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Constructing crime: Neighborhood characteristics and police recording behavior

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A B S T R A C T

It has long been acknowledged that police officers have substantial levels of discretion in their day-to-day activities. There is a well developed body of literature that considers how this discretion is exercised across a broad array of situations including the decision to arrest, use force, and grant citizen requests for official action. Using both social disorganization and conflict theories as conceptual models, the purpose of this study was to determine if neighborhood characteristics affect police reporting behavior across a wide cross-section of reported call types. The findings indicated that reporting behavior widely varies across crime types with a greater percentage of more serious crimes translated into official crime. Neighborhood characteristics did affect reporting practices, but surprisingly only for more serious forms of disorder where discretion was perceived to be less. The findings lent support for both social disorganization and conflict theories. Theoretical implications are discussed.

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Introduction

Questions about when and how police use discretion have been a pressing concern among scholars for decades. A large body of literature seeks to explain discretionary decision-making by police, particularly regarding the use of force and decision to arrest. Less empirical consideration has focused on how police use discretion when recording citizen reported calls for service into official crime, despite the broad effect this decision has on victims and communities. With a few notable exceptions (Block & Block, 1980; Goldstein, 1960; Klinger & Bridges, 1997; Maxfield, Lewis, & Szoc, 1980; McCleary, Nienstedt, & Erven, 1982; Smith, 1986; Sung, 2002; Warner, 1997), police responses to reported crime and the degree to which responses are conditioned by neighborhood characteristics has received limited attention from the research community. This is an important short-coming in the literature because it is ultimately the police who have the legal authority to determine which *reported* crimes are *recorded* as crimes.

Understanding how police reconcile citizen initiated calls for service yields important theoretical and policy implications. First, recording decisions affect the “picture” of crime in an area since official police reports become the source of public knowledge about “actual” levels of crime (Klinger, 1997; Klinger & Bridges, 1997).¹ Second, recording practices are important because police have a moral (and in some instances, legal) obligation to formally acknowledge victimization; generating a crime report is one mechanism for such

formalization. Third, aggregate police behavior represents a form of resource allocation where the *quality* of responses reflects the level of governmental services provided to victims and citizens. This is particularly relevant for those concerned with social justice and the equitable distribution of public goods. The present study examined the relationships between neighborhood characteristics and aggregate patterns of police responses to calls for service. The research aim was to better understand how neighborhood characteristics predict official recording practices by police. The term “translation rate”² is used to refer to the percentage of calls for service received by police that are eventually recorded as official crime. Guided by social disorganization, the goal was to ascertain whether police provide more or less formalized public control in disadvantaged neighborhoods.

Background

Scholars interested in discretionary decision-making by police have focused attention on a variety of outcomes including decisions to arrest (Black, 1991; Worden & Myers, 2001), use force (Paoline & Terrill, 2007), grant citizen requests for service/assistance (Mastrofski, Snipes, Parks, & Maxwell, 2000), and make court referrals (McCluskey, Varano, Huebner, & Bynum, 2004).³ Less prevalent within the existing literature is evidence about when and how police “translate” or record reported crime into official crime. This is an important limitation since calls for service represent a prime method by which citizens come into contact with police and the majority of known crimes are reported directly to police by victims and witnesses. Warner (1997) argued police decisions to record criminal incidents are important not only because they “shape” the picture of crime, but they reflect low visibility

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decisions that often escape public scrutiny. Warner (1997) noted “[d]ecisions that cannot be reviewed provide fertile soil for abuses of discretionary decision-making” (p. 632).

The disjuncture between *actual* crime and *official* crime has been duly noted. Donald Black (1980), for example, recognized official crime as a product of police decision-making. While some have treated the lack of correspondence between official crime rates and *actual* crime rates as a mere methodological misfortune, Black (1980) argued that “production of crime rates” is a sociological phenomenon that is better conceptualized as a reflection of actual *social control* compared to actual *deviance* (p. 66) (see also Kitsuse & Cicourel, 1963). Law is bound by socio-legal traditions and norms; its application is far from certain. Police responses to calls, like nearly every other aspect of police work, are variable and influenced by factors besides the availability and strength of evidence. The process of translating calls for service into official police incidents is one of many decision points in police work that is characterized by a high level of discretion on the part of patrol officers (Klinger & Bridges, 1997; McCleary et al., 1982; Warner, 1997) and this process reflects the quantity and quality of law distributed within a society (Black, 1980). Officers responding to 911 calls are faced with several options when arriving at the scene of a reported crime or disturbance. “Founded” crimes are categorized as those events that result in, at a minimum, the generation of an official police report. Crimes may also be coded as “unfounded” for several reasons; the most obvious is a lack of sufficient evidence. Black (1980) suggests that police recording behavior is influenced by factors other than evidence including the seriousness of the crime, complainants’ preferences, complainants’ personal characteristics (including social status and deference), and relational distance between victims and perpetrators (see also Block & Block, 1980).

Recording decisions by police may further be influenced by organizational factors. Officers may use the “unfounded” code as a way of avoiding paperwork or other types of work generated pursuant to officially recognizing an incident as a crime, a concept some refer to as “load shedding” (Maxfield et al., 1980; McCleary et al., 1982; Pepinsky, 1976; Rubinstein, 1973; Sung, 2002). Pepinsky (1976) notes officer recording behavior is influenced by dispatcher expectations about how calls should be handled. Maxfield et al. (1980) attribute variations in recording behavior to area work load; that is, recording decreases as general work load (e.g., total calls for service) increases. Importantly, the authors report this relationship is most evident for less serious crime.

There is also reason to believe that police discretionary decision-making is influenced by ecological factors. Black (1976) provided one of the early articulations of how social settings can influence the quantity, quality, and direction of law. This theoretical perspective focuses on victims, offenders, and their relative positions within society, but an underlying force within these dynamics is how ecology might condition such relative positions. Klinger (1997, 2004) argues that researchers tend to neglect the role of ecological factors in explaining police behavior in favor of situational characteristics. Klinger’s contention draws on Herbert (1997) and Rubinstein (1973) in advocating that a good deal of policing is organized around geographic space. “Police districts” and “patrol beats” exemplify how the bureaucratic structure of police departments is organized around sub-geographical areas. It is these areas that provide narratives or cognitive maps used by officers to understand the nature of crime and the citizens contained therein. Thus, space provides a context for understanding patterns of officer decision-making. Recent scholarship considering police use of force has offered at least some support for the influence of space on this discretionary behavior (Terrill & Reisig, 2003). Despite recent advances, Klinger (2004) contends the general disregard of ecological influences has resulted in the absence of a “systematic theory of how and why police behavior varies across space” (p. 278).

Macro-level influences on police decision-making

Social disorganization theory provides a framework for understanding how social control and other forms of governmental resources are mobilized within and between neighborhoods. Police organizations, like other governmental entities, can be conceptualized as social institutions with the capacity to provide a myriad of services that increase the overall quality of communities (Kelling & Coles, 1996).⁴ They represent one of the most direct and immediate modes the community has to access governmental services, particularly in disorganized communities otherwise lacking effective social institutions. It is worthwhile to understand how access to police services is distributed between and within communities.

Police recording practices, like other forms of police behavior, can be quantified to reflect levels of social control and resource allocation. For example, the decision to translate calls into official crime brings with it the infusion of potentially coercive or beneficial governmental intervention. This intervention may take the form of investigative resources that result in arrests, use of force, detention, and/or imprisonment. Reporting parties will typically interpret these resources as positive infusion of governmental authority because they were specifically requested. Less formal responses (e.g., an officer reprimanding and releasing a suspect) and other undocumented outcomes represent less social control. Police recording practices, like other forms of police resource allocation and discretion, are expected to be influenced by ecological characteristics of place. Prior research has sustained that there is a spatial dimension to nearly all forms of police behavior (Herbert, 1997; Klinger, 1997; Rubinstein, 1973). That is, even when controlling for situational and temporal variables, characteristics of places where crime occurs remain important to understanding how police resources (including the responses to calls for service) are allocated. Herbert (1997) succinctly states:

The location of the incident is also recognized as crucial, because it may shape how officers view situations; officers may understand an area to be characterized by a certain way of life that must be taken into consideration.[P]olice officers are acutely aware of the prevailing moral order in the areas they patrol and act in accordance more with that than with the law. (pp. 35–36)

Variation in when and how police resources are mobilized at the neighborhood level reflects differential access to the public level of systemic control (see Bursik & Grasmick, 1993). From a social disorganization perspective, aggregate patterns of police behavior are reflective of the capacity of neighborhoods to mobilize public resources. It is expected that members of all segments of society can mobilize the police to take formal action (e.g., respond to a call for service, conduct an investigation, record a police report when crime occurs, and provide other resources to apprehend offenders). Thus, residents who contact their local police department to report a problem are likely to expect that their victimization will be recognized as important and that their call will be effective in mobilizing a desired level of resource investment. From this perspective, citizens are likely to expect formalized police action when they request the presence of police.⁵ The recording of a police report when the available evidence supports such a conclusion represents, at a minimum, a symbolic acknowledgement that the victimization actually occurred and the appropriate authorities are doing something to bring justice.

Kubrin and Weitzer (2003) specifically encourage social scientists to expand traditional conceptualizations of collective efficacy to include additional forms of social control, such as when and how governmental agents handle community problems. Mobilizing the police to respond to crime, for example, has largely been ignored by the research community. Calling the police as a means of resolving conflict represents the point of demarcation where informal *private*

social control breaks down in favor of *public control* (Bursik & Grasmick, 1993). When other forms of social control fail and public modes are invoked, it is presumed that the police will be responsive to crime victims regardless of neighborhood characteristics. Although there is disagreement among scholars if calling the police represents a type of *formal* or (indirect) *informal* social control, the process itself “refers to practices of the authorities to maintain order and enforce legal and regulatory codes” (Kubrin & Weitzer, 2003, p. 381).⁶ The basis of the argument is that neighborhoods can be differentiated based on their capacity to mobilize public resources into purposive action. Thus, it is important to consider variations in this capacity and to discern what neighborhood characteristics (consistent with social disorganization theory) predict such variations.

Neighborhoods and police resource mobilization – prior research

Empirical evidence has established that neighborhood characteristics influence a variety of police behaviors. Some argue there is a positive relationship between the distribution of police resources and social status, with economically advantaged neighborhoods receiving the most and best quality of governmental resources. This perspective suggests that fewer government services of all types are allocated to poor and minority neighborhoods; per resident, less money is spent on streets, social services, recreation, libraries, police, and fire protection (Lineberry, 1977; Liska & Chamlin, 1984). Liska and Chamlin (1984) argue government employees (including police) do not place equivalent value on residents of these disadvantaged areas, a situation the authors refer to as “benign neglect.” Police officers may be less likely to use their authority to aid victims because even serious incidents may be viewed as “trivial” and victims as less deserving or credible (Uviller, 1984). Less police recording would be expected in poor and minority neighborhoods.

Residents of disadvantaged communities often report police are less responsive to local concerns and assume relatively tolerant approaches to crime, especially street crime (Huang & Vaughn, 1996; Kennedy, 1997; Kubrin & Weitzer, 2003). Smith (1986) supports this contention, finding police recording behavior is greater in higher status neighborhoods and less likely in transient neighborhoods. Importantly, Smith's (1986) findings suggest that neighborhood influences are dependent on the *type* of police behavior considered. That is, police exert more *coercive authority* in minority communities but more assistance-like behavior in upper-income neighborhoods with more elderly persons. This may partially explain why residents of these communities often view police negatively (Schafer, Huebner, & Bynum, 2003), though empirical support for this perspective is inconsistent (Van Ryzin, Muzzio, & Immerwahr, 2004).

A competing perspective suggests an inverse relationship between space and police behavior; public resources (particularly those deemed coercive) are thought to be disproportionately concentrated in poor and minority neighborhoods. The minority group threat hypothesis (Jackson, 1989), for example, suggests that minority communities are over policed; police spend more uncommitted patrol time in minority neighborhoods and are likely to apply the law in a more formal fashion. The threat hypothesis is a class-based perspective that predicts governmental authority is exercised in ways that control “dangerous classes” (Blalock, 1967; Jackson, 1989). Police authority is a manifestly coercive form of class power that is instrumental to maintaining existing social relations. Kane (2003), for example, reported police deployment across neighborhoods increased as percent Latino increased, but effects were nonlinear and decreased after a “tipping point” was reached. Terrill and Reisig (2003) reported that police are significantly more likely to use force in neighborhoods characterized by high levels of crime and concentrated disadvantage. Residents of poor and minority neighborhoods are viewed as a potential threat to the existing normative order, and are in need of social control (Bass, 2001; Bayley & Mendelsohn, 1969). Police

officers would be expected to respond more vigorously and formally, even to minor incidents, in order to gain control over the area and its residents. The threat hypothesis has been supported in some studies (Jackson, 1989; Liska & Chamlin, 1984; Liska, Chamlin, & Reed, 1985; Smith, 1986; Sung, 2002; Warner, 1997), and if it holds in the present analysis, more recording is expected in poor and minority neighborhoods.

Warner's (1997) findings on police recording practices in Boston provided some support for the conflict perspective. These findings indicated that neighborhood level recording practices for burglary were related to socio-demographic characteristics. The recording of burglaries was positively associated with percent foreign-born and percent mobility. In contrast, neighborhood poverty was negatively associated with recording; police recorded fewer burglary calls in poorer neighborhoods. Recording practices, however, are also conditioned by crime type (Maxfield et al., 1980; Warner, 1997). After noting that neighborhood influences had little effect on recording of assaults compared to burglary, Warner (1997) concluded that neighborhood characteristics dissipate as crime seriousness increases. It is likely that when the chance of apprehending an offender is low (e.g., burglary), police are more likely to ignore criminal victimization.

Existing literature suggests a third possible explanation. It is possible that police recording practices are a function of neighborhood crime levels. The tolerance of deviance perspective posits that police have a limited capacity to respond to reported crime in violent or crime-ridden neighborhoods. Resources are considered to be relatively fixed, so as demand for finite resources increases, so does the “threshold” at which a formal response occurs (Alpert, MacDonald, & Dunham, 2005). In higher crime neighborhoods, police may fail to differentiate between victims and offenders (Klinger, 1997; Stark, 1987). For example, some victims may be viewed as “unworthy” (Uviller, 1984) of police consideration based on social class and space (e.g., surroundings). Officers may view certain levels and/or types of deviance as acceptable, and thereby perceive victim/complainant as less worthy of official intervention due to the reoccurring nature of citizen request for police service.

Sampson and Jeglum-Bartusch (1998) found a significant relationship between socioeconomic status and tolerance of deviance among residents of Chicago neighborhoods; individuals living in more disadvantaged neighborhoods are more tolerant of deviance. It is possible that officers recognize these community sentiments and begin to accept higher levels of deviance as “normal,” which in turn, does not warrant formal intervention. Viewed in this way, police recording criminal behavior would be considered a function of the overall demand for police services within a neighborhood. Consequently, in “demanding” areas, overall recording would be expected to be proportionally less common. Maxfield et al. (1980) found that work load, not demographic characteristics, best explains neighborhood-level variation in recording practices. The research found that variation in recording practices conditioned by crime type; as work load increases so does variation in recording practices for less serious crime (p. 233). As a result, it takes higher levels of criminal/deviant behavior to generate a formal police report (see also Lawton, 2007). The tolerance of deviance perspective offers an alternative explanation that serves to further support Warner's (1997) findings that police recording behaviors are conditioned by crime seriousness.

Guided by the theoretical frameworks noted above, the present study examined the effects of neighborhood characteristics on police recording behavior. In doing so, this study complimented Warner's (1997) work by expanding on her research in ways that: (a) broaden the range of call types and (b) shifts the unit of analysis to a smaller geographical aggregate. Toward this end, a central goal was to determine whether patterns of police recording behavior vary by crime type as suggested by Warner (1997). In addition, the present study added to the existing body of police recording scholarship by considering the effects of land use and work load temporal characteristics.

Methods

Research setting

The research took place in the city of San Antonio, Texas, a large metropolitan community with a 2000 census population of over one million residents. San Antonio has one of the largest Latino populations in the United States (Guzman, 2001) with a population that is approximately 60 percent Latino (primarily persons of Mexican origin) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002), 35 percent White, and 6 percent Black. According to the 2000 census, only 12 percent of the Latino population was foreign-born and 15 percent reported speaking English less than “very well.” In other words, San Antonio is an acculturated city characterized by large numbers of Latino native-born Mexican American residents. Despite such acculturation, there are indications that San Antonio's Latino neighborhoods demonstrate characteristics consistent with social disorganization. Latino neighborhoods exhibit higher concentrations of poor female-headed households and individuals who receive public assistance and/or are unemployed (Martinez, Stowell, & Cancino, 2008). Allen and Turner (2005) reported 78 percent of the Latino population is concentrated in certain residential areas. To gain a better sense of community factors that may influence police decision-making, San Antonio's 275 census tracts were selected as the unit of analysis.

Researchers have long considered the appropriate operational definition for neighborhood boundaries in recent years. Sampson and Jeglum-Bartusch (1998), for example, created “neighborhood clusters” of census tracts based on natural boundaries demarcating areas. Warner and Pierce (1993) operationalized “neighborhoods” as long recognized boundaries in Boston, a city with well-established and recognized neighborhoods. In contrast, researchers considering the effects of neighborhood characteristics on police practices have often defined neighborhoods based on police administrative boundaries such as precincts (Kane, 2006) or team areas (Schafar et al., 2003). Finally, researchers have also used conventional administrative boundaries such as census tracts or similar administrative boundaries (Cancino, Varano, Schafar, & Enriquez, 2007; Warner, 1997; Wooldredge, 2002). The choice of definition is not merely an issue of semantics, but may have important implications for the substantive meaning of research findings. The concept of modifiable area unit problem (MAUP), for example, suggests the choice of aggregate boundaries might be artificial and not reflect any underlying meaning. If this is the case, research findings could be misleading (Unwin, 1996).

The choice of census tracts in the current research as an operational definition for neighborhoods was justified for the following reasons. While this definition is not without controversy, the criminal justice/criminology community has generally accepted it as an appropriate measure. Moreover, San Antonio is a community that has undergone substantial periods of geographical growth in recent decades through annexation that make more natural boundaries nearly impossible to define. A city of approximately 37 square miles in 1937, the geographical boundaries of San Antonio increased to approximately 70 square miles in the 1940s, more than 160 miles in the 1950s, and included more than 522 square miles in 2006 (City of San Antonio, 2008). Thus, San Antonio is an ever expanding community both in terms of geography and population. In contrast with more historic cities with long established neighborhood boundaries (e.g., Boston, Detroit, or Chicago), San Antonio is an ever changing city. Based on discussions with the San Antonio Police Department's research and planning unit, the city's growth makes it difficult to preserve the “natural” boundaries/patterns. It should also be noted that Wooldredge (2002) reported little effects of aggregation bias when utilizing census tracts versus more generally recognized neighborhood boundaries. As a result, although acknowledging the possibility MAUP, it was decided to proceed with the census tracts as a proxy for neighborhoods.

Dependent variables

Police recording practices were operationalized using two data files, calls for service and official crime incident data, both of which were provided by the San Antonio Police Department (SAPD). Calls for service (CFS) data provided details of each call received by the SAPD and were the most complete source of emergency calls. Not included in this analysis were apparent crimes that might come to the attention of police in ways other than 911, such as walk-in reports to police substations. In their analysis of discrepancies between dispatched calls for service and actual police encounters observed by researchers, Klinger and Bridges (1997) reported that call data might under-represent actual crime levels. Klinger and Bridges' (1997) research, however, emanated from an observational study of policing in 1977, a time when communication technology was quite different. The impact of excluding reports made through sources other than 911 was unknown at this time. The SAPD receives, on average, between 850,000 and 950,000 CFS annually.⁷ The data were pooled across five years covering the period 2001–2005. This increased the overall sample size in each neighborhood. SAPD's data system purged multiple calls relating to the same event.⁸ The records included call identification number, initial dispatch classification type, and dispatch location. Each call was geocoded and assigned to the appropriate census tract with ArcView 9.0, a leading GIS software (x-y coordinates were included in the CFS data). After the CFS data was geocoded to their respective neighborhoods, official crime incident data were utilized to complete the operationalization of the dependent variables. The official crime incident data represented all founded crimes that were used to tabulate official crime measures. The records included case number, address location, date and time, and crime type. More importantly, the CFS and official crime incident data were subsequently merged through a common identifier included in both files. Merging of the files based on this unique identifier was a novel operational strategy not found in existing literature.

Separate dependent variables were computed for each of nine different call for service categories: assaultive violence (including domestic assault), auto theft/burglary of auto, residential/commercial burglary, drugs and vice, sexual assault, robbery (personal and commercial grouped),⁹ weapon-carrying offenses (e.g., carrying concealed weapons), disturbances, and minor property crime. The call categories represent classifications assigned to calls by dispatchers and eventually recorded in SAPD's call for service data base. Calls for service were determined to be “translated” if they appeared in the crime incident data as recorded crime events.¹⁰ Neighborhood rates were then calculated by dividing the number of translated CFS by the total number of CFS for each category. The city of San Antonio was comprised of 275 census tracts at the time of the 2000 census. For each dependent variable, the analysis was restricted to tracts with counts of five or more CFS to avoid possible biasing effects of translation rates based on smaller numbers of incidents.¹¹

The descriptive statistics for the dependent variables are presented in Table 1. The data indicated there were substantial variations in police recording behavior across crime types with higher rates for more serious crimes. For example, the translation rate for robbery was 65 percent compared to 59 percent for auto theft, 41 percent for rape/sexual assault, 35 percent for assaultive crimes, 33 percent for other weapon offenses, and 28 percent for drugs/vice crime. The lowest translation rates, between 5 and 6 percent, were associated with disturbances and minor property crimes. The data were informative and suggested that translation rates vary considerably by crime type.

Independent variables

The first set of independent variables was informed by the ecology of crime literature and represented traditional measures of

Table 1
CFS translation rates for census tracts (n = 275)

| | CFS descriptives | | | | | Translation descriptives | |
|--|---------------------------|------|--------|-------|-------|--------------------------|------|
| | Valid tracts ^a | Min | Max | Mean | S.D. | Mean rate | S.D. |
| <i>Dependent variables</i> | | | | | | | |
| Assaultive crime | 261 | 5 | 8,337 | 675 | 709 | 0.35 | 0.09 |
| Auto theft | 250 | 6 | 1,361 | 190 | 141 | 0.59 | 0.07 |
| Burglary | 255 | 6 | 4,501 | 1,034 | 1,034 | 0.61 | 0.07 |
| Disturbances | 262 | 9 | 26,821 | 3,667 | 3,667 | 0.05 | 0.02 |
| Drugs/vice | 251 | 5 | 2,405 | 252 | 252 | 0.28 | 0.11 |
| Minor property crime | 260 | 5 | 10,172 | 936 | 936 | 0.06 | 0.03 |
| Rape/sexual assault | 248 | 5 | 2,764 | 98 | 98 | 0.41 | 0.11 |
| Robbery | 241 | 5 | 617 | 53 | 53 | 0.65 | 0.10 |
| Other weapon offenses | 229 | 5 | 278 | 39 | 39 | 0.33 | 0.12 |
| <i>Independent variables</i> | | | | | | | |
| Population ^b | All tracts | Min | Max | Mean | S.D. | | |
| Population ^b | 275 | 13 | 12,562 | 5,025 | 2,238 | | |
| Percent Black | 275 | 0.00 | 0.73 | 0.07 | 0.11 | | |
| Percent Latino | 275 | 0.00 | 0.98 | 0.55 | 0.27 | | |
| Population mobility | 275 | 0.00 | 0.96 | 0.49 | 0.15 | | |
| Percent female-headed households with children | 275 | 0.00 | 0.35 | 0.09 | 0.05 | | |
| Percent poverty | 275 | 0.00 | 0.61 | 0.16 | 0.12 | | |
| Percent foreign born | 275 | 0.00 | 0.36 | 0.11 | 0.06 | | |
| Percent linguistic isolation | 275 | 0.00 | 0.52 | 0.09 | 0.08 | | |
| Percent owner occupied | 275 | 0.01 | 0.98 | 0.61 | 0.22 | | |
| CFS yearly average 2001–2005 | 275 | 0.00 | 29,786 | 3,170 | 2,548 | | |
| Percent parcels commercial | 275 | 0.00 | 1.00 | 0.06 | 0.11 | | |
| Percent CFS Friday and Saturday | 275 | 0.17 | 0.50 | 0.31 | 0.02 | | |

^a Analysis for dependent variables restricted to tracts of five or more calls for service.

^b Variable was transformed by dividing total population by 100. The purpose was to reduce the variance.

social disorganization theory. They included dimensions of social disorganization that had previously been shown to predict neighborhood crime levels (Bursik & Grasmick, 1993; Sampson & Jégnum-Bartusch, 1998), neighborhood levels of police use of force (Terrill & Reisig, 2003), and police resource allocation (Kane, 2003). The variables were derived from the 2000 U.S. Census Bureau and are freely available through on-line data sets (www.census.gov). The variables included total population (transformed by dividing population by 100), percent Black population, percent Latino population,¹² residential mobility (percent of residents living in their current residence less than five years), percent female-headed households with children, percent poverty (percent of households living in poverty), percent foreign born, and percent owner-occupied housing. An additional variable, percent linguistically isolated, represented circumstances in which no household member fourteen years or older spoke: (1) only English, or (2) a language other than English, but also spoke English “very well.” Linguistic isolation was included due to San Antonio’s large Latino Spanish-speaking community.

Three additional neighborhood variables were included. Average yearly calls for service received was included as a work load measure in order to account for the tolerance of deviance perspective, which suggests that police will be less responsive to victimizations that occur in higher crime neighborhoods. Percent commercial land (land parcels classified as commercial use) and percent CFS received on Fridays and Saturdays,¹³ were also included. The data for “percent commercial” were a “land use and valuation” file provided by the Bexar County Tax Assessors Office in San Antonio. This variable was included because recent research on neighborhoods and crime suggests that features of land use often shape people’s perceptions of and responses to crime (McCord, Ratcliffe, Garcia, & Taylor, 2007). Percent CFS on Fridays and Saturdays also accounts for temporal characteristics of police work load. These two variables considered simultaneously account for problems associated with entertainment and other commercial establishments which may influence other

decision-making. Descriptive statistics for all independent variables are also included in Table 1.

Hypotheses

Based on the literature, the following hypothesized relationships were proposed:

Hypothesis 1. There will be a negative relationship between social disorganization and recording practices. Residents of disorganized neighborhoods would be expected to have a reduced capacity to mobilize public goods and police would thereby be more inclined to ignore victimizations.

Hypothesis 2. There will be a positive relationship between percent commercial parcels (land use) and percent CFS occurring on Friday/Saturdays. Both measures are proxy measures for economic interests. Police are expected to respond in ways that protect economic interests; more recording is expected.

Hypothesis 3. There is a negative relationship between work load and recording practices. The “tolerance of deviance” perspective suggests that as work load increases, police “load shed” by ignoring apparent crimes.

Analysis

Bivariate correlations between the independent and dependent variables are presented in Table 2. Several important findings emerged from this initial analysis. The bivariate relationships between the independent variables and police recording behaviors varied by crime type. For less serious crime, such as minor property crimes and disturbances, only a few of the relationships were significant. Thus, neighborhood characteristics appeared to explain little variation in police recording practices for less serious crime. These findings stood in sharp contrast to

Table 2
Bivariate correlations of police recording practices

| | Assaultive | Auto theft | Burglary | Disturbance | Drugs/vice | Minor property | Rape | Robbery | Other weapon |
|--|------------|------------|----------|-------------|------------|----------------|---------|---------|--------------|
| Population | 0.14* | 0.08 | 0.01 | -0.00 | -0.19** | -0.03 | 0.19** | 0.07 | -0.12 |
| Percent Black | -0.03 | -0.22** | -0.20** | -0.03 | -0.09 | -0.11 | 0.13* | -0.08 | 0.10 |
| Percent Latino | -0.31** | -0.16 | -0.37** | 0.16** | 0.20** | -0.02 | -0.24** | -0.25** | 0.33** |
| Population mobility | 0.10 | 0.00 | 0.29** | -0.05 | -0.14* | -0.10 | 0.21** | 0.22** | -0.24** |
| Percent female-headed households with children | -0.14* | -0.12 | -0.37** | 0.18** | 0.03 | -0.08 | 0.06 | -0.14* | 0.19** |
| Percent poverty | -0.31** | -0.21** | -0.45** | 0.06 | 0.24** | -0.03 | -0.21** | -0.29** | 0.41** |
| Percent owner occupied | 0.17** | -0.08 | -0.01 | -0.06 | -0.20** | 0.13* | -0.03 | -0.09 | -0.12 |
| Percent foreign born | -0.27** | -0.09 | -0.30** | 0.02 | 0.20** | -0.05 | -0.26** | -0.18** | 0.31** |
| Linguistic isolation | -0.30** | -0.09 | -0.32** | 0.06 | 0.20 | -0.00 | -0.25** | -0.25** | 0.37** |
| CFS yearly average | 0.02 | 0.01 | 0.03 | -0.04 | 0.09 | -0.15** | -0.06 | -0.21 | 0.13 |
| Percent parcels commercial | 0.16** | 0.01 | 0.06 | -0.10 | 0.31** | 0.04 | 0.03 | 0.02 | 0.17* |
| Percent CFS Friday and Saturday | 0.09 | 0.04 | 0.14* | -0.00 | -0.05 | 0.27* | -0.16** | -0.04 | 0.07 |

^aAnalyses for dependent variables restricted to tracts with five or more calls for service.

* Sig. <.05.

** Sig. <.01.

*** Sig. <.001.

the results for serious crimes. For assaultive incidents, percent Latino, female-headed households with children, owner occupied housing, foreign born, and linguistic isolation were significantly related to police recorded behaviors. Most of the relationships were in the negative direction which suggested police translate fewer assaultive calls in neighborhoods characterized by disorganization and recent immigrants. Similar relationships were observed for burglary and robbery. In the only instance where CFS work load was significant (minor property crime), it was in the negative direction. Finally, in the models where percent land parcels commercial or percent calls received on Fridays and Saturdays were significant, they were mostly in the positive direction. This indicated police may respond more formally to crime that occurs in commercial areas and neighborhoods with more weekend crime.

To further explore these relationships, nine separate multivariate models were constructed to analyze the relationships between the independent and dependent variables. Ordinary-least squares (OLS) regression would normally be used to analyze these relationships since the outcome measures are continuous. An important assumption of OLS regression, however, is that each observation is independent of all others. Given the spatial nature of the data, this assumption was likely violated. Spatial dependency, a concern traditionally referred to as spatial autocorrelation, implies that any given geographical unit's value is dependent on surrounding areas. This type of spatial dependency violates OLS assumptions of independent errors and could lead to inefficient and/or biased coefficients (Levine, 1996). To account for dependence among observations, a spatially-lagged error model (see Anselin, 1988) was used in all multivariate analyses.¹⁴ Spatial weights were computed using Queen's contiguity. The weights and subsequent regression analyses were computed using GeoDa 0.9.5i, a freeware statistical software package, provided by the Spatial Analysis Laboratory in the Department of Agricultural and Consumer Economics at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign (<https://www.geoda.uiuc.edu/>).

The multivariate findings for the first categories of calls for service, assaultive crimes, are presented in Model 1 (see, Table 3).¹⁵ Results for this model indicated that approximately 24 percent of the variation in police recording practices for assaultive crimes was explained by the variables. With a few exceptions, the majority of social disorganization variables were not significant predictors of recording behaviors for aggravated assault. Although percent Black and Latino were negatively associated with translation rate, neither achieved statistical significance. Percent owner occupied was the only social disorganization variable significantly and positively related to translation rates for assaultive crimes. This indicated police respond more formally to assaults in neighborhoods characterized by greater proportion of owner occupied units. Land use, as measured by percent commercial parcels, was also significantly and positively associated

with recording behavior. Finally, the variable measuring percent calls occurring on Friday and Saturdays was also significant and positive.¹⁶

Model 2 details the findings for CFS that originated as auto thefts. In contrast to Model 1, the overall explained variance was substantially lower (24 percent compared to 15 percent). The relationship between percent Black was significant and negative, although nonsignificant for percent Latino. Two additional social disorganization measures, percent households in poverty and percent owner occupied housing were both also significant predictors of recording behaviors and in the negative direction. Finally, average yearly work load (CFS yearly average) was significant and positively associated with recording behavior.

The findings for burglary are presented in Model 3. Compared to Models 1 and 2, the explained variance in Model 3 was considerably larger (47 percent) suggesting a better fit. Three of the social disorganization variables, percent Black, percent foreign-born, and percent linguistic isolation, were significantly related to recording behavior and in the negative direction. This indicated that officers recorded fewer burglary calls in poorer neighborhoods with higher percentages of recent immigrants. Like Model 2, average yearly CFS was also positively associated with recording behaviors.

Models 4, 5, and 6 detail the findings for disturbances, drugs/vice, and minor property crime. These call types represented events that are among the least serious and most ambiguous that police encounter. The R-squared values ranged from 9 percent for disturbance calls to 15 percent and 25 percent for minor property crime and drugs/vice calls, respectively. For disturbance calls, the only significant predictors associated with social disorganization theory were percent owner occupied and percent Latino residents. Police recorded a significantly higher proportion of calls in neighborhoods with more Latinos and renters. Moreover, there was a significant but negative relationship between average yearly CFS work load and recording behaviors. The findings for drugs/vice and minor property crime were very different than disturbances. For drugs/vice calls, percent mobility, percent owner occupied, and percent CFS Friday and Saturday were significantly and negatively associated with recording behaviors. Percent commercial was also significant but in the positive direction. It appeared that police recorded a larger proportion of calls for drugs/vice in neighborhoods with more commercial parcels compared to other areas.

The findings for rape/sexual assault are detailed in Model 7. The model accounted for 17 percent of the explained variance. Interestingly, the single biggest predictor (in terms of magnitude of coefficient) of translation rate was the percent of female-headed households with children. Total population and yearly CFS work load were also significant predictors in the positive direction. Model 8 included the findings for robbery-related calls for service. The findings indicated the combined independent variables had less explanatory power than in other models; none of the independent variables reached statistical significance except

Table 3
Spatial error regression on translation rates

| Variable | Model 1 | | | | Model 2 | | | | Model 3 | | | |
|--|-------------|---------|---------|--------|------------|---------|---------|--------|----------------|--------|---------|--------|
| | Assault | | | | Auto theft | | | | Burglary | | | |
| | b | SE | b | SE | b | SE | b | SE | b | SE | b | SE |
| Constant | 0.158 | (0.12) | -0.048 | (0.13) | 0.536* | (0.14) | 0.797* | (0.16) | | | 0.622* | (0.11) |
| Percent commercial parcels | 0.137* | (0.05) | 0.240* | (0.05) | 0.000 | (0.00) | 0.007 | (0.05) | 0.023 | (0.03) | -0.053 | (0.04) |
| CFS yearly average | 0.000 | (0.00) | 0.000 | (0.00) | 0.000 | (0.00) | 0.000* | (0.00) | 0.000 | (0.00) | 0.000* | (0.00) |
| Percent CFS Fri. and Sat. | 0.582* | (0.38) | 0.884* | (0.05) | 0.111 | (0.45) | -0.319 | (0.46) | 0.301 | (0.31) | 0.237 | (0.31) |
| Population | | | 0.001* | (0.00) | | | -0.000 | (0.00) | | | -0.000 | (0.00) |
| Percent Black | | | -0.098 | (0.06) | | | -0.131* | (0.05) | | | -0.129* | (0.05) |
| Percent Latino | | | -0.072 | (0.04) | | | 0.020 | (0.04) | | | -0.057 | (0.03) |
| Population mobility | | | 0.063 | (0.05) | | | -0.079 | (0.05) | | | 0.046 | (0.04) |
| Percent female-headed households with children | | | 0.268 | (0.16) | | | 0.016 | (0.14) | | | -0.136 | (0.03) |
| Percent poverty | | | 0.015 | (0.09) | | | -0.268* | (0.08) | | | -0.185* | (0.07) |
| Percent foreign born | | | 0.010 | (0.13) | | | -0.145 | (0.12) | | | -0.193* | (0.10) |
| Linguistic isolation | | | -0.171 | (0.12) | | | 0.074 | (0.11) | | | 0.100 | (0.09) |
| Percent owner occupied | | | 0.120* | (0.03) | | | -0.065* | (0.03) | | | -0.033 | (0.04) |
| Lambda | 0.302 | 0.09 | 0.000 | (0.11) | 0.246* | 0.10 | 0.091 | (0.11) | 0.706* | 0.06 | 0.514* | (0.08) |
| <i>Model statistics</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| df | 257 | | 248 | | 246 | | 237 | | 251 | | 242 | |
| -2 log likelihood | 277.297 | | 304.117 | | 308.254 | | 324.529 | | 354.640 | | 379.421 | |
| R-squared | 0.084 | | .244 | | 0.045 | | .154 | | 0.392 | | .470 | |
| Variable | Model 4 | | | | Model 5 | | | | Model 6 | | | |
| | Disturbance | | | | Drug/vice | | | | Minor property | | | |
| | b | SE | b | SE | b | SE | b | SE | b | SE | b | SE |
| Constant | 0.066* | (0.03) | 0.062 | (0.04) | 0.570 | (0.17)* | 0.983* | (0.20) | -0.144* | (0.04) | -0.189* | (0.05) |
| Percent commercial parcels | -0.022 | (0.01) | -0.021 | (0.01) | 0.391 | (0.07)* | 0.359* | (0.08) | 0.001 | (0.02) | 0.025 | (0.02) |
| CFS yearly average | -0.000 | (0.00) | -0.000* | (0.00) | 0.000 | (0.00) | 0.000 | (0.00) | -0.000 | (0.00) | -0.000* | (0.00) |
| Percent CFS Fri. and Sat. | -0.032 | (0.10) | 0.022 | (0.11) | -1.001 | (0.55) | -1.604* | (0.57) | 0.690* | (0.14) | 0.766* | (0.15) |
| Population | | | 0.000 | (0.00) | | | -0.000 | (0.00) | | | 0.000 | (0.00) |
| Percent Black | | | -0.004 | (0.02) | | | -0.141 | (0.08) | | | -0.028 | (0.02) |
| Percent Latino | | | 0.022* | (0.01) | | | -0.001 | (0.06) | | | -0.009 | (0.01) |
| Population mobility | | | -0.009 | (0.01) | | | -0.248* | (0.07) | | | -0.000 | (0.02) |
| Percent female-headed households with children | | | 0.072 | (0.04) | | | -0.374 | (0.21) | | | 0.050 | (0.06) |
| Percent poverty | | | -0.037 | (0.03) | | | 0.203 | (0.12) | | | 0.053 | (0.03) |
| Percent foreign born | | | -0.044 | (0.04) | | | 0.109 | (0.18) | | | -0.021 | (0.05) |
| Linguistic isolation | | | 0.009 | (0.03) | | | -0.272 | (0.16) | | | -0.027 | (0.04) |
| Percent owner occupied | | | -0.024* | (0.01) | | | -0.100* | (0.05) | | | 0.018 | (0.01) |
| Lambda | 0.199 | (0.10)* | 0.011 | (0.11) | 0.407* | (0.08) | 0.144 | (0.10) | | | -0.021 | (0.11) |
| <i>Model statistics</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| df | 258 | | 249 | | 247 | | 238 | | 256 | | 247 | |
| -2 log likelihood | 631.964 | | 641.669 | | 218.192 | | 228.008 | | 554.908 | | 560.640 | |
| R-squared | 0.029 | | .092 | | 0.212 | | .249 | | 0.114 | | .152 | |
| Variable | Model 7 | | | | Model 8 | | | | Model 9 | | | |
| | Rape | | | | Robbery | | | | Weapon | | | |
| | b | SE | b | SE | b | SE | b | SE | b | SE | b | SE |
| Constant | 0.812* | (0.21) | 0.493* | (0.24) | 0.687* | (0.22) | 0.831* | (0.24) | 0.259 | (0.25) | 0.234 | (0.26) |
| Percent commercial parcels | 0.012 | (0.07) | 0.031 | (0.08) | 0.030 | (0.09) | 0.016 | (0.10) | 0.143 | (0.09) | 0.158 | (0.10) |
| CFS yearly average | -0.000 | (0.00) | -0.000* | (0.00) | -0.000 | (0.00) | -0.000 | (0.00) | 0.000 | (0.00) | -0.000 | (0.00) |
| Percent CFS Fri. and Sat. | -1.253 | (0.68) | -0.370 | (0.69) | -0.067 | (0.70) | -0.150 | (0.71) | 0.132 | (0.78) | 0.234 | (0.78) |
| Population | | | 0.001* | (0.00) | | | -0.000 | (0.00) | | | 0.000 | (0.00) |
| Percent Black | | | 0.071 | (0.08) | | | -0.119 | (0.08) | | | 0.226* | (0.09) |
| Percent Latino | | | -0.041 | (0.06) | | | -0.040 | (0.05) | | | 0.076 | (0.06) |
| Population mobility | | | 0.071 | (0.07) | | | 0.012 | (0.07) | | | -0.115 | (0.08) |
| Percent female-headed households with children | | | 0.493* | (0.21) | | | 0.090 | (0.20) | | | -0.180 | (0.22) |
| Percent poverty | | | -0.128 | (0.12) | | | -0.188 | (0.12) | | | 0.122 | (0.13) |
| Percent foreign born | | | -0.221 | (0.18) | | | -0.061 | (0.18) | | | 0.052 | (0.19) |
| Linguistic isolation | | | 0.136 | (0.16) | | | -0.053 | (0.16) | | | 0.150 | (0.17) |
| Percent owner occupied | | | -0.043 | (0.05) | | | -0.109* | (0.05) | | | -0.047 | (0.05) |
| Lambda | 0.271* | (0.10)* | 0.133 | (0.10) | 0.230* | (0.09) | -0.056 | (0.11) | 0.399 | (0.09) | 0.073 | (0.11) |
| <i>Model statistics</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| df | 244 | | 235 | | 237 | | 228 | | 225 | | 216 | |
| -2 log likelihood | 204.678 | | 221.340 | | 207.358 | | 220.940 | | 181.793 | | 197.725 | |
| R-squared | 0.061 | | .171 | | 0.039 | | .134 | | 0.138 | | .227 | |

*p < .05.

for percent commercial parcels. It was also important to note that the explained variance (13 percent) was considerably lower for the robbery model when compared to crimes such as burglary.

The final model, weapon-related crimes, was detailed in Model 9. Percent Black was the only significant predictor of recording behavior for weapon offenses, and it was in the positive direction. This finding suggested that each unit increase in percent Black corresponded with a 23 percent increase in police recording for weapon-related offenses. Interestingly, a similar relationship was *not* observed for percent Latino.

Looking across the models and within substantive groupings/categories of independent variables, several important findings emerged from the analyses presented above. The findings presented some limited support for the first hypothesis, namely, that measures of social disorganization would be negatively associated with police recording practices. Police translated small percentages of reported crimes in census tracts with higher levels of poverty, African Americans, and foreign-born individuals. In addition, police also translated smaller proportions of calls in tracts with higher percentages of population turnover (mobility). This was particularly the case for crimes involving direct economic losses (e.g., auto theft and burglary). The findings also provided support for the second hypothesis. In tracts with higher proportions of commercial properties, police translated higher percentages of both assaults and drug/vice events. Finally, there was limited support for hypothesis that anticipated issues of police work load would negatively impact translation rates. The most substantive findings emerged as it related to busy weekend shifts. Police translated a larger percentage of assaults in tracts with busier weekend shifts, but significantly fewer drug/vice events in similar shifts. Thus, the degree to which questions of work load impact police decision-making may be specific to offense type.

Discussion

Why does police recording behavior matter? Understanding how police respond to reported crime is a critical area of inquiry because their responses represent the most direct and immediate access to the coercive or liberating power, depending on one's perspective, of public social control. Viewed practically, recording matters because police hold a tremendous and largely hidden capacity in the crime construction process that ultimately yields the "picture of crime" across the city landscape. Theoretically, differential recording practices suggest access to the formal justice system is distributed in different manners. The current study sought to advance the existing scholarship by: (a) expanding the analysis to a broader cross-section of crime/disorder types and (b) choosing a more homogenous unit of analysis (neighborhood census tracts) not found in prior police recording studies.

Calls for service are particularly interesting because they represent one area of police-citizen interaction where their presence and services are *requested* by the public in contrast to traffic-related or police-initiated encounters. Police responses are meaningful because they are a direct measure of citizen access to governmental services. Given the "gatekeeper" function of the police, the decision to report can influence access to government and social services beyond the criminal justice system. In his recent book, Tom Tyler (2006) explores questions about what people really want or expect from legal authorities. Tyler suggests that from the distributive fairness perspective, the public expects the government to distribute benefits and burdens in a fair and just manner (p. 73). It is the perceived equity of treatment that structures much of what the public thinks about the police and other governmental agents.

Tyler (2006) suggests that while citizens' expectations are driven by instrumental purposes, there is also something more profound at play. Why, for example, would someone call the police to report a burglary when most people know there is little chance that the actual

property will be recovered (p. 72)? Beyond the instrumental purpose, it is likely that parties report apparent victimizations to validate the harm they have incurred and to receive some form of official recognition of that harm. The idea of procedural justice suggests that police and other criminal justice agencies deliver resources in a fair and equitable manner, in a manner that both recognizes harm and attempts to ameliorate it by attempting to make victims whole.

The current research evaluated the extent to which neighborhood characteristics affect the distribution of justice. Klinger (2004) argues that in addition to organizational context, neighborhood is an often overlooked factor when understanding police action. It is important, Klinger (2004) argues, to understand how "environmental forces penetrate and influence law enforcement agencies" (p. 120). There is sufficient evidence that neighborhood characteristics influence a host of discretionary decisions made by police on a day-to-day basis. The empirical evidence has shown that neighborhood characteristics indeed dictate how police respond to crime, but neighborhood influences vary by crime type. Looking across models, the explained variances range widely from 9 percent for disturbance calls to 47 percent for burglary. Unsurprisingly, a smaller fraction of CFS for minor crimes such as disturbances and minor property crimes are translated as "official crimes." It is interesting to note that for disturbance calls, police record a smaller percentage of calls in areas with higher levels of owner occupied housing, and by extension, take more formal actions in neighborhoods with higher levels of vacant or rental housing units. Similarly, police respond more formally to disturbance calls in neighborhoods with higher levels of Latinos. It could be worthwhile to further explore how recorded CFS categories such as "disturbance" are either upgraded or downgraded when translated. It could be that in some neighborhoods, a greater percentage of "disturbance" calls might actually be more serious crimes such as domestic violence. This supposition, while curious, is likely not the case. First, no such relationships exist as would be expected in the assault analysis presented in Model 1. Moreover, Ammar, Orloff, Dutton, and Aguilar-Hass (2005) provide evidence that police often view domestic violence victimizations among Latinas less seriously.

For more serious forms of property crime such as auto theft and burglary, neighborhood influences matter to a much greater degree. It is interesting to note that for burglary, race, and social disorganization variables appear to impact recording decisions negatively. Why? The "unworthy victim" perspective (Uviller, 1984) suggests officers fail to take action because victims in poorer neighborhoods are deemed less worthy of official action. Warner (1997) argues, especially for serious property crime, when the likelihood of suspect apprehension is low (e.g., burglary) police record fewer events in poor-minority areas. These decisions, however, may be more practical in nature since residents of poor neighborhoods may be less likely to maintain appropriate insurance policies that will replace stolen or damaged goods. Where an insurance claim is likely, police will generate reports. Knowing that burglaries are rarely solved and property seldom recovered, officers and citizens may be less inclined to "waste time" documenting a burglary when the victim is uninsured. It is more likely that reality is somewhere between the two explanations as most of the other independent variables were also in the negative direction even when controlling for poverty.

The lack of neighborhood effects for robbery was expected. Robbery is a serious crime by most standards and generally has fewer ambiguous circumstances compared to other forms of assaultive behavior. Nearly two-thirds of all robberies were translated as official crime. It is likely that situational factors greatly influence officer recording behavior for robbery. Two variables that emerged as important predictors of recording behavior, and were often absent in prior research, are percent commercial parcels and percent CFS on weekends (Friday and Saturdays). These variables measure both land use and temporal characteristics of crime. For both assaultive and drug/vice crimes, the relationships for both variables were significantly positive. San Antonio has a well known entertainment district commonly known as the "River

Walk.” Officers working along the River Walk may respond differentially to crimes due to tourist safety; and the fact that this popular area generates a large portion of city revenue. In addition, the formal application of the law around known problem locations in entertainment districts may very well function as a “code enforcement” strategy. For example, San Antonio recently adopted a city ordinance to more strictly regulate adult entertainment establishments based on the “secondary effects” premise (Enriquez, Cancino, & Varano, 2006). It is possible that cities may rely on formal and aggressive recording practices in order to build a legal position against establishments (e.g., bars and clubs) that appear to be associated with social problems and crime.

Considering the race and ethnicity variables across the models, police generally translate a small proportion of crimes in Latino and Black neighborhoods suggesting that victimizations are more often ignored. One exception to this rule is the effect of percent Black on recording for weapon-related offenses. As described earlier, this category is largely comprised of weapon-carrying behaviors. The relationship for percent Black was significant and positive, the only significant variable in the model. This difference might be explained by either differential enforcement practices, or more likely, different types of weapons. There is evidence that supports this argument; compared to both Whites and Latinos, African Americans are more likely to carry, brandish, and use firearms (Nielsen, Martinez, & Rosenfeld, 2005). Additional empirical evidence suggests that neighborhoods with larger concentrations of Latinos are less violent, in terms of homicide, than their racial/ethnic counterparts (Martinez, 2002; Martinez & Lee, 2000).

A more compelling and controversial explanation for the positively significant association between percent Black and weapon translations is based on implicit bias (Banaji, 2002), racial stigma and cultural stereotypes (Loury, 2002), and ecological contamination (Werthman & Piliavin, 1967). These theoretical perspectives are related, in that they operate at the individual level, yet have implications ecologically. For example, the implicit bias thesis posits that an individual automatically concludes (despite empirical contrary evidence) from a statistical generalization that a Black neighborhood has a particular problem with crime and violence. Such implicit bias leads to actual perceptions of racial stigma and ecological contamination whereby individuals view all persons (e.g., Blacks) living in a geographical area as threatening, dangerous, and violent (e.g., culture of violence). In a recent experimental study with police officers, Correl, Park, Judd, and Wittenbrink (2002) tested the power of implicit bias by conducting shoot/don't shoot exercises with police officers who were instructed to shoot armed and not to shoot unarmed targets. The findings indicated that officers responded more quickly to shooting an armed target when such target represented an African American as opposed to a White target. Although San Antonio is a majority-minority city, African Americans are a racial and cultural minority.

The current study added to existing literature by including measures of foreign-born and linguistic isolation, two distinct dimensions of immigration. It was noteworthy that with the exception of burglary, neither percent foreign-born nor linguistic isolation were significant predictors of police recording behaviors. These findings contrasted Warner's (1997) significant foreign-born effect. The majority of minorities in San Antonio are Latinos of Mexican Heritage. In addition, nearly 50 percent of the San Antonio Police Department is Latino (<http://www.sanantonio.gov/sapd/InfoPersonnel.asp>). The assumption is that Latino citizens and police share a cultural background that provides a level of responsiveness to the needs of Latino neighborhoods.

The findings for the work load variable (average yearly CFS total) were somewhat mixed. With the exception of rape/sexual assault, work load was a significant predictor of recording behaviors only in the property crime models. For more serious property crimes like auto theft and burglary, the relationships between work load and recording were positive and significant. In contrast, work load was a significant,

negative predictor of recording for minor property crime. The effects of work load then are mitigated by crime seriousness.

Overall, results added to the social disorganization literature in a few important ways. Bursik and Grasmick (1993) recognized that neighborhood social control is exercised through a variety of social institutions that play important roles in establishing norms of conduct and responses to violations of such conduct. For example, schools, community centers, families, and governmental services are likely to set the foundation for appropriate/inappropriate behavior. All else being equal, strong pro-social neighborhoods produce strong social institutions. Social control, however, is exercised through different outlets. *Private* level social control is control which is exercised through informal social/friendship networks (Bursik & Grasmick, 1993, pp. 16–18). Numerous scholars have attempted to explain the factors that explain the decisions of individuals to take ownership of local problems. To be sure, much of the collective efficacy literature seeks to explain how private social control is mobilizing between and within communities. *Parochial* control is different, in that it conceptualizes social control as a mechanism operating through social institutions such as stores, schools, and churches. Finally, *public control* is a form of social control that is exercised through neighborhood capacity to secure and realize public goods. More precisely, a neighborhood's capacity for public control refers to its capacity to mobilize and secure desirable municipal services that are traditionally located outside of the neighborhood.

Findings from the current research underscored the relationship between neighborhood characteristics and access to public goods. That is, police recording behavior can be conceptualized in a way that reflects differential access to public goods; more formal recording behavior equates to greater access to desirable or beneficial public service. These findings suggested that neighborhoods which experience higher levels of social disorganization experience reduced access to public control. Features of social disorganization seem to matter the most when the chances of actually apprehending a suspect is at its lowest (e.g., burglary). This supported Warner's (1997) finding that police recording behaviors decrease as the chances of apprehension decreased. In this context, these findings provided some limited support for the conclusion that police respond less formally to victimizations that happen in disorganized neighborhoods even after controlling for work load. It is important to note, however, that this conclusion is likely crime-specific. For example, robbery is a serious personal crime that involves strangers, some level of direct victim and offender interaction, and often involves physical harm.

The inclusion of land use and temporal measures of crime added an additional dimension to the police recording body of research. Namely, these findings indicated that police and other governmental agents might be sensitive to the economic interests that exist in and around commercial/entertainment districts; the result may be more responsive policing (i.e., higher rates of translation). As stated earlier, San Antonio has a well defined entertainment district that is critical to its economic viability and tourist industry. There is likely pressure on police to be responsive to crime that occurs in these areas. It is not surprising that police respond to assaultive crimes and drugs/vice more formally since they are among the most visible forms of disorder and can threaten the viability of an entertainment district.

Conclusion

Researchers are encouraged to explore how discretion is exercised across a wide range of police behaviors. Since discretion lies at the very core of policing, it is important to understand if access to public control is governed by discriminatory practices. Police are in many ways the gatekeepers to the formal criminal justice system, and as Tyler (2006) argues, such access should be based on fundamental fairness. Criminal victimization, regardless of the level of perceived damage, is harmful and should be recognized formally. The decision of individual police officers to record reported behavior as “official crime” is one important

symbolic step in acknowledging its impact and communicating that the victimization is important to the collective community.

Scholars are encouraged to build on this work by expanding analyses to include both organizational and situational factors. The police literature on discretion clearly indicates that situational factors are key to explaining what police do, and there is no reason to believe this area of decision-making is any different. Scholars are particularly encouraged to consider the effects of complainant/victim demographic and socioeconomic characteristics. Moreover, researchers should consider aspects of demeanor, and if possible, legal evidence present at the scene. Currently, inclusion of these variables is difficult based on existing police data systems. Call for service and police incident data are notoriously plagued with missing data. The authors' experiences also noted that situational-level variables are unavailable with CFS data.

Lastly, effort should be made to consider how *organizational* factors influence recording practices. Herbert (1997), Klinger (1997, 2004), and Rubinstein (1973) have recognized that organizational factors impact officer behavior. There also is a geographical component to police recording behavior since deployment often occurs around physical space. Thus, neighborhood factors can directly influence officer behavior through their own personal experience, or indirectly through organizational mandates. As police data collection technology improves (e.g., NIBRS) and departments rely on in-house research and planning units, it is possible that researchers can better isolate the plethora of neighborhood, situational, and organizational factors that influence police behavior, particularly for less visible and less studied decisions, such as the translation of reported crime.

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Notes

1. While this discretion is not without limits, the realities of police work (e.g., limited direct supervision and limited witnesses to an officer's actions) afford officers considerable latitude in making dispositional decisions (see Klockers, 1985).

2. Maxfield et al. (1980) employed a similar concept they referred to as the "recording ratio."

3. See Gottfredson and Gottfredson (1988) and Skogan and Frydl (2004) for more comprehensive reviews of police discretion literature.

4. The authors recognize this statement represents a highly idealized description of the role of police departments in contemporary society and is not without controversy. The authors suggest, however, that this premise is both valid and appropriate within a social disorganization framework.

5. The meaning of formalized police action is likely situation-dependent. When citizens request the presence of the police, it is because they have a problem that can best be reconciled through formal action. When police action is pursuant to proactive police efforts, it is less likely that formalized action is welcomed by residents. The authors would like to thank Dr. Barbara Warner for her helpful insight into this perspective.

6. In contrast to Kubrin and Weitzer (2003) who view calling the police as *formal* social control, Warner (2007) refers to this as *indirect informal* social control. Warner (2007) argues that calling the police is *indirect* formal control because it involves mobilizing a third party with formal authority to intervene in a problem. It also represents *informal* control because it originates in the behaviors of residents themselves (pp. 101–102). Warner's (2007) categories of social control appropriately recognize that not all police involvement in crime is the same. That is, police resources can be mobilized through proactive patrol strategies or reactively by citizens. The former would be appropriately approximate *formal* control, in that it is mobilized by police directly. The latter, in contrast, is considered *informal* in that it is mobilized by citizens. For purposes of this research, Warner's (2007) conceptualization of calls to the police as measures of indirect informal social control was utilized.

7. See <http://www.sanantonio.gov/sapd/pdf/callsmonth.pdf> for a monthly summary of CFS for the years 2000–2006 that is publicly available through SAPD's Web site.

8. Like many large police departments, the dispatching function within SAPD is comprised of two distinct functions, e.g. call takers and dispatchers. All SAPD related 911 calls are answered by call takers who average approximately thirty persons per

shift. If the event warrants a police officer, call takers forward the call details electronically to a set of seven dispatchers who cover all six police substations and the traffic unit. Typically if several calls are received by several different call takers relating to the same event—this commonly happens with traffic accidents—these are recognized by the dispatcher. Occasionally multiple dispatches, and therefore multiple case numbers, are assigned to a single event in error (San Antonio Police Department, Crime Analysis Unit, personal communication, 2009).

9. It was not possible to disaggregate personal from commercial robbery with the CFS data.

10. It was important to note that this scheme did not take into account if official crime classifications were upgraded or downgraded in terms of crime type or seriousness. Assaultive crimes, for example might be downgraded in the official crime data as a "disorderly conduct" or a variety of other less serious criminal behaviors. Thus, all CFS that appeared as officially recorded crimes were considered "translated" regardless of the degree of consistency between the event classifications. Warner (1997) did not consider events that were substantially downgraded in terms of seriousness as "recorded" events; this decision was not fully justified.

11. The number of excluded tracts varied across crime type. The largest number of excluded tracts was for the more serious crime such as robbery (valid $n = 241$) and smallest number was for less serious crimes such as disturbances (valid $n = 261$). Only eleven tracts were excluded in all analyses. These tracts largely included industrial areas and special use tracts such as the San Antonio International Airport.

12. The race and ethnicity categories were not necessarily mutually exclusive of each other, a fact that could possibly confound research using such distinctions. In San Antonio, it was estimated that approximately 90 percent of Latinos self-identified as "White" Latinos compared to Black Latinos (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002). The authors would like to thank a reviewer for raising this issue.

13. The authors would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for this suggestion.

14. Since there was no theoretical reason to expect that a "diffusion effect" existed for the translation rate, spatial dependence was treated as a disturbance in the normally distributed error term rather than as a consequence of a spatially lagged variable.

15. Tests for multicollinearity were run for each of the nine models detailed below using SPSS. The results indicated only moderate problems, particularly for variables percent Latino and percent foreign born. The variance inflation factor (VIF) scores for these variables ranged from 4 to 5 across models. Although slightly higher than the traditional VIF cutoff of 4.0, both were simultaneously left in the model because they tapped two distinct dimensions of the Latino population, especially in a city with large percentages of recent immigrants. Beyond these concerns, all additional VIFs were well below the 4.0 cutoff across models.

16. Spatial regression included one additional parameter (λ) estimate in the output that measured if there were spatially correlated error terms. A significant estimate for λ suggests the error terms were significantly correlated, and thus, use of the spatial regression model with estimated spatial weights improved the overall fit of the data. The spatial error term was only significant for the burglary model.

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