarily the system. However, this typically describes individuals that are attracted to law enforcement. Once an individual becomes a law enforcement officer, they tend to break into typologies.

Typologies are behavior characteristics of the officer when they are engaged in law enforcement duties. Birzer and Roberson (2007) discussed four typologies officers typically fit. The first is Broderick's Typology. This individual is college educated and maintains a set of high ideals in the social structure of society. They typically have the end goal in mind and would not recommend a career in law enforcement. They are people focused and view law enforcement as just a job in which they work. The following typology is Muir's Typology, a professional law enforcement officer who only works when they must work. These individuals could be considered slackers who cannot make up their minds. Individuals who follow White's Typology are the tough guys. They pay attention to the citizens' needs and take pride in the job. They want

to solve crimes. These individuals are typical strait-laced individuals who follow everything to the letter of the law. Finally, some follow Coate's typology. These individuals are focused on the community, but they have a rigidness to them. They focus on the tasks at hand but can be overly involved and get caught up in the rules and regulations of the job. It is important to note that an officer may not fall directly into each one of these categories. Some officers may fit into one category and then switch to another. Many outside factors may determine which type and officer fit into as well. Family issues, work dynamics, community culture, and attitudes play into an officer in a specific syndrome or typology. Roberson and Azaloa (2023) refer to this as the "blue wall" (p. 97) and emphasize that "it covers the unspoken fact that police officers do not report fellow officers for abusing the power of committing crimes while on duty" (p. 97). The idea of the "blue wall" has been known to law enforcement researchers for many years, and while some researchers will adjust the name slightly, the concept remains consistent throughout law enforcement research. In some cases, officers can go unchecked if their fellow officers are unwilling to report crimes or wrongdoing to law enforcement management.

2.4.2 The Code of Law Enforcement

To survive in a law enforcement agency, and for that matter, the field of policing, an officer may feel obligated to join one of these sub-cultures discussed above. Officers who go against the status quo of their agencies do not often last long in that agency. Furthermore, officers removed from an agency may have trouble finding employment in another agency. To survive in a law enforcement agency, a law enforcement officer must accept the norms and practices of the agency. After all, law enforcement remains a small, tight-knit community. Just as Roberson and Azaloa (2023) refer to this concept as the "blue wall," Skolnick (1994; 2002) refers to this as the "blue code of silence," which is a normative injunction, but an unwritten one"

(p. 7). The code consists of loyalty to one's fellow officer, ignoring police misconduct, and not reporting it. The "blue code of silence" dictates that when an officer is investigated for police misconduct, other officers are to remain silent.

However, not all crimes or wrongdoing are tolerated by law enforcement. Westmarland and Rowe (2018) found that urban law enforcement officers in the United Kingdom were more likely to disregard any misdemeanor act committed by a fellow officer, regardless of the seriousness of the offense, compared to their rural counterparts. They found that urban officers focused on their loyalty to their law enforcement partners as a framework for whether a crime would be reported. Interestingly they found that officers in rural United Kingdom communities were likelier to hold a higher sense of ethics and integrity and would report such offenses by their fellow officers. Moreover, they found that officers in rural areas would be more likely to report a violation because it would stay with them for the rest of their careers if they did not. They argue that when an officer works in a smaller community, the officer views a minor bending of the rules as a big deal. It is recognized that this study took place in the United Kingdom, and it is not known if it can be applied to rural Kansas Law Enforcement. Law Enforcement in the United States is generally known to be more closed off and follow the Skolnick (1994; 2002) version of the "blue code of silence" law enforcement code.

2.4.3 Paramilitary Culture

One area in which police culture has developed is through paramilitarism. Balko (2021) discusses how the military and law enforcement have developed similarly throughout the years. He describes the militarization of the police in terms of direct and indirect militarization. Direct militarization is when the military is used as a police force. Indirect militarization "happens when police agencies and police officers take on more characteristics of an army" (p. 35). According to

Sparrow (2016), police culture is distinct in so much as "they wear uniforms, carry firearms, and traditionally exhibit many aspects of a quasi-military culture" (p. 214).

From 1960 to 1980, law enforcement in America increasingly adopted a militaristic mentality. The 1960s were filled with widespread unrest, and in the 1970s, more agencies developed SWAT [Special Weapons and Tactics] teams. In 1970 there was one SWAT team which increased nationwide to approximately 500 in 1975 (Balko, 2021). During this time, the Supreme Court and many lower courts ruled on cases allowing law enforcement to expand its authority. No-knock search warrants were introduced, allowing law enforcement to act more covertly. In the 1980s, the idea of tackling crime became a talking point for many politicians, and in the 1990s, law enforcement became more about producing results and numbers. Results and numbers were classified as arrests, seized property, retrieved illegal drugs and guns, and anything else that could show as taking criminals or illicit substances off the street. Increased search warrants and stops and frisks were executed to find drugs and other contraband. Because law enforcement officers did not know what would be encountered during the raids to arrest alleged criminals or retrieve illegal materials, many agencies wanted more armor and guns. To maintain a higher level of protection for law enforcement officers, agencies slowly began to acquire more weapons of the trade, such as those more commonly found in military operations. These weapons of the trade include armored vehicles, advanced weaponry and ballistic protection, and other weaponry that would help combat the war on drugs (Balko, 2021). Some argued at the time that the new emphasis on policing by the numbers in the 1990s was at the expense of addressing other immediate concerns that citizens thought were important to the daily operations of their neighborhoods (Birzer, 1996).

Using advanced military-grade weaponry that large departments typically use to combat crime became more prevalent in the smaller agencies. Kraska and Cubellis (1997) found that law enforcement agencies strongly follow military models. Following these models primarily affects police culture and creates a subculture in paramilitary policing. Furthermore, they questioned why this subculture was so popular and appealing to law enforcement agencies. They concluded that it "lies generally in the seductive powers of the paramilitary unit subculture as promoted by the for-profit [arms] industry" (p. 625). Kraska and Cubellis (1997) continued, "the techno-warrior grab, heavy weaponry, sophisticated technology, hypermasculinity and 'real work' function are nothing less than intoxicating for paramilitary unit participants" (p. 625). In short, the paramilitary units in law enforcement have the technology and gadgets that attract particular types of people to their teams, further reinforcing the subculture.

2.4.3.1 Uniforms

Twentieth-Century police reformer O. W. Wilson and his colleague Roy McLaren (1977) wrote, "police uniforms should be distinctive to avoid confusion with those of any other service and to ensure recognition by the stranger" (p. 547). Law enforcement's recognition was initially crucial to quickly recognize an officer and receive the proper help and support needed by the community. However, in society today, police officers are wearing fewer police blue uniforms and look more like tactical SWAT teams. Law enforcement often wears trousers and a shirt that is blue or darker color in nature. The shirt usually contains pockets, and officers wear an outer nameplate and a gun belt. Since most agencies employ a similar dress code, these uniforms are typically considered police blues. Officers who wear a more tactical, SWAT-type uniform wear an outer vest, cargo pants, and sometimes a helmet or other head covering and weapons of some nature (MacDonnell, 2016). The difference between a police blue or soft uniform, and a SWAT

or tactical uniform, is that the latter can often be removed in parts when an officer is not on active patrol, giving an officer more comfort.

In 1968, Victor Cizanckas became the Chief of Police for the Menlo Park Police Department in California. As police chief, he experimented with a new type of soft uniform consisting of "green (or sometimes gold) blazers over white shirts and black or brown slacks. Officers wore ties as well. Hats were no longer required" (Schrader, 2017 p. 1008). The new uniforms were a break from the militaristic uniforms that officers had worn. The uniforms also eliminated rank and unified the look of police officers to the public. An officer's insignia was also no longer visible with new uniforms and no longer identified supervising officers versus junior law enforcement officers. The uniforms represented a department structure change and included focusing less on arrest numbers and more on community interactions. Approximately a decade after implementing the new uniforms, Cizanckas left the Menlo Park Police Department, and the department returned to standard police blue uniforms (Schrader, 2017). Notably, during this experiment, the most significant achievement was a regained sense of trust in the community and interacting more with the community through changing uniform types.

Paul and Birzer (2004) argued that officers who dress like soldiers and are trained like soldiers might lose the community's trust. Officers lose community connections when they dress and act like military members. The President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing (2015) also produced a similar recommendation. This change in mentality and militaristic culture primarily evolved from the War on Drugs and has perpetrated police corruption (Paul & Birzer, 2004). If officers continue down this road, a particular police culture will likely develop from an isolated sense of law enforcement. Officers might not be able to relate to their communities well. In part,

Paul and Birzer (2004) argued that reducing military-style uniforms may reduce some forms of law enforcement misconduct.

Nickels (2008), in his study, sets out to look at the effects of citizen perceptions of uniform color on the citizens and if there was any psychological effect of the uniform on citizens. The study found that darker uniforms positively impact citizens more than lighter uniforms when examining the analysis of covariance model of color in all black, all navy, blue shirt and navy pants, and white shirt and navy pants. However, the research also revealed that the officer's posture affected a citizen's perspective of how citizens perceived law enforcement officers. The study also found this was due to the roots of Judeo-Christian religions, where clergy typically wear black and are viewed as humble. A salient question then emerges if a uniform can have the opposite effect if citizens view the uniform positively and officers are viewed like clergy. Can this also affect the culture of law enforcement officers? This positive light may potentially develop another type of subculture in law enforcement.

2.4.4 The Extremist: The Left and The Right

Law enforcement has been known to be dominated by members who align with more of a conservative ideology. In 1968, William Vega studied law enforcement and the "liberal policeman." Vega writes, "the liberal policeman will find little company to share his value scheme. He is a social isolate in an occupation already isolated by its vocational relationship to the community" (Vega, 1968, p. 19). Vega describes law enforcement as a conservative field and discusses how liberal members of law enforcement can change their beliefs or put them aside, or they can leave the field of law enforcement entirely (Vega, 1968). Today, this mindset still exists in law enforcement. However, when a political ideology takes root and dictates the actions of law enforcement, this creates a subculture of law enforcement officers. There are indeed cases

where extremism exists within law enforcement agencies. It is speculated that a far-left law enforcement officer might embody more of a social worker role, being opposed to using weaponry and fewer police tactics. It is not a new concept, and extremists exist on the far left and far right. However, there are more documented occasions of its existence on the far right than on the far left. Samuel Walker (1992) describes this phenomenon as an "extreme version of the police – a version that views the police as an army fighting crime" (p. 61).

A study conducted by Holman and Farris and reported by Chammah (2021) of The Marshall Project, found that 1,770 members of the National Sheriff's Association responded to a survey on their views of law enforcement, which represented just over half of the estimated 3,000 sheriffs that exist in the United States. In the survey, 440 of 1,770 surveys rated the statement, "the sheriff's authority supersedes the federal or state government in my county." Of the 440 sheriffs to respond, 26.8% of sheriffs strongly agreed with the statements that their authority as sheriff "supersedes the federal or state government in [their] county." Another 21.8% agreed with the idea, and 30% neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. In the same study, 69% of 437 respondents, sheriffs from across the nation, agreed that they would be "willing to 'interpose' [their beliefs] on behalf of the county resident when [they] believe a state or federal law is unjust" (Chammah, 2021). These results show that a small group of extremists that govern local law enforcement agencies decided not to enforce the laws as they are written consistently.

If a sheriff or chief directs their agency not to follow the laws enacted by local councils, states, and federal agencies, a breakdown of trust is likely to occur among the people and the law enforcement agency. This directly impacts and nurtures police culture outside any transparent community or legal boundary. Law enforcement officers are to carry out the law equally for all

citizens. The head of law enforcement agencies should enforce the laws put in place by the people's elected representatives, not try to legislate the rules as they see fit. This extremist viewpoint allows an agency to pick and choose what law enforcement officers act on or how they enforce the law. This can turn the community against the law enforcement agency, furthering a divisive sub-culture in the law enforcement agency to develop.

2.5 Areas of Lacking Research

The literature informing police culture in Kansas law enforcement officers is non-existent. Furthermore, no studies have been found on rural law enforcement agencies in Kansas, as access to these smaller agencies is rarely, if ever, granted. No known studies have examined police culture in Kansas law enforcement from the officer's perspective. It is unknown if recent events involving law enforcement have had an impact on Kansas law enforcement officers or if the reforms recommended by the Commissions that investigated these incidents have influenced the culture of Kansas law enforcement (Executive Office of the President of the United States, 2020; Kansas Governor's Commission on Racial Equity & Justice, 2020; Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2015; President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing, 2015). Furthermore, it is unknown if any of the above-described subcultures currently exist in rural Kansas law enforcement officers. This study aimed to fill the void in the literature that informs through an ethnographic lens, rural Kansas law enforcement culture.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 The Study

This study used a qualitative ethnographic approach focusing on in-depth interviews with a select group of active rural Kansas law enforcement officers. The study involved the researcher observing law enforcement officers practicing their craft during several ride-alongs. The ethnographic approach to qualitative research involves studying a cultural sharing group (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Alternatively, as Guest, Namey, and Mitchell (2013) point out, "ethnography literally means to write about a group of people" (p. 11). In this study, the cultural sharing group selected was Kansas law enforcement officers in a rural Kansas law enforcement agency. Some ethnographic studies in criminal justice and criminology make use of intense, long-term participant or non-participant field observations of the cultural sharing group of interest (Anderson, 1999; Birzer & Cromwell, 2017; Cromwell & Olson, 2004; Quinton, 2020; Souhami, 2020; Websdale, 2001). Other ethnographic approaches rely heavily on in-depth interviews and conversations with the cultural sharing group to better understand the group's insider or emic perspective (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Skinner, 2012). According to Bacon, Loftus, and Rowe (2020), ethnographies on law enforcement help the outside reader to understand the internal workings and reasoning of the law enforcement officer and the law enforcement organization. They argue, "as a methodological approach, ethnography has proven unparalleled for penetrating the inner world of police organizations and examining the working rules, tacit understandings, and underlying assumptions that operate beneath" (p. 4). Finally, Creswell & Poth (2018) state "there is no single way to conduct ethnographic research" (p. 93). According to Van Maanen (2010), the ultimate point of ethnographic research is for the researcher to immerse

themselves in the culture. Van Maanen writes, "it is an interpretive craft, focused more on 'how' and 'why' than on 'how much' or 'how many'" (p. 219). In essence, Van Maanen states that engaging in ethnographic research is about understanding and finding the organization's culture and not focusing on the number of interviews or participants. Conducting an ethnographic study will allow a cultural description of the interworking of one rural Kansas law enforcement agency.

3.2 Participants

This study entailed in-depth interviews and focus group discussions of members of a rural Kansas law enforcement agency recognized by KSCPOST. Participation in this study was limited to officers with an "active law enforcement certificate" defined by the Kansas Law Enforcement Training Act. According to the Kansas Law Enforcement Training Act:

> Active law enforcement certificate means a certificate which attests to the qualification of a person to perform the duties of a law enforcement officer, and which has not been suspended or revoked by action of the Kansas commission on peace officers' standards and training and has not lapsed by operation of law... (KSCPOST, 2018)

The interviewed officers were from a cooperating rural law enforcement agency that allowed full access to their department.

All participating officers were graduates of KLETC [Kansas Law Enforcement Training Center] near Yoder, Kansas. All officers received their basic training at KLETC. This study made use of one rural law enforcement agency employing three law enforcement officers. Data was collected until the researcher reached data saturation. According to Straus and Corbin (1998, p. 136), data saturation is that point in the analysis process "when no new information seems to emerge during coding, that is, when no new properties, dimensions, conditions,

actions/interactions, or consequences are seen in the data." Interviews for this study took place in one-on-one in-depth interviews and in person, during ride-along observations in the field. The researcher also wrote extensive field notes and in-process memos to record phenomena observed during the non-participant observer ride-alongs. In-process memos are commonly used in qualitative research to allow the researcher to write about analytic hunches and leads observed during fieldwork (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). In order to achieve accurate data for interview transcriptions, participants consented to have their first interview recorded by audio. Follow-up discussions were also held with the participants during the ride-along observations which allowed the officer to explain their thought processes. These conversations were documented in field notes. Follow-up conversations were also held with participants to ensure the researcher's valid interpretations of the data were correct. Before data collection began the Wichita State University Institutional Review Board approved this study on March 6, 2023.

3.2.1 The Law Enforcement Agency Studied

Nestled in the plains of Kansas sits a small community of approximately 1,000 citizens. The median household income is $79,000 per year. The community is very active in the agricultural industry. The community is primarily made of citizens who identify as Caucasian, while only 7% of the population identify as another ethnicity. The town has two schools, a combined elementary and middle school, and a high school. There is one Catholic Church located near the edge of town. It also has one bank and two gas stations. One gas station has a convenience store, and the local co-op operates the other gas station. The city operates its water tower, sewer plant, and lagoons and has a city dam. There are two restaurants in town. One restaurant is a café and has limited its hours and days of operation since the COVID-19 pandemic and is now only open a few days a week during the mornings and early afternoons.

The other restaurant is a restaurant/bar combination. The bar can stay open until 2:00 a.m., but most nights, it is closed by 10:00 p.m. The town also has a grain elevator, a lumber yard, a metal shop, an auto repair shop, and recently a home health dispatch center has moved to town and has both day and evening shifts. This city is classified as a City of the Third Class by the State of Kansas.

A large red brick building with a brown facade is near the town center. As the reader faces the building, there is a library to the left and a café to the right. The building has a large sign that says, "City Hall." This building houses both the city offices and the law enforcement agency. Each department has its separate location within the building.

In this ethnographic study, the law enforcement agency and law enforcement officers remained anonymous, and the researcher used a pseudonym, the Sunflower Police Department, here in after referred to as Sunflower PD. As noted previously, Sunflower PD employs three full-time law enforcement officers, the chief and two supporting officers, who support 21-hour coverage Monday through Friday from 6:00 a.m. to 3:00 a.m. the next day. Hours on Saturday and Sunday vary, with most coverage happening in the afternoon and at night. If an officer is not on duty for various reasons, such as someone calling in sick or on vacation, one officer is on call for the community. If this does not happen, the local county law enforcement agency supports Sunflower PD with law enforcement coverage. A pseudonym refers to each officer so they can maintain anonymity and allow them to speak freely about their lived experience.

Chief Tanner is the Sunflower PD Chief of Police. He has nearly 20 years of combined law enforcement experience as a law enforcement and corrections officer. He has been chief of Sunflower PD for eight years. Sergeant Burke is the department's administrative sergeant with eight years of experience. He also works for two other police departments near Sunflower and

serves as a guest instructor at KLETC, training officers in the basic training program. The final officer is Officer Paul. He holds multiple college degrees and has over 20 years of experience in law enforcement. He has served at Sunflower PD for only three years serving his other years at a law enforcement agency in a neighboring county. He is the newest member of Sunflower PD. All law enforcement officers of Sunflower PD are graduates of KLETC.

Sunflower PD works on a chain of command-structure—the officer and the sergeant report to the chief of police. The chief of police reports to the police commissioner, a city council member with former law enforcement experience, this council member's job is to assist Sunflower PD in its operations before taking matters to the mayor or the whole city council. The chief of police, although, ultimately reports to the town's mayor.

Sunflower PD only investigates crimes classified as misdemeanors since they are a small agency. Because they lack an investigative division, they have limited jurisdiction over crimes involving juvenile offenders. Those cases must be processed in Sunflower's municipal court system. The county's law enforcement agency, Exploited and Missing Child Unit, investigates cases involving child abuse, bullying, or sexual assaults of children for Sunflower PD. The county law enforcement agency also handles crimes involving adults classified as a felony. Sunflower PD relies significantly on the support of the county law enforcement agency.

3.3 Data Analysis Scheme

While there are various ways to code and analyze qualitative transcription data, the schema used in this study was a modified technique outlined by Moustakas (1994). Data analysis was carried out using a six-step process as follows:

Step 1: All audio-recorded interviews and focus groups were transcribed. These transcripts were the raw data for analysis.

Step 2: The transcripts and in-process memos were read first to ensure that they contain adequate data to be helpful in the analysis.

Step 3: The data was then examined, and relevant information was separated from irrelevant information. All relevant information was broken into small segments of significant statements reflecting a specific thought.

Step 4: The significant statements were then carefully re-read and overlapping, and repetitive statements were eliminated.

Step 5: The segments were then coded and grouped into meanings that depict how participants describe police culture.

Step 6: Clusters of themes were then organized from the formulated meanings. Specifically, the data examined, and the various ways law enforcement officers describe police culture were considered. The objective of this analysis stage was to allow for the emergence of themes common to all the participant's descriptions.

3.4 Validity and Trustworthiness of the Data

To maintain the validity and trustworthiness of the data, this study employed two validation strategies as put forth by Creswell and Poth (2018); those strategies are corroborating evidence through triangulation of multiple data sources and member checking.

3.4.1 Corroborating Evidence through Triangulation

Corroborating evidence through triangulation of multiple data sources is taking information from numerous places, such as interviews, documents, pictures, drawings, journals, and anything that can provide information. The researcher used these various sources to check the data against each other to ensure the themes in the research are consistent with what all the sources are saying (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Corroborating evidence through triangulation took place by using individual interviews and focus groups. The data was coded into themes and matched with other interviews to find common themes. Since data collection occurred through in-depth one-on-one interviews with all the members of a rural Kansas law enforcement agency, all acquired data came from all members of Sunflower PD. The themes represent all officer's lived experiences and describe the culture of the rural Kansas law enforcement agency and the rural Kansas law enforcement officers. Nevertheless, the data represents a description of rural Kansas law enforcement culture, not the experiences specific to one law enforcement officer.

3.4.2 Member Checking

Member Checking is taking the information from the interviews and observations found while conducting the research back to the individuals who have participated in the study. Only the themes developed through the participating members of Sunflower PD, through one-on-one interviews and field observations, were presented to the officers and not the raw data, as mentioned earlier. The members of Sunflower PD advised the researcher on the accuracy of the theme. This approach ensures accurate themes, and that data coding is correct (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Members from the ethnographic site [Sunflower PD] participated in focus groups and one-on-one debriefings. The debriefings shared the theme results with the participant officers. Officers provided feedback about the themes to see if they match the officers lived experience as rural Kansas law enforcement officers.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

4.1 The Findings

In this ethnographic study of rural police culture, the goal was to determine the shared lived experience of the members of Sunflower PD, a rural Kansas law enforcement agency. After interviewing each officer of Sunflower PD and conducting multiple ride-alongs and field observations over two months, six common recurring themes and two lesser emerging themes emerged describing their rural police culture or their lived experience. While each officer approached their job and daily tasks differently, in other words, no two officers went about the job in the same way; each provided a glimpse into the shared lived experience of Sunflower PD members. Through in-depth conversations and watching each officer's interactions with the community, the six following themes and two lesser emerging but relevant themes emerged continually through the work of the law enforcement officers in Sunflower PD.

4.1.1 Theme 1: The Law is at the Center

The first theme, entitled "The Law is at the Center," is about the officers of Sunflower PD as a group. This theme describes the officers and how they function as a cohesive unit. Each officer works their shift independently of the other officers, but it works towards the collective order of the PD. Chief Tanner describes the officers by saying, "you have three different officers, you have three different ways of doing things, three different personalities….they don't understand why they each do the things that they do." "The law is at the center" that roots the three officers. However, their application of the law depends on the officer. Some officers prefer a more laid-back and watch approach, while others interact more with the public. Officer Paul states, "our approaches are different [it] doesn't mean they are wrong; they are just different."

The key to understanding Sunflower PD is that each officer could approach things slightly differently than their counterparts. Sergeant Burke spoke of how the officers conduct their business differently, but "we do enforce similarly." The three elements that make up the culture of Sunflower PD are the officers, the personality of each officer, and the enforcement methods, as characterized in Figure 4.1.

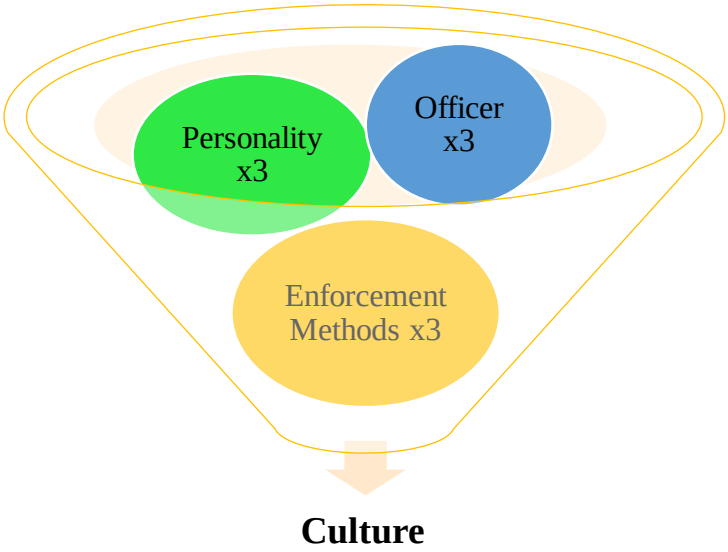

Figure 4.1. Sunflower PD culture.

Through field observations, it was clear that each officer acted independently. The officers were like two ships passing in the night. The day shift officer, typically the chief of police, and the nighttime officer would sometimes go days without seeing each other. Officer Paul stated, "I might go five or six days without seeing him [the chief] in person." On one ride-along, Sergeant Burke said he rarely sees Officer Paul because they work different shifts and nights. Sergeant Burke implied they would speak on the phone, but rarely see each other in person. Sergeant Burke and Officer Paul also tended to associate with the officers in nearby communities during their shifts than Sunflower PD officers and Chief Tanner tended to associate more with Sunflower's public works department.

4.1.2 Theme 2: Superman of Policing Identity

The second theme is the "Superman of Policing Identity" that applies to the Chief of Police of Sunflower PD. This type of policing identity has not been accounted for in the current academic literature. It is based only on Chief Tanner's interviews, descriptions, and observations from the researcher in the field. It may also apply to other rural chiefs of police, although this study does not examine those possibilities. Through interviews and field observations during ride-alongs, Chief Tanner offered a complex role as a law enforcement officer that expanded outside the experiences of the other officers of Sunflower PD. While the main job of the chief of police is to be a law enforcement officer, the chief must deal with additional complexities that his fellow law enforcement officers do not have to deal with. It compiles a mixture of being "community-oriented," as described by Chief Tanner, who must keep three distinct groups of people happy. These groups are the citizens of Sunflower; Sunflower's governmental authority, which consists of the Sunflower's police commissioner, mayor, and council; and finally, the officers of Sunflower PD. Chief Tanner states, "there is always someone after your job, someone always wants to be on top, but they don't necessarily want the job." Chief Tanner's comments implied that other officers within Sunflower PD would like to be the chief of police, but they do not understand what the job fully entails. It also alluded to the political nature of the position; however, Chief Tanner continually described himself as "community-oriented." Chief Tanner also spoke of his personal and family life, in this case dealing mainly with his family and the added stress that is applied to him for being a chief of police, the job that supports his family. All the officers of Sunflower PD agreed that the chief of police has a unique role in the policing of Sunflower that is distinct from their role. The "Superman of Policing Identity" focuses on three

job elements: the chief as a "community-oriented" individual, the chief as a family man or having a personal life, and the chief as a law enforcement officer, as shown in Figure 4.2.

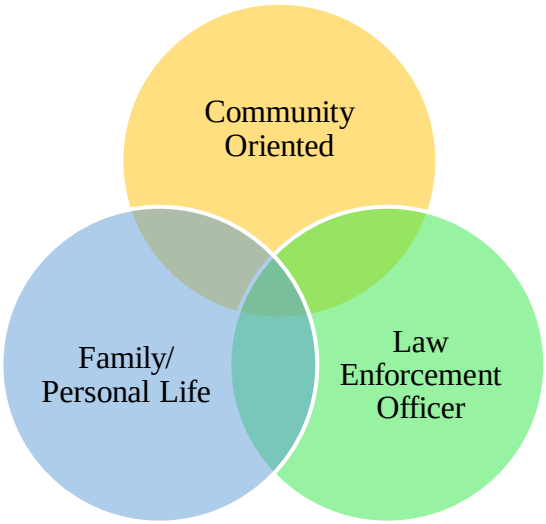

Figure 4.2. Superman of policing identity.

At his very nature, the chief of Sunflower PD is "community-oriented," by his description. Some might describe Chief Tanner as diplomatic or a politician, but he quickly dismissed these terms. He must keep both the citizens of the community happy but also maintain a positive relationship with his police commissioner and the mayor, whom he ultimately reports to, and the Sunflower's council. The chief must be quick to defend his officers and take the appropriate time to investigate complaints or accusations against his officers. Dealing with the community is paramount to his success as a law enforcement officer and the chief of police role. Chief Tanner states his job is to "take the brunt" of the complaints. People will message him on Facebook Messenger or call him at all hours of the day and night, regardless of whether he is on duty or not. If his phone rings, the chief will answer it. He must also keep his police commissioner and mayor happy and informed of events but be careful not to violate laws by sharing information that individuals outside of sworn law enforcement should not have. He

states, "I will tell them everything I legally can tell them – no details and no names." His best defense is to "let his commissioner and mayor know ahead of time." He recalled a story about a suspicious vehicle at 5:00 a.m. one morning that was found after a shooting had occurred nearby in a local community. The car was registered to a community member in Sunflower. The chief recalls waking the vehicle's registered owner and asking them about it at 5:00 a.m. In the chief's words, the citizen was "mad as hell" to have been awakened. The car's registered owner had sold it, but the new owner had not filed the appropriate paperwork to change its registration. Due to the irritation of the citizen, the chief notified his police commissioner at about 6:00 a.m. of the events because the chief knew that if he did not, it might become a more significant issue. The chief recalled, "thankfully, my police commissioner gets up early."

The other officers of Sunflower PD agreed that the chief was a "community-oriented" individual and officer. When asking the officers how they would describe this nature of the police chief, Officer Paul said, [the chief] is trying to be safe. [He is] trying to be cautious and not offend others." Sergeant Burke aligned the chief with more of a political role stating, "just take off the badge, and you have a mayor." He continued later stating this identity in his opinion might fit, "any chief in [rural] law enforcement."

The chief must also be a "defender" of his law enforcement officers by taking the brunt of the force from those who complain about the officers. He clarified, "as long as it is within the moral and code of ethics" of being a law enforcement officer. He also stated he would "be hurt if they [the officers] didn't have morals and ethics" while performing their jobs. He surmises that he wants to be careful not to damage the officer's relationship with the community but must also not damage his relationship with the community. In other words, he must give his officers the benefit of the doubt but simultaneously investigate them. He also constantly checks in with his

officers to know if things are going okay. Throughout the research, the chief contacted this researcher after every scheduled ride-along to make sure this researcher had no issues with his law enforcement officers. It was implied to this researcher that the chief wanted to maintain good relations with side communities such as Wichita State University, adding to the nature of being "community oriented."

During the interview, Chief Tanner also discussed the changing environment of law enforcement, which adds to his "community-oriented" identity. The chief stated, "Let's face it, worldwide or nationwide, law enforcement has changed drastically." Later, he talked about the importance of wearing body cameras, saying, "That's not just for my protection, that's for the citizen's protection also…if something had [been] done illegal, unethical or immoral, there is video documentation of it." When asked if the changing landscape of law enforcement affected his rural community or the impacts of federal commission reports, incidents such as George Floyd in Minneapolis in 2020 or Ferguson, Missouri in 2014 affected his job as a rural law enforcement officer, he states, "you know, they do because we're noticing more and more like when people [of color] will come out here." Chief Tanner recalled a traffic stop of stopping someone without lights on a boat trailer at 11:30 p.m. The stop was because no one could see the boat trailer. However, the driver articulated that they were stopped because they were Black. Chief Tanner recalls, telling the driver, "I didn't even know what nationality you were [or] what color you were." He describes his approach to being a law enforcement officer today as defensive. Chief Tanner noted:

> But you feel like now every officer has to be on a defensive like they've gotten to not only be able to explain in their report for the probable cause or anything, but they have [to be] able to explain to society in the news and the community why they did their

> action. And it used to never be like that. You know, the officer did their job, and they went home. Now there's so much discrepancy between the community's citizens and law enforcement.

He also wondered if the "media has made it" [this way], but also stated. "I'm not putting all the blame on the media either. "

Chief Tanner is also a law enforcement officer, so many of the daily tasks law enforcement officers deal with, he must also deal with, in addition to being roles specific to the chief of police. All officers must deal with the nature of the crime, the prevention of crime, and the protection of the citizens they serve. He also remains vigilant of his "community-oriented" nature. Chief Tanner states, "you don't overlook major crimes, but you will let things slide." This implies that the "community-orientated" nature may sometimes win out if the crime is not severe.

Chief Tanner speaks openly about how his job affects his family and personal life. He states, [this] "job never leaves you." He recalled a story about going to Wal-Mart, and he was looking out for people he had encountered earlier in the day, or a description given out to law enforcement in a "Be on the Look Out" bulletin commonly referred to as a BOLO. He also recalled how you all "see stuff" no matter where you are, whether at Wal-Mart or driving down the road, for example, "an expired tag or someone you arrested." The chief also speaks of the stress this job places on his family. The chief stated, "they say never take your work home with you – that's not going to happen." The chief constantly takes his work home with him. Dispatch often calls him with reports of something happening instead of dispatching a county deputy. He also stated, "here recently, they have started to call me with stuff that happens near my town." He recalled an incident of a person burning two miles away from Sunflower, out in the county. He

informed dispatch that he would not respond as it was out of his jurisdiction. He talked openly about missing family events, holidays, birthday parties, concerts, and other performances of his children because the police phone rang. Even in his off hours, he feels responsible for the citizens of Sunflower. The chief states, "if you care enough about your job, you can't just leave – you just can't leave the job."

Chief Tanner also admits he "cares too much," which is the source of his stress. However, he quickly points out that he differs from the other officers because he has "personal relationships" with the community. Before moving to a nearby community, Chief Tanner lived in Sunflower for 15 years, while the other officers have always lived outside the community. Chief Tanner states:

> They don't understand [the chief of police] role because they don't understand what it's like to live here. I've been at funerals [and] weddings. I've been a pall bear [at funerals]. I've seen them [the citizens] at their strongest and weakest.

Chief Tanner has embodied the ideal of being "community oriented." However, he also sees it as a reflection of him as a man. Throughout our ride-alongs, he often repeatedly said the same quote about representing the agency he works for and himself as a man. Chief Tanner would state, "the patch on your shirt represents who you work for, the name on your shirt who raised you. It's the truth." Chief Tanner has high ideals for himself as chief of police and as a member of Sunflower PD, but also for himself as a man.

4.1.3 Theme 3: Nature of Crime

The third theme is the "Nature of Crime" that exists in Sunflower. Sunflower PD must deal with reported crimes, non-reported crimes, and areas of concern, all of which make up the "nature of crime." Areas of concern are the crimes that Sunflower PD knows occur but are not

reported often to law enforcement. Citizens in Sunflower also have an aversion to reporting crime by contacting 911. Shown in a circular pattern, Figure 4.3 represents all the aspects of crime that officers of Sunflower PD deal with when policing their community.

Figure 4.3. Aspects of crime in Sunflower.

Through the end of April 2023, Sunflower PD officers have only taken 25 case reports. These cases involved runaways, non-injury accidents, thefts and auto thefts, and a forgery case. Every officer of Sunflower PD says they know crime happens, but the people will not always report the crime to officers to investigate. Chief Tanner reports that "oftentimes it's weeks or even months later before they learn a crime has occurred." Officer Paul reports that many cases have come from one family this year, more cases than Sunflower PD typically has by this time of year. Officer Paul states, "half of them [the cases] were from one family. It would be 15 [cases] if we didn’t have that family to deal with."

Sunflower PD does not hear about cases because it may lead to embarrassment for a family. According to officers, many families in the town have called Sunflower home for over 100 years, and some are the town's original families that founded Sunflower. Reports of

domestic violence and sexual assault are lacking from Sunflower PD's case files. Sergeant Burke states, "not all things are reported, but statistically, we know DV's [domestic violence situations] occur, but we don't get calls about it." Chief Tanner places informational pamphlets about the county's sexual assault center in the post office. Again, no reports are made about this crime, but Chief Tanner states that the pamphlets are often missing. This leads Sunflower officers to believe this crime is occurring in their town.

Officers also have concerns about other crimes and community issues, such as illicit narcotics. Sunflower law enforcement officers openly acknowledged the drug fentanyl, along with citizens failing to take proactive measures to secure their safety and the safety of their property, and the schools are areas of concern. Listen to what Sergeant Burke says about the growing fentanyl problem, "Fentanyl is here; it is going to be more and more of a problem." Sergeant Burke recalled how the community recently lost a school-age student to a fentanyl overdose. He said the student did not die in town but in a town that belongs to the Sunflower PD cooperative. According to Sergeant Burke, it is his most significant concern for the kids of the community, and he articulates that educating students about the risks of fentanyl is the only way to stop the deaths from occurring in the future.

The officers are also concerned about the lack of protective measures citizens will take to protect and secure their property. Sunflower is a town where many people still do not lock their cars or houses. Officers recounted stories about citizens leaving their car doors unlocked or not locking their houses. Officer Paul recalled a situation in which he responded to a citizen's house where a group of friends were returning from the local bar one night. One friend became lost from the pack and walked into another individual's house, sat on the couch, and passed out while the homeowner watched television. Officer Paul recalled how the young man was in shock when

he woke up, and Officer Paul was standing over him. His friends, who had noticed his absence from the group, quickly returned to collect their friend. Officer Paul said, "he [the individual whose house was entered] locks his door now." Officers also recalled how citizens would not lock their cars, so thefts of items in cars happen occasionally. Sometimes Sunflower PD has a transient come through town in the middle of the night, and they attempt to open the vehicles and see what they can find. Vehicles that are locked are not touched, implying that the individuals searching for money and other valuables are looking for a quick steal.

Another concern for the officers is the schools. Chief Tanner is the officer who interacts the most with schools primarily because he works the largest number of day shifts. Sergeant Burke and Officer Paul do not deal with the schools because they tend to work overnight hours when school is not in session. However, they affirmed the schools were a concern if Chief Tanner said they were a concern. The schools typically do not let Sunflower PD know what is happening in their school. Chief Tanner reports, "it depends on the last name" of the student. Students with prominent names in the community typically get away with incidents, and no report is made to Sunflower PD. During a ride-along, the chief received a report of a student driving at high speed through town. Chief Tanner located the truck at the high school, but when the chief informed the principal of the event, the principal did not recall which student drove the vehicle. Upon leaving the school parking lot, Chief Tanner said, "he [the principal] knew, and he will probably make an announcement and speak to the student," but it was clear to Chief Tanner that the principal did not want to give up the information on whom the truck belonged too. Chief Tanner shared another story of hearing a report that the baseball complex was burglarized. The baseball concession lost over $500 of merchandise. However, upon speaking to the school about the theft, they informed Chief Tanner they would "write it off" and "it wasn't a big deal." The

Chief said, "they know who did it, but it's someone with a name." The school, at times, will call the police cell phone but never call the 911 call center, and according to the chief, it is only when the school wishes to share information with the law enforcement. Chief Tanner stated it is typically for someone without a name.

The reporting of crime by the school and many other individuals in Sunflower rarely goes through the county's 911 call center. This happens, according to officers, for two reasons. As mentioned earlier, the first reason is that people do not report certain crimes. Officers know certain crimes will never be reported. For some families, according to Chief Tanner, "they are afraid of bringing shame to their families," and reporting a crime will bring that shame. Chief Tanner reiterated as he did several times, "some of these families have been out here for 100-plus years; some of these people are related to the original founders of the town." According to the officers, people take pride in their town, and the citizens do not want their business out amongst everyone. Sergeant Burke recalled a story about someone who wanted to report suspicious behavior in his neighborhood and drove around for 45 minutes before finding Sergeant Burke to report the incident. Sergeant Burke said the activity was over, and the suspect was long gone. Upon sharing this story with the other officers to see if they had similar experiences, Officer Paul said, "it happens all the time." Officer Paul continued, "it's frustrating they won't report incidents to 911." Chief Tanner echoed similar thoughts but also provided a possible reason. He said:

> A citizen came to the city council meeting because they had been placed on hold for a medical emergency, and the call was dropped. The citizen ended up driving their loved one to the emergency room. They were mad.

Chief Tanner recalls the shock that came across him when he heard this story. He states, "in my head, I was thinking like, oh shit." Officer Paul stated, "People can't get through to 911," and told a story of another citizen getting multiple busy signals when calling 911.

Chief Tanner told a story about how citizens do not understand that the address does not mean Sunflower PD has jurisdiction. Chief Tanner explains, "[a Sunflower] address doesn't mean I can go to it." Often, people outside the city limits but near the town will have a Sunflower address, but Sunflower PD has no jurisdiction over the crime. The citizens do not always understand the jurisdictional boundary limits of Sunflower PD.

4.1.4 Theme 4: Jack of All Trades

The fourth theme for Sunflower PD is the "Jack of All Trades." This theme means that officers do whatever needs to be done to serve the community of Sunflower. Reminiscent of the Watchman Style of Policing discussed in the classical work of James Q. Wilson (1975), officers in Sunflower PD tend to watch, enforce, are visible, and promote community relationships. Wilson describes this theory as officers having little room for career advancement, and most officers will engage in patrol duties throughout their careers. There is little room for advancement due to the lack of positions available (Wilson, 1975). In Sunflower PD, there are only three full-time officers, there is no room for advancement, and the officers know this. Officer Paul reported that the town council hires people they know. He described this as the "good old boy" system. According to Wilson, advancement is determined by the people the officer knows, not actual abilities (Wilson, 1975). The Watchman Style of Policing also can handle crimes with much discretion rather than a ridged enforcement system. The "Jack of All Trades" theme encapsulates many of the concepts Wilson discusses but lacks in the visibility of societal relations. The "Jack of All Trades" tasks is shown in Figure 4.4.

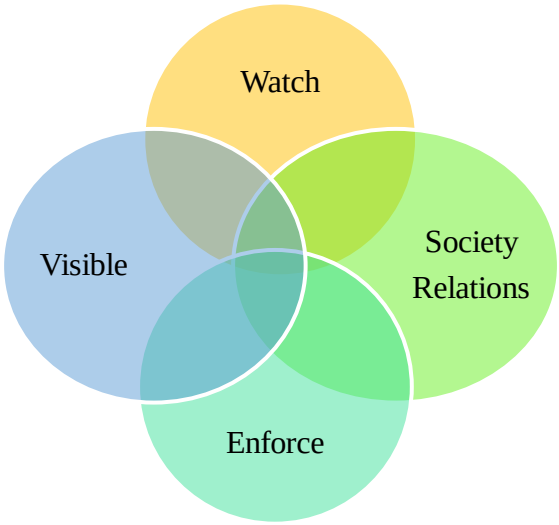

Figure 4.4. Jack of all trades.

The main job of Sunflower PD officers is to watch the community and ensure that all members and visitors obey the law and are safe. While the researcher was on patrol riding with Sergeant Burke, the sergeant spoke with a young boy around eight or nine. Just as the sun had begun to set and the young boy was on his way home from baseball practice. Sergeant Burke stopped the boy to visit with him about his lack of reflectors and light on his bike. The sergeant explained to the boy that traffic on the road in front of the school is heavy, and without the proper illumination gear on his bike, he may get hit by a car. Sergeant Burke said, "it's about promoting positive relationships with community members." He surmised that this young boy would not only know the officers care about his safety, but he will also be more likely to approach law enforcement in the future after a positive experience.

The members of Sunflower PD also enforce the laws of Kansas and the community. Evident by the 25 cases the law enforcement officers took throughout April and through the ride-alongs observations of traffic stops, this shows the officers are active enforcement participants in the enforcement mindset of law enforcement. However, the officers demonstrated numerous

ways of flexibility in enforcing those laws. The vast array of enforcement is shown by giving warnings, simply educating the public of the laws, or acknowledging the attempt of the citizens to follow the law, as when an individual attempted to stop their vehicle at a stop sign but did not come to a complete stop.

Part of the enforcement activities the Sunflower PD officers engage in is the act of being visible. The visibility of the officers reduces the amount of crime in the community. It, in essence, acts as a deterrent to those who want to commit crimes. Both Sergeant Burke and Officer Paul would park their patrol units in public, visible areas, so citizens and visitors to the community would know where the officers were. Officer Paul usually parks his patrol unit near the town's busiest intersection, where those coming into Sunflower would see him. Officer Paul said his approach was to be visible, and community members would do the correct thing. Sergeant Burke had a similar approach but preferred to sit in front of the high school on what he felt was the busiest road in town.

Both officers, who tend to work the night shifts, wanted to be visible when cars entered the community. Sergeant Burke said, "if someone was going to do something wrong, this may prevent it." The officers believe being visible would prevent anyone wishing to commit a crime to move on to the next town and leave Sunflower alone. Sergeant Burke said, "I turn off the lights and the car, roll the windows down and listen. You can hear a lot. If glass is breaking or people need help, you'll hear it." Officer Paul also sat with his lights off in another part of town, but he kept his patrol unit running. On the last ride-along observation of this research, Officer Paul was excited to try out a new dashboard cover to cover the internal lights of his patrol vehicle when he had his unit blacked out. Officer Paul said, "the lights in my unit are so bright, so I got this piece of felt to try and black out [the lights] more." He later said, "I can hear more

when people don't see me right away." The officers of Sunflower value visibility; however, at night, they sometimes take more of a reserved approach to visibility. Chief Tanner and Sergeant Burke commented that the day shift was about community relations, and once people went inside the job, they switched to crime deterrence.

The officers of Sunflower PD promote community relationships. One day Chief Tanner went to mail a letter at the post office and informed the researcher he would be right back. However, upon leaving the post office, citizens approached him to speak with him about various issues. The mailing of the letter took 45 minutes. The chief also enjoys meeting with a local group of community members who have coffee at the local gas station every morning. Chief Tanner said, "this is how I find out about things; if the community is talking about it, these guys will know." One citizen often likes to tell the latest conspiracy theory he has heard about, while other farmers tend not to say much and listen to everything. Chief Tanner stated he enjoyed meeting with the group, "no matter how crazy the conspiracy theories are, it’s good to know what the community is talking about. I stay informed this way."

Chief Tanner spoke of other duties he must complete as a law enforcement officer in Sunflower. Every morning Chief Tanner assists with the elementary school crosswalk duty. He said, "this year, when the seniors graduated, I was thinking I walked every one of them across the crosswalk, that means something." Chief Tanner has also been known to plow the driveways of citizens who are elderly when the community gets significant snowfall. He said, "they can't do it themselves for various reasons, so I will go out there and do it." Chief Tanner is also known for clearing the gutters of the community when they become full of debris. He states, "I keep a rake and shovel in the trunk [of his patrol unit], so I can clean gutters." Chief Tanner said, "the backed-up gutters cause problems for the community, it becomes a danger, so I clean them." He

spoke of how certain storm drains may become clogged with debris during the winter, and if water backup and freezes, it can cause an icy spot in that area, and the officers will have to work accidents. Chief Tanner implied it was part of his job because he was looking out for his community, and that is the job of a law enforcement officer in Sunflower.

4.1.5 Theme 5: Community Relationships

The fifth theme in this ethnography was "Community Relationships." In Sunflower PD, the community can be divided into three groups 1) the public of Sunflower; 2) the law enforcement officers in the cooperative to which Sunflower PD belongs; and 3) the officers of the county law enforcement agency. Sunflower PD operates in the cooperative with three other towns serving as the backup to officers in these communities. The relationship between Sunflower PD, the public of Sunflower, and the other law enforcement agencies is depicted in Figure 4.5.

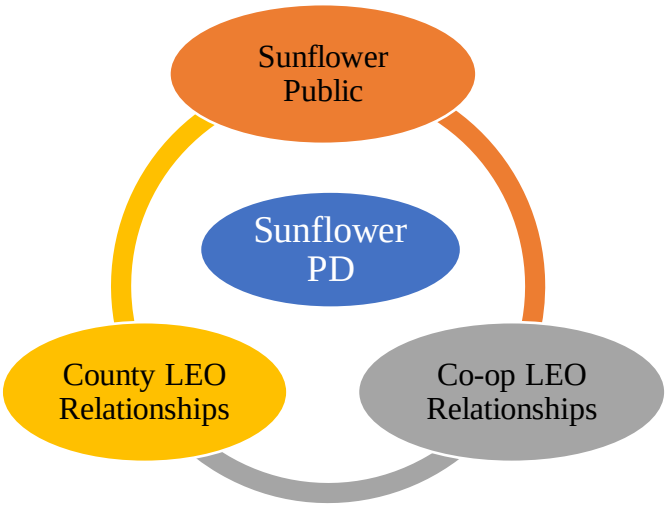

Figure 4.5. Sunflower PD's community relationships.

The officers of Sunflower PD must first interact with the community in which they serve. The officers of Sunflower PD have a dynamic relationship with the community. Listen to how

Officer Paul describes the job of Sunflower PD as a job of service: "We're here to protect and serve, but we have an opportunity to really serve the citizens of this community, but it doesn't mean we are going to make everyone happy."

Sunflower PD officers often irritate the teenagers in the community. While on patrol one morning during an observational ride-along, Chief Tanner described how teenagers typically avoid the officers. He stated that teenagers would text their friends and tell them where the officer is sitting in town. The students on their way to school will then take an alternative route depending on where the officer sits. On this particular morning, a report of reckless driving alerted the chief to a situation. When the driver could not be located, Chief Tanner contacted students outside the school building to see if they could identify the vehicle in question. He said the teenagers were unaware of the vehicle and declared, "students will act like they don't know but will spread the word to the reckless driver he is being looked for." Since Chief Tanner is the only officer working during the day in Sunflower, he finds the maintenance department helpful in situations. He commented, "they will let me know if they see something," and then Chief Tanner can follow up. Chief Tanner told the story about how the Sunflower maintenance department caught individuals drag racing in front of the maintenance shop with their cameras one evening. The officers followed up with those individuals thanks to the Sunflower maintenance department's assistance.

Officers also talk to the community members of Sunflower. At times this could be a group gathered for coffee, citizens who have heard something outside of the post office, or children who will approach the patrol units of the officers. From the researcher's lens, the citizens appeared to enjoy speaking with the officers. Officer Paul says the community is very engaged in everything the officers of Sunflower PD do daily. Officer Paul states that the citizens

are "always engaged, always aware, always looking" at what the officers are doing. Several officers commented that many citizens were more than likely trying to figure out whom the person was riding in the passenger's seat during the researcher's ride-alongs.

Chief Tanner describes the officers' actions as trying to "assist them" [the citizen] in whatever they have going on. He spoke of how an officer would assist citizens in filing a police report or on a traffic stop and about the officer's roles in the community. He quickly dismissed the word educate when asked if the officer educated the public. He stated, "there are smart people out here. Educate could come across as offensive." This shows that the officers are very aware of not only the citizens' needs but the community's accomplishments as well. Relationship building is vital for officers in Sunflower PD with their citizens. Officer Paul states, "I think we all do that well [talk to people]. We all have people to talk to, and that helps build up [relationships] with others."

Officers of Sunflower PD also have relationships with their neighboring law enforcement agencies in the three surrounding towns. Sergeant Burke works for two of those agencies part-time. He describes the cooperative as a "bubble," explaining that everything stays within the smaller community of the county. Sergeant Burke and Officer Paul reported meeting with older or more experienced officers in the other communities. They would also communicate with the other officers throughout the night via text messaging or phone calls. Chief Tanner's job as the chief of police and constant interactions with citizens made it difficult for him to meet up with the officers in other communities during the day. During the ride-along observation, this researcher journeyed with the officers as they met with their counterparts in the neighboring towns. Officers discussed what was happening in the other departments and with fellow officers and shared information about cases or other events that officers should be aware of. Officers

often shared a meal and made dinner plans for additional nights when both would be working. While the officers did not comment on the change in stress levels, they were observed to have a lighter demeanor in their interaction with the other officers than the public they encountered.

The younger officers that worked in the neighboring departments and members of the county law enforcement agency were missing from these meetings. The officers of Sunflower PD had critical words to say about younger officers who work for other agencies in the cooperative and the county law enforcement officers. Sergeant Burke states, "they want to enforce more than a mature/experienced officer." Sergeant Burke commented how the younger officers in a neighboring town within the cooperative constantly ran traffic; in other words, the younger officers continuously looked for traffic violations to perform traffic stops. The sergeant commented how this upset many officers in the cooperative. He was asked to speculate on why the younger officers ran so much traffic instead of engaging in community policing activities, and he said, "they have justification under the law," but implied they did not understand how to inform citizens instead of issuing citations. Later in the evening, the topic returned to younger officers and their many traffic stops. He said:

> They use words like ‘boredom’ when they are looking to stop someone. It’s not good to have younger officers in a rural community. Other officers are not wanting to even do a traffic stop with that [a younger] officer.

Sergeant Burke commented on how he felt many new officers were looking for action and not the life of rural policing. Officer Paul states that younger officers "are not going after [the] crime, and they make the job of law enforcement harder." This frustration with younger officers also applies to the younger county law enforcement officers.

Sunflower PD has an agreement with the county law enforcement agency to work cases involving juveniles or cases classified as a felony. However, this is where the relationship ends with the county. The officers discussed how many of the older officers would stop and talk to the Sunflower PD officers, but many of the younger officers do not engage with Sunflower PD officers and the community. Sergeant Burke said:

> If an [older] officer [from the county] was driving through [Sunflower], they would stop and talk to you. Now the new graduates of the [county's law enforcement agency] will drive by and not introduce themselves to the officer which would have never use to happen. If they [the younger officers] are not doing it to us [the officers], they are not doing it to their fellow citizens.

According to the officers, gone are the days when information would be shared with a county law enforcement agency on the side of the road. Also gone are the days of exchanging numbers with officers. Chief Tanner states that the old officers will still stop by and speak with officers, but the younger ones will not.

4.1.6 Theme 6: Selective Enforcement of Crimes for Teenagers

The sixth theme that evolved from the ethnographic data collected on-site at Sunflower PD was Selective Enforcement of Crime for Teenagers. When speaking to the officers, they commented on the laws they would not enforce regarding the youth and teenagers of the community. It became apparent that some crimes in Sunflower are enforced with teenagers while others are not. Sunflower PD officers would deal with crimes involving a violent nature or offenses considered severe crimes. However, if the behavior improves, selected enforcement issues, such as traffic violations or actions in which the victim is willing to work with the teenager, are not enforced. Chief Tanner describes this concept as trying to help and educate

teenagers. He said they would let them slide with a crime or find another way instead of "ruining their lives." Sunflower PD officers focus on education over law enforcement action, but it remains a balancing act, as depicted in Figure 4.6.

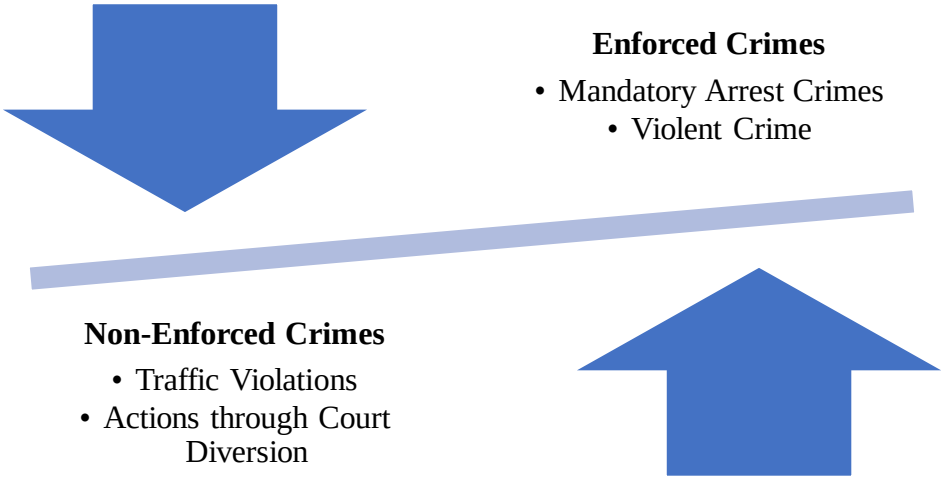

Figure 4.6. Selected enforcement of teenage crime.

The officers of Sunflower PD are not quick to issue traffic citations to its teenage citizens. They are, however, quick to educate the youth on the issues of proper traffic laws. Sergeant Burke stated, "we want to change the habits" of the drivers, and the goal of Sunflower PD officers is to "enforce safe habits."

Part of that mission of enforcing "safe habits" is being visible to drivers during peak traffic times while not issuing citations. Officer Paul argued that he has more of a deterrence effect on the younger citizens by sitting his patrol vehicle at a busy intersection and having people see him versus writing tickets. He also acknowledged that he does not get complaints from citizens, arguing that they know he is watching but allowing them to do their business. He also proclaims that "teenagers are the worst drivers" because they are not used to the traffic law, and "that's why they [the officers] cut them [the teenagers] a break."

On the other hand, Sergeant Burke argues that stopping vehicles is his "primetime to engage in community policing." Explaining the laws to teenagers is an essential job of officers during traffic stops. Sergeant Burke also talked about rewarding the effort of trying to follow the law versus actually following the law. While on patrol, a car slowed down and came to a rolling stop before proceeding through an intersection. In this instance, Sergeant Burke said they tried, so there was no need to pull the teenage driver over. Sergeant Burke articulated that while not made public, any officers tend to reward any efforts of citizens who attempt to follow the law. The other officers of Sunflower PD seemed to echo similar sentiments as well.

For Sunflower's younger residents, the nature of the crime and their age may have benefits to breaking the law. They might get away with it, depending on the offense. During one traffic stop, Officer Paul spoke to a young lady about her expired vehicle tag. Returning to his patrol unit, he recanted, "mom got thrown under the bus on that one." Officer Paul quickly acknowledged, "I'm sure that will be taken care of by tomorrow." Officer Paul further explained that the young driver had said her mom was the one who paid the tags, and she did not know the tag was expired. Officer Paul said, "the driver probably went home and told her mom immediately." According to Officer Paul, citizens respond quickly to complying with the law when they realize they have violated it. Chief Tanner describes these actions as the citizens policing themselves. He noted:

> They don't want embarrassment brought to them or their family heritage. They don't want that embarrassment, so nine of ten people out here want to do what [is] right. Not only for themselves but because they know it is a rural area.

Similarly, the offender's age matters to Sunflower PD, and the officers want to do the right thing for their citizens. In crimes that are not violent, and officers are not required to arrest

under Kansas's mandatory arrest laws, Sunflower PD will try to find other ways to make restitution to victims. The officers know that taking a young person to juvenile detention increases the chances of that individual continuing down a path of crime. The officers of Sunflower PD were quick to point out that they did not want to start the criminal record of a young person. The commonly held belief is that if an officer charged a younger person with a crime, this would affect the outcome of the teenager's life trajectory. Officers make it a point to explore other options that can be explored, so they do not want to give a 15 or 16-year-old a one-way ticket to juvenile detention. One recalled example was a teenager tossing a rock at a school bus window when it set out overnight, and the rock broke the window. Chief Tanner said the goal is "try and keep them out of court if the victim agrees." In this case, the victim, the school district, agreed with the plan that the teenager would reimburse the school district for replacing the bus window. No charges were filed in this case since this was under the teenager's parents' supervision, and the student avoided the court system.

4.2 Lesser Emerging Themes

Through the interviews and field observations with the members of Sunflower PD, two lesser emerging themes emerged, but data saturation was not at a point to form and name these final themes. Nevertheless, this data helps in fostering a fuller understanding of the culture of Sunflower PD. A discussion of these lesser emerging themes follows.

4.2.1 Lesser Emerging Theme: Citizens have a Right to their Guns

In American society, guns have always been a hot topic issue. In a rural community like Sunflower, this also remains true. While speaking to the officers of Sunflower PD, the officers brought up the topic of guns and how nearly every citizen of Sunflower owns a firearm. The discussion allowed officers to speculate if the federal government mandated officers take

firearms from citizens and what might be their response. Chief Tanner states, "I wouldn't do it." He continued by articulating that his former mayor once told him that if the federal government required local law enforcement to seize guns, and he complied in assisting the federal government in such actions, "the mayor stated he would fire me if I did it." Sergeant Burke also held a similar sentiment. He stated, "if it's a violation of the U.S. Constitution, then I would not enforce the order. I would resign." Upon inquiring who determines what constitutes a violation of the U.S. Constitution, Sergeant Burke stated that he did. The implication was that each officer was empowered to decide what was and was not allowed under the U.S. Constitution.

4.2.2 Lesser Emerging Theme: Lack of Community Resources

The second lesser emerging theme was the lack of resources for the community of Sunflower. Two officers agreed that the community needed access to more community resources to assist the citizens of Sunflower. The areas in which some officers felt the community lacked resources were mental health and drugs.

Chief Tanner advocated for the need for mental health hospitals in the county to help the citizens of Sunflower and commented on how this effects the citizens when those resources are not available. Chief Tanner stated, "the government is taking away mental health hospitals." He continued speaking about what happens to these community members if mental health resources are unavailable. He spoke about families who have called requesting support. However, Chief Tanner stated that if officers do not have the resources, "a lot of those people end up in jail" when the law is broken instead of getting the help needed. Sergeant Burke also shared the sentiments stating, "we do need more resources for mental illness," and recalled how the county formerly employed officers who would work with social workers, and the pair would respond to

calls when officers came across a mental health situation. However, the county discontinued the program.

Sergeant Burke also commented that it was not just mental health issues the community needed help with but also support for those suffering from drug addiction. Sergeant Burke spoke of the crime when an individual who suffers from drug addiction would commit a crime to have money to feed the drug addiction. He called this a "snowball effect," meaning that an individual suffering from addiction will commit a crime, typically theft, to feed the addiction.

Officer Paul said he did not feel this was an issue for the community. He commented that other communities outside of the county need more help with mental health and drug-related issues, and since Sunflower is in the same county as a metro community, they were many resources for individuals to find help. Officer Paul stated, "this county has a lot of resources if the person is capable of helping themselves." He further commented, "other rural communities are in more need; we have detox [centers], a psych ward, battered women's shelters, VA [Veteran's Affairs] crisis lines."

4.3 Validity and Trustworthiness of the Data

To maintain the validity and trustworthiness of the data collected in this research, the researcher employed two validation strategies by Creswell and Poth (2018) throughout the research process. The strategies were 1) corroborating evidence through triangulation of multiple data sources and 2) member checking with the participants.

Data was collected from officer interviews, ride-along observations, and follow-up conversations. Pertinent themes from collected data were identified, and emergent patterns began to show the culture of Sunflower PD. This information was taken to the participants in the study. Officers were asked about statements other officers had made while trying to maintain a sense of

discretion. The participants were asked if they agreed with the perceived themes and ideas the researcher had observed from the information present in both the ride-alongs field observations and interviews. This analysis began immediately after the first interview and during the ride-along observations. This process was conducted according to the data analysis process outlined in Chapter 3 by Moustakas (1994). Through this process, some potential themes could be isolated to a single officer's experience based on their training, past work history, or individual experience. Other possible themes were also eliminated because they represent a specific officer's view on policing and not the collective lived experience. While some of this information proved interesting, it was not in line with the other officers, so those themes were excluded from this research. Finally, through further conversations and field observations of the officers, themes could be condensed into the six themes presented. All information presented in this research came from the triangulation of multiple data sources. In this case, the multiple data sources were observations from each officer and three separate in-depth interviews conducted between the researcher and the participants, followed by follow-up conversations for clarity and to expand on additional information.

After establishing common and recurring themes, an additional member-checking process was conducted when the researcher met with the members of Sunflower PD individually. The officers were presented with six themes—each initial member checking session lasted one to two hours. The officers were asked if they agreed with the themes presented and were given a chance to expand upon the theme or to offer critiques of the themes. Immediately three themes were agreed to, and officers offered more quotes to elaborate on each theme. The remaining themes were not agreed to due to the researcher using language with which the participants did not agree. Officers were then allowed to describe those themes in their own words. The remaining

themes were reexamined with the officer's new statements and reworked along with consulting the initial transcripts of interviews and the researcher's field notes. The themes in question were reworked and presented to the officers in additional one-to-two-hour sessions. The officers agreed to the corrected themes, and each was again allowed to give quotes and stories to expand upon the revised themes.

Four additional themes began to develop during the re-examination of the data. Two themes, on which all officers agreed, could be organized in the preexisting current themes, and two lesser emerging themes were established. There was no unanimous consent for the two lesser emerging themes, so they were not organized into the six established themes of the study.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

5.1 Discussion

This qualitative study examined the culture of one rural Kansas law enforcement agency using an ethnographic approach. This study sought to answer the following overarching research question: What is police culture as described and constructed by rural Kansas law enforcement officers? As well as exploring the following sub-questions 1) What experiences in law enforcement officers' work exemplify police culture; 2) What is the core structure and/or stages of police culture; 3) Do forces like the news media, politics, and agency or community leadership affect police culture; and 4) How do officers' ethnographic descriptions of police culture relate to existing theories?

By conducting narrative interviews and ride-alongs (in field observations) with an entire rural Kansas law enforcement agency, given the pseudonym of Sunflower PD, over a two-month timeframe, six themes and two lesser emerging themes were discovered. Validation and trustworthiness checks with participants substantiated the themes. In addition, there were two lesser emerging themes flowing from the data. While data saturation was not obtained on these two lesser emergent themes, they are discussed because they add further insight and understanding of rural law enforcement culture at the study site.

The following sections take up a discussion of the findings and conclusions of this ethnographic study. In addition, the interaction of the themes describing rural law enforcement culture of Sunflower PD are discussed.

5.1.1 Theme 1: The Law is at the Center

The first theme of Sunflower PD was named "The Law is at the Center." This theme focuses on all the law enforcement officers holding the law at the center of what they do. Sunflower PD has three officers who have their way of doing things, and each officer has their own personality, but they are united in the single purpose of enforcing the law.

Officers do not always see each other as they work different shifts and often work on different days of the week. However, occasionally, overlapping shifts or activities bring all the officers together. The enforcement of the law and the service to the citizens unites the officer in a joint mission. Wilson's (1975) "service style" of policing can be described as law enforcement focusing on service to the citizens by helping and informing the citizens instead of taking policing actions such as an arrest or issuing a citation. This type of service is fundamental to the approach of Sunflower PD officers and this theme.

5.1.2 Theme 2: Superman of Policing Identity

The second theme from this ethnographic study was named the "Superman of Policing Identity." The "Superman of Policing Identity" applies to only the chief of police of Sunflower PD. It contains the elements of the chief as a community-oriented individual, a law enforcement officer, and a family man with a personal life.

While this type of policing identity applying to the chief of police is lacking from the larger collective of literature, some of the elements of this theme can be found in combinations of Wilson's (1975) styles of policing. The chief of police is very much an individual who aims to serve the citizens of the Sunflower community. This also embodies what Wilson describes as a "legalistic style" of policing, focusing on explaining every action of the job of a law enforcement officer. The chief believes an individual must understand his job and actions to conduct his job

correctly. Nevertheless, the chief also embodies some elements of the "watchman style" of policing, which focuses on the law enforcement officer as a patrol officer who watches the community and acts as a deterring force. This style of policing has little room for advancement, and the chief of police role is as high as the chief can go in Sunflower PD unless he leaves the agency and moves to a larger agency. Sunflower's chief expects to do that job and will do it to the best of his ability. The chief also cares about the citizens of Sunflower, and in his words, he "cares too much."

The chief of police role is unique. It is unclear if this is a unique position that multiple chiefs of police fall into or if it is unique only to Sunflower PD. During the study, one officer mentioned that the way the chief of police behaves in Sunflower is in line with how other chiefs of police that he knows to behave as well. This theme needs further research to determine if it applies to other chiefs of police outside Sunflower, but it may show that many chiefs of police embody many of the same philosophies and actions that all rural police chiefs in Kansas embody. A further study would need to be conducted to see if the theme in this study can be applied to multiple chiefs of police.

5.1.3 Theme 3: Nature of Crime

The third theme found in this ethnographic study was named the "Nature of Crime." The officers of Sunflower PD described the nature of crimes theme as including reported crimes, non-reported crimes, areas of concern for the officers, and citizens who fail to call the 911 call center.

Sunflower PD only has crimes reported that will not bring shame to the families of Sunflower, according to officers of Sunflower PD. Officers know statistically that crimes such as domestic violence and sexual assaults occur but are not reported to law enforcement. Research

shows that many of these crimes are not reported for various reasons. Many Sunflower PD officers understand that shame, trauma, and the victim blaming themselves might be why these crimes are not reported. This acknowledgment is congruent with current research in regards to reporting sexual assaults to law enforcement (Johnson & Lewis, 2022). However, a more significant issue is known to the Sunflower PD officers. This issue is the importance of the family name in the community. In Sunflower, many value their family name and will not report a crime because it may reflect poorly on their family name by other community members. Officers report that many incidents not reported to law enforcement are incidents an individual can take care of themselves, something that will not cost much money to replace, or crimes that would bring shame or insult to the family name. Crimes such as domestic violence and sexual assaults are often associated with labels that would label the victim as a survivor. According to Johnson and Lewis (2022), "Victim-survivors' top reasons for non-reporting were dominated by the themes of fear, shame, and a lack of faith in the criminal justice system" (p. 4307). Sunflower PD officers say crimes are not reported if citizens believe something could damage the family name. Some current residents who reside in Sunflower can trace their town roots to their ancestors who founded the town nearly 100 years ago, and everyone knows who these families are, and they do not want to disgrace that family name, even if they are the victim.

This same idea describes members of the community who did not want to call the 911 center to report a crime. They want to report the crime directly to law enforcement and will drive around Sunflower for several minutes to hours looking for a law enforcement officer to report a crime or suspicious activity to, instead of calling the 911 call center. Residents know they will often run into an officer, according to officers, citizens will search for them driving around town. Officers also commented that citizens may not always know what to report to the 911 call center

and do not wish to be embarrassed to call for something that is not considered a big deal and seek out officers individually. The officers, however, still encourage residents to call the 911 center for a fast response.

Therefore, Sunflower sees the underreporting of crime to prevent their family name from tarnishing. However, for the officers of Sunflower PD, it makes it harder for them to do their job when they do not find out about a crime that has occurred until weeks or months later, if at all.

5.1.4 Theme 4: Jack of All Trades

The fourth theme that emerged from this study was named "Jack of All Trades." The officers of Sunflower PD watch, enforce, are visible, and promote community relationships. The town council typically hires people known to the town that represents a "good old boy" system. The officer's ability to watch and handle crime with the discretion of their judgments is again reminiscent of Wilson's (1975) view on the "watchman style" of policing. Once again, the officer maintains visibility and ensures the public is safe.

The officer as the "Jack of All Trades" also fits into Wilson's (1975) "service style" of policing. The service style of policing focuses on helping the individual citizen with whatever task must be completed and not enforcing the law. This type of policing is evident in the various tasks the chief of police and other officers carry out. Chief Tanner spoke openly about being available to plow the driveways of elderly citizens when it snows, and how he kept a rake and shovel in the trunk of his patrol unit to clear the gutters when the need arose. The chief is also quick to speak to a citizen and will talk to a citizen for 45 minutes if this is what the citizen requests. The officers of Sunflower PD are ultimately there to serve the needs of the citizens in whatever capacity that is called to do so. Once again, these police functions underpin both the "watchman style" and the "service style" of policing as outlined by Wilson’s (1975) classic work.

5.1.5 Theme 5: Community Relationships

The fifth theme in the study was named "Community Relationships." This theme focuses on the officers of Sunflower PD's interactions with the public, the members of the cooperative that Sunflower PD belongs to, and the county law enforcement officers. While the last two groups mentioned are fellow law enforcement officers, the citizens of Sunflower PD play a vital role in the relationship between law enforcement and the community of Sunflower. Perhaps the best meaning of this theme is described by Officer Paul: "we're here to protect and serve, but we have an opportunity to really serve the citizens of this community." Law enforcement officers embrace service values and aim to assist all they interact with daily. This daily interaction is supported by what is known in the literature about how other rural law enforcement officers operated. Law enforcement in rural communities typically gravitates to the public in which they serve. Officers in Sunflower will join a group of citizens who are talking or stop their patrol unit and talk to residents who are outside their homes or walking the streets of Sunflower. Often, these events determine what an officer deals with during a shift (Flanagan, 1985), and this remains the same in Sunflower. Officers will typically receive information during their shifts from citizens about different events that are occurring or have occurred in Sunflower such as a suspicious person or vehicle or information relating to past events that have occurred, which leads the officer to follow-up on that information or relate it to other officers involved in ongoing investigations during their shift.

This theme again shows how Sunflower officers are citizen-oriented and bring a service function to law enforcement (Wilson, 1975). Law enforcement interacts with the public more in their shifts and spends most of the time with the public while interacting with many elements of the community policing model of policing (Cain, 1971; Liederbach & Frank, 2003; Pelfrey,

2007). The classic literature introducing community policing generally describes it as a strategy or philosophy requiring the police and citizens to work together to solve contemporary community problems related to crime, fear of crime, social and physical disorder and general neighborhood conditions. Community policing centers on the idea that achieving these goals require the police to develop new relationships with citizens and involve them in efforts to improve the overall quality of life in their neighborhoods and larger community. The law enforcement officers take on a role of being more community-oriented and the citizens take on a role of being more involved with assisting the police with information. Officers become partners with the community in maintaining social order (Goldstein, 1987, 1990; Trojanowicz, 1990; Trojanowicz & Bucqueroux, 1990).

5.1.6 Theme 6: Selective Enforcement of Crimes for Teenagers

The sixth theme in this ethnographic study was named "Selective Enforcement of Crime for Teenagers." In this theme, the officers of Sunflower PD established they would attempt to develop a way of giving teenagers a break from a crime that did not involve a violent nature. Officers would observe traffic offenses committed by teenagers. Officers often met these offenses with warnings or would ignore the offense if an individual appeared to be a teenager who attempted to follow the law. One such example observed during the ride-along observations was a teenager who did not bring their vehicle to a complete stop at a stop sign, but instead slowed down and rolled through the stop sign. The officer noted an attempt had been made to make a complete stop, so he decided to ignore the failure to stop violation and did not conduct a traffic stop.

Furthermore, evidence of working with the victim of a non-violent crime to establish restitution and not making a formal report of the crime for younger citizens was the agreed to practice.

Some officers preferred to engage in the "watchman style" of policing, which focuses attention on keeping the peace between citizens and not legal actions, such as writing tickets to younger drivers. This also mirrors the "service style" that Wilson (1975) put forth, which engages a more community-oriented approach to law enforcement. One officer believed this was his "primetime to engage in community policing" on a traffic stop. This aligns with Pelfrey (2007) who argues that many of the roles differ from the officers in urban areas. For this officer, it is about informing the citizens of the law so they know better for the next time.

Each officer, however, can make their own decisions. Congruent with community policing philosophies, not every problem in the criminal justice system requires an act by law enforcement. The officers of Sunflower can make this decision on their own as an individual and are not dictated by agency guidelines.

5.1.7 Lesser Emerging Theme: Citizens Have a Right to Their Guns

This study found that law enforcement in Sunflower PD believe citizens have a right to their guns. Two officers claimed they would not confiscate guns if the federal or state government gave them the order. One officer stated that he would not do something he viewed as unconstitutional, and he was the one who decided if something was constitutional.

This finding is similar to the research presented by Holman and Farris and reported by Chammah (2021), which reported that 26.8% of sheriffs strongly agreed that their "authority supersedes the federal or state government." These findings appear to hold in Sunflower as well. One officer threatened to quit, and even the former mayor stated he would fire an officer if they

agreed to confiscate a citizen's guns in an order from the state or federal government. Rural law enforcement in this study shows elements of extremism on the issue of guns. Officers in Sunflower show a willingness not to support the law or interpret it as they see fit and not according to the governing authorities in the state or federal government. However, officers were not asked about their views on enforcement for other issues, so this cannot be implied for anything other than guns.

5.1.8 Lesser Emerging Theme: Lack of Community Resources

One concern for officers was the lack of mental health resources that were once available in the community that are no longer due to funding reductions from the county. Officers expressed concerns about taking an individual suffering from a mental health crisis to jail instead of having a social worker come to the scene and help the individual in crisis, which had happened in the past. The concern was not only for the citizens who would be in crisis but for the other residents of Sunflower, as taking someone to jail would result in about an hour round trip, depending on traffic for the officer. The concern was that the officer would be away a significant amount of time from patrol duties in Sunflower.

One other concern for officers was the increase in fentanyl and the effects of drugs in the community and its relation to crime. One officer reported the "snowball effect," in which those addicted to drugs look for a quick steal from unlocked vehicles which in turn causes the officers to have to deal with an uptick in crime.

Sunflower PD has limited jurisdiction, resources, and abilities to help its citizens, in spite of the fact that they view themselves as the first line of defense to carry out this mandate. More research would need to be done to determine the resources needed in a rural community. However, based on past research, officers are typically not away from the public for long and

law enforcement depends on the citizens to give them their daily tasks (Flanagan, 1985; Liederbach & Frank, 2003).

5.2 Theoretical Implications

This study confirms what many researchers have previously found in regard to rural law enforcement culture. However, it places this data in Kansas, where no known published research has been conducted previously. This study demonstrates that with the proper gatekeepers to introduce or get the researcher into the law enforcement site of interest, along with extended observation and interviewing, an ethnographic portrait can be constructed of rural law enforcement culture in one small agency. Studies such as this one, could be replicated to see if these findings can be transferred to other similarly situated rural law enforcement agencies.

The work of Wilson (1975) is germane to the findings of this study. Wilson (1975) discusses what he labeled as "Varieties of Police Behavior." It is salient that many of the varieties of police behavior that Wilson proposed were present within Sunflower PD. As part of Wilson's typologies, he describes the "watchman style," the "legalistic style," and the "service style" of policing.

The "watchman style" of policing deals "with situations that do not involve 'serious' crime as if order maintenance rather than law enforcement were the principal function" (Wilson, 1975, p. 140). The officer is about maintaining order rather than overt actions by the police departments." According to Wilson, "juveniles are 'expected' to misbehave" under this style of policing, and infractions are "best ignored or treated informally." (p. 140-141). Law enforcement officers are known to judge the severity of the crime and not just maintain a simple maintenance viewpoint of the community. According to Wilson, these communities typically value morality

and the rule of law. The watchman law enforcement officer dares not to "'rock the boat'" (p. 144) and counts on the officer's relationship with the public to solve the problem.

Wilson also found that officers who engage in this type of policing tend to engage in alternative methods of policing. The law is not as black and white with those officers who engage in the "watchman style" as other officers may make it out to be. If possible, the officer will allow alternative dispute resolutions to solve the problems between citizens or family and friends. The "watchman style" officers are typically "locally recruited, paid low salaries, [and] expected to have second jobs" (p. 151). They tend to be individuals who are locally known by the community or the council, and they do not typically cause waves in the community with their enforcement style attempting to blend amongst the community. Officers also do not receive special training for special assignments as no forward or upward advancement exist in the agencies that employ "watchman style" officer.

The "legalistic style" of policing is when the officer "will act on the whole, as if there were a single standard of community conduct – that which the law prescribes – rather than different standards [for some groups]" (p. 172). However, this style of policing does not mean that an officer necessarily regards "all laws as equally important" (p. 173). Instead, an officer can determine their own viewpoint on each law. An officer also has the flexibility on how to handle enforcement action. An officer will act on his own accord in the "legalistic style" on what the officer believes can be changed. An officer who embraces the "legalistic style" will conduct traffic stops to contact a driver and check the documents of the driver and those of the vehicle, along with making a visual inspection for drugs, weapons, or any other illegal material.

According to Wilson, an agency will "issue tickets at a high rate, detain and arrest a high portion of juvenile offenders, act vigorously against illicit enterprise, and make a large number of

misdemeanor arrests" (p. 172) when the agency as a whole subscribes to the "legalistic style" of policing.

As the chief of police who embraces the "legalistic style," the chief will “induce [the officers] to handle commonplace situations as they were matters of law enforcement rather than order maintenance” (p. 172). The chief will typically demand law enforcement officers enforce the laws because the chief will want all laws enforced. "The chief knows that the law is a device to achieve certain social objectives – order, peace, security, certainty, and liberty" (p. 182). However, the chief and agency exist "often in a political environment" (p. 196) that requires the chief always to maintain awareness.

According to Wilson (1975), in the "service style" of policing, “the police take seriously all requests for either law enforcement or order maintenance but are less likely to respond by making an arrest or imposing formal sanctions (p. 200). This type of policing typically takes place in middle-class communities. The community's citizens expect their chief of police to protect them and their interests. Wilson (1975) states:

> The common definition of public order [is] against minor and occasional threats posed by unruly teenagers and 'outsiders.' Though there will be family quarrels, they will be few in number, private in nature, and constrained by general understanding requiring seemly conduct (p. 200).

The number of incidents in the community will be lower, and law enforcement will be able to focus on "managing traffic, regulating juveniles, and providing services." (p. 200).

Officers who work in an agency that adapts to the "service style" of policing typically have fewer radio calls put out by the dispatching center, making it "more leisurely" and "peaceful," allowing officers to detect "apparent threats to the order" [of the community]. (p.

200-201). Officers are expected to take a role in the community and help the citizens in need. According to Wilson (1975), they must have the traits of "department store salesman, local merchants, and public officials – courtesy, a neat appearance, and a deferential manner" (p. 201). Officers are given discretion on how to do their job, and their patrol decisions are not second-guessed.

More serious crimes are handled quickly, and those who may be suspects of a crime are "watched carefully or questioned" (p. 201). Offenses such as traffic and minor infractions are handled with warnings or lectures for juveniles. Traffic tickets may be issued, but arrests are avoided if possible. Officers are expected to be “courteous” and be willing to "accept abuse" from citizens, and this should not affect the outcome of a citizen’s penalty (p. 206).

Law enforcement agencies focus on hiring officers who will not earn complaints, and there is the possibility for special training for these officers. According to Wilson, “competition for promotions is stressed’ (p. 208). The drawbacks to the "service style" of policing are that order is typically maintained more than the law, and some officers may show favoritism to their friends instead of enforcing the law equally.

Each officer in Sunflower PD did express elements of one or a combination of multiple styles of policing. This concludes that Wilson’s styles are prominent in the law enforcement culture of Sunflower PD.

The results of this ethnographic study have shown some similarities to previously cited research presented in the literature review which are further discussed below.

Cain (1971) found that law enforcement interacts with the public more in their shifts than their urban counterparts. While a comparison was not completed with a nearby urban agency to

establish this finding to be accurate, the officers of Sunflower PD were documented to interact with many, if not all, of the citizens they encountered.

Flanagan (1985) found the duties of law enforcement officers are often determined by the citizens they encounter during an officer's shift. Several of the daily duties that officers in Sunflower PD encountered were at the direction of the citizens, from the report of a reckless teenage driver to reports from citizens in a coffee group at the local gas station, to a young boy riding his bike and being waived down by an officer. The officers encountered citizens and found some information that led to the next task the officer would engage in before the conclusion of their shift.

Liederbach and Frank (2003) argued that law enforcement often is only away from the citizen 1.2% of the time. While a formal calculation of the law enforcement officer's time in Sunflower was not conducted, many public interactions and even the time of a quick task took longer than expected based on the needs of the public the officer encountered. For example, the mailing of a letter by the chief was planned only to take a few moments; however, because he was stopped by a citizen who wanted to speak with him, the task took near 45 minutes.

Weisheit, Wells, and Falcone (1994) discuss how officers have no privacy and receive calls from citizens when off duty. Perhaps Chief Tanner's experience best proves these findings in Sunflower, with many of his family's and personal events often interrupted by calls on the police phone with the needs of the citizens who contact him.

Ricciardelli (2018) found that officers must watch their backs. Chief Tanner's comments allude to this happening among Sunflower PD's officers, that he does not trust anyone in the community, and that someone is always out to try and take his job.

Pelfrey (2007) argues that rural policing holds many elements of community policing, but rural policing is very different. Officers in Sunflower PD are responsible for patrolling, conducting investigations, and effective time management along with the community and problem-oriented policing that their urban counterparts do not face. This study proves Pelfrey's analysis to be correct in Sunflower.

Westmarland and Rowe (2018), in their study of rural officers in the United Kingdom, are less likely to allow their fellow officers to break the law. The Sunflower PD officers commented that during the ride-along observations, the most they would allow their fellow officers to get away with is speeding or running a stop sign. This shows that the 2018 United Kingdom study does have some relevance in Sunflower PD, but more research would need to be conducted to see if this applies to all rural law enforcement agencies in Kansas or just Sunflower PD. It is also unknown if this applies to all rural law enforcement agencies in the United States or just this particular agency.

This study also found information not prevalent in the current literature, the "Superman of Policing Identity" of the chief of police. This study found that the chief of police also has a unique role among the officers outside of what a standard job description for a chief of police faces. Additional research would need to be done to determine if this finding could be developed into a theory of rural law enforcement chiefs of police and have a more widespread effect outside of Sunflower on other rural law enforcement agencies or even just those present in Kansas.

5.3 Practical Implications

The practical implications of this study show that there are two different types of policing in Kansas. Urban law enforcement is perhaps the most well-known because it takes up considerable news coverage. The other form of policing is rural policing. Not all

recommendations given by commissions studying law enforcement may work in rural communities. However, most of the law enforcement agencies in Kansas are rural. Any recommendations for a report regarding law enforcement or other items issued by Kansas should recognize this distinct difference.

Sunflower and other rural law enforcement agencies should allow the researcher to tell their stories. The lessons learned from one law enforcement agency cannot be generalized to multiple agencies, so access and understanding of what law enforcement officers do in rural communities would help researchers and the public better understand law enforcement and give their distinct voices a place at the discussion table. Their voice is currently missing from these conversations.

Governing authorities, lawmakers, policing researchers, and professors should read this study and others to understand that rural policing is different and faces unique challenges from its urban counterparts. Further research should also be conducted about rural Kansas law enforcement to understand the rural Kansas law enforcement landscape better.

5.4 Limitations

While validation strategies put forth by Creswell and Poth (2018) were used, and the data interpretation and analysis resulted in reliable results, this study had some limitations. These limitations include a lack of ability to generalize this study to other rural law enforcement agencies, the lack of time and the time of the year the study was conducted, and the lack of knowledge of the involvement of the law enforcement cooperative prior to this study being started.

The first limitation of this study is the lack of the ability to generalize the results of this study to other rural law enforcement agencies in Kansas or anywhere else. It should be noted, the

purpose of qualitative research is not to generalize to other sites or conditions, but rather to provide deep description and meaning about social phenomena. Social phenomena in this study was the rural law enforcement culture as socially constructed by members of the Sunflower PD, as Glesne (2006) points out, the scientific standard of generalizability does not apply the same way in qualitative work as it does in quantitative studies.

The second limitation of this study was the time. This can be broken down into two aspects of time 1) the time frame in which the researcher had to complete this study and 2) the time of year in which the culture of the rural law enforcement officers was studied. The first issue with time was the time constraints of the researcher to finish the study. The researcher had to achieve data saturation from the officers' data and was subject to the availability of the officers and the ending of academic terms. More time would have allowed the researcher to build a more trusting relationship with each officer and hence be able to understand more of the inner workings of Sunflower PD that were not present on the surface. The second limitation in the time category was the time of year in which the researcher conducted most of the research. Many community members had not started coming out of their homes, which generally happens during the summer. This could be due to the unseasonably cool temperatures that occurred during this study. More detailed information about the relationships between the officers and the community could have been observed instead of relying on officers retelling stories if time had not been a factor.

Finally, the researcher did not fully understand the cooperative agreement between Sunflower PD and the other towns until the end of the study. This study is limited to just the Sunflower PD officers and their unique culture. Due to the officers working so closely with three other towns in the area, a more appropriate examination may have allowed for comparison of

how the culture of various rural law enforcement agencies in the area are similar or dissimilar which may better inform rural police culture.

Regardless of the limitations of this study, data saturation was achieved through interviews and field observations, and validation strategies of multiple data sources, and member checking proved the data to be true and accurate. The themes fleshed out of this ethnography are robust and stand on their own.

5.5 Future Research

Since no research has been conducted on rural Kansas law enforcement before this study, future results would allow this study to be replicated to see if the results could be transferred to other jurisdictions.

Sunflower PD and three other law enforcement agencies share a cooperative of law enforcement care. This study only examined the police culture of Sunflower PD. However, a future study could examine the law enforcement culture in the entire law enforcement cooperative. It hypothesized that the findings of Sunflower PD culture would also be present in a more extensive study of the cultures of the law enforcement cooperative. However, different themes could be present in the larger collective that were not present in Sunflower PD.

As previously mentioned, studies on Kansas law enforcement are not existent. It would be beneficial for more studies to be conducted on rural law enforcement agencies in Kansas. Rural Kansas law enforcement officers have historically been closed off to those conducting research, so smaller studies should be completed before a larger study is attempted.

Some officers in this study also expressed concerns for the lack of community resources that are available to a rural community. A future study could look at the resources a small community like Sunflower would require. Another study could examine the resources the

surrounding cooperative would need to find out the level of community resources needed to support these communities.

This study also presented the concept of the "Superman of Policing Identity" for the chief of police. Future research should be conducted to determine if enough information is available to classify this as a theory. Furthermore, in some communities, the chief of police is appointed annually by the mayor with the consent of the town's council. However, this is not the case in Sunflower. It would also be interesting to see if this finding applies to sheriffs. In Kansas, most counties elect the sheriff. This would cause chiefs and sheriffs to exhibit many characteristics of the "Superman of Policing Identity". An additional qualitative study focusing on grounded theory could be used to examine this relationship further.

Furthermore, a quantitative study could be used to determine more characteristics of the "Superman of Policing Identity" in hopes of one day establishing a theory. This idea should also be tested in multiple states to confirm that this is not just a characteristic that affects rural Kansas law enforcement but the larger rural law enforcement communities across the United States.

5.6 Research Question

This study sought to answer the question what is police culture as described and constructed by rural Kansas law enforcement officers. The police culture of Sunflower PD can be described by acknowledging the officers working as a team of law enforcement officers who keep the law at the center of what they do; the one exception to this would be if someone violated the rights of gun owners in their town. The officers have varying enforcement methods and personalities, but all of this focuses on the primary element of their culture. Through this culture, the officer tackles the nature of crime and those cases that are reported and not reported at times, dealing with some individuals, such as teenagers, in unique ways to not damage their

future long-term. Officers must also worry about their citizens regarding issues such as fentanyl, the public school system, and the lack of reported crimes through the 911 call center. Officers must also be a jack of all trades focusing on the needs of whatever develops in the community. This allows officers to handle crimes flexibly, as Wilson (1975) described, and keep up with the latest information from many sources in the community. The officers value the community relationships they develop with the members of the Sunflower community. This, in essence, described the police culture of Sunflower PD as a law-focused and community-oriented organization.

Officers tend to exemplify this police culture through interactions with the community by dealing with crimes while on patrol and by tending to the needs of citizens. Officers put the community at the forefront of their work, assisting the public with whatever is needed at the given time.

Investigations point to how Sunflower PD officers, in essence, exemplify this police culture focusing on the core structure of the community. The community helps dictate the police culture because they become the center of the focus of law enforcement along with the essence of fighting crime.

This study also examined the forces, such as the news media, politics, and agency leadership, that affect police culture. This study found that the news media does not affect the police culture of Sunflower PD. However, the chief of police does pay attention to the things that are happening in the broader law enforcement community, and in essence, this may affect how he runs his department. Outside factors, such as the town governing council, affect how the agency's leadership, the chief of police, runs the agency. Officers immediately pass information to the police commissioner or mayor, which can be legally shared on incidents that occur in the

community. The chief of police's role was found to be of a political in nature, but the chief himself describes his role as more "community-oriented" rather than political. However, some of his officers describe him as a mayor with a badge.

This study found that the ethnographic descriptions relate to many current theories in the broader community of law enforcement research. This includes Wilson's (1975) theories of policing, including the "watchman," "legalistic," and "service" styles. Along with how much officers interact with the public (Liederbach & Frank, 2003). This study also found how the public often assign an officer their daily tasks or duties (Flanagan, 1985) and the many different elements of rural policing and how they differ from community policing (Pelfrey, 2007). In line with current studies on law enforcement, officers in Sunflower PD also felt the need to constantly watch their back with the public (Ricciardelli, 2018). Finally, the ethnographic descriptions in this study relate to a United Kingdom study on officers' ability to police one another to ensure they always uphold the law (Westmarland & Rowe, 2018).

5.7 Conclusion

The results of this ethnographic study show a unique structure that identified the foundational elements of law enforcement culture in a rural Kansas law enforcement agency. Since no known published study has previously been conducted on rural Kansas law enforcement, it is unknown how other rural Kansas law enforcement agencies would compare to the result of this study. Further studies of rural Kansas law enforcement culture are needed, and this should not be the last study conducted. The benefits of studying rural Kansas law enforcement could lead to better resources for rural communities and break down any mysteries surrounding how rural law enforcement agencies operate. Rural law enforcement is more than just community policing, and this study shows excellent examples of how a rural law

enforcement agency has balanced rural and community policing and embraces the concerns of its citizens. There are valuable lessons to be learned in what many may view as dull and mundane law enforcement.

Further studies of rural Kansas law enforcement could discover and illuminate new ways of law enforcement operations and the distinct cultures that exist within those agencies. The results of Sunflower PD cannot tell the story of all rural Kansas law enforcement. However, it would not be surprising if many of the themes presented in these findings are also present in other rural law enforcement communities.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

QUESTIONS TO GUIDE LAW ENFORCEMENT INTERVIEWS

The following questions guided the interviews with rural law enforcement officers to discuss police culture. The officer was allowed to discuss topics freely and at times asked to elaborate on the answers provided.

1. What is it like to be a rural law enforcement officer today?
2. How do you think the public views law enforcement officers in your community?
3. How do news stories or public reactions to events involving the police affect you in your job performance?
4. What kind of support do you get from your fellow law enforcement officers or agency?
5. Now, let me ask you a question about working with other officers in your agency. If you were to compare working relationships among law enforcement officers to working relationships in other occupations, are they similar or different? How so?
6. How would you describe the general environment or culture of rural law enforcement?

APPENDIX B

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB) APPROVAL MEMO

WICHITA STATE UNIVERSITY
OFFICE OF RESEARCH

Date: March 6, 2023
Principal Investigator: Michael Birzer
Co- Investigators: Joshua Davis
Department: Criminal Justice
IRB Number: 5407

Title: BEHIND THE THIN BLUE LINE: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF POLICE CULTURE THROUGH THE PERSPECTIVES OF KANSAS LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS IN A RURAL KANSAS LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCY

This letter is to certify that based on the exemption categories and conditions pursuant to Title 45, Code of Federal Regulations Part 46 (45CFR46.104) the Wichita State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has determined that your research qualifies for a Category 2 exemption. This exemption applies only to the proposal as written and currently on file with the IRB. Any change potentially affecting human subjects must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation and may disqualify the proposal from exemption.

A determination that research is exempt from the requirements of HHS/OHRP regulations does not imply that investigators have no ethical responsibilities to subjects in such research. Depending on the nature of the study, investigators performing exempt studies may need to make provisions to obtain informed consent, protect confidentiality, minimize risks, and address problems or complaints.

Please keep this letter with your protocol files as documentation of IRB exemption approval. If you have any questions, you may contact me at IRB@wichita.edu.

Sincerely,

Linda Steinacher

Linda Steinacher
IRB Administrator

Wichita State University, Wichita, Kansas 67260-0007 Telephone: (316) 978-3285 Fax: (316) 978-3750

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Consent Form

Purpose: You are invited to participate in a research study of rural police culture. We hope to learn from rural police officers themselves about police culture in rural communities.

Participant Selection: You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are a member of the [Redacted] Police Department. You are one of three participants who will be invited to join the study.

Explanation of Procedures: If you decide to participate, you will be interviewed one or more times. Each interview will last between 30 to 60 minutes. Here is an example of some of the questions I will ask you during the interview: (1) What is it like to be a police officer in a rural community? (2) Do you believe there is a distinct rural police culture? If so, how would you describe it?

Discomfort/Risks: There are no anticipated risks associated with participating in this study. However, if you feel uncomfortable with a question, you may skip it.

Benefits: There are no direct benefits to you for participating in the study, however, results may help police practitioners and police researchers better understand rural police culture.

Confidentiality: Every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential. However, in order to make sure the study is done properly and safely there may be circumstances where this information must be released. By signing this form, you are giving the research team permission to share information about you with the following groups:

• Office for Human Research Protections or other federal, state, or international regulatory agencies;
• The Wichita State University Institutional Review Board

The researchers may publish the results of the study. If they do, they will only discuss group results. Your name will not be used in any publication or presentation about the study.

If you consent, the interview will be audio recorded. The audio recordings will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the School of Community Affairs located in the Law Enforcement Training Center at Wichita State University. They will be kept for five years per university protocol at which time they will be erased.

Refusal/Withdrawal: Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relations with Wichita State University. If you agree to participate in this study, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Contact: If you have any questions about this research, you can contact me: Josh Davis, School of Criminal Justice, Wichita State University, 1845 N. Fairmount St. Wichita, KS., 67260, telephone (316) 978-6545, and email: jjdavis@shockers.wichita.edu. You may also contact the principal investigator: Dr. Michael Birzer, School of Criminal Justice, Wichita State University, 1845 N. Fairmount, Wichita, KS. 67260, telephone (316) 978-6525 - email: michael.birzer@wichita.edu. If you have questions pertaining to your rights as a research subject, or about research-related injury, you can contact the Office of Research at Wichita State University, 1845 Fairmount Street, Wichita, KS 67260-0007, telephone (316) 978-3285.

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. Your signature below indicates that:

- You have read (or someone has read to you) the information provided above,
- You are aware that this is a research study,
- You have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to your satisfaction, and
- You have voluntarily decided to participate.

You are not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

_____
Printed Name of Subject

_____ _____
Signature of Subject Date

_____
Printed Name of Witness

_____ _____
Witness Signature Date