

THE SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICER PERSPECTIVE:
EXAMINING CRIME, VIOLENCE, LAW ENFORCEMENT,
AND EDUCATION ON PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL CAMPUSES

A Thesis

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ii

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Abstract
of
THE SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICER PERSPECTIVE:
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Following incidents such as the 1999 shooting at Columbine High School, governments and school districts have responded with the increased incorporation of police, also known as School Resource Officers (SROs). This critical study deconstructs the recent trend utilizing Bowles and Ginitis' 1976 theory on schooling in a capitalist society, the Prison-Industrial Complex (PIC), the School-to-Prison Pipeline (S2PP), and additional theories on crime and race. In-depth interviews were conducted with SROs from six different public high schools in Sacramento, CA. Each were asked a series of questions revealing the overall role and effects of SROs, as well as their personal explanations of student crime and violence to see if their responses were symbolic of any of the aforementioned theories. Their individual responses were analyzed and discussed in relation to the outlined theoretical framework. It was found that SROs support some of the arguments of the theory on schooling in a capitalist economy and they can also be

viewed as contributors to the PIC and a S2PP. However it was also found that they counter such perspectives through additional roles they fulfill on campus such as mentoring and creating a safer learning environment. The study concludes with a raised level of concern and demand for future research which examines the role of SROs, and addresses the inequality that continues to exist within our education and criminal justice systems.

_____, Committee Chair
Kevin Wehr, Ph. D.

Date

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Acknowledgements.....	vi
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Purpose of Study.....	1
2. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	5
Education in a Capitalist Economy.....	5
The Prison-Industrial Complex (PIC).....	11
The School-to-Prison Pipeline (S2PP).....	13
Background Check: School Resource Officers (SROs).....	17
Police Culture.....	19
Criminological Overview.....	25
Social Disorganization.....	26
Differential Association.....	27
Strain Theory.....	28
Labeling Theory.....	30
Broken Windows Theory.....	31
The Racialized Systems of Criminal Justice and Education.....	33

3. METHODOLOGY	39
Data Collection.....	39
4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION.....	44
Findings.....	44
SECTION I: How do SROs construct their position, identity, and role on public high school campuses?.....	45
Theme 1: Mandatory Times and Daily Duties.....	45
Theme 2: Drama.....	47
Theme 3: Mentoring.....	48
Theme 4: Serious Police Work?.....	51
SECTION II: How do SROs affect students and their educational experiences?.....	55
Theme 5: Safety First.....	55
Theme 6: “Crutch”.....	59
Theme 7: Contradictions (Family life/Survival or Individual/Choice.....	63
Theme 8: Distractions.....	67
Theme 9: The Columbine Effect.....	69

SECTION III: How do SROs view the essential causes of student crime and violence?.....	72
Theme 10: Parenting.....	72
Theme 11: Disrespect and Pride, or Survival?.....	74
Theme 12: Gangs and Drugs.....	75
Theme 13: Culture.....	76
Theme 14: Race.....	80
Theme 15: Marijuana.....	83
Theme 16: The beginning and end of the school year.....	84
Theme 17: Comprehensive Involvement.....	86
Theme 18: Time.....	87
Theme 19: Testing.....	90
Discussion.....	95
5. CONCLUSION.....	107
What to make of it all and where do we go from here?.....	107
Appendix A. Consent to Participate in Research.....	111
Appendix B. Interview Questions.....	113
References.....	114

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of Study

The topic of violence and crime in America has and will seemingly continue to be at the forefront of public concern. Furthermore the concern over public safety only becomes heightened when discussed in the context of students and schools. As a result, over the last two decades, we have seen the government response towards student crime and violence has been increasing incorporation of law enforcement within our educational institutions (Monahan and Torres, 2000). However, while the safety of students, teachers, faculty and the surrounding community should be a great concern, we must ultimately be focused on the overall quality of education and the future success of all students.

According to the *Alliance for Excellent Education* (2009) it is found that the national public high school graduation rate for African Americans and Hispanics are both around 50%. Although this graduation rate can vary from state-government calculated graduation rates by up to 11% (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009), with government findings reflecting more conservative statistics of higher graduation rates for both groups, it nevertheless presents a clear problem for the future success of many African Americans and Latinos. Additionally African Americans make up approximately 39% of the US prison population while Hispanics make up approximately 33% (Bureau of Prisons, 2011), even though African Americans only account for around 13% of the total US

general population and Hispanics about 16% (US Census Bureau, 2009). Nonetheless, disregarding the relationship between these disproportionate findings and the actual causes and contributing factors which produce them, it is imperative that we delve deeper into the dynamics of police within the educational setting. While law enforcement officials on school campuses, known as school resource officers (SROs) are implemented to prevent crime and violence and increase safety for all, we must also be highly attentive to any additional affects they may have on disadvantaged students, the state of public education, and the future quality of society.

To lay the foundation for the affects law enforcement may have on students and their educational experiences, I utilize three main theoretical perspectives. The first is Bowles and Gintis's (1976) critical theory on the function of schooling. The second is the Prison-Industrial Complex (Davis 1998, Schlosser 1998, Wehr and Aseltine 2013), which explains the network of interests in the expansion of the American prison system. And third the school-to-prison pipeline (Losen and Wald 2003), a more recent radical theory that is a product and component of the Prison-Industrial Complex, involving the processes by which marginalized students are pushed out of the education system and funneled into the juvenile justice system. Following these main perspectives the intersection of law enforcement and our educational institutions can become highly problematic. However, long before we can come to any conclusions or even prior to making any assessment of the overall advantages and disadvantages of police on school campuses, it is crucial that we gain a better understanding of the specific roles SROs play

according to these theoretical perspectives and how or why their presence is symbolic. To do so we must further examine the identity, function and duties of SROs, and gain their own perspective on the topics of crime, violence, law enforcement, and education.

In order to obtain this information SROs from six of the larger public high schools in Sacramento, California were interviewed. Numerous questions were asked through a series of in-depth interviews, with the three main overarching research questions being: How do school resource officers (SROs) view the essential problems contributing to student crime and violence? How do they construct their role on public high school campuses? And how do they feel they affect students and their education? Through their responses to these questions, in addition to other more specific open-ended questions related to these themes; we will have a more accurate understanding of the justifications, consequences, and overall dynamics of law enforcement within the public education system. Moreover, and most significant to my research objectives, we will begin to evaluate how and why their presence in schools symbolizes the aforementioned theories, and how and why they are not representative or supportive of these perspectives.

Crime and violence unarguably does nothing to improve the quality of education, nor the success rate of students. But if we are able to prevent and reduce crime and violence through the integration of law enforcement officials on school campuses, we must strive for perfection in the methods and strategies they use, while identifying possible auxiliary affects their measures may have on all students and the state of the public education system. To ensure that the final goals of preventing crime, and

increasing the quality of education and the future success of students is met; expanding our knowledge of law enforcement, crime, and violence from the perspective of SROs is a critical and extremely beneficial starting point.

In the following sections I explore theories on education and the function of schooling, as well as the prison-industrial complex and the school-to-prison pipeline. These theories will help provide the conceptual framework needed to explain the possible latent function of SROs. After providing this synthesis of theoretical perspectives that is both the foundation and guidance to my research, I give a brief history and background of SROs, discuss what “police culture” is, then review some of the relevant theories in the field of criminology that are fundamental when evaluating police and their work in any setting. Finally I will discuss what may be the underlying theme and the larger social significance of my study; the role of race in our education and criminal justice systems.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Education in a Capitalist Economy

Before we begin our evaluation of law enforcement on high school campuses from the standpoint of SROs, it is essential that we take a step back and begin by deconstructing the nature and function of schools as a socially constructed institution. Only by understanding the deeper meanings and role the education system plays in the structuring of society can we locate the conceivable purpose and effects of law enforcement within this particular context. Therefore in the following section I give a brief historical background of the American education system, then lay foundation to the theoretical perspective I have used throughout to examine the intersection of law enforcement and education.

According to the theoretical perspective of Bowles and Gintis (1976) and their critical theory on American education, it is explained that schools can only be defined by and through the capitalist structure in which it exists. In order to completely understand the institution of schools we must comprehend its history and growth, as well as its relevant application and expansion under a capitalist system. By and large schools evolved as a shift in the American economy took place. During the colonial American era, families were the standard unit of production in which parents and elders were the primary sources of upbringing, teaching, and training of children. But the relationship between the family and the system of production soon changed this practice. As the trade

of goods and services expanded during this time period, larger commercial interests profited which resulted in greater investment in the labor of production. The concentration of capital investments in the development of factories that produced commodities at lower costs became a force that damaged the sustainability of family-owned and run production. With this dawn of a system of capitalist production came the transformation of schooling (Bowles and Gintis 1976).

Prior to the growth of the early American capitalist economy, children did not enroll in schools as the family and church institutions provided all their cultural and educational needs. But as the expansion of commerce changed the social relations of production, it also created an evolving social class structure in which the upper class, made up of owners and capitalists, controlled the means of production. As capitalism progressed, it created demand for a widely skilled and specialized labor force. Whereas apprentice systems of training were erected to meet this demand, family workers became forced to migrate to the cities for work where they were paid low wages and endured harsh conditions, struggling to survive. This inequality between the workers and owners threatened American political stability, forcing capitalists to find solutions which would satisfy the proletariat class without damaging their production and profit. Schools became the desired measure and mechanism which would meet the needs of both of these groups (Bowles and Gintis 1976).

While the establishment of schools served the purpose of justifying the economic status of individuals through an ostensibly meritocratic process, Bowles and Gintis

(1976) argue that the structure of schools serves a much more significant purpose beyond that. Their main arguments strongly suggest that the institution of schools could be best understood as meeting the systematic need for producing a surplus reserve army of skilled labor, legitimizing a technocratic-meritocratic perspective which benefits owners and capitalists, reinforcing the fragmentation of individuals and groups in society according to stratified and unequal work statuses, and socializing youth to interactions and relationships of dominance and subordination which are highly represented characteristics within the capitalist economy.

According to the technocratic-meritocratic ideology, bureaucratic and hierarchical structures within the workplace form naturally according to technical skill and superiority of the workforce, which in turn functions to coordinate collective activity and nurture expertise (Earl and Kruse 1999). Therefore organizations become most successful when workers are assigned tasks and duties within the sectors in which they specialize and have the greatest ability to become experts. The positions workers fill and the jobs they perform are based on a system of merit following one's natural intelligence, cognitive skills, and level of education. However contrary to this widely accepted perspective Bowles and Gintis (1976) claim that this ideology simply perpetuates economic disparities, masking the ways in which school systems are designed as institutions that justify and perhaps contribute to socioeconomic inequality.

As economic status is allegedly a reflection of technical and cognitive skill derived from one's own level of educational accomplishments, it is suggested that under

this belief individuals in society automatically assume that schooling is the sole determinant of economic success (Bowles and Gintis 1976). But as their research concludes, educational attainment does not automatically yield greater economic success. Once the statistics are further scrutinized, it is the socioeconomic background of an individual that is the stronger predictor of economic success than their actual levels of educational attainment. Yet despite other predictors of economic success, schools use measures such as IQ tests to reinforce a merit system which determines one's future position in society. Although high IQ's do not directly correlate with high economic status, the measurement itself benefits capitalists by dividing individuals through levels of intellectual testing. Bowles and Gintis further state that this hierarchical structure within education shaped by test scores and grading systems, simply reflects the nature of the economy and not that of a true egalitarian system of equal opportunity. Thus the competition experienced in schools directly benefits capitalist enterprise through the stratification of the labor force. As a result schools have become the central legitimizing social institution of the technocratic-meritocratic perspective.

In addition to legitimizing the technocratic-meritocratic perspective, the second key function of the education systems' support of capitalism is the reproduction of social relationships. More specifically Bowles and Gintis argue that in schools, economic life is replicated through the social relationships among teachers, faculty, adult authority figures, and their students, or what they termed the "correspondence principle" (1976:131). The interactions between these two groups yields relationships based on

dominance and subordinancy, a common theme found in the workplace. While the structure of schooling socializes youth to dominance and subordinancy, it most importantly integrates them into adult roles they will experience in the labor force. They explain that schooling shapes the self-concepts, aspirations, and social identifications of students according to the necessities of the social division of labor. In other words receiving an education symbolizes alienation of the student from his or her own education through the lack of control over the content and quality of the curriculum; and student pressure to conform to standards of grading and testing which only reaps external rewards as opposed to their overall contribution to the production process of learning and knowledge building (1976:131). When taking a look at the worker in a capitalist system, their experiences and relationships match that of students. In a competitive market where hierarchal structures exist, owners and capitalists use the same merit system as a way to shape the consciousness of lower class groups, pitting workers against one another, causing an alienated labor force that suppresses any formation of collective action (1976:130).

Bowles and Gintis clearly express their concerns with an education system that coexists with an economic system of capitalism. Overall as they argue that the education system functions to reinforce the technocratic-meritocratic perspective which is legitimized by false social presumptions, and the integration of youth submitting to adult work roles and relationships of dominance and subordinancy; we must refer back to the core purpose of study and how this perspective on schools relates to the implementation

of law enforcement on high school campuses and how their presence along with their work roles affect the educational climate.

The process of schooling is utilized by capitalist production as it functions to locate the economic niche for society's members, ranking them according to a false system of merit which reinforces class inequality. But, by definition under a capitalist system, economic inequality is inevitable. Thus adhering to Bowles and Gintis' perspective it can be argued that students who venture outside the norms, customs, and intended goals of the education system, (such as defying dominance and subordinancy from teachers and administrators or proving educational failure according to testing and IQ measurement), they have no individual value from the capitalist-production standpoint. As a result students who engage in deviant and criminal behavior are easily deemed disposable and warrant punishment and exclusion from the system based on merit. SROs then become the state enforced power to justifiably exclude them from not only schools, but essentially the entire political economy. Instead of working towards eventual re-socialization of youth back into the education system, for at the very least an opportunity at future economic advancement, they become processed and entered in the criminal justice system.

Keeping in line with my main research endeavors and determining other explanations for the intersection of schooling and law enforcement beyond the idea of safety; in the next section I examine the force and influence of our current crime control

industry. More specifically I discuss the prison-industrial complex to provide a clearer context for my purpose in research.

The Prison-Industrial Complex (PIC)

Crime is indeed a problem, but while national violent-crime rate trends illustrate an overall decline since the early 1990's (Bureau of Justice Statistics 2008), the American prison system continues to expand, supporting the ever so powerful prison-industrial complex (Davis 1998 and Schlosser 1998). Coinciding with the decrease of violent crime, the privatization and increase in prison construction creates an extremely perverse idea: the demand for more criminals (Christie 2000). By meeting this absurd need from a network of politicians, lobbyists, media, and corporations all with vested financial and capital interests, American jails and prisons have become filled by a majority of non-violent offenders with an overall extreme disparity in the number of Black and Latino inmates (Gottschalk 2006). Although the larger national issue of crime should not be ignored by any extent, my central focus is the degree to which SROs in public high schools contribute to such a problem.

According to Wehr and Aseltine, "the prison industrial complex can be defined as a set of governmental, private, and corporate interests that develop policies and practices to exert social, political, and economic control, and perpetuate social processes that are biased by race, class, gender, and political perspective" (2013: 5). The comprising interests between government, corporations, media, and the criminal justice system

benefit through the expansion of the prison system. Generally speaking, as government officials on all levels from local to federal respond to public fear of crime and violence, they gain popularity and citizen votes by taking a “get tough” punitive approach to criminality. As a result law enforcement agencies are pressured to make more and more arrests to support such a stance, giving viable evidence that they are successful and efficient. Furthermore the media and pop-culture industry which promotes the topics of crime, violence, and politics benefit by producing such stories and portraying such images that are widely consumed by the public, gaining larger audiences and accumulating higher profits. However the most obvious, controversial and fastest-growing sector of this network are the large private-prison companies (Schlosser 1998).

Like any other industry, the privatization of the prison system has allowed corporations to profit immensely. By investing in the prison system, corporate enterprises gain through the contracts to construct prisons, the goods and services needed to supply them, and the access to an open market of cheap labor that prisoners supply. However this would not be possible without the vested interests by all groups within this constellation of power. For instance, rural communities are enticed by private investors with the opportunity to expand their suffering economies, creating jobs with the construction of new prisons in their locales. Government officials use crime and violence as political platforms, while their firm position to “get tough” on crime by declaring a “war on drugs” yields higher incarceration rates, winning support from the public. This relationship between government legislation and corporate financial gain creates a

desired supply of crime in which the raw material are inmates such as the poor, the homeless, the mentally ill, drug-addicts, drug dealers, alcoholics, and a wide array of other violent sociopaths. The quandary is that many of these inmates now being put in prison were once handled by government funded institutions and non-profit organizations such as mental health facilities and drug and alcohol treatment centers (Schlosser 1998). Moreover when the illiteracy rate among US prisoners is approximately 70% (Schlosser 1998), and for state institutions 70% of inmates do not have a high school diploma (Western and Pettit 2010), investigating the association between our diminishing public education system and our expanding prison system should be of particular concern.

Making a stronger connection between the theory on schooling (Bowles and Gintis 1976) and the prison industrial complex, in the next section we will delve deeper into the process by which law enforcement officials affect certain groups of students and their educational experiences. More specifically I examine one of the more recent critical theories in education, known as the school-to-prison pipeline, with the intentions of advancing our understanding of a SRO's function, purpose, and effects within the public education system.

The School-to-Prison Pipeline (S2PP)

The school-to-prison pipeline (S2PP) in its broadest definition is the process by which marginalized students are funneled by the structure of the public education system onto paths leading to future incarceration. Under this perspective it is argued that the

denial of adequate student services leads to failure among large populations of at-risk youth (Kim, Losen, and Hewit 2010). Students attending socioeconomically isolated schools with high concentrations of racial minorities are faced with damaging conditions such as lack of quality resources, overcrowded classrooms, under-qualified teachers, ineffective leadership, and social isolation (Wald and Losen 2003). These circumstances coupled with Zero Tolerance policies, No Child Left Behind laws, and standardized testing exacerbates educational inequality through student tracking, harsh punishment, and exclusion (Christle, Jolivet, and Nelson 2005).

The relationship between school failure and incarceration has been well documented in the past (Maguin and Loeber 1996, Lerner and Galambos 1998, Wald and Losen 2003). But the crucial concern is how the education system works to prevent failure and promote success, or contributes to deficiencies and hinders achievement. It is argued that through zero tolerance policies, students once reprimanded are now automatically suspended or expelled, many times being punished for non-violent, minor infractions (Kim, Losen, and Hewit 2010). This exclusion thwarts the social development of youth, further discouraging them from attending and participating in the schooling process. Once students begin to fall behind they are far more likely to dropout, hence turning to crime and other deviant acts that often follow in replace of the formally structured institution of education (Advancement Project 2010).

In addition to strict disciplinary policies of punishment, the demanding standardized testing which all students must undergo unequally measures intelligence.

Students who are taught under lower quality conditions are assessed by the same tests in which students with access to greater resources and more qualified teachers are. This notion intensifies the expectations and demands of schools and of individual students not meeting standards. Schools who perform poorly receive less funding, perpetuating the issue at hand, while the students who fail to meet requirements become isolated, either by repeating the same grade-level or being placed into special programs and charter schools which restrict their educational opportunities (Christle, Jolivet, and Nelson 2005).

As a result it is even argued that the emphasis and severity of standardized test scores has an effect on schools' concerns with student dropouts. It is explained that in order to raise school-wide test scores, some teachers and administrators under much pressure may actually encourage dropouts for students who are performing poorly (Figlio 2005). In this case standardized testing has an auxiliary function to push at-risk students out of the education system. Additionally according to the findings from the Advancement Project 2010, the more schools have relied upon standardized testing, the more likely they have turned to higher disciplinary measures. This crucial finding linked with the fact that the number of states that used test results to sanction schools more than doubled from 2001 to 2008 (Advancement Project 2010), shows the potential significant role law enforcement may have in the pipeline to prison.

While standardized testing and zero tolerance trends increase and come to a crucial juncture, we can see how a greater reliance on school resource officers have been implemented as legitimized forces of authority, discipline, and punishment. Although

highlighting the ways in which the public education system increases the elements which lead to incarceration is the focus of a school-to-prison ideology, my research revolves around how school resource officers may or may not contribute and reinforce such mechanisms within this particular perspective. Thus using the PIC to expose the underlying reasons for a S2PP offers us a logical explanation to the possible secondary role SROs play beyond the mere means of student and administrative safety, but also as essential components in the production and supply of future prisoners.

Drawing upon the relationships between the government, the prison system, and corporations we are able to see how each institution benefits from the mass imprisonment of its citizens. Understanding even this broad definition of the prison-industrial complex helps clarify the discussion of a school-to-prison pipeline argument, therefore supported by the larger critical theory on schooling. Utilizing the perspective of Bowles and Gintis it can be argued that the prison-industrial complex is the ideological formation and subsequent creation of a new economic niche (via capitalist production) for students who have been deemed failures according to false meritocratic ideals of education. According to the prison-industrial complex, at-risk students formerly considered socially disposable in terms of their economic production are now economic values as incarcerates of the profitable American prison industry. Furthermore the trends within the prison-pipeline perspective explains the process by which schools are failing to play an active role in preventing marginalized students from engaging in patterns that lead to crime (instead punishing students on the basis of unequal cultural and social capital and enforcing

punitive and exclusionary practices) creating a justified supply of prisoners on the basis of their own individual failures. Thus my principal purpose and goal of research remains geared towards a greater understanding of SRO's position in this highly complex phenomenon and how they view their functions and roles in maintaining or countering such theoretical approaches to education and crime. In the remaining sections I briefly explain the evolution of SROs, discuss the implications of a police culture, and review some of the most applicable criminological theories of the past to better conceptualize their possible perceptions, function, and effects on students and their education.

Background Check: School Resource Officers (SROs)

Law enforcement officials on school grounds, most commonly known as School Resource Officers (SRO's), have been around since 1958 when the first SRO program was put in effect. But it was not until the late 1990's, as a result of Federal government funding, that SRO programs started becoming regularly utilized by schools nationwide (School Violence Resource Center 2001). The allocation of Federal funds was an urgent political response towards the sudden national increase and severity of violence in schools, in addition to the public outrage and community concern surrounding media coverage of tragic school shootings such as those at Lindhurst High School in Olivehurst, California (1992), Frontier Middle School in Moses Lake, Washington (1993), Pearl High School in Pearl, Mississippi (1997), Westside Middle School in Jonesboro, Arkansas (1998), and of course Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado (1999)

just to name a few. Through the Safe Schools Act of 1994, the 1998 amendment to the 1968 Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act, and the Office of Community Oriented Police Services (COPS) \$68 million worth of grants in 2000, schools across the country were heavily pressured to strengthen their bonds with police in order to rapidly identify and prevent further crimes on school grounds (Bracy and Kupchik 2010).

SRO programs are generally defined as the partnerships between school officials and their local law enforcement agencies that have the goal of reducing and preventing crime and violence on campus through shared resources, information, and community-policing strategies (Atkinson 2002). SRO's are sworn-in, uniformed police officers who are assigned a specific school or schools by their respective police departments. All of their duties on campus are included in the functions of police officers off campus. They patrol school grounds, secure school parameters, investigate all criminal offenses, detain or arrest offenders, minimize deviant and disruptive behaviors, and write administrative reports on various incidents and violations of the law (Bracy and Kupchik 2010).

Besides being bound by the same duties as off-campus police officers, SRO's are further empowered by their discretion to uphold the rules and regulations of the schools they are serving, while also attending to the diverse needs of students, faculty, administration, parents, and of course the wider community. Although the specific tasks that these SRO's perform throughout their day varies from individual to individual and school to school, their general objectives are enforcing the standard laws of the community, counseling, and teaching (Peterson 2002).

Even though the term “school resource officer” or “school liaison officer” is different from a security guard or any other extra-supervisory adult on campus, the true definition of an SRO is highly debatable. For instance at some schools or within specific school districts SROs are simply any local law enforcement agents from various backgrounds of expertise, assigned by their department for part-time or for specific purposes, circumstances, and events. At other schools, particularly those in lower-income districts, SRO’s are full-time officers on campus at all hours of the day attending to a variety of needs. Most notably what many believe to be “true” SROs, are not only officers who are constant figures on campus directly interacting and communicating with students and school officials, but they are those who also have had comprehensive training on policing within the unique school environment (Theriot 2009).

Police Culture

SROs are a specific type of law enforcement official that needs to be examined under the unique context in which they work, however in most cases they are still representatives of their larger local police organizations. While much of the current research on “police culture” tends to deflect traditional theoretical perspectives: that of monolithic and homogenous behaviors, attitudes, beliefs and norms for all police, instead focusing on the complexity and variation in culture and subcultures among officers who work in highly fragmented systems of modern police departments (Paoline 2003); it is nevertheless crucial that we review some of the traditional theoretical arguments that help

us imagine and formulate a possible framework for SROs, and determining whether or not a separate framework is reasonable, necessary, or even possible.

According to Paoline (2003) most definitions of police culture involves the understanding of single phenomena among occupational members that become generalized over time, without fully revealing exactly how the cultural constructs are in fact produced. He suggests that defining the singular “police culture” involves following his conceptual model which examines: what are the work environments for police (occupational and organizational), how it is that police deal with the tensions they encounter in their environments, and what are the overall outcomes for the relationship between citizens and other police.

Within the occupational environment for police, the most fundamental element is danger (Barker 1999, Brown 1988, Cullen et al. 1983, Kappeler et al. 1998, Reiner 1985, Skolnick 1994, Sparrow et al. 1990, Toch 1973, Van Maanen 1974, Westley 1970). As police work consists of entering a multitude of arenas which can be both violent and unpredictable, they are faced with the constant risk of danger. Given their clear and constant potential to dangerous situations, police are also given legitimate power and authority over citizens (Bittner 1974, Brown 1988, Manning 1995, Muir 1977, Reiner 1985, Skolnick 1994, Van Maanen 1974, Westley 1970). This coercive power, what he describes as the second element, plays a central role in the construction of the occupational police culture because it gives officers the ability to create, maintain and control their authority (Paoline 2003). Together, the elements of danger and coercive

power, account for the most significant components of the occupational environment of police.

In addition to the occupational environment of police, Paoline (2003) argues that there are also added elements from their organizational environments. Two key elements of their organizational environment include uncertainty and role ambiguity. Due to the hierarchical structure of police departments, officers are constantly being scrutinized by their supervisors about the ways in which they go about enforcing laws (Brown 1988, McNamara 1967, Skolnick 1994). Within their organizations, officers are most often recognized for negative reasons and less likely to be recognized for a job well done. Due to this notion their occupational dilemma becomes finding the delicate balance between efficiency and certainty of procedural standards (which can be very vague in the first place) and engaging in proactive work that would gain positive recognition (Paoline 2003). Moreover the extreme scrutiny from supervisors becomes further exacerbated by the ambiguity in police officer, role identification. According to past research (Brown 1988, Rumbaut and Bittner 1979, Wilson 1968) the three main functions of officers are law enforcement, order maintenance, and service. However as they are expected to meet these three objective duties for the streets, within their actual departments and from supervisors, they are usually only recognized and rewarded for enforcing laws. This poses somewhat of a contradictory organizational position within the system of policing, adding more strain to the already stressful occupational features of their environment.

Analyzing the occupational and organizational environments of police, and extracting the core elements resulting from such situations, we can comprehend the development of coping mechanisms. Two such mechanisms in response to danger and coercive authority (occupational environment) are suspiciousness and what some researchers have defined as “maintaining the edge” (Kappeler et al. 1998, Reiner 1985, Reuss-Ianni 1983, Rubinstein 1973, Skolnick 1994, Westley 1970). In addition to being suspicious of citizens who may break the law or cause disorder, it is stated that officers are also suspicious of newly hired police until they are evaluated under work conditions that reveal their personal demeanor and level of commitment to other fellow officers. Next in preparation for possible dangers on the job, officers must also maintain an edge on citizens by being able to read a wide range of people and situational settings. This involves learning how to sort out citizens according to their appearance, behaviors, and actions in order to categorize them by potential levels of danger (Skolnick 1994, Van Maanen 1974).

While suspicion and maintaining an edge are coping mechanisms pertaining to occupational environment, “laying-low” and “crime-fighting” are two strategies in response to supervisor scrutiny and role ambiguity for their organizational environment. Laying low, also referred to as “covering your ass” (CYA), means distancing oneself from any sort of situation that involves risk. Officers learn to lay low at all costs, avoiding possible judgment-calls from supervisors and the negative recognition that may likely follow (Brown 1988, Herbert 1997). Second, in order to manage the ambiguity of

their role, officers emphasize a strong crime-fighting identity (Brown 1988, Drummond 1976, Sparrow et al. 1990, Van Maanen 1974). Although as previously mentioned the three main functions of police are to enforce laws, maintain order and serve their communities; the pressure from within police organizations force them to prioritize and focus specifically on law enforcement. As a result, and what is known as one of the most common threads in police culture (Brown 1988, Drummond 1976, Sparrow et al. 1990, Van Maanen 1974), officers become aggressive and punitive. The difficulty with this lies in the disagreement between these two coping mechanisms. While police may wish to lay low, they must also conform to supervisorial requirements of enforcing laws and arresting criminals. This consequently leads to selective approaches of law enforcement, more specifically centering attention towards more serious crimes with less administrative risks (Paoline 2003).

Occupational and organizational environments have a great effect on the strategies police use to deal with them, which in turn shapes the relationship between citizens and other officers. Danger and coercive authority among occupational environments result in suspicion and maintaining an edge, which leads to the first outcome of social isolation (Paoline 2003). Under these circumstances police begin to view their occupational worlds through a police versus non-police and an “us versus them” perspective. This dichotomized lens then results in the second outcome of loyalty, which is not only seen as an occupational outcome, but also an organizational one as well. By isolating themselves from non-police, protecting each other from the outside

dangers related to their work, officers start to socialize exclusively with other police building upon in-group relationships. Furthermore as police encounter added inner-organizational pressure and strain, they must learn to continue strengthening bonds with fellow officers for protection from supervisors (Brown 1988, Sparrow et al. 1990).

As I have reviewed Paoline's (2003) conceptual model, it is clear to see how the traditional occupational culture of police can be limited, over generalized, and over used. Nonetheless it is not my concern to come up with a more precise definition of what police culture is, nor is defining a single culture representative of all police even possible. Instead my intentions are to see how SROs could possibly fit this universalized homogenous culture of police. For instance, we all know that some high school campuses have less crime and violence than others, but how do the varying levels of danger affect SROs suspiciousness in students (as opposed to citizens outside of schools)? How does the school setting and the fact that the majority of students are minors shape their coercive authority and their ability to maintain an edge on this specific population? And as far as the organizational elements of SROs, do they have more discretion and face less supervisory scrutiny being on a school campus as opposed to being in the streets; or do they face more bureaucratic pressure from both the school system and their own police departments? Finally most important, how ambiguous is their role on the unique setting of a school campus? Do they adhere to the same crime-fighting orientation as they maintain in the streets, or do they take on other more critical roles of service, order maintenance, and community-policing tactics?

Even as traditional models of police culture have their limitations when describing the norms, laws, values, customs, behaviors and beliefs of a single police officer identity; it is nevertheless essential to keep in mind how these available themes compare and contrast to the roles of specific SROs, and the possible cultural formations that may or may not be developing among this specialized unit. The differences in occupational environment between street officers and SROs are lucid, yet the organizational differences are even more ambiguous. The extension of law enforcement in our educational institutions supports the argument that future research needs to continue, defining what police culture is and what subcultures are forming and quite possibly already developed. Tapping into SRO's individual and personal perspectives on: the causes of student crime and violence, their function and duties on campus, and their perceived effects on students and their education, help us advance our knowledge on police culture and begin to construct a basic conceptual model relevant to the SRO.

Criminological Overview

It is possible that an increase in student crime and violence can be verified through longitudinal data, but what cannot be statistically proven are the precise contributing factors. Whereas delving into the multiple causes of crime and violence is not my chief research concern here, it is nonetheless only rational that we review some of the main criminological theories that ought to guide the strategies towards stopping crime and violence (which gives greater insight to why and how SRO's may explain the causes

of student crime and violence, as well as how their position and role is constructed). Hence it is only through the criminological background and the gained knowledge and understanding of these various perspectives, that we can effectively prevent crime and violence from occurring in the future.

There are numerous criminological theories from the classical to the positivist, and while the support or rejection of many of these theories are merely a matter of one's own opinion, there are some that remain prominent in the field of criminology and particularly relevant to my focus of law enforcement in high schools. The following theories broadly defined are social disorganization, differential association, strain, broken windows, and labeling.

Social Disorganization

Social disorganization theory, developed by the Chicago School in the 1900's, is an ecological perspective that explains the causes of crime to be related to the structure of the community. In disorganized neighborhoods where social institutions break down (family, schools, businesses, churches, and other group formations), informal social controls disappear creating a suitable and rather welcoming environment for crime. The lack of a community's ability to maintain public order (collective efficacy) and build strong informal networks (social capital), allows for new criminal cultures to evolve. Thus in communities fraught with broken institutions, where shared goals and common interests are difficult to generate and complicated to maintain, delinquent behavior is

nearly inevitable (Park and Burgess 1925, Shaw and McKay 1942). Recognizing the experiences and struggles of students outside the classroom, places a much greater burden on institutions (such as schools) to provide for them where other social support systems are insufficient. From this perspective, SRO goals and objectives are designed to help maintain and create a safer and healthier learning environment which will produce a more stable structure within the lives of many youth. This “social organization” that SROs seek to sustain within the realm of high schools, presumably prevents and decreases the chances of students to engage in criminal and violent behavior and acts.

Differential Association

Differential association, an extension of social disorganization theory, is a type of social learning theory that describes the process by which individuals come to commit criminal acts. This theory states that criminality, like all other non-criminal behaviors, are learned through interaction with peers and other intimate group relations (Sutherland 1978). The rationalizations, motives, and attitudes towards crime are developed through relationships with those who are already criminal-minded. Furthermore the techniques and skills learned to commit crimes are predicated upon favorable and unfavorable definitions of the law, hence the more association one has with those who view an excess of unfavorable definitions of the law, are more likely to become delinquent themselves. Unlike social disorganization theory which identifies ecological patterns in the structuring of communities that cause crime, differential association theory focuses on the

cultural definitions and social practices within group interaction that cause crime. Following this theory, SRO programs are a rational method to preventing an increase in delinquency especially in schools that are more susceptible to crime and violence. Teachers, administrators, and counselors may not be able to stop students from learning the definitions and skills related to committing acts of crime once they are outside of school, but SROs have greater access and opportunities to positively guide or correct the behaviors of marginalized students given their jurisdictional duties are not confined to the space of education. But the ascending concern my research suggests is whether or not their duties and role within schools extends outside of school boundaries, not to mention whether or not their role and duties within schools even attends to this specific construction of crime in the first place (intervening and rerouting criminal tendencies, behaviors, and actions before they occur instead of simply dealing with the results after they have already occurred).

Strain Theory

Next under the theory of strain, which was a development of Durkheim's anomie theory (1897), there are a number of various branches that all attempt to explain the forces which lead to crime. Without summarizing and critiquing each of these branches, the most commonly applied definition of strain refers to Merton's strain theory, where the main focus is the link between structural inequality and individual behavior. More specifically strain occurs when there is a disconnection between social and cultural values

of economic success and the structural accessibility to resources that generate means to achieve such goals. This subsequent social pressure placed on individuals most commonly results in criminal behavior. Furthermore while the type, severity, and consistency of criminal and deviant acts vary according to one's developed behaviors of conformity, innovation, ritualism, retreatism, and rebellion, it is suggested that crime is primarily concentrated among lower class populations due to unequal opportunities and lack of sufficient resources (Merton 1938).

Applying this theory to practice, it can easily be argued that the daily presence of police on campus would add another dimension to the strain young racial minorities and lower class citizens are faced with. As many inner-city urban youth experience harassment, racial discrimination, racial profiling, and harsh treatment from police patrolling the streets in their neighborhoods, the confrontations they encounter at school will be interpreted no differently, perhaps obstructing their likelihood of a desire and motivation to learn (or in some cases even attending). This presumed additional strain SROs may produce, serves an adverse purpose of what they are originally intended to do, which is create a more positive learning environment and not add to the tension and pressures already experienced by many students outside of school. Education is possibly the single greatest solution to economic strain and an alternative path to crime, yet the police infiltration of both the schools and the streets can be overwhelming and may have ultimate, overall damaging consequences.

Labeling Theory

Whereas the first three theories I addressed examine the contributing factors to crime, the labeling theory and all labeling theorists center their attention more explicitly on the reactions and response to crime. In its broadest definition, labeling theory states that once an individual engages in crime, a criminal label becomes attached to that individual. This label gradually evolves into an ascribed, criminal master status. Once they are stigmatized by their criminal identity, they become marginalized by the rest of society and begin to associate with other criminals, accepting their role and sole identity as a criminal. It is suggested that this social psychological pattern of deviance further contributes to the socially constructed label that presumably perpetuates criminal activity (Becker 1963). This theory is definitely essential when analyzing the role and effects of SROs because as adolescent students are faced with reoccurring accounts of police contact, it becomes more likely that they will be entered into the criminal justice system (gaining the legally attached labels), as opposed to being reprimanded and punished exclusively through school oriented discipline. Disregarding the reasons for a student's punishment in the first place, as well as disregarding the success or failure of police presence as a deterrent to crime, the sheer existence of legal law enforcement representatives within the school setting creates a higher likelihood that many deviant or delinquent youth will eventually become entangled with the criminal justice system and forced to struggle with the stigmatizing label of being criminal. Overall as the labeling theory suggests and illustrates the probable damaging consequences that may occur when

student criminal acts are dealt with through police intervention; emerging from this is the critical concern of whether or not SROs adopt this potential interpretation of the labeling theory and recognize how their role as law enforcers on school campuses may affect individual students and their educational futures.

Broken Windows Theory

The last criminological theory I address is broken windows theory. While this theory does not specifically explain how student crime and violence occurs within schools, there is a strong relationship between a general broken windows ideology and the manifestation of police on school grounds; particularly in how SRO programs are implemented, justified, and sustained. For the most part broken windows theory is a recent revelation into the prevention of continual crime rates. This theory is developed around the idea that when minor crimes (mainly petty property crimes) such as broken windows are not repaired, it yields the impression that “broken windows” and other acts of vandalism are non-repercussionary; therefore permitting offenders to continue engaging in criminal activity that will eventually develop into more consistent and severe offenses (Kelling and Wilson 1982). However this theory has faced an abundance of criticism given its logical inconsistencies of assuming causation through correlation (disorder leads to more major crimes), its extreme oversimplification of the process in which crimes occur (ignoring factors such as race, class, and structural implications of a community, assuming that stable conditions and an organized appearance in

neighborhoods will automatically lower and prevent crime rates), and a lack of valid empirical support (Harcourt 2001). Yet despite major objections and limitations, the general position of our public school institutions still seem to follow this broken windows ideal.

As we can see today, the penetration of a crime control industry within our schools provide a much needed mechanism to safety (and an added formal preventative measure for “broken windows” and the visibility of other minor acts and violations), but at the same instance it also neglects the underlying need of attending to deeper socio-political factors that quite possibly contribute the most to student crime and violence. Empirical data at this point cannot prove that SRO presence automatically and directly prevents serious or even petty crimes from occurring on campus, but as previously mentioned they are assumed to be working according to recent trends of police incorporation (Bracy and Kupchik 2010). However ultimately, it is through the prior examination of the central questions such as how SROs interpret the causes of student crime and violence, how do they construct their own identity and roles on high school campuses, and how do they feel their position affects students and education; that we are able to address this broken windows ideology (in addition to other opposing and overlapping criminological theories) in respect to our education system..

It is particularly vital that we analyze the perceptions of causes and problems related to crime and violence from the SRO point of view. As we identify the explanations from their own standpoint, we have sparked a dialogue about how various

criminological theories such as the ones I have reviewed, shape the roles of law enforcement within the school setting. Furthermore this may allow us to be critical of both school policing and the numerous criminological theories which guide or misguide our general strategies at reducing crime and violence. Finally, once we have evaluated the perspective of more SROs along with the perspective of various theories in this field, we must gain the other perspective of the students themselves as this is the group that is affected most by the crime, violence, and especially law enforcement on campus. Without exploring each of these perspectives, beginning with that of the SROs as I have done, we will not be able to reach our full potential at effectively preventing student crime and violence and improving the state of our public education system.

The Racialized Systems of Criminal Justice and Education

In society today, it is obvious that race still plays an important role in our daily lives. But sadly many are under the belief that racism and all forms of racial discrimination are themes of the past, relying instead upon colorblind ideologies (Bonilla-Silva 2001 and Wise 2010) which focus on individual, cultural, and socioeconomic forces to explain racial disparities. Clearly, this should not be the case. With an ever expanding influx of racial minorities in America, the implications of race should be at the forefront of our concerns. Omi and Winant (1994) state that “particular meanings, stereotypes, and myths (regarding race) can change, but the presence of a system of racial meanings and stereotypes of racial ideology, seems to be a permanent feature of US culture” (2004: 25).

Although this racialized system still exists, the troubling quandary facing our society presently is that the meanings, stereotypes, and myths have altered only slightly. Quite arguably, overtly racist discourse, practices, laws, and policies may have declined; but in reality the social, economic, political, and educational inequalities of racial minorities still endure. Apparently this means that the stereotypes, meanings, and myths have merely reduced in the degree of deliberate harshness, and the modest changes that have taken place are just as much if not more detrimental than they are advantageous. Furthermore in order to impede upon the unbridled perpetuation of racial inequality, we must investigate our social institutions and uncover the processes where racial disparities are most existent. The criminal justice system and our education system are prime examples, with the junction of these two institutions the most necessary location of scrutiny.

Taking a look at some of the American criminal justice system statistics by race, we can see large discrepancies that require further justification. For instance, in 1999 African Americans made up approximately 12.7% of the United States population (US Census Bureau 1999) and 15% of the country's drug users (National Household Survey of Drug Abuse 1998), however they represented approximately 36.8% of those arrested for drug-related crimes (Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics 1998) and 48.2% of adults in state and federal prisons and local jails (Bureau of Justice Statistics 1999). Additionally while Latinos made up approximately 11.1% of the US population in 1999 (US Census Bureau 1999) and 10% of US drug users (National Household Survey of

Drug Abuse 1998), they accounted for approximately 22.5% of those arrested for a drug-related crime (Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics 1998) and 18.6% of American adults in state and federal prisons and local jails (Bureau of Justice Statistics 1999). To put these figures in perspective, during this same year when African Americans accounted for 15% of drug users and Latinos for 10%, whites represented approximately 72% of all US drug users (National Household Survey of Drug Abuse 1998).

Even though these statistics are ten years old, more recent trends show no significant signs of decline, and in fact current reports indicate that these daunting numbers have gotten worse. For example, The Sentencing Project (2004), a national research and advocacy organization for prison reform, found that 55% of federal prison inmates are serving time for a drug-related offense, with the majority being cases that fell into the lowest criminal history category of sentencing guidelines where no weapons were involved in the act of crime. And most importantly, since 1989 when Federal Sentencing Guidelines were first fully implemented, the disparities between blacks and Latinos in comparison to whites grew immensely (minorities had a much greater chance of being convicted, on average received longer sentencing terms, the enacting of unequal crack vs. cocaine laws targeting African Americans, the attack on low-level street oriented drug offenders and users which were a majority racial minorities, etc.).

Upon a closer examination behind the racially disproportionate statistics of prisoners we are able to see that the percentages do not simply speak for themselves. However whereas many will still object to the unjust nature of these clear racial

discrepancies, we must make broader societal connections that would refute such a privileged position. Accepting such figures for how they appear without any deeper consideration only reinforces racial stereotypes which automatically blame individuals for innate negative characteristics that stigmatize their larger racial group (Bonilla-Silva 2006). This notion explains the latent function of a “war on drugs” and a “war on crime” which is empowered by a seemingly harmless mentality towards the neutral interpretation of degrading statistics. And most significant, this destructive process which turns into a self-perpetuating cycle, leads to the demand and deployment of an enlarged, state and public empowered police force. Over a short period of time it is evident that the reliance on police as a solution to crime and comfort in public safety has normalized their presence in formerly unlikely settings such as our school institutions (Monahan and Torres 2010). Clearly this can become extremely problematic as the racial discrepancy among criminals may become worse as racial minorities are introduced to the criminal justice system at much younger ages. Ultimately although preventing crime and violence is the central concern, we must be more sensitive and aware of the damaging effects the intersection of an already unequal criminal justice system and education may have on society. This again starts with allowing law enforcement to describe their roles on campus, how they prevent and reduce student crime and violence, and their interpretations of the causes. Only after these questions are answered can we begin to assess the effectiveness of law enforcement on high school campuses and further impede upon greater racial injustices.

Our education system, similar to many other social institutions in America, is plagued by racial inequality. In racially segregated communities, where socio-economic isolation breeds poverty, many children are forced to attend predominantly African American or Latino schools where resources are extremely scarce and qualified teachers are nearly impossible to find (Wise 2010). Under these stark conditions, students with very little family, social, and institutional support become socialized by the streets learning the language, behavior, attitudes, beliefs, and skills necessary to survive in their environment (social disorganization theory and differential association theory). Unfortunately and all too often this culture that reflects their life experiences and social landscape is looked down upon, rejected, and in many instances punishable within our educational institutions. Denying this culture in the classroom essentially equates to discriminating against their race, and this is too common of an occurrence to overlook. Analogous to the public and government perception and treatment of adult African American and Latino criminals, Noguera (2008) states that marginalized minority students are “labeled, shunned, and treated in ways that create and reinforce an inevitable cycle of failure” (2008: 21). It should be widely acknowledged that preexisting assumptions toward one’s culture has damaging and lasting consequences which can profoundly affect a student’s educational experience. For instance, the stereotypes and attached meanings of troubled children derive from the illogical assumptions that at-risk students are well beyond the needs of what educators can provide them, habitually resulting in more favorable methods of control and discipline as seen in the incorporation

of higher level authorities of the law (Noguera 2008). Even though the strategy of SRO programs are aimed at creating a more positive social climate for all students, teachers, faculty, and community, we must explore deeper into how these methods are affecting students of various racial backgrounds. Law enforcement officials on public high school campuses may very well assist in the security and safety, but it is critical we draw particular attention to whom and what benefits most. Certainly asking SROs the question of what racial groups benefit most would not give us accurate answers, but by gaining their perceptions of the topics of law enforcement, crime, and violence on campus we at the very least have a more un-bias portrayal of their effects on students in general.

As I have reviewed, our criminal justice system and education system is fraught with institutionalized racism. While the racial inequalities within each of these institutions have been documented in the past, much of mainstream society still has a tendency to discount such claims believing that the prevalent social problems experienced by racial minorities are in fact race-based. This becomes exceptionally important when examining the intersection of law enforcement and education, or more specifically, analyzing the ways in which SROs interpret their roles, affects, and explanations of student crime and violence. While race and ethnicity will always play a significant role in our social institutions and remain a controversial topic in the minds of many Americans, it has never been more critical that we propel our level of inquiry on the topic of race relations.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

In order to advance our understanding of the dynamics of law enforcement within our educational institutions, it is essential that we look beyond quantitative methods and utilize qualitative approaches as well. While statistical data sets can provide definitive and concrete answers to the number of arrests, expulsions, suspensions, and graduation rates on campuses, it cannot however explain the perceived causes, effects, and solutions surrounding such problems. Thus through the qualitative research method of interviewing, we are able to obtain answers to the questions of how SROs explain the causes and contributors to student crime and violence; how they construct their own identity, role, and function as law enforcement officials on school grounds; and how they feel their presence on campus affects the educational experiences of students and the quality of public education. After conducting the interviews we are able to identify how SROs counter and support such theoretical perspectives on education, the S2PP, and the PIC which in turn enhances our understanding of their possible effects on student success and the greater racial disparities that exist within the education and criminal justice systems of America.

Qualitative data in general refers to the essences of people, objects, and situations (Berg 1989). This form of data allows the researcher to study a particular subject in greater depth than he or she could with quantitative data. While there are numerous

methods in which researchers may use to obtain this type of data, semi-structured interviewing was the method best suited for my research. Semi-structured interviews are formal interviews in which the researcher asks interviewees a series of questions following a guide of topics or themes. The questions included in semi-structured interviews are open-ended so the interviewee is able to elaborate on his or her responses, developing a clearer picture from their perspective. Although this type of interviewing permits greater lengths of discussion, the same series of questions are asked to each interviewee to remain focused on the research topic, and more importantly so the responses can be organized systematically keying in on comparisons and trends.

According to Miles and Huberman (1994) there are three main approaches to the analysis of qualitative data and they are interpretivism, social anthropology, and collaborative social research. My analysis utilized a reflexive collaborative approach where I (researcher) asked the SROs (actor/interviewee) a series of questions in which they gave their point of view, discussing issues surrounding student crime, violence, safety, law enforcement, and the state of public education.

Due to time, resource, and financial constraints, my research was limited to the city of Sacramento, CA where I interviewed SROs who work on six different public high school campuses. The average size of each of the schools is 2,000 students, with one outlier consisting of less than 1,000 students. Every school who participated has at least one full-time officer that patrols the campus and surrounding area. All of the interviews took place on campus, at a Sacramento Police Department or nearby public location

(quiet enough so that the conversations could be tape recorded). Written consent from the superintendent of the school district and each of the interviewees were obtained according to human subjects guidelines.

Following conduction of the interviews, which were recorded and later transcribed, the data was analyzed and the findings were interpreted. Nineteen themes were extracted from the SRO responses and discussed in the following section. These themes were grouped according to the research topic in which they were asked, however some appeared during different times of the interviews, and also for more than one question. While themes were highlighted due to the importance of their shared meaning and reoccurrence in SRO responses, they were also helpful in providing plausible examples of support or counter-support of the theoretical perspectives which framed my research. For instance in the first theme of how SROs construct their role on campus; responses having to do with the exclusivity of law enforcement, discipline, an authoritative presence, formal control, or the elimination of violence and crime lend support to the reviewed theoretical perspectives (Bowles and Gintis' function of schooling, PIC, and S2PP). On the other hand SROs responded less favorably by describing their role as being mentors, counselors, or figures on campus that strengthen the school-community and use their official law enforcement discretion as only the last option in preventing the most violent actions and severe violations (all of which highlight their role to help all students succeed in education). For the second theme of how do SROs affect students and their educational experiences, the majority of the responses

included only the positive effects they have on students, teachers, the surrounding community and the school. For example safety and targeting student crime and violence may have a positive effect on faculty and most students as some of the SROs shared, but this does not necessarily mean they counter the theoretical perspectives. Thus paying particular attention to the SROs' choices of words, we can comprehend the greater implications they have on all students. Students who are abiding by the rules may gain a safer learning environment from the perspective of SROs, but the students who engage in punishable activity are excluded therefore facing negative effects of SROs. For the last theme of how do SROs view and explain the essential problems and causes of student crime and violence, responses can be divided into two categories. The first category, which would be supportive of the theoretical perspectives, includes all responses that suggest the causes of student violence and crime are problems of the individual, whether or not this has to do with their personality, behavior, culture, social class or race. While the SROs did not make any statements of a direct race, culture or social class correlation to crime and violence, cueing in closely to the language and "feel" of their responses proved important. The second category, which refutes the SRO role in support of the theories, included answers that do not blame the individual and instead refers to factors such as environment, family, upbringing, and social disadvantages that contribute to crime and violence.

Using the SRO responses and categorizing their terms to formulate themes is much different than the data analysis involved with quantitative research. Whereas

qualitative data generally provides researchers with intricate detail and deeper explanation of their study subjects, the findings and interpretations of the results cannot be generalized to a greater population as is possible with quantitative data. However this was neither the intention nor goal of conducting my research. Instead using this method highlights the central perspective of SROs given the substantial amount of discretion and power they have within schools as well as everyday life. Furthermore it is groundwork to the relationship between SROs and the previously outlined theoretical perspectives.

Overall as the SRO responses cannot be easily classified to clearly and definitively support or oppose the theoretical perspectives on schooling, the PIC, and the S2PP; it proves how ambiguous not only the perceptions and effects of law enforcement are, but of SROs in particular. Nonetheless for us to gain a clearer understanding of the implications of law enforcement in our schools, we must engage in a wider and deeper SRO discourse. Beginning with the perspective of SROs, we can then open up greater discussion surrounding the function and affects they have on students and education, eventually leading to potential solutions that eliminate the persistence of the larger problem of racial inequality that exists throughout our education and criminal justice systems.

Chapter 4

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

While findings for each of the six conducted interviews had traceable similarities, they also each took on their own unique feel according to the SRO's interpretation of my questions and the nature of their individual responses. As noted in the previous chapter, interviews with open-ended questions allow for an in-depth exploration of the research topic. In this case, specific questions were formulated according to and in hopes of finding concrete answers to my three overarching research questions. Hence in this section I will pay particular attention to not only all the SRO responses to my interview questions, but more specifically, any responses that have a shared meaning among a few if not all of the SROs. The similar responses, or what I refer to as emerging themes, will be discussed in addition to other noteworthy responses that reflect the arguments of the outlined literature. Furthermore, critical to my research, the character (tone, feeling, content, inferring, defensive, offensive, informative, suggestive, open-ended, justifying, misleading, concealing, etc.) of their responses were also analyzed.

SECTION I: How do SROs construct their position, identity, and role on public High School Campuses?

Theme 1: Mandatory Times and Daily Duties

For the first series of interview questions which correspond with the first research topic of how SROs construct their position, identity, and role on campus, all of the SROs had many similar if not the same responses. In this section of the interview all six clearly mentioned the importance (as an SRO) of being on campus at mandatory times of the day. One of the SROs shared, “I’m assigned to the School Resource Unit, umm you know our-our, usual day to day guideline of what we operate by is um there’s three critical times of the day, they’re outlined in the contract with the schools and that’s the opening of school, lunch time lunch recess, and the closing of school.” Another stated, “typically before school, umm during lunch, and after school, the district and Sargent’s and-and my...these, are brass, they want us on campus at those times...on, near or around campus.” A third responds with, “our general tasks are to be here at the beginning of school, during passing periods, during lunch period, and after school. So we have to make a visual presence and that whether it be parking your car outside where kids can see you, where staff can see you, or walking around campus, umm it’s just a general presence that’s kind of the general thing we do.” Not only is it crucial to be present during these times of the day, but as stated by the first two SROs it is a part of their

contract with the school districts as employees of both the school and their respective police departments.

While a couple of the SROs mentioned that each campus within their district was different in terms of the level of activity and incidents they must deal with, they also all indicated at one point or another common daily duties. Such everyday tasks included keeping in contact with the administrators at their school, directing traffic before and after school, patrolling the surrounding neighborhoods, interacting with students, and keeping a close eye and ear out for fights or other avertible incidents that may occur. Two of the SROs referred to this as having the “hair on the back of the neck”-type of feeling when something is about to happen amongst students. One of the SROs explains:

Um we look at overall climate of the school, you know kids coming in are they acting funny, we-they down or is attention high, you know is it a normal day? You know that’s the kind of things you’re looking at as the day goes on, you’re constantly evaluating the climate. Umm and a lot of that is very informal, the hair on the back of your neck type of feel you know you walk into a room and go what’s wrong here yeah, what’s going on here, umm that- that’s a lot of times where I’ll become involved because it’s like ok we need to figure out what’s going on is-if that stuff goes unchecked that’s how things go wrong, that’s how people get hurt, that’s how fights happen, and you start having other things that occur.

This can also be representative of traditional police culture, more specifically the characteristic of “maintaining an edge” as in an SRO’s case, they are always striving to maximize the control they have over the student population by paying particular attention to their behaviors and the general campus climate.

As a SRO, there are mandatory times during each school day in which they must be present; before school, during lunch period, and after school. Throughout the day they

are constantly involved with happenings on campus as well as communicating and interacting with administration, students, and patrolling the surrounding neighborhoods. Although duties and responsibilities vary, for many the general idea of keeping the campus safe was a key daily responsibility.

Theme 2: Drama

When the SROs were asked what the most common problems are that he or she must deal with on a daily basis, the leading answers were issues with drugs, mainly consisting of marijuana, and fighting which was often generally defined as “drama.” The idea of drama was explained in a few different ways, but essentially they all had the same meaning. One of the SROs clarified, “I wouldn’t necessarily classify it as bullying, but it’s getting to that point with some of these kids. But a lot of it is uh, just chatter. It is that faceless chatter where they can say something without being front uh-face-to-face with that person, and all those issues end up here, throughout the day.” The non-face to face communication between individuals or groups through social media websites such as Facebook sparks many of the problems dealt with on a daily basis. While he stated that Facebook was by far the worse aspect of all the “faceless chatter” on his campus, other social media outlets called “flame pages” also cause problems because they are an online arena for students to talk negatively and aggressively about others to a wide audience without any direct or immediate consequences.

Another SRO described instances of perceived disrespect which cause unnecessary and avoidable altercations due to pride. He explained that “ninety percent of the mean-mugging is, somebody said something about someone’s mom or sister” which fuels many students into fighting. He also replayed a common occurrence where two students accidentally bumped into one another and instead of walking away or apologizing, both sensed that they must react in a hostile manner in order to uphold their pride. A different SRO described the same exact scene, “it can be something as simple as two people running into each other in the hallway and not having the manners and giving each other the look, um you know mugging, whatever term you want to use for it, that’s the kind of thing that ends up escalating into gargantuan problems. So in some way shape or form that’s pretty much what I deal with all day every day.” Whether it is rumors and insults shared through social media and directly through one another on campus, or needless accounts of reactionary disrespect towards each another, the all-encompassing “drama” is one of the most common issues SROs must deal with daily. As a result the most common responsibility of an SRO is to pinpoint the drama as soon as possible and intervene before it intensifies into much more severe concerns.

Theme 3: Mentoring

Next the SROs were asked about their relationship with students on their campus. Responses varied greatly however most explained their daily interactions with them by greeting the students by their last name, having short conversations pertaining to school

or any other topics, assisting them with homework, helping them find jobs, or locating any type of resources for those in need (drug rehabilitation, alcoholics anonymous, planned parenthood, etc.). While the tone of their responses varied, nearly all of them mentioned or described in detail how they are mentors or try to be mentors to as many students as possible. Three of the SROs described that building relationships with students as well as forging stronger bonds amongst the student body was highly important to them. One SRO explained:

We interact really well with each other, we-the common goal is to make sure that kids graduate and become successful adults. Umm so plenty of times I've helped with resumes, um college applications, scholarships, um let them know about the law, they've interviewed me multiple times for projects and stuff like that. It's kind of like a bonding, a friendship, a brother or sister that you're kind of mentoring. So whether you're a counselor, a teacher, friend, mother-daughter type deal that sometimes that meant being a friend, parent, or sibling.

Another SRO described how he relates to students by revealing his own experiences as a foster care child and an academically poor student. A third elaborated in detail how he is a mentor to different types of students (those who are being suspended or expelled, those with attitude and behavior problems, or those who are good students). Overall mentoring was considered an important element of the student-SRO relationship. Unfortunately the relationships between the two groups are not all positive.

Two of the SROs openly touched on the topic of the negative perception that some students have with police and that part of the purpose of having them (SROs) in schools is to change this perception. When explaining her effects on students one SRO said:

I mean yeah you have negative interactions, but usually the kids get over it umm. I think they're given the new perspective that cops are good, um we're all there to help, not to just send any students you know to jail or uh um juvenile hall. And like I always explain to kids, is that um, you do something that you know is wrong, there's consequences, but even though there's consequences, what you do there for after. And when I explain it that way to the kids, that's when they get a different perspective and say hey look I was wrong, give me my punishment, and let's move forward.

As the other SROs detailed their relationships with students, without actually saying it, they also seemed to suggest similar feelings about the significance of their interactions with students in attempt to build rapport. For instance one claimed that in order to run a successful SRO program, "you have to be able to um you know they have to see you, not just as a police officer, but as a person too um because you're not on that campus solely to arrest those kids and-but they may not look at it that way." While he did not specifically say that the purpose of his job was to create a more positive perception of police officers from the student standpoint, he did make a point to say that a SROs goal of helping students succeed and creating a safe environment would not be effective without attempting to improve police perception.

Whereas all of the SROs mentioned positive aspects to their relationship with students, three of them also shared that not every student is the same. It was stated by these SROs that some students avoid them, some students will always be problematic, and each year is different in terms of the relationships they have, essentially meaning that regardless of the circumstances many students will always dislike and disagree with them (referring to police in general). Overall the SROs noticeably spoke in a manner that

accentuated the positive aspects of their student relationships and gave an explanation or justification for those relationships that were damaged or non-existent. For example one of the SROs described:

Um...but um....some of the relationship-I mean some of the kids, they're good kids, they do the right things and they realize they've screwed up and some of them just don't care, some of them..um...some of them just um-just rude and crass, and stuff like that. So I-just-one of the things I try and do-and and most of them know that I won't put up with any of their garbage. Umm um I've put a bunch of them in the back of my car, put a bunch of them in handcuffs, I've arrested a bunch of them, um but they um I-but I also-I do the respect thing, I pay them respect, I try to call them by their last names, I try to say hi to them and say hey what's going on.

Prior to making this comment he explained that outside of schools, police officers are only there working with about 5% of the population, and he is there for that same percentage of the population who are getting into trouble in school. Although he did not explicitly say that he had a hostile relationship with students, which I am sure would be the case with at least a small portion of the population, he emphasized that there are those that are unwilling to cooperate and build a friendly relationship. Nevertheless he highlighted a way in which he still shows respect to all the students he deals with, in addition to always smiling on the job, reinforcing the positive atmosphere he provides.

Theme 4: Serious Police Work?

The last question pertaining to the first research topic asked about the background and process of becoming an SRO. This question was posed in order to tap into the differences between traditional law enforcement outside of schools and law enforcement

within schools. Since the high school campus is an exclusive environment with separate rules and regulations dealing with minors, it was assumed that becoming an SRO would require additional training or testing before one is hired. This was not necessarily the case. Answers included receiving the position by chance, opportunity, being asked by their Sargent to apply, and one even jokingly hinted that he did not have much of a choice (he was on his probationary period and it was the only available position at the time). While most of them said they had to test into the position, it did not seem as if the test was specifically geared towards being a police officer in the specialized setting of public schools, but more or less a requirement for any new job opening within law enforcement. Only two out of the six SROs revealed their desire to apply for the unit, and only one described the actual process where they were interviewed by a panel including the school principal, a few other members of the administrative staff, the police Sargent, and a student from the school. Even though the students and faculty did not make the final hiring decision, and it is also unknown whether or not the same interview process exists for all schools in the district, it was noteworthy that at least one student was allowed on the panel to represent a student perspective. Whereas none of the SROs spoke of any special training requirements and one even admitted that he had to learn everything about the position on the job, two of them did mention SRO-specific conferences and special trainings on safety that either they attended or had taught.

After speaking with all of the SROs about their position, a common theme appeared which shed light on the negative perception of the SRO unit from the

perspective of fellow police. According to a few of the SROs, working in the schools is undesirable for most if not all law enforcement officials. One of the SROs even readily admitted. “um haha nothing too glamorous, uhh I um.....let’s see...I was...our school resource unit was not exactly a desired position when I became an SRO.” Another responded to the question of how he became an SRO with similar feelings saying, “I started out working patrol and um then an opening came up in uh our SRO unit and I thought it may be something interesting to uh I’ll tell you to uh-regular street cops do not want to deal with juveniles or juvenile delinquents, it’s a completely different beast from the adult justice side.” It was explained that due to the fact that one must deal with school administrators, the district, campus-specific policies, teachers, parents, social workers, attitudes from the kids and most of all the added excessive paper work that is included with minors and the juvenile justice system, many officers wished to remain outside of the schools. It was further noted by one of the SROs that when his SRO unit was initially being formed following tragedies such as Columbine which led to the funding for law enforcement in schools, the assumption from fellow police officers was that those assigned to the schools were lazy or no longer effective in other police units.

He recalls:

Umm they-eh the people that were doing it were older, older officers that had kind of.....stopped working...you know uh kind of jokingly called ‘soon retired officers’ yeah, so they were guys that went to schools because they did not have to answer calls and they read the paper and said well that isn’t a school issue so that was kind of their mentality.

He even hinted at the notion that being an SRO equated to soft police work or security. However following his commentary on the reputation of SROs, he proceeded by saying that the perception of the unit improved over the years and new officers changed the status of SROs through hard work and mainly by taking the job more serious.

Ultimately it was significant to hear what the SROs had to say about the general police perception of their units, especially given that a few of them brought the topic up at different points during their interviews when it was not part of the questions asked. This supported what was outlined in the literature review. The culture amongst law enforcement officials (police culture) is one that prides itself on the severity and danger of their work. It was displayed here as many regular duty police officers were opposed to other features that are found in the work of SROs such as strong communication, newfound relationships with those who are not police, added restrictions on the job, and most significant dealing with a population of minors that is not often regarded as serious police work.

According to their responses SROs are crucial figures on high school campuses. They work in close relation with school administrators to decrease the amount and severity of crime and violence, as well as increase the security and safety in schools by deterring larger incidents such as school shootings. In addition to the benefits of law enforcement, they also commented on their daily interaction with students, attempting to build stronger police-student relationships. However it is uncertain whether or not a police presence in fact directly affects the rates of crime and violence on campus, and

more critical the advantages and disadvantages of their interaction with students is unclear. In the next section SROs were asked about their effects on students and their educational experiences in order to delve deeper into this dilemma.

SECTION II: How do SROs affect students and their educational experiences?

Theme 5: Safety First

Unlike the first series of questions which were straight-forward and concise, the interview questions pertaining to the second research topic produced responses with greater variability. For the question of whether or not SROs believed they had any effect on the educational outcome of students and the general climate on campus, each SRO seemed to interpret it slightly different, being selective with what they decided to speak about. One of the SROs responded to this question in great length by discussing numerous areas. He explained first:

Um but when you look at it from the standpoint of you've got kids that don't have support networks, the school is everything for them. Now if they don't feel safe being able to come to school, they don't come. Um but-and they don't do well when they do come if they don't feel safe walking from class to class. They can't learn. Um I mean you look at the hierarchy of needs, safety is the primary need.

He followed by saying that when he first took the position he quickly began to address many of the safety issues that would impede upon a students' desire to attend and their ability to focus, such as fights or bullying. While he attributed his role in upholding

safety as his largest effect on the educational outcome of students and the general climate, he also mentioned his educational effect on a smaller scale:

Um I mean and then on a smaller level and that's um a school wide benefit to that, but on a smaller level, you know any given year at the high school level, there's probably-I have three to six kids that I was their advisor for their senior project. Now senior project you don't graduate so we had um kids-you know that-we had to uhhh, target isn't the right word.....let's go with target umm for low academics and um truancy issues. Um if I could get them to come to school then maybe they'll actually turn in a paper every once in a while and their grades will go up, and I mean that's the kind of kids that we looked at. Those are high-risk kids we're not seeking out 4.0 kids that come every day that's pointless. Um so there's a lot of things that we do that does affect learning and education.

Therefore each year he helps a handful of students complete their high school education by helping them finish their senior project which is a requirement to graduate. After describing what he felt his effects were on the general climate and the educational outcome of students both on a large and small scale level, he continued to give another example of how he affects the overall process of learning:

When I came, and then after I left....a lot of teachers expressed....how they didn't feel safe. Umm and when the teachers don't feel safe, do you think they're giving their all in the classroom? And the teachers knew that if they called for help that I'd be there to help them as fast as I could be there to help them and um you know a lot of teachers relaxed a lot. And that was expressed to me when I first came came that they were very happy.

According to his claims, his police presence not only brought comfort to students, but also a sense of security to the faculty as well. He reiterated that the feeling of knowing that they (teachers) have assistance if something were to go wrong, allowed them to focus on teaching and perform better, which in turn meant that students were receiving a better education because of his work.

Overall this SRO undoubtedly believed that he had a positive effect on the educational outcome of students and the general climate on campus. He was also the only one who discussed specifically how he does. Two other SROs described similar ways in which they affect the climate or educational outcome of students, but they did not speak with as much certainty, confidence and depth. These two used terms or phrases that left a feeling of hesitancy and uncertainty to their answers such as, “I think we do” or “um I think they can” when initially responding to the question. They too mentioned that the safety they promote and their presence as police officers alone has a positive effect on the general climate, as well the mentoring component (Theme #3) that has a positive academic impact on students.

Mentoring was a reoccurring theme amongst the SROs which they felt largely affected the students on their campuses. One SRO described the ways and the extent to which he assists students, setting up tutoring for them, going to each of their teachers to get them caught up with assignments, and helping them because the “parental role” is not there. He went on to say that he sets up appointments for students to come in once a week to check their attendance in the hopes of simply getting more kids to come to school so they can gain an education. He sums it up by saying, “am I in there teaching these kids, no, no not really, um but I am building those relationships and doing other things that are going to enhance the environment so they can um-uh get that education um so they can go to the next level.” Another SRO discussed the ways in which she is a mentor:

You play many roles in these children's lives and I think education is the key um, it's a lot of stuff they-they don't know, it's because they haven't been taught by parents, friends and family, and they only get a limited amount in school because they're only there for so many hours, so I think as me being a school resource officer...I just help them with anything.

She proceeded by saying that she forms study groups, stays after school to help with homework, and if she cannot help them she will find the right tutors. She concluded by asserting that a significant part of her job is to simply being someone to talk to on campus besides teachers or other students, and being a true resource for any needs and concerns as youth often face a multitude of problems going on in their personal lives.

Overall three of the SROs discussed ways they positively affect students and the general climate on campus, from a safety standpoint and through mentoring. However not all of the SROs shared the same responses. While three of them made a point to reference their effect on both the educational outcome of students and the general climate, two of the other SROs either misinterpreted, missed, or avoided the part about educational outcomes. One SRO answered the question in terms of the effect he has on the general climate and did not once make reference to the educational outcome of students. Like the others he too adhered to the perspective of safety, merely stating that the "kids would run amuck" if he were not on campus, and then quickly switched the subject by reminding that we all must keep the Columbine incident in mind. His lack of inclusion about any effect he has on the educational outcome of students raises interest. He gave off the impression through the nature of his response that his function and foremost concern on campus is to prevent behavioral problems amongst the students and

ultimately make sure a tragedy like that at Columbine does not happen on his campus. Although the success and academic achievements of students are most likely a concern for him as well, he did not discuss the ways in which he affects them directly or even indirectly. The other SRO whose response was lacking, chose to answer the question by openly stating that when he first came to the school he did not believe he would have any effect on students. He proceeded by discussing the general effects he has on the campus climate through his focus on security, and how subconsciously his presence affects the comfort level of students at the school. However he too did not make any connection between the security and comfort level he explained, with any educational outcome of students.

Theme 6: "Crutch"

The purpose behind asking the question of whether or not SROs have any effect on the educational outcome of students was to understand precisely how the SROs feel they are directly helping students succeed academically. Although a few described the mentoring component of being an SRO, most of the SROs adhered to their perspective on safety as the primary way in which they improve the overall environment or general climate of the school. Whereas they discussed how their emphasis on safety affects the educational outcome of students as well, their responses seemed to reflect only an indirect or broad effect on student outcomes at that. There was only one SRO who managed to interpret the question according to my initial intents. This SRO responded

with what was interpreted as an open and honest answer, revealing a meaningful point. He described that on an “anecdotal basis” there may be a small group that they (SROs) have an impact on. This may include students who are on the verge of dropping out of school or considering joining a gang. However what was most intriguing is that he not only brought up the notion that one does not have to be an SRO to make an impact on students and anyone has the ability to do so, but he also stated, “I don’t know as a whole um I have mixed feelings about police officers being in schools.” He shared that he was unsure of any real benefits to the educational outcome of students by having SROs in schools. When asked what he meant by mixed feelings, he explained that the problem he has noticed is that police have become somewhat of a “crutch” for school administrators. He uncovered more by saying, “once you introduce a police officer into it um they-they somewhat become the hammer or you know just uhh let’s defer this to the officer and maybe a lot of things that don’t necessarily need to be criminalized, at that-at that level.” Continuing his explanation he described that a “grey area” exists with the separation between the duties of your traditional law enforcement and those in schools. Due to the ambiguity of responsibilities between these groups, he stated that many times it is easy for school administrators to simply say “let the cop deal with it.”

Not only was it noteworthy that this SRO questioned the duties and function of his own role in schools, but he also highlighted a trend in the S2PP literature that argues that many youth are introduced to the criminal justice system through avoidable offenses that occur in school. It can also be added that for many youth, their first encounters with

police happen in schools. This response was particularly significant because none of the other SROs came even remotely close to discussing anything that may possibly hinder the success of students. Since he and none of the other SROs were specifically asked of their evaluation of police in schools, it was surprising to hear him bring up the topic and be critical of their involvement in the educational setting. The question that remains is whether or not other SROs share any doubts of law enforcement in schools and if they believe there are any possible negative effects they have on the educational outcome of students. If they do believe there are negative effects, what are they, and second how does the perception of their negative effects shape the way in which they police schools. This notion relates back to Theme 4 (“not serious police work”) because the minor acts and violations that are often criminalized on campus are not likely to be considered crimes off campus. As a result much of the policing done by SROs on campuses today were once simply disciplinary issues handled exclusively by the schools. Most critical is how do the ideas of SROs being a “crutch” for schools and SROs being sworn police officers that do not do “serious police work” ultimately effect the larger student population. For instance do SROs focus on arresting more offenders to make it seem as if they are doing more police work or do they become frustrated with being a crutch for administration and find other avenues to deal with student problems. Unfortunately these questions were not further investigated as it was my assumption that the SROs would become defensive of any possible negative effects they have on students and education, producing obscured responses throughout the rest of the interviews.

Overall the SROs were in clear agreement that the safety they work to uphold on their respective campuses positively affect the general climate of their school. It was also shared that their role in campus safety was their perceived effect on student outcomes as well. While mentoring was identified as being the other positive effect SROs have on students, one SRO gave a response that reflected an entirely different perspective. Although the question of their effects on student outcomes was geared towards tapping into their direct contributions to the success of an entire student population, it also had a more latent and critical purpose in opening dialogue that could reveal what type of students are being affected most. For instance, a certain student demographic may benefit most from a SRO strategy focused on safety. It may work to exclude at-risk and already marginalized students from the rest of the student population such as the S2PP literature suggests. Nevertheless disregarding the actual function of schooling or quality of education, student success such as graduation rates and the amount of skills and knowledge they retain should be a great concern for anyone involved in the education system. However for apparent reasons, nearly all of the SROs related their effects on the general climate and the educational outcomes through their emphasis and focus on safety only. Consequently the underlying question is what are the real costs and benefits of a safety-focused SRO agenda on the educational outcome of students. Since this question is not one that can be easily measured or straightforwardly answered, it is of substantial value to gain a SRO perspective on the largest believed hindrances to student success. Thus once we have their opinions, it is easier to determine whether or not their function

and role as safety personnel on campus corresponds with helping students overcome such hindrances to their success.

Theme 7: Contradictions (Family life/Survival or Individual/Choice)

When asked what they believe is the biggest hindrance to student success, each SRO gave their own answer, yet many of the responses had overlapping similarities or analogous meanings. For instance whereas one SRO described that “family life” and more specifically what they are being taught at home and outside of school was the biggest hindrance, another SRO referred to family life as “parental involvement.” While the two SROs utilized different terms at various times throughout their responses, the central idea was that it was an outside source such as who or what is going on at home, or even lack thereof anyone being at home, that is causing student misbehavior at school. A separate example is when one SRO explained that the success of any student on his campus is based upon choice, meaning that kids have to make personal decisions to do right and show care in their own education and futures. This response was parallel to the response of another SRO who quickly responded to the question by saying “themselves”. She explained that students must be responsible and accountable for knowing right from wrong. By not fully grasping this concept, it is the students’ “themselves” who are the biggest obstacle in the way of their own academic success. What was fascinating and most significant with these two SROs was that while both of them clearly indicated it was essentially up to the individual (students themselves) to determine his or her own success

or failure in school, they both discussed additional factors that made their initial answers seem less affirmative.

After the first SRO discussed his view on why individual “choice” is the biggest hindrance to student success on his campus, he continued by reverting back to what two of the other SROs responded with. He described that many kids are in foster care or come from broken homes, and a lot of the problems they face in school have to do with the “family issues” they are dealing with at home. Although he reconfirmed that he believed the biggest hindrance was “choice” and the second biggest is family issues, his opinion seemed to be more reflective of his own personal experiences growing up as a foster youth, who ended up forging his own path on a way to a successful career. While he made a point to reveal his own childhood and how he uses his personal experiences to connect with students, the fact of the matter is that not all youth will accept his story and react the same way. Ultimately the harsh realities of problems going on at home will certainly threaten the educational accomplishments of many students in high school.

Whereas the second SRO described a similar response as the previous, stating that it is the students themselves who are the biggest hindrance to their own success, she also proceeded by detailing additional factors that did not clearly support her original response. For instance, although she repeated the word “themselves” throughout her explanation, she also mentioned factors such as lack of guidance at home, peer and public influences, “acting out” for attention, and having to “survive”. Twice she even used the word “sometimes” in reference to “themselves” being the leading problem which gave

off an impression of uncertainty. While she seemed to want to sound confident in her answer, she did not fully exude this feeling. The biggest indicator of this was that she repeatedly used the term “survival” in her explanation. She stated that “sometimes they’re just in survival mode” inferring that it is not necessarily “themselves” that are the problem, but more so their own personal hardships outside of school that shape and determine their punishable actions and behaviors in school. She reiterated by saying, “whether it’s right, wrong, or different, doesn’t matter to them, it’s about ‘I need to survive, I need to take care of me and my family.’” Clearly she contradicted her original statement, that the biggest hindrance to students are “themselves” when she continued her response by supporting and reinforcing the rough experiences of students as an indicator of why they continue to struggle in school.

Similar to the first SRO who used the term survival, the second SRO used it over the course of his response, contradicting his originally intended answer. While the first SRO used it in a manner which gave rise to the conditions that cause hindrances, the second used it in a slightly different way that described the environment itself as being the biggest hindrance. According to the dialogue with the first SRO, being in “survival mode” was the explanation or justification for certain behaviors and actions which negatively affect their success in school. On the other hand the second SRO described that when a student is faced with gangs that run rampant, constant fighting in school, a “war zone” in their neighborhood and communities, and various problems at home, they are only focused on surviving. Under these circumstances, many students do not have

enough energy left to focus on their education. Thus through his explanation he implied that the campus environment and particularly the daily surroundings of some students are the biggest hindrance to their educational success.

The first SRO believed it was “themselves” or more so the responsibility and choice of the individual that was the biggest hindrance, adding that being in a “survival” state of mind influenced their behaviors. The second SRO believed it was the environment itself which was the biggest hindrance, with the term “survival” explaining the harsh reality of such settings. Although the concept of survival was used in a different context by the two SROs, it nonetheless was indicative of the same thing. In both cases the inclusion of “survival” in their responses highlights the pressure of external influences and experiences of students which negatively affect their existing struggles in school. Thus even though they initially gave different answers to the same question, ultimately their responses intersected with the use of the term survival, and most importantly it exposed an important aspect to the academic struggles of a substantial number of high school students.

Overall two of the SROs described family life and two others mentioned that the individuals themselves and the choices they make were the biggest hindrance to student success. Furthermore another SRO, along with one of the SROs who stated “themselves,” used the term “survival” in their responses which was an indication that external forces such as the environment or experiences of students was a major hindrance as well. However there was still one more response from a sixth SRO that was unlike

any of the others. While this SRO also touched on the campus climate (environment) and specific things such as fighting, drugs, and gangs just as one of the other SROs did, he ultimately stated that “distractions” were the number one hindrance. His response was significant because although “distractions” was such a broad answer and one that was not discussed in these terms from the other SROs, he elaborated by touching on a specific form of distraction that was previously highlighted by another SRO in a separate interview question.

Theme 8: Distractions

The general idea of “distractions” was the biggest concern for this SRO. He addressed things from students participating in high school sports which he has seen have an effect on academic performances, to the dress attire of students affecting their focus in the classroom. Nonetheless he stated that the two biggest distractions from his point of view were social media and marijuana. According to his claims, marijuana is rampant on any campus in the Sacramento area. With the availability of marijuana in Sacramento being so prevalent, he estimated that around 5% to 10% of students come to campus high every single day. When students are under the influence of marijuana, they are obviously less focused and cannot perform well. However even though marijuana is a major issue on high school campuses in the area, he still believed that social media creates more problems. He stated that everyone and everything is moving at such a fast pace and social media is a prime example. While he verified the benefits of technology, he also

recognized that social media, along with texting and the use of phones are a daily and constant distraction on campus. This was a critical connection to what one of the other SROs described with social media (facebook, twitter, youtube) being the reason why many fights, or what he described as “drama,” are often started. Although the two SROs did not share the same responses to the question about what they believe is the biggest hindrance to student success, the fact that they both cited social media in their discussions is meaningful in its own right.

The first SRO described social media as contributing to a large amount of the issues he deals with on a daily basis, where the other described it as being the number one distraction, and in turn the number one hindrance to student success. As a result we must ask ourselves, how are the problems in this era different from those in the past due to technological advancements, and how are they the same? For instance social media may be new to the officers, yet rumors and negative behavior resulting from rumors have always occurred. The only difference may be the time in which it takes for rumors to spread and the accessibility to a wider audience. On the other hand, according to my interpretation of the second SRO’s response, it may be the actual technological devices themselves that are a distraction causing decreased focus which effects student learning and education.

As all the SROs shared their opinion on the effects they have on student outcomes and the general climate of their school, it was interesting to see the relationship between their presumed effects and what they believed were the biggest hindrances to student

success. Nonetheless disregarding whether or not their effects as SROs corresponded to the hindrances high school students are faced with, it is clear that nationwide the amount of law enforcement officials working in public high schools has increased. It is also clear that much of the public and educational concern surrounding school shootings and other safety issues on campuses has led to the increased implementation of SROs.

Theme 9: The Columbine Effect

For the last question pertaining to the second research topic, SROs were asked why they think there has been a nationwide increase of law enforcement in schools. As expected, every SRO except one referred to the Columbine shooting or similar “incidents” as being the reason why. However while most of their answers were the same, the differences between each of the SROs was the approach and tone of their supporting explanations. For instance, even though two of the SROs claimed that their involvement in schools was simply a matter of preventing incidents from happening on campus, they expanded by emphasizing the sheer value of having a police officer present. Given the importance of school safety, they provide a quick response time for administrators and the surrounding neighborhoods, as well as being a “true resource” fulfilling numerous roles for anyone on campus. These two SROs seemed to describe that even though incidents are the main reason why they are there, the schools find “additional value” to their law enforcement capabilities.

Whereas two of the SROs touched on the value they represent to schools, another SRO took it a step further. The tone of his response was that of a stout advocate for police on campus. He not only stated that there are more and more incidents occurring on campus, but also that, “it’s not a matter of where it’s going to happen it’s a matter of when it’s going to happen.” He proceeded by giving detailed examples of tragedies that have occurred nationwide at other schools as well as a hypothetical situation that is definitely conceivable on any campus. He even went as far as promoting that what we are witnessing today is, “a huge trend of major violent incidents happening on campus and it is completely negligent for a school district to not anticipate this type of action.” This SRO was a clear proponent of police in schools as he not only answered the question of why he believes there is a nationwide increase of SROs, but also why they are absolutely necessary. Reinforcing his stance he added, “you have to be prepared for that now, anything less is completely unacceptable.”

What was most significant about this SROs response was that he repeatedly spoke of violent incidents in schools through media accounts. For instance, “I mean just the other day on CNN I saw that some school folks came in and the Principal had been stabbed by uh a student.” However even though he retold numerous stories of tragedies on campuses, he never actually referred to any statistical data or proof that rates of violence and crime in schools were in fact rising, instead simply referring to specific incidents that were sensationalized through media accounts as justification for police in schools. Furthermore what was most fascinating was that he said, “the media will crucify

you” when explaining the importance of having police to assure campus safety. His statements alone are symbolic of the PIC. They show the power of the media and how images and headlines of violence in school create public fear which shapes the public perception of safety. Thus the media can and should be viewed as one of the most influential contributors to the increased demand of law enforcement in schools.

As the previous SRO brought to light the probable effects of the media and the implementation of SROs as a necessity for schools, two other SROs discussed related ways in which they have become a true value to schools. However there was a striking difference. They believed that SROs on campus are similar to a “bet” or an “insurance policy” as opposed to being something that the schools must have. The first SRO described, “you’re doing a bet that ok by maybe having them there we’re preventing this from happening in the future.” The second SRO explained that:

It’s just a liability issue. So you know post-Columbine the big, you know incidents that happen, I think school districts, society, is trying to uh heir on the side of safety and say hey we want to uh, we don’t want something like that to happen so we’re going to have an officer there kind of as a as an insurance policy or you know uh uh preventative measure whether-yearh, right because you look at a lot of um instances like that um they do result in, there’s a lot of lawsuits.

In both cases the SROs described that it is a gamble not having law enforcement, and once they are on campus they are used as a resource for other services, but neither actually described the reasons why there is an increase of SROs as decisively as the first SRO responded.

Discounting the tone and position of the SRO responses to the question of why there is an increase of police in schools, it was apparent that they all agreed with the

Columbine-effect. The spectacle that the Columbine shooting created has left such a lasting, severe impression on the American conscious that it has created a demand for change in the way safety and prevention has propelled. Whether or not the reason for SROs in school was for their value as a resource, an insurance policy, or a reaction to public fear and the media, ultimately the primary issue revolves around the enduring effects of the Columbine shooting. Nobody wishes to be the next Columbine and in order to prevent such incidents SROs have seemingly become the most popular and uncontested solution. Hence since SROs have been the national response and action towards the possibility of such incidents, it only made sense that we further examined their views towards crime, violence and safety.

SECTION III: How do SROs view the essential causes of student crime and violence?

Theme 10: Parenting

The SROs were asked what they believe are the causes of student crime and violence and what they feel the best method of prevention is in order to determine whether or not their duties, responsibilities and purpose in schools coincide with their answers. Their responses to the first question, while all different, overlapped one another with shared themes. The most common themes mentioned included parenting and disrespect (pride), followed by gangs and drugs. Parenting was the most prominent response as it was also described under “family life,” one of the biggest hindrances to

students and their educational success (Section II), as well as a reason for the importance of mentoring (Theme 3). Four of the six SROs made reference to parenting as the greatest contributor of student crime and violence. One readily responded to the question by stating that it is “poor parenting, whether that be from an Uncle, Aunt, single-parent, parents being there but are not committed to the kids.” Another SRO confirmed, “umm I think one of the...uh major things is the lack of parental involvement.” He continued by explaining that just as is the case with problems outside of schools, in schools they are there for only ten percent of the population who are breaking the law. Referring to the ten percent of problematic students he argued:

Um and a large part of those kids..um...there’s no parental involvement, there’s no parental control, um you see kids that are gang members, that are second or third generation gang members um and those are the people causing problems for you. And even kid-even kids that do have both sets of parents at home and umm there could be a-a, no supervision. You know you could-you could deal with um no parental-no parents involved at all, or parents that are there but they’re really not supervising.

From the SRO perspective poor guidance, support and teaching from parents (or lack thereof) decidedly shapes the majority of the negative behaviors witnessed inside their schools. To them the straightforward idea of parental involvement and parental control at home would prevent much of the problems occurring on campus. Unfortunately according to one of the SROs the main quandary is that poor parenting is a, “self-perpetuating thing that happens over and over and over again.” He makes his argument supporting the claim that crime will always continue by saying, “if you look back to the parents today that are raising their kids poorly, they were raised poorly as kids. How do

you change that?” Parenting obviously has a lot to do with a child’s behaviors and actions; however this notion of poor parenting and lack of parental involvement becomes an even deeper seated issue because nobody can force someone how to raise their child or children. Taking the idea of parenting a step further, it also becomes extremely difficult for single-parent households to manage the tasks of working, providing, caring, and parenting. Larger issues at hand such as the economic downturn with loss of jobs and high rates of divorce in America may also have an influence. Thus as we can see, whether or not poor parenting is the main cause of crime and violence in school, it is a complex, multilayered subject in which parents alone cannot be solely blamed.

Theme 11: Disrespect and Pride, or Survival?

Disrespect, also related to the concept of pride, was another key response. Not only was it shared amongst the SROs in their responses to this question, but it was also referred to in other areas of the interview. For instance when first asked the question, one of the SROs instantly responded with:

I think pride is the biggest thing...umm..and disrespect. If a student feels like another student is looking at them in the wrong way, then they feel like if they- they feel like they’re forced to do something about it instead of doing uh maybe doing conflict man-uh-conflict resolution or something like that. That’s the biggest thing.

Many of the students were described as having too much pride and not wanting their pride to be tested. Another SRO shared:

Um and like I said before the you know the mean mugging or the bumping into somebody, I mean....you know walking through college I’m sure you’ve bumped

into somebody haha. These kids here for some reason they bump into somebody and it's the end of the world.

For many of the SROs, the majority of the problems that arise amongst students revolve around this concept of exaggerated disrespect and pride (as previously discussed in Section I under daily duties and common problems), and as a result it was determined to be the main cause of crime and violence on their respective campuses. However conversely what was also notable was that when the SROs elaborated, the reoccurring theme of survival came up. One SRO stated that, "for some reason the kids here, a lot of them or, oh I'm hard, I gotta be hard or I have to be tough, I've got to fight to survive." When referring to the problems of drug dealing on campus, another SRO straightforwardly added, "umm I think that's survival mode." This shows that while disrespect and pride was declared a main cause of violence and crime on campus amongst the SROs, the necessity for many students to simply survive in their outside environments may be the actual origin of their amplified beliefs and behaviors towards disrespect and pride.

Theme 12: Gangs and Drugs

Gangs and drugs were also included in almost all of the responses. However unlike the topics of parenting and disrespect which are primary causes of crime and violence, gangs and drugs were described more as the result of such causes. For example it can be interpreted that gangs and drugs are products of poor parenting or the reactions to disrespect and having to survive, even though the SRO responses say otherwise.

Nonetheless only two SROs outwardly stated gangs and or drugs as a main cause of crime and violence. One automatically stated it as his primary answer while the other took a moment to think about his answer and then replied by ranking poor parenting, gangs, and drugs. This SRO proceeded to say, “or some combination there-of, cuz usually it is some combination of the three” affirming that it is a wide-ranging question that involves more than the concrete answer of gangs and drugs. Thus while gangs and drugs were widely cited in their individual responses, parenting and disrespect were far more significant themes that help expose the complexity of prevention in schools. Thus if SROs believe the majority of student crime and violence is a reflection of poor parenting, preventing it may be outside the power of SROs, as the root cause is an external influence related to family upbringing. From this perspective, SROs are only dealing with the consequences of crime and violence and not effectively working to prevent its causes. On the other hand in the case of disrespect and pride, it takes much greater understanding of why students react in such a manner, one in which it is unknown whether or not SROs should, can, or will investigate.

Theme 13: Culture

One of the SROs surpassed all the others with his response to this particular question due to the information he shared and the depth of analysis. After taking a brief moment to process his thoughts he explained that, “it boils down to culture.” Throughout his response he described that there are a number of “cultural-type things” he sees on his

campus. While he did not label all the cultures he did discuss three which were theft, violence, and death. Recalling a recent event involving a stolen bike on campus, he found out in the end that the bike had been in the possession of three or four different students. After interrogating the students he realized that none of them cared whose bike it was, but instead placed the blame on the original owner for not watching over their belongings. He came to the conclusion that, “they’ve detached themselves so much from you know.....hey I-I don’t know what the problem is.” This SRO strongly believed that the attitude towards theft is a pervasive problem and not an issue of an isolated incident. To support his theory he gave another example of a grandmother who came onto campus and stole a cell phone while picking up their grandchild. He stressed that, “now that grandchild is basically being raised in a culture where it’s ok to take things. Grandma did it, dad does it, why can’t I do it.” While he determined theft to be its own culture, what he essentially defined as its cause was poor parenting and how theft is a socialized behavior (differential association). Just as theft was a culture he also noticed a culture of violence amongst students. His culture of violence has a lot to do with Theme 11. He explained:

When it comes to violence that you know uhh someone disrespects you, the acceptable and the expected reaction is that you’re going to get beat up, stabbed, or shot. That’s accepted, that’s normal and when that’s the attitude that’s the culture.

Hence a culture of violence corresponds with disrespect, pride and survival. If a student feels disrespected, in order for him or her to uphold their pride and survive in a hostile environment that many live in, violence is often a first and last resort. However what was

most noteworthy about his definition was his uncertainty. As he continued to explain the culture he compared it to when he was growing up and how there was not even a subculture of violence:

Not even within my social groups but school-wide that was not-that wouldn't even be accepted so coming down here to work and working in these schools was like, I can't believe this is normal, why is this normal for people? Umm so I can't say where the origin of this is specifically, I can say that that attitude that culture is-is a basis for a lot of what we see on the campus, in my opinion.

This SRO was not accustomed to the culture of violence quite possibly because of generational changes or even more likely due to his own socioeconomic background compared to that of the students he encounters. It seemed as if he knew his observation of violence was related to demographics, but he did not want to give off the impression that specific groups of people are more inclined to violent behavior than others. Instead he gives a conservative and safe response by saying he does not know where it (culture of violence) comes from.

As an SRO who strives to positively change the lives of youth by helping them succeed in school, it only becomes more complicated to build relationships with those who cannot relate. In this case, the SRO readily differentiates his experiences growing up as a youth compared with the experiences of a lot of the youth at his school. Although it is not impossible to form positive relationships with such differences, interactions between them can easily be strained. Furthermore whereas factors such as personal experiences and socioeconomic backgrounds may have a lot do with where and why

violence is normalized, the third culture this SRO defined, explains how such cultural formations evolve.

According to this SRO the culture of violence only became fathomable after he started noticing a culture of death. He recalled having a conversation with another school administrator (who he referred to as his job “partner”) about how they could not believe the way a student was talking to them so disrespectfully with no hesitation or regret. He remembered it was after that conversation when he started to ask more students questions pertaining to their long term goals in life, to see if they would act upon them. He came to the conclusion:

Umm.....but in all honesty these kids are telling me they don't expect to make it til 18. They don't, they honestly think that they are going to be dead by the time they are 18, 20 years old. So what does it matter they use drugs now, what does it matter if they get arrested, what does it matter if they get shot at now? They honestly believe they're going to be dead at 18.

Noticing this trend and how the bleak outlook of many students affected their short term behaviors and attitudes, it is hard to disagree with his argument that a culture of death is one of the largest contributors to crime and violence on campus. In fact if there is a culture of death, a culture of theft and violence only makes logical sense because if one foresees a near death, they are not likely to be concerned with the consequences from violence and theft.

While none of the other SROs discussed theft, violence, and death in terms of it being a cultural phenomenon amongst students within their schools, there were traceable connections in that many revealed the same feelings towards the attitudes of students

when it comes to disrespect, pride, and survival. Much of the “drama” which SROs deal with on a daily basis is related to the theme of disrespect. The reaction students have if they feel disrespected (testing one’s pride) escalates quickly and often turns to violence. Furthermore if students do not see the consequences of violence or do not care, they are certainly not going to be afraid of the consequences of theft. Thus the remaining dilemma is that while SROs cannot fill the parental roles of every student, how or what are the ways they help combat these cultural tendencies? Also, in this particular case, can the SROs use of the term “culture” perhaps be a conservative substitute for the term “race”? As the racial makeup of communities differ, and as he made the statement that the culture of violence was non-existent when and where he grew up, does this hint at the notion that certain stigmatizing cultures such as violence, theft or death are racially based? It is important to ask questions such as these as the use of the term race has become taboo, yet the implications and consequences of race have never been so prevalent.

Theme 14: Race

Race is a controversial and sensitive topic of conversation and by no means did any of the SROs say that it was a cause or contributor of crime and violence. However it was unanticipated that two of the SROs mentioned it in their responses when they were never asked a question pertaining to race. When the previously discussed SRO claimed that “it boils down to culture” he ended the sentence with, “-which has nothing do with

race.” He obviously did not want his use of the term “culture” to be mistaken for race, but for him to make a point to clarify this shows the power and importance of race itself. While race was not used as pointedly as the other themes in this section, it is nevertheless meaningful. If race was not a subject already discussed in association with cultures that are more prone to cause crime and violence, then there would be no purpose and motive for him to distinguish the two in the first place.

The second SRO who mentioned race in his response also used it in a manner to differentiate and deflect it from his original answer. He managed to use it in an even more peculiar way. As he further discussed poor parenting and how the cycle sadly continues he explained:

The other issues, that-that poor parenting...self-perpetuating thing that happens over and over and over again. If you look back to the parents today that are raising their kids poorly, they were raised poorly as kids. How do you change that? From a Sociology standpoint I think it's up to you to figure out and honestly I do think we need to make a change. Uh there is so many youth, and I'm not going to put a race on it or anything that...they try to impregnate as many kids as possible or as many people as possible and not have any consequences. They don't want to deal with that baby.

Again as with the first, this SRO did not have to discuss “race” nor were there any hints made towards race, ethnicity, or culture in the initial question or ensuing conversation. My assumption was that he was being overly cautious and prepared for any accusations of discriminatory observations. Nonetheless his apprehensiveness was almost too overt to the point where it made his claim of poor parenting not having anything to do with race slightly doubtful. Furthermore the sheer notion of adding this comment suggests that for

whatever reason, race does have something to do with it, if not by his own admission then at the very least by someone else's opinion.

Although race was not explicitly used to explain the main causes or contributors of crime and violence on campus by any of the SROs, it was significant to hear two of them use it so reactively in their responses. Hence the believed reason why both quickly (as if it were customary) commented on race was to protect themselves' from being linked or thought of as contributing to any negative racial undertones. Whereas neither wished to connect race with the causes or contributors of such problems, it is apparent that there are those who do. If there were not those who do believe race is an indication of behavior and action, then the SROs would have no need to defend their comments. In these two instances the term race is essentially used as a disclaimer that allows one to discuss negative issues that are often pertaining to race, without reproducing racial stereotypes, supporting racial discrimination, and thus avoid being labeled a racist. Whether or not the SROs believed race is correlated with poor parenting or certain cultures that produce higher levels of crime and violence, is not the main issue. The fact that they mention race at all is. As race relations constantly shift and evolve, it is critical that it is a topic of concern and a subject that is continuously discussed. Here it is seemingly briefly discussed by the SROs only to prevent it from being a matter of controversy. Nonetheless ultimately what they have both done is highlight the real dynamic of racial discourse that should not be overlooked and instead at the forefront of American conversation.

Theme 15: Marijuana

In order to gain a wider understanding of the causes of crime and violence in schools, SROs were asked to describe any trends of crime and violence they have witnessed since working on their campuses. Overall two of the most common responses included discussions about marijuana and student misbehavior towards the beginning and end of every school year. It was noted by three of the SROs that the leading trend is marijuana usage. One of the SROs readily responded to this question by saying:

One of the big trends I noticed within this last year and it's um....surrounded around uh California's um Laws about Marijuana, uh once that-that law passed or once there was a lot more acceptance to it um.....I've seen...the amount of marijuana increase on a campus probably a hundred fold.

He proceeded by describing a specific trend having to do with the use of marijuana on campus that another SRO also revealed:

Umm I mean the marijuana is in everything now. Um when when I'm doing a search, I-you know just things that look simple to me like candy, may not be candy. I mean I've had uh THC candy, marijuana brownies, marijuana-anything that you can possibly eat I've seen kids put marijuana in it.

Another SRO recounts the same story:

Last-last year we've had a lot of pot brownies. Every one of them was uh-you know all of these marijuana dispensaries have come up and you-you-you've got-have you ever looked at the Sacramento News and Review? They now have a whole insert yeah a whole insert in there with all the marijuana places. You read those things and I pay attention to them too because what's the new thing, that you know-what's-what-what are all these kids-what do they look at, they look at all the new things coming out. You know and if I bake some marijuana in my brownies and try to hide it, I'll do that. Last year we had a lot of baked goods with marijuana in it.

All of the SROs who mentioned marijuana noticed the pervasiveness, and more concerning the widespread acceptance, accessibility, and the ways in which students conceal their possession and usage. For the SROs marijuana is illegal and has negative health effects, but it poses a much larger threat being a constraint on student focus and their learning capabilities.

Theme 16: The beginning and end of the school year

The second trend shared by SROs was the noticeable amount of increased student misbehavior towards the beginning and end of every school year. One of the SROs stated:

Yeah I would say um I have been in our unit for 5 years now and I'd say one of the biggest impacts I've seen uh-uh and I've taken just issues fights behavioral issues on campus um one is that it always coincides with summer, you know taken out of that structured environment and they come back um that's usually one busy time overall.

While the lack of structured environment explains why students may be acting up at the beginning of the year, it does not fully explain why they may also be misbehaving towards the end of year. Another SRO expands on this notion recalling a conversation he had with his job partner. He explained that it is not necessarily about students going crazy about being free for the summer and the subsequent lack of care towards schooling any longer, but more so, "the anxiety of summer." He elaborated by clarifying that, "most of the kids receive free breakfast and lunch, they receive free medical care, free social work, guidance and-and support from their teachers, they have an officer here that

they can go talk to and report stuff.” For many students school is their main and sometimes only social support network, and too often it is a safer and more positive environment than what they experience outside of school. According to his description the anxiety of an approaching summer break from school produces the increased trend of misbehavior as students react, or to some extent retaliate towards not having that social support system or what the previous SRO mentioned, a structured environment.

Whereas the prevalence of marijuana usage amongst students contributes to a substantial amount of the problems SROs deal with on a daily basis, the observed trend of misbehavior towards the beginning and end of the school year may be more illuminating when it comes to the foundational causes and contributors of student crime and violence. The trend of marijuana observed by SROs at their high schools likely reflects a larger issue facing California, if not all of America. As it was previously noted by one of the SROs, the effects of leniency in laws regarding marijuana and the ensuing increase in marijuana dispensaries are a causal factor to the everyday issues he must deal with on campus. However on the other hand, the trend of misbehavior during the beginning and end of the school year seems to reflect a much greater concern regarding the vital role the institution of schools play in the lives of many youth, as both a structured environment and a social support network. Nevertheless without taking away the importance of either trend, the next interview question was posed to make comparisons and connections between the perceived causes of crime and violence, noticeable trends on their campuses, and their proposed methods of prevention.

Theme 17: Comprehensive Involvement

Adhering to the general research endeavors of gaining a firsthand SRO perspective on the topics of student crime, violence, and education, SROs were asked the final question of how crime and violence can be best prevented. Due to the ambiguous and open-ended nature of the question, their responses led in various directions. For instance, a few chose to discuss specific things about their job as SROs or certain measures that must take place for crime to be best prevented, whereas others responded with broader answers consisting of comprehensive and often inconceivable plans that would have to be enacted for prevention to be absolutely successful. The most consistent responses included answers with comprehensive plans. For instance:

Umm I don't think crime will ever be eliminated. I think with um with the help of the community, the schools, um the police department, law enforcement in general, um having the common goal, which is to-to decrease it....and do whatever we can to make the community better, I think that's the only, that's the only thing....umm because crime is always going to be around.

The idea that multiple groups or things must converge was a common response.

Agreeing that crime will be ever present another SRO shares:

Umm...I think it takes a multifaceted...approach to it. Parents need to get involved. That's going to be number one aspect. School district needs to get involved. And then law enforcement has to get involved.

These officers were very general in the sense that they felt that everyone relies on something or someone else as a network, for the problems to be resolved. A third SRO addressed the concern more insightfully responding with:

Um I would say at the school site level um definitely involvement from-from everyone and I think a lot of um adults now have taken a hands-off approach

when dealing with-like the old saying says it takes a whole village to-to raise a child.

He continued by discussing how there is a lack of “accountability on all levels” and the result is that we deal with the problems after they have already occurred, instead of searching for the core causes. He described that far too often we look for a “quick-fix” referring back to his concept that we live in a “fast-food society” where we search for instant gratification. This notion of finding the simple and fast solution relates to what another SRO touched upon, the notion of time.

Theme 18: Time

A fourth SRO who also gave a comprehensive prevention plan described three factors that must occur. First SROs should be actual police officers from local agencies, second you must have the right people in the right positions, and third you must have what the previous SRO mentioned and that is time. Justifying this SRO’s support for only local law enforcement officials occupying school positions as opposed to school district police he explained:

There’s some severe limitations, yeah they can arrest people, yeah they can do gang validations, yeah they can do those other things. They’re limited by an operating budget which is significantly smaller than ours, they don’t have the man power that we do. umm...quite frankly..they don’t have....and probably because of the man power and the resources and everything else, they don’t have the same pull in the law enforcement community that my Lieutenant per say would have.

This statement is particularly significant as it displays elements of the traditional model of police culture. For instance although he does not make any references to dangers he

encounters in his job environment which would determine attitude and behavior, his comments regarding superior power and resources over other SROs is suggestive of maintaining control and authority within his own occupational organization (law enforcement hierarchy). He reinforces this by continuing with:

Their Lieutenant versus my Lieutenant, my Lieutenant could move the earth uhh whereas their Lieutenant can request things and is going to be put down here on a list to get things done where as my Lieutenant can make stuff happen like that (snaps his fingers).

Additionally, highlighting his ability to arrest, validate gang members, and having a larger operating budget in schools reflects the importance of having coercive power within his occupational environment which is another characteristic of traditional police culture.

Whereas the first component of his response accentuates not only the value of SROs but more critical the police culture found amongst a SRO who is also sworn police officer, the second component like other SROs shared, reinforces that their work alone is only part of the solution. Claiming that it is necessary to have the right people in the right position conveys the message that while SROs are vital to crime and violence prevention, other entities must be in place, working together effectively as a larger system. He detailed examples that indicated far too often administrators, teachers, police officers, and social workers have conflicting beliefs and interests. In order to be successful, groups in opposition must collaborate by identifying their own strengths and weaknesses. He reiterated, “everybody knows their limitations and their expertise's and respects other people's limitations and expertise's, that's when you can start to effect

positive change.” While nearly every SRO agreed with the importance of law enforcement in schools, almost all of them also mentioned other factors that must come into alignment with their work as SROs.

The third component of time was a significant factor in prevention as it was a concluding part of the response for the previous SRO and explained in depth by this one.

Referring to the factor of time this SRO argued:

It’ - it’s a huge problem for law enforcement, it’s a huge problem for schools-it’s a huge problem for schools! They implement some sort of change and they want to see improvement like last week.

Here he not only touched on the concept of not being given ample amount of time to correctly address and solve issues as the previous SRO mentioned, but he also discussed time in a different fashion:

And the other problem is they’re addressing stuff at the High School level. Like I said a High Schooler at *High School Z* is like an adult. Good luck changing that. Umm parents come in all the time, what can I do to change my kid? Well you screwed them up for sixteen years, there’s no magic pill, and it’s probably going to take sixteen years to fix.

He proceeded to discuss how he has no clue why they (his school and the school district) address dropout rates in high school when instead they should be focusing on them back at the elementary school-level. By highlighting another angle to the concept of time he explained that while money put towards new programs and more support at his school would have been nice, it would be self-serving. Recalling a district meeting with the Associate Superintendent he said:

I’d love to have it, but if you really want to make a difference go put this money into the elementary schools that feed *High School Z*, and then we’ll see how it

is in six years. And nobody wants to hear that because they want a result on their money, right now. Most programs for schools. Two years. Most grants. Two years best, maybe a year. They just want to see instant improvement.

While the first SRO also commented on time in the sense that children should be raised by whole communities and that problems are often dealt with after they have already occurred (points in time), he did not emphasize time in this manner as focused and in-depth as the second SRO did. Although the amount of time given to address problems was clearly important to both SROs, the second SRO proceeded to uncover that even more critical is the time at which problems are actively attended to.

As is the case with nearly all problems micro and macro, according to the SROs, solutions only come through all-inclusive approaches with numerous entities working together in concert. Still a reoccurring theme that was proven to be significant throughout the interviews was underlined again. Parental involvement or parenting was included as part of the comprehensive plans for half of the SROs. The significance of this theme was displayed through its repeated and emphasized use at various points in the interviews. Moreover yet another important theme also emerged in the responses to this question by two SROs that reflected the previously outlined S2PP literature, and that is testing.

Theme 19: Testing

The function of standardized testing is to gage academic performance and growth. However this process of measurement is flawed and has great effects on the structure of

the education system and student outcomes. The topic of standardized testing, although only briefly discussed by two SROs, highlighted these impediments on education and student learning. The first SRO discussed the specific drawbacks he has witnessed due to an overemphasis on testing. When expanding on the problem of “time” he recalled that after about four or five years, he finally started to see campus-wide change (less crime and violence, restored attention on education), but unfortunately his school still struggled with test scores yielding a low academic performance index or API score. In order to improve a school’s rating he explained districts do one of two things, change it to a charter school and switch the name, making it by technicalities a new school, or make other drastic moves as what took place at his high school. The Superintendent for his school chose the second, “dumping a whole bunch of money into it” and putting in a new administration with the sole focus of raising the rating of the school. He assertively shared:

So that principal’s only motivation is to make sure that that STAR (Standardized Testing and Reporting) test goes well. Well, and that’s what happened, is all the focus went towards the STAR testing, everything was about the STAR test, everything was about the STAR test, nobody cared about the CAHSEE (California High School Exit Exam).

He continued expressing his frustration:

What graduates a kid from school? It’s not the STAR test. That doesn’t count towards-that’s not in their-their-that doesn’t go off to college with them. They can’t pass high school soo....where did you put the motivation to the principal? It’s misplaced motivation in my opinion. Um and that’s the kind of stuff that they do which really hinders how-yeah (crime and violence).

From his point of view all the major improvements on his campus were destroyed as the school-wide focus strictly revolved around improving standardized test scores. He then revealed that due to the major misdirection of funding, the principal that he believed was doing an amazing job at changing the school climate, along with the staff he worked with (social workers, gang prevention team, counselors, teachers, SRO) were either transferred or removed. While he made no direct link between standardized test scores and students heading down paths to incarceration as the S2PP literature suggests, he did cite the lowered attention towards student crime and violence as well as graduation rates (CAHSEE) that are highly associated with incarceration rates. For this SRO, testing took precedent over all other matters on campus, a detriment that is one of the reasons why crime and violence persist. This irrational thought process dismantled a system that in his mind was successful and on its way to greater campus wide improvements.

The second SRO who discussed testing brought it up when asserting how schools need to improve in all areas for student crime and violence to be reduced. He readily admitted in a statement:

I think we need to deemphasize testing, the state testing, and emphasize a learning environment to make productive people. Um right now we're just testing to a number and I don't think you'll ever get a good student out of it unless they're a self-committed student that wants to learn and go forth.

As the first SRO explained the consequences of a solitary focus on testing, this SRO described similar feelings, stating the insignificance of testing from a student perspective. If students do not have interest they are not going to be involved in their schooling. He

continued by pointing out the flaws of education reform and the shifting of curriculums based largely upon standardized testing:

Um I think we really need to have more hands on things and unfortunately it's cut out of all, most other schools. Very little automotive shops, wood shops, all the little shops that teach these kids that aren't the best student but are interested in working with their hands or are good at it. It keeps them in school to learn those other aspects. And some of these kids might be...terrible at school, great at hands on, but as a senior, they've changed cuz just by being here and staying in those other classes they're going to be a better student as a-as-a, as a senior. So I would love to have that aspect come back to schools.

What he viewed was that too many students are not succeeding or simply failing due to a lack of interest or what was my interpretation as having a meaning to their own education. If they are not succeeding in a certain field of study and see little relevance to it with their own lives, they are not going to be engaged, and will not learn anything. Testing exacerbates this problem for many students, measuring their performance in something that does not matter to them or does not match their skill set. Moreover this response reflects the theories of schooling by Bowles and Gintis (1976) and supports arguments of a school to prison pipeline perspective. Education serves the purpose of categorizing students into various skill ranks and economic groups. The students that do not succeed become automatically classified as the excess economy or reserved army. The justification for their social ranking or position stems from their failure in school, which in this case is determined by an unequal measurement of educational performance (standardized testing). Once considered an educational failure and inadequate to the established workforce, they involuntarily occupy the lowest of positions which often leads to eventual criminal behavior. Finally once involved in a life of crime, many often

come into contact with the criminal justice system. Hence the second SROs explanation argued that there is no place for many youth in education who are not actively participating whether that is due to a lack of interest, skill, or a support network. No matter what the reasons are, until there is an arena for all to learn and have an opportunity at success, there is no chance of crime and violence to decrease. What he argues is that there needs to be alternative routes in school for those who are not currently gaining an education because lastly, there is no hope for society unless there is a workforce of educated and productive members. Standardized testing complicates this entire dilemma as this SRO firmly stated that it tests to a number and not to what students are learning. Even though he believes crime and violence will always exist, the direct problems he sees within the education system itself has a large effect on student behavior.

When contemplating the issue of student crime and violence, one would not initially believe there would be a connection to standardized testing. Yet two of the SROs discussed the impact they see as a result of testing. Without it being a topic in question or even mentioned anywhere throughout the interviews, the negative implications were highlighted in two similar ways. The first SRO spoke of the direct effect it had on his unit. As district pressure came down on his school, funding was removed from many positions and his team was dismantled, resulting in the problems of crime and violence on campus returning. The second SRO referred to testing as a detrimental measure of school performance. Due to the nature of standardized tests the fixated focus becomes numbers and statistics, when instead it should be about learning

and forging futures. In both cases the problems lie in the emphasis of standardized testing and the long-term lasting effects it has on crime and violence. Testing masks other issues such as crime and violence on campus, while simultaneously depleting any sort of funding and support that goes with it. Testing also is a fundamental problem by itself as it latently excludes students on the basis of unequally evaluating ones academic performance. Although only two of the SROs responded to the question by including testing, it is clear that it has a negative effect on student crime and violence, hence shaping the educational experiences and futures of many youth.

Discussion

Overall there were glaring similarities amongst each of the SROs. Some themes were reoccurring, where others proved their significance through the timing in the interview and their meaning alone. Although the SROs shared the same answers to many of the interview questions, the explanations and more importantly the tone or what is interpreted as the feel (sense) of their responses is where differences were found. The tone and feel of the first SRO was one that proclaimed, “I am good at what I do” and being good at what he does, he is a potential benefit to all (almost arrogant and cocky). He symbolized power and what it meant to be an influential, prominent figure not only on campus, but in society. The feel of the second interview was one in which the SRO was knowledgeable on what needs to take place on campus, and how it must be done correctly and efficiently. He took the legal (“by the book”) stance towards every question

reflecting his background in law and focusing on crime prevention, safety, and the criminal justice perspective. The third SRO had an entirely different feel from the first two, only discussing the positive aspects of the SRO line of work. SRO interaction with students and changing the public perception of police was clearly the intended message. Whether this was an honest reflection of her duties or a defensive mechanism reflecting the secretive, protective, and fraternity-like nature of police is unknown. Nonetheless when compared to the first two law enforcement perspectives, she gave off a counselor or social worker persona. On the other hand the fourth SRO was very “matter of fact” throughout the whole interview. He answered all the questions informatively and openly with nothing to hide. The tone of his responses seemed to be suggestive of the saying, “it is what it is” (even though he portrayed an extremely friendly, happy, and positive figure on campus), and that students simply need to work hard to overcome their hardships as he did himself growing up. The fifth SRO was similar to the fourth, but the differences were that the fourth seemed to feel individuals needed to change, whereas the fifth SRO’s overall arguments seemed to reflect a much larger and more complex problem facing society as a whole. Interpreting his entire interview, I got the sense that he wished to take more power and control over certain situations on the job. Similar to the responses of the first and second SROs, he reflected an overall authoritative position. The final SRO had a tone and feel unlike any of the others. While he shared many of the same responses as his fellow SROs, his were much more insightful and critical, questioning the role law enforcement plays in education. Passiveness towards the ways he helps or hinders

students was also sensed through throughout the interview, leaving added curiosity towards possible negative effects of police in schools.

Ultimately while none of the interviews can be generalized to a larger population, it more critically shows the depth of information that can be obtained and that needs to be analyzed to address the intersection of law enforcement and education. For instance four of the SROs spoke in a manner that accentuated an authoritative position at least once in their interviews, lending support to the theoretical perspectives on schooling, the S2PP, and the PIC. As the SROs stressed maintaining control and upholding safety on campus, they simultaneously function by excluding certain students on the basis of bad behavior through increasingly punitive procedures, in which they are delegated by administrators to strictly enforce or feel that it is necessary to do so themselves. However this leads to the thwarted social development of youth, and the manifestation of a stratified public education system determined by the unfair classification of students. The underlying problem is that students who are deemed failures in school and subsequently unqualified or surpassed by others in the job market, have become of value for those with vested interests in mass incarceration. As described earlier, the privatization of prisons has resulted in a network of beneficiaries which include corporations, politicians, private investors, construction contractors, media, and police creating a demand for more prisons and criminals to fill them. Although SROs may not be a central entity in the PIC they can certainly be seen as a key contributor to the problem.

On the other hand, whereas SROs can be viewed as an essential cog in the process of schooling in a capitalist society, the S2PP, and an overlooked component in the process of a rapidly expanding prison system, they also can be seen as a counter to such theoretical perspectives. Nearly every SRO shared responsibilities and duties beyond their role of law enforcement. Although they detailed how they promote safety, their underlying concern was student education. Mentoring and building positive relationships was a key example of how their roles in schools are to help students, not simply criminalize and exclude them. A power balance between these two strategies is apparent, with SROs either using their power to control order amongst the student population or empowering them through social support and rehabilitative methods of policing. The exact measurement of this power balance is unclear and likely varies by school as well as individual SRO, however their impact whether negative or positive, is undoubtedly significant.

While we are incapable of measuring the overall costs and benefits of SROs, an accurate calculation may never be possible. What we have gained is specific examples of how they coincide and contest the perspectives on schooling in a capitalist society, the S2PP, and the PIC in their own words. By interviewing the SROs and asking them open ended questions as opposed to surveying them or using statistics to weigh their advantages and disadvantages, we uncover inconsistencies where additional questions surface. For example, scrutinizing the true function of SROs we can take a closer examination of their responses to the question of what they believe the biggest hindrance

to student success is. Two of the SROs readily declared that it is the students themselves (the individual) who are to blame for their own educational shortcomings. However as they elaborated, their explanations alluded to a different story. They along with two other SROs ended up describing hindrances that were outside the control of the individual, such as family life, parental involvement, the environment, and having to “survive”. Not only would quantitative measures have portrayed something entirely different, but more critically it raises concern to the strategies we take to overcome student hindrances. As two of the SROs originally stated that the students themselves were the biggest hindrance, only continuing by describing a separate problem, are they involuntarily essentially placing blame on the individual and removing the responsibility from SROs? Are they over assuming that individuals always have the agency and support to make the right decisions in life even though they proceeded to describe obstacles that may impact such decisions? Moreover since two of the SROs believed it was the fault of the individual and their personal choices that are the biggest hindrance to student success, does this result in SROs being more reluctant to assist, mentor, and guide troubled youth? Do they also become more inclined to taking the punitive approach insisting that students who make bad decisions, regardless of their circumstances, need to learn on their own and face the consequences? These questions are imperative as law enforcement officials have immense power and extreme discretion, and the approaches to their specific line of work has a lasting effect on all of society. If SROs believe that individuals are to blame, what are they doing to change their actions and behavior that is a hindrance to education?

If they are simply dealing with the product of such behavior then it is fair to say that they are supporting a S2PP and justifying the PIC. If they are working to prevent, rehabilitate, and create an equal opportunity for all students to learn and creating a safer more productive educational environment for all, then it is reasonable to say they are countering such S2PP and PIC arguments. Nonetheless whereas the interviews revealed additional unanswered questions, they also reflected some of the grounded theory in criminology.

Through the interviews we are able to see how SROs are symbolic to theories on law enforcement, police, and crime. As it was previously noted, SROs display some of the same characteristics representative of traditional police culture. Examples include SROs discussing ways in which they maintain control, authority, and an edge on students paying particular attention and awareness to gangs and drug activity. There were also numerous times when the SROs reinforced their legitimized power over students, shared instances in which they had to use aggressive and punitive action, or discussed the great differences that lie between police and non-police. Although we are nowhere close to being able to define a distinct police subculture amongst SROs, the substantial differences in settings and experiences between them (SROs and other law enforcement) which impact their beliefs and behaviors, are evident. On the surface many elements of traditional police culture seem problematic to the successful functioning of our public education system. However even though some of the characteristics of traditional police

culture were found amongst this small sample of SROs, the extent to which all SROs display the same culture is unclear.

Gaging the effectiveness of how SROs prevent student crime and violence and gaining a greater understanding of the relationship between them, the SRO responses were also deconstructed and interpreted in comparison to the criminological theories detailed in Chapter 2. Throughout their responses, none of the SROs explicitly discussed the structural makeup of the surrounding communities in terms of it being disordered. However where there was an absence of ecological discussion, citing the breakdown of informal social networks and the lack of collective efficacy, did seem to be implied by many of the SROs. For instance as noted throughout the results section above, the lack of parental involvement and poor parenting having a substantial effect on crime, violence, and educational success also suggests a possible need for additional stronger forms of social control such as the institutions of schools, churches, and thriving businesses. Three of the SROs touched on this notion of the deficiencies of social institutions and informal social control, describing why it is crucial that they help students beyond the end of the school day. Ways to combat this problem, keeping them constructively occupied and off the streets, were the development of extracurricular activities; forming after school programs, helping them with class projects and homework, and assisting them in locating jobs. Furthermore two of the SROs also mentioned that the environments many of the students live in are far different than the environments they live or grew up in, signifying the instability and danger many students encounter outside

of school. This clear and present danger some students are faced with was also reflected through the use of the term survival. Survival was mentioned numerous times by one SRO and was also used by another to describe the reasons for negative behavior amongst students. Hence even though the SROs never explained that the unstructured communities of students was a cause of crime and violence on campus, the insinuations towards social disorganization were clear, speaking almost as if it was something already widely acknowledged and accepted.

Differential association, an extension of social disorganization theory, describes that criminality is a behavior learned through the interaction with others who are criminal minded. This theory was directly displayed through Theme 13, one of the SROs explanations of culture. It was described that a specific culture of theft and of violence was a main cause of crime and violence. Defining the culture of theft he shared the two stories, of how a grandparent stole a cell phone while on campus and how numerous students stole the same bike from one another. The point was that in both cases the behavior is accepted and it is a learned behavior from parents and peers. These types of stories are symbolic of differential association theory, but more notably two of the SROs shared how they attempt to break these behaviors as opposed to allowing them to persist. One described how he works towards changing the attitude and climate of the entire school by holding students more accountable for their individual actions. The other SRO, who used the concept of culture, examined the problem much deeper by explaining how he attempts to get the students to see beyond the present day and look towards the future.

He shared that far too often students are engaging in crime and violence because they do not believe they will be alive much longer. Helping them foresee futures, he not only opens students up to greater life possibilities, but he reduces the likeliness that they will participate in further acts of crime and violence.

Whereas SROs indirectly referenced social disorganization theory and described differential association and their solutions, the connections between their responses and strain theory are less comprehensible. In general, strain theory describes the link between structural inequalities and criminal behavior. While it was my assumption that SROs would become an additional strain on already struggling and marginalized students, this conjecture could not be determined. During the duration of the interviews at least half of the SROs made some reference to students not getting along with them or not wanting to have any relationship with them on the simple fact that they are police. On the other hand nearly all of the SROs mentioned having conversations, interacting, and building rapport with a number of students. Thus SROs may indeed create added strain on some students, but they also strive to neutralize strain. Although none of the SROs discussed social and cultural values of economic success and the structural accessibility to resources that generate such goals as strain theory argues, the general idea of strain is an important one that cannot be overlooked. For instance, as we can conclude that SROs may increase strain as well as reduce strain, the critical question is who precisely are they adding strain to and who do they remove strain from. Additionally how accurate is this depiction of a student and SRO relationship? It will be of great value that future research

attends to the perspective of students to determine this relationship. These questions left unaddressed pose a huge threat to the equality of policing as well as education.

Next the labeling theory in general states that once an individual engages in crime, a criminal label becomes attached to that individual. Overall none of the SROs made any references or discussion of this theory, but this was anticipated and expected. However what can be linked to this theory is the power and discretion police have in schools and the implications they have on stigmatizing youth. Following the argument of this theory, the more SROs arrest youth on campus, the more they are contributing to the future criminal patterns of these students. While SROs are integrated with schools to prevent crime and violence, the processing of additional non-criminal behaviors may be much more damaging in the long run. Thus, we return to the underlying question of how SROs are reacting to crime and violence and more critically are they taking punitive or rehabilitative approaches to prevention? While differences between SRO beliefs and methods may vary greatly, as well as overlap, an example did surface through the interview process that was indicative of an overall punitive approach amongst law enforcement. When describing the importance of having an open relationship with school administrators, and how their roles are vastly different from each other, one of the SROs readily revealed how some of the administrators are “more on the liberal side” where they “have the viewpoint of giving kids a second chance.” His description seemed to be suggestive of opposing perspectives in that police are more conservative in comparison to school administration when it comes to crime, violence, and the resulting

punishments. If this is in fact the case, then according to the labeling theory, SROs are not the most efficient method to crime prevention on campus as they seek to process and punish students instead of giving second chances as opportunities to teach.

While all of the previously mentioned criminological theories dealt with the methods, perspectives, and effects of SROs the broken windows theory relates more to the initial incorporation of police and the significance of their presence. To review, the broken windows ideology broadly argues that when minor crimes are left unattended, it eventually leads to greater and more severe crimes. Although this theory is oversimplified and faces reoccurring limitations, the general idea is one that was commonly reflected amongst SROs. As it was noted by nearly all of the SROs, their presence alone is mandatory at specific times during the school day. One even admitted that their visible presence is important to show the community that there is an officer on site making it appear that their school is safe and secure. Their visibility and presence alone symbolizes the idea that crime will not be left unaddressed and order will be maintained. Another SRO also detailed this when explaining why there is an increase of law enforcement in schools. He responded by saying that school districts, “don’t want society to have the perception that we don’t care about the kids,” essentially equating to the idea that SROs are in schools to keep the “broken windows” fixed and give off the impression that there is zero tolerance on campus crime. In this case the appearance of safety is seemingly just as important if not more important than the means to safety. However the problem is, since the broken windows theory faces an abundance of justified

criticism, our concern with the automatic and increasing implementation of law enforcement in schools must be questioned too. Have we followed an oversimplified explanation of crime by incorporating police into our education system? Are we overlooking other strategies to prevent the root causes of student crime and violence, or at least testing other methods in combination with SROs for greater efficiency and an overall benefit for all? Keeping the theories on schooling, the S2PP, the PIC, and criminology in mind, we are able to systematically address these comprehensive issues and interviewing SROs only enhanced our knowledge on their perspectives and effects.

Chapter 5

CONCLUSION

What to make of it all and where do we go from here?

While high school graduation rates amongst Latinos and African Americans continue to lag, and a disproportionate representation of Latinos and African Americans in our prison system exists, it must become a social responsibility and civic duty to investigate the causes of such degrading disparities. In addition, while the public and educational concern with student crime and violence is a pressing issue, we must examine the deeper effects our currently implemented strategy of SROs has on the public education system. This is where the value of qualitative research shines. While quantitative data can support the claim of an increasing number of student arrests (making it either appear safer or appear as if there are more problems than there truly are) or the increase in graduation rates (making it seem like a progressing institution and not an accurate reflection of the quality of education students receive), it cannot explain why and how. Although qualitative data proves less definitive answers, it can illuminate the intricacies to such problems that is not possible with quantitative data.

As displayed over the course of the interviews, each SRO gave their own unique perspective, detailing the diversity of responses. These responses, once deconstructed, offer advanced explanation to many questions of why and how. For instance, exploring the relationship between the S2PP and the role of SROs in schools we can see that SROs

could be considered a catalyst in the overall process of the increased likelihood of students ending up in jail or prison. As previously discussed the existence of law enforcement in schools is a product of increased safety measures. However their mere presence has detrimentally resulted in the criminalization of many minor disciplinary offenses as one SRO described being a “crutch” for school administration to rely upon when they do not wish to deal with student issues themselves. In contrast, through interviewing SROs we can also recognize the encouraging ways they positively affect students and their educational experiences, as they repeatedly shared a mentoring process to their jobs. Numerous SROs emphasized this as an essential component of their work, doing more than simply enforcing the law, focusing on the individual success of students and shaping their educational experiences.

Not only are we able to grasp some of the potential disadvantages and clear advantages by listening to their responses, but with open-ended questions SROs are also able to voice their own opinions and specific concerns. Nearly every SRO mentioned the problem of poor or lack of parenting and parental involvement at least once in their interviews. According to their claims, the issue of parenting is a main cause and contributor to student crime, violence, and failure in school. This concern amongst the SROs brings up a critical point of how they are able to directly address the problem. If the SROs occupy schools to increase safety as well as promote student success, and from their point of view parenting is the main underlying issue affecting this, then SROs may not be the preeminent solution to the problem. Thus it may be of more value to continue

to apply some of the grounded criminological theory such as the social disorganization theory or strain theory to develop further research combatting the primary causes of crime and violence. These theories in addition to the theories on schooling in a capitalist society, the school-to-prison pipeline, and the prison-industrial complex ought to be utilized in combination as opposed to being used mutually exclusively. For instance as two of the SROs highlighted the problems of standardized testing, they simultaneously supported the theories on schooling and a school to prison pipeline. Hence if these theories are used collectively, together they will help elucidate the complex and multidimensional characteristics of crime and violence, and most importantly how these problems can be prevented more effectively.

Finally in-depth interviews conducted for this research are significant because they naturally unveiled the topic of race, which through quantitative measures would have otherwise gone undetected. The concept of race is undeniably intertwined in the social fabric of America. While on the surface race relations have seemingly improved, racial discrimination and racial inequality has fluidly adapted over time, continuing to be a major yet under addressed issue. Through the interviews we are able to identify this, as the topic of race was brought up separately by two SROs in order to deflect any sort of racist persecution. However this only proves the sensitivity towards race and not the real dynamics of racial connotations towards negative subjects such as crime and violence. The longer race is ignored and downplayed as simply a historical topic, the longer racial implications will exist. Racial inequality is so deeply embedded in American culture and

one of the reasons it continues today is because of such defense mechanisms displayed by the SROs in their interviews that do not allow for the consequences of race to be confronted through a widespread discourse.

Lastly if SROs are in fact occupying schools to attend to the issue of student crime and violence, then it is apparent that they cannot be the only solution, which apparently is the current situation. According to the voices of the SROs interviewed here, many of the problems in schools endure due to contributing factors outside of their own control, whether that is the environment students live in or the damaging individual choices many students make. This notion alone should be an indicator that more research and evaluation must begin. If conversely SROs are occupying schools as a safety measure in order to prevent any possible incidents such as the Columbine shooting, then we must take an even closer examination at the real costs and benefits of their integration. Once again by doing so, we must also be much more cognizant of the racial disparities that exist within our education and criminal justice systems, keying in on the practices which exacerbate this problem. Finally if the main goal of schooling is the success and future of all students; no matter what the purpose, effects, disadvantages and advantages of SROs are, the focus must be entirely devoted towards equal opportunity learning and the quality of education.

Appendix A

Consent to Participate in Research

Purpose of Research: You are being asked to participate in research which will be conducted by Ryan Morimune, a Sociology Graduate student from California State University, Sacramento. The study will examine issues related to the topics of crime, violence, law enforcement, and education from the perspective of school resource officers.

Research Procedures: You will be asked a series of questions related to three main research questions in a one-on-one, semi-structured interview. The three central topic questions are: How do school resource officers (SROs) construct their position/identity/role on public high school campuses? How do SROs feel they affect students and their education? And how do they view/define/explain the essential problems/causes contributing to student crime and violence? The interviews will last approximately one hour, some may be much shorter and some may last longer. The interviews will also be recorded and later transcribed for the purpose of analysis, with your permission to do so.

Risks: While I do not believe or anticipate any of the questions throughout the interview to be discomforting or in any way harmful, you still have the right to refuse to answer any of them.

Compensation and Benefits: Unfortunately no financial benefits will be given to you as a result of your participation, however sharing your perspective on the function, effects, and possible improvements in your job, the safety of students and faculty, and the overall quality of public education may be rewarding in its own right.

Confidentiality: In order to preserve confidentiality, your name and the name of the high school in which you serve will be replaced with pseudonyms. Furthermore once the interviews are conducted and transcribed, the audio tapes will be destroyed. During the time in which it takes to transcribe the interviews, the audio tapes will remain in a secure and private location that only I the researcher has access to.

If you have any questions or concerns please feel free to contact me, Ryan Morimune, at (925)XXX-XXXX or you can e-mail me at xxxxxxxx@hotmail.com.

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. Your signature below indicates that you have read and fully understand this page, and agree to participate in my research.

Name_____

Date_____

Signature_____

Date_____

Appendix B

Interview Questions:

Research Topic/Theme 1: *How do SROs construct their position/identity/role on public High School campuses?*

1. Can you talk about a typical work day for you (what are your duties/tasks/responsibilities as a SRO on a high school campus/what is the most common issues you have to deal with)?
2. Can you describe to me your relationship with students? Can you describe any relationships you have with adults on campus or off campus?
3. Can you talk to me about your law enforcement background and how you became an SRO (special training, programs, etc)?

Research Topic/Theme 2: *How do SROs affect students and their educational experiences?*

1. Do you think SROs have any effect on the educational outcome of students, if so what do you think the affect is? What about the general climate of the school?
2. What do you believe is the biggest hindrance to student success (what do you think are some of the biggest obstacles students face in school), and why?
3. Nationwide there is an increase of police officers in schools, why do you think this is? There has also been a growth in crime prevention technologies (metal detectors, surveillance, etc.), do you use any sort of technological devices to prevent crime?

Research Topic/Theme 3: *How do SROs view/define/explain the essential problems/causes of student crime and violence?*

1. From your point of view, what are the largest contributors or causes of crime and violence on campus? What is your biggest problem or concern on campus? If you could sum up the significance/most important aspect of your job what would it be?
2. Can you describe trends of student misbehavior since you have been an SRO? Have they changed over time?
3. How can student violence and crime be best prevented? How can it eliminated or decreased? Will more police enforcement help, why or why not?

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