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A Qualitative Exploration of the School Resource Officer's Role in
Two K-12 School Districts

by

Christopher T. Muench

A Dissertation submitted to the Education Faculty of Lindenwood University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of

Doctor of Education

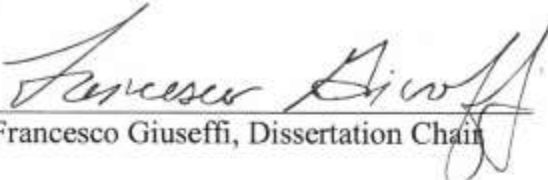
School of Education

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Christopher T. Muench

This dissertation has been approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
Doctor of Education
at Lindenwood University by the School of Education



Dr. Francesco Giuseffi, Dissertation Chair

Oct 11, 2019
Date



Dr. Stephen Sherblom, Committee Member

Oct 11, 2019
Date



Dr. Lynda Leavitt, Committee Member

Oct 11, 2019
Date

Declaration of Originality

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work here at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree here or elsewhere.

Full Legal Name: Christopher T. Muench

Signature:  Date: 10/11/2019

Dedication

The researcher dedicated the work of this dissertation to the one God, the most gracious, the most merciful.

Acknowledgements

The researcher would like to thank Dr. Francesco Giuseffi, committee chair, Dr. Lynda Leavitt, and Dr. Stephen Sherblom, all Lindenwood University members of the committee. A sincere gratefulness to my wife, Taghreed, who was supportive through this endeavor and did not give up. A special thanks to my parents, John and Martha who displayed encouragement. Finally, thanks to the law enforcement community for supporting this work who helped along the way.

Abstract

The researcher conducted a qualitative exploration on the role of the School Resource Officer (SRO) specifically on safety/security, law enforcement duties, and interaction with students. The idea of an SRO was present in school systems since the 1950s and over the decades showed considerable expansion. On the surface, the SRO position seemed to need little definition but attempting to clarify the role led to conflicts, vagueness, and confusion among organizations served, the community, and the SROs themselves. The research was diverse concerning the roles and responsibilities of the SRO whether it be from a legal, educational, or tactical standpoint. This study explored the SRO's role in three predominant categories reflected in current literature to better define their nature and practice. The researcher collected data through surveys from SROs in two school districts examining the roles, duties, and perceptions of the job. The researcher also conducted interviews, observations, and participant phone-ins as research instruments. The results of the qualitative data indicated SROs regularly involved themselves in the three meta-categories although disproportionate and did not support some of the contemporary theories such as the NASRO triad or the "school to prison pipeline" found in current literature. Moreover, the themes which emerged indicated the SROs performed many tasks and some went beyond their own perception of the role which neither aligned with their realization of the job nor within the bounds of law enforcement. Hence, the data showed there was no defined, consistent role and each SRO functioned in their own way within the confines of their own school.

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Chapter One: Introduction

On October 26, 2015, a video of a Sheriff's Deputy in South Carolina, who served as a School Resource Officer (SRO) in a local high school, emerged on social media. The video showed the officer physically handling a student in the classroom. A disruption in class prompted a call for an SRO to respond, which eventually led to the officer giving an ultimatum for the student to accompany him out of the classroom or he would use force. When the student continued to remain seated the SRO picked her up and threw her to the floor. As the officer proceeded to restrain the student, the deputy dragged her back and forth across the floor. The SRO handcuffed and took the student out of the classroom, and later charged her with disorderly conduct. A classmate caught the incident on video and posted it on Facebook, Twitter, and other popular social media sites. Shock set in over the incident and some claimed police abuse, while others defended the officer, saying the student was resisting arrest (Aarthun & Yan, 2015).

In the aftermath of the incident, the officer was heavily scrutinized in the media and the forum of public opinion. Many called for an immediate termination. Lawsuits soon followed against the school district, the sheriff's department, and the deputy. Furthermore, the American Civil Liberties Union sued the state of South Carolina over, "the criminalization of normal adolescent misbehavior" (Kinnard, 2018, para. 8). The arrest challenged the state's "disturbing schools" and "disorderly conduct" charges as unconstitutionally ambiguous.

This incident was one of many questionable police videos that surfaced over the last several years and brings up an important issue. This happened in a school, bringing police mistrust from the streets into an adolescent learning environment (Clark, Bland, &

Livingston, 2017). Unfortunately, this illustrated how fragile the role of the SRO was, compared to traditional policing responses to unruliness. The SRO was in a position involving responsibilities in multiple educational settings, utilizing an array of pragmatic remedies suitable for young students. The incident gives a sobering look at the need for solidifying the roles for SROs and the successful outcomes satisfactory for educational and community stakeholders.

For over 50 years, police officers have trickled into the education world in one form or another. Early on, one might have seen an officer helping students at a cross walk or dealing with a rebellious teen and a “hot rod” car. Police departments initiated many contacts over time, from simple community relations to regular visits from officers to the school. Until the Columbine massacre in 1999, law enforcement and schools were only loosely connected. This incident, along with others, such as Sandy Hook in 2012 and the Parkland, Florida incident in 2018, have elicited a serious call for law enforcement to act in one way or another to better link themselves directly to the schools, on a more permanent basis (Maa & Darzi, 2018).

Background

The researcher served as an SRO for approximately six years and noticed the role was undefined, with little oversight by the respective police agency or school district. Many times, the SROs received little “hands on” training, and as police agencies placed them in unfamiliar territory, i.e., the schools (Swartz, Osbourne, Dawson-Edwards, & Higgins, 2016). This leaves the SRO functioning in a laissez-faire mindset, with no defined role, pursuing his or her own means, and thereby attempting to achieve the best results for the students, staff, the community, and the police organization. Often, the

SRO comes straight from a traditional police patrol designation or another non-educational assignment, and maintains the “street” mentality which can be ineffective. Many times, under stress, officers have reverted to their training, such as “use of force” or other traditional criminalization remedies, not realizing the detrimental outcome for students.

Problem Statement

The purpose of the study was to explore the role of the SRO, closely examining three contemporary, research-based functions that define, influence, and effect the position of the SRO. These components consist of a safety security agent, a law enforcer, and an interacter with students. School Resources Officers have become a notable component in education today, helping to contribute to the success of students (Hurley Swayze, D., & Buskovick, D, 2014). On a macro level, it was an acceptable practice, but societal shifts, along with various behaviors and standards on the part of the SROs, have led to the need for a closer examination of the actual role. Duxbury and Bennell (2018) argue, “Establishing a clear definition of the role of the SRO is difficult given the diffusion of responsibilities that arise when one is a law enforcement officer in an educational environment” (p. 24).

Prior literature examined varying elements of police and schools collaborating in one sense or another, yet what remains unclear is the standard function the SRO carries out. Other studies have been inadequate and unsystematic in examining the boundaries of the SRO’s mission, and have not seemed to solidify any static model or uniform framework (Stinson & Watkins, 2014). While many SROs implemented a sound regimen, any one of many societal ills or media driven public outcries purporting the

latest plight threatening the youth may shift the SRO to focus on particular problems while neglecting rudimentary operations (Ryan, Katsiyannis, Counts, & Shelnut, 2018). Furthermore, organizational conflicts have situated the SRO in a balancing act between two organizations (the school and the police department), with few policy guidelines in place, leaving many involved asking who takes responsibility for any one of many problematic areas. SROs in schools may be unfavorable in some instances, and create more problems than they solve (LaPointe, 2016).

Rationale of the Study

“According to the extant literature, there is vast inconsistency in how School Resource Officers (SRO) operate in the K-12 school setting. Many have no formal governance document to guide their role and responsibilities in each respective setting” (Jones, 2014, para. 5). In addition to regulatory guidance complications, the numerous and fluid roles of the SRO can sometimes conflict and even manifest controversy. The researcher recognized a lack of consistency and structure in the SRO field operations in U.S. public schools and the need for a systematic framework, leading to a better topographical layout. Even though the literature exhibited common re-occurring themes in SRO functions within schools, the researcher found no evidence of a solidified praxis. Consequently, the lack of concrete guidance on SRO practices prompted exploration of the three defined roles to gain familiarity and acquire new insight for further investigation and studies.

Prior to the 1950s, police departments and schools operated in separate domains. Any law enforcement contact was typically a service call where police would deal with the matter at hand and leave (Joyner, 2015). However, throughout the latter part of the

20th century police departments began to recognize a need for better relations with the youth, as to make schools a safer place (Joyner, 2015, p. 3). Today, police officers are becoming an increasing part of the educational landscape. Bleakley & Bleakley (2018) stated, “School Resource Officers are undoubtedly the most visible representations of the nexus between schooling and policing” (p. 2). However, SROs duties and obligations have varied with no clearly defined parameters (Swartz et al., 2016).

The researcher discovered the current literature showed three re-occurring themes regarding the role of the SRO. First, the SRO, based on its origins, seemed to play the part of a safety and security agent. Bonanno & Levinson (2014) suggested keeping students safe was one of the primary concepts in placing the SRO in schools. Second, the law enforcer role, although controversial in schools, strayed little in philosophy from the traditional role of the police officer as enforcer of statutory laws and juvenile offenses (Chongmin & Gottfredson, 2013). Thirdly, Gill, Weisburd, Telep, Vitter, and Bennett (2014) described the SRO as friend, mentor, role model, and counselor which included building relationships and capitalizing on the community policing philosophy carried over from the 1980s, under the Community Oriented Policing (COP) model. The COP model purported the traditional police approach was no longer the focus, and instead, became about building partnerships and rapport with the community (Randol & Gaffney, 2014).

Collectively, the information suggested to the researcher even though SROs were prevalent in many school districts, the role was categorically inconsistent, and always changing. In the researcher’s experience, what SROs needed was role analysis as a guiding framework to better understand the position, as well as limitations, in the

aforementioned categories. The researcher built the study on the overwhelming profusion of operational fluctuation in SRO functions, thereby trying to better understand the role. Another gap in the current literature was a lack of concurrence with any unified practice in the field. The National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO), a leader in the field of SROs, recommended a triad model, describing the SRO as a law enforcement officer, counselor, and teacher (NASRO, 2009). While many SROs adhere to NASRO's premise and receive training under its guiding principal, many do not. The researcher believed collaborating among SROs, as well as an exhaustive analysis of the role, would promote a more categorical and definitive position where the result may lead to better job performance.

Finally, if the proposed study revealed a better understanding of the SROs' existing role, then the findings would add to the already existing body of knowledge on police in an educational setting, and could help SROs, police departments, and school districts understand the benefits and even limitations of the job function. If the SRO's role was more defined in the K-12 arena, then other police departments could choose to study the analysis to replicate and elucidate existing practice.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of the qualitative study was to explore the School Resource Officer's role in two K-12 school districts. More specifically, the researcher found, in examining current literature, the SRO operates predominantly in three areas: a safety/security agent, a law enforcement official, and a role model that strives to interact and build relationships with students. These three focused categories provided the researcher with information allowing exploration of the SRO, and possibly, yield a better idea or clarification of the

role. This research study will also be essential in educational leadership as the dynamics are laid out for two varying entities who inevitably have been working together. SROs participated in surveys, interviews, observations by the researcher, and phone check-ins as data became available. The qualitative data was coded for common themes for each research question.

Research Questions

Research Question 1: How do the SROs participating in this study perform the role of safety/security agent?

Research Question 2: How do the participating SROs function in the role of law enforcer?

Research Question 3: How do the participating SROs interact with students in the school and what are the resulting behaviors?

Research Question 4: What changes, if any, occurred in the participating SROs self-perceptions regarding the three categories during the research study?

Research Question 5: Do the participating SROs conceive the role in some way not covered by the terms in the three categories?

Limitations

The researcher wanted to work within two large and diverse school districts. The concept behind this was to procure active and experienced SRO study participants with a multiplicity of school/police related situations, thereby extracting the richest data possible. The research sites (school districts) did not differ and did not completely represent the makeup or sample population of the entire metropolitan area in which it took place.

There were several qualified, competent SROs in the two school districts, and the researcher chose the SROs based on a purposive method. There were 12 participants involved in the study, and they represented most of the SROs employed in the districts. Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun (2012) stated, “In qualitative studies, the number of participants in a sample is usually somewhere between 1 and 20” (p. 103). The researcher felt a sample limitation was probable and within reason of a qualitative study, even though the SROs were sufficiently represented.

A normal academic school year begins in fall and ends the following spring, spanning approximately nine months. However, many schools offer summer school and, in this case, both school districts held a summer session for students who either wanted to participate in learning, or those who needed credit recovery. The researcher only studied the SROs during the regular school year, and excluded any summer classes. Selected SROs, in fact, worked during the summers, and the researcher may have drawn new or more data from the time period.

The research was conscious of gender diversity of the participants. The researcher sent out requests for participation in the study to SROs, as well as permission paperwork, to male and female SROs alike. Only one female SRO returned the form and agreed to be a part of the study. The female participant was concerned about anonymity and felt using pronouns such as “he” and “she” would compromise her in the study. The researcher assured the participant as much anonymity as possible by only referring to her as a designated character and number such as “P18,” or to be referred to as simply “SRO” or “Participant.” Any gender-specific pronoun usage was written as “s/he”.

Another conceived limitation was communicating with the SRO participants. The researcher, being in the field of law enforcement himself, knew sometimes officers were not good at opening up and did not want to expose emotions or weaknesses, especially to peers. Therefore, the interaction with the researcher may have hindered some of the true data and findings and there might have been struggles for the participants to answer truthfully.

The researcher wanted to study the SROs in a natural environment while conducting observations. The researcher perceived the SROs performed their normal duties regularly. At other times, however, the researcher sensed the SROs were aware of an observation. This changed the way they acted such as being more proactive and even making statements, “I normally don’t do this, but since you are here...” Mannerisms such as this were consistent with Hawthorne effect, and the researcher did whatever was possible not to skew the results.

Definition of Terms

Community Oriented Policing (COP): A policing mindset focused on interacting with the community to gain trust and develop different crime prevention strategies, as opposed to a customary style of law and order (Gill, Weisburd, Telep, Vitter, & Bennett, 2014, para. 5).

Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E): A program, begun in 1983, utilizing a police officer to teach students (usually in elementary schools), and teaches about the dangers of alcohol and drug abuse (Caputi & McLellan, 2016, para. 1).

Restorative Justice: A method used in the criminal justice system focusing on repairing damage done or harm caused to a victim of a crime, by involving everyone

(suspects, victims, community members) through meetings or sessions that focus on repair as a holistic approach, rather than strictly punishment (Payne & Welch, 2015).

School Resource Officer Triad: Three connected concepts, universally accepted among SROs, and developed by the National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO), consisting of being the enforcer of laws, a teacher, and mentor (Johnson, Fessler, Wilhelm, & Stepensky, 2014, para. 33).

School Resource Officer (SRO): “Sworn law enforcement officers who are assigned to work in school” (James & McCallion, 2013, p. 1).

School shooting incident: One person at minimum who willfully utilizes a firearm to shoot one or more persons at a school (Gerard, Whitfield, Porter, & Browne, 2016, para. 4).

School to prison pipeline: “A phenomenon whereby young people are arrested at school for behavior that would not normally be considered dangerous” (Pigott, Stearns, & Khey, 2018, p. 121).

Zero Tolerance in schools: The imposing of severe disciplinary actions by administrators with the goal of eliminating bad conduct at school through punishment, this may include juvenile detention (Monterastelli, 2017).

Summary

“The [SRO] position, with its genial-sounding name, is an unusual hybrid of counselor, educator, and cop, and perhaps no other job better personifies America’s shifting ideas about schools, policing and safety” (Saul, Williams, & Hartocollis, 2018, para. 8). The impetus for SROs in schools was multi-faceted, bringing in a heterogeneous problem solver who patrols a micro-community, as well as being an

additional resource for education. Hence, this study undertook an exploration of what occurred in the functions of the SROs performance in the three dominant areas.

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

Introduction

During the 1990s, School Resource Officers materialized as noteworthy players in education, with an increasing interest for more integration into public schools (Wolf, 2014). Following the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in Connecticut in 2012, school stakeholders, politicians, and the community called for expansive and comprehensive initiatives to place police officers in schools as common fixtures (Hutchinson, 2013). Hence, school safety plans and law enforcement in schools became a reality, a concept known as school-based policing, and was an instrument used by police departments and school districts which kept schools safe and prevented crime (Shaver & Decker, 2017). Police officers assigned to this duty were known as School Resource Officers (SRO), and as implied by the title, typically served as a diversified resource for schools, students, and respective communities (Dohy & Banks, 2017). The United States Department of Justice (n.d.) defined an SRO as follows: “SROs are sworn law enforcement officers responsible for safety and crime prevention in schools” (para. 2). Soon, the SRO position transformed into an expansive role, taking on many characteristics amongst schools as the position evolved over time (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction [NCDPI], 2018).

The public viewed schools across the nation as safe places for learning and mind development, void of crime and violence. However, disruptions of educational practices began and spanned beyond educator bounds, which called for greater measures (Zhang, Musu-Gillette, & Oudekerk, 2016). According to Rhodes (2015), “SROs must navigate

two separate cultural environments – that of the police culture and of the school – which may influence officer perceptions of roles, work activities, and job satisfaction” (para. 3).

Traditionally, rigid and para-military management governed police operations, having strict oversight on officer’s daily tasks. Wickersham (2016) argued SROs possessed highly varied autonomous functions, contrary to that of a traditional police officer on the street. The SRO’s role depended on the desires and needs of school administration, with little direction from an immediate police supervisor for day-to-day operations. Hence, many of the parties involved asked the question - who should the SRO answer to? (Haas, Van Craen, Skogan, & Fleitas, 2015) “For instance, SROs have been trained and socialized in the culture of police departments - a culture that is not always compatible and sometimes at odds with the goals of a school” (Fisher & Hennessy, 2016, para. 7).

Stinson & Watkins (2014) argued police officers were less refractory when they have a job that is well-defined, and noted few studies examined police actions in schools. Delvin (2015) assessed that even today, with a need for police in schools, an SRO essentially had no defined role, and what SROs did amongst schools varied greatly. Jones (2014) concurred and fused the link between traditional law enforcement and security functions. The first ever nationwide survey of SROs in 2001, cited by the National School Safety and Security Services (2019), reported 70% of SROs believed local elected officials misunderstood the job, 71% made a similar claim with the media’s perceptions of their role, and 69% of fellow police officers were not completely clear about the SROs mission (p. 3). Pollock (2014) contended almost every police officer

ultimately battled two conflictual roles, crime fighter or public servant with no exception for SROs.

Hence, the task was defining the SRO's role through examination of the multiplicity of duties, which conflicted even with the expectations of school administration (Schlosser, 2014). Additionally, SROs' personalities varied, and they performed their duties differently from one another (Johnson, 2016). What is known, however, is SROs generally shared common characteristics and a functional component in law enforcement and education beyond solely school safety (Hutchinson, 2013). The current literature indicated there is no universal definition to the role(s) of the SRO.

Organization of the Literature Review

The literature review examined the background and history of SROs, followed by the exploration of the three major themes in current literature, regarding the best representation of what current role the SRO played in public schools. Scholars have not comprehensively studied the position of an SRO, yet an extensive analysis conducted by Kelly & Swezey (2015) otherwise provided law enforcement, schools, and the community with a much needed and refined community service. The SRO's role was dynamic and ever changing, according to the needs of the school and/or the police organization, which made it hard to solidify a typology (McKenna, 2016). The many missions and tasks of an SRO were too exhaustive to explore in this research, and therefore, the focus was on three meta categories.

The three meta-categories were as follows: safety/security; then, the SRO as a law enforcer within the school setting; finally, the relationship building component. The researcher explored the role (or lack of a role) of SROs in each of the three categories

within this analysis. The researcher paid particular attention to literature that involved the National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO), the leading organization for SROs in the United States, and addressed their justification for police in schools. The researcher also discussed the role conflict. Finally, there was analysis of police training concentrating on standards and current training of the SROs.

Background of the SRO

The SROs backgrounds offered rich information as the research explored the nature and role of the SRO. Law enforcement roots were centuries old and well documented but the SRO position, although somewhat new, did not have a detailed archival history (Kappeler & Schaefer, 2018). A police car regularly parked in front of a school decades ago caused concern, but today, there seemed to be little surprise with a uniformed officer roaming the hallways of a K-12 facility. This setting became normalized in many school districts, as the implementation of SROs has rapidly increased (Fisher & Hennessey, 2016). Police in schools were not standard, and generally only provided a response type service prior to the 1950s (Thompson & Alvarez, 2013). The ties between schools and law enforcement were distant. Police entered schools mainly after being called for an incident, and even though officers provided services such as crossing guards, safety talks, or stranger awareness there was no solidified partnership (Walker, 2018). According to Joyner (2015), the origins of school-based law enforcement involved police who initiated this philosophy in the 1950s in Flint, Michigan. The sole purpose was to address school violence and build a bond between young people and police, which consisted of police officers who visited the schools and not assigned to some form of permanent duty. Surveys distributed among students at that

time showed this to be a positive endeavor, and eventually, other cities and states emulated this model (“Basic SRO Manual,” 2017).

The National Association of School Resource Officers (2009), a leading organization in the field, coined the term “School Resource Officer” in 1963 from Chief Bernard Garmire of the Tucson, Arizona Police. Chief Garmire realized that law enforcement and the youth needed to have a bond as he instituted police in schools. Despite this effort, the SRO model did not appear to develop well after the first two decades of existence. In 1975, Chongmin & Gottfredson (2013), cited the National Institute of Education, who identified only 1% of the schools in the United States had a police officer permanently assigned to a school (para. 3). However, a rise in crime in the 1980s was the reason for initiation of federal funding (O’Murphy, 2013). During the 1990s, police only provided a response type service, but after the Columbine High School incident in 1999, the demand for safer schools sharply increased. Many experts believed this incident was the main impetus for policy change and police tactics to active shooters (Reyes, 2014). Security was the main objective at this point but as more SROs reached the school system, they found a diverse expansion beyond security that encompassed many facets, but at times, were contradictory to one another (McKenna & White, 2018).

The SRO remained a fluctuating job at the beginning of the 21st century that varied amongst schools with an overwhelming police presence in some places and some (mainly rural) that had no plans concerning SRO implementation (James & McCallion, 2013). By this time, many inner-city schools had visible security measures, including metal detectors, security cameras, and even uniformed guards, to combat gang violence, expelled students, and weapons on campus (Tanner-Smith & Fisher, 2016).

Security implementation was unsavory, and according to Swartz, Osborne, Dawson-Edwards, & Higgins (2016), “SROs differ from security guards in that they are professional, sworn police officers that perform typical police activities but rather than the neighborhood as their beat, it is the school” (p. 466). Although school shootings were rising, it was the 2014 Sandy Hook Elementary School incident that prompted the nation to act in a significant way (Jonson, 2017). President Obama, along with lawmakers, introduced legislation that provided funding for school security (with SROs specifically mentioned), which increased the numbers of SROs in schools permanently within a few days of this incident (Brydolf, 2013). Although it was difficult to estimate the actual number of SROs in schools today, McGinn (2017) assessed the number at approximately 43,000 SROs in public schools. This development incurred more resources and required further responsibilities besides that of security. The need to standardize the role became apparent when NASRO’s leadership developed a triad of duties that intended to establish a common model for many SROs (May, Barranco, Stokes, Robertson, & Haynes, 2015). According to the NASRO triad model, discussed later in detail, the SRO shared three roles proportionally: law enforcement officer, counselor, and teacher (NASRO, 2009). Similarly, James & McCallion (2013), outlined the role of SROs; this turned into a new hybrid public servant that encompassed the role of being a police officer, problem solver/liaison, and educator. Yet, whether the officers adopted a standardized model, each SRO still had challenges and goals, which the literature suggests needs further exploration.

Status of SROs

The public, politicians, and educators called police officers to take part in aiding the education system. This was meant to yield positive relations through proactive approaches, having partaken in remedies for student disorder matters that have hindered the educational success of students (Tanner-Smith & Fisher, 2016). An SRO had a greater deal of responsibility, compared to a traditional police officer. The requirements to be an SRO were the same as that of a sworn police officer. They were also to be currently employed by a police department, with the expectation that they possessed an interest or some experience related to working with schools and students (Johnston & Fischer, 2016). The SRO selection process held various job descriptions within police departments. The Federal Community Oriented Police Services (COPS) office (as cited in Hurley-Swayze & Buskovick, 2014), pointed out the following attributes for SRO:

1. Appreciates kids
2. Appropriate demeanor
3. Experience specifically to the SRO position
4. Able to work in an autonomous environment
5. Trustworthy
6. Good work ethic
7. Good teacher
8. Having rectitude

The most current data showed the acceptance of SROs was higher in the public-school system, and the numbers of SROs have increased (Counts, Randall, Ryan, & Katsiyannis, 2018). Upward trends for schools acquiring more full-time SROs continued

to reinforce the need for an emphasis on how the SRO navigates through this complex and sometimes unfamiliar environment (Schweit & Mancik, 2017). The SRO's daily operations relied on the school's ethos, which shaped the modus operandi of the SRO. Kupchik and Ward (2014) identified the social governance by administration, and SROs of student populations involved either exclusionary or inclusionary efforts. In the exclusionary approach, harsh measures were punitive in nature and involved more arrest-oriented actions by the SRO. Inclusive approaches involved diffusing problems and utilized counseling, thereby strengthening social ties. Consequently, this again exemplified the complications of the SRO's role and reliance on an important fusion of law, procedure, and school security practices.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2015), a survey conducted in 2016 showed 57% of public schools had some type of security staff, and 48% had a sworn police officer of various types. Forty seven percent of schools specifically had a full time SRO, and 22% reported having only security guards at the school (p. 372). The data signified that SROs were present in almost half of public schools, and when not, some security was in place. Although heartening, it seemed to add inconsistencies to the conversations about an effective school safety plans and endemic challenges whether a school needs security guards, police, or both (Perumean-Chaney & Sutton, 2013). Another challenge in the campaign for more SROs was on the financial end (Hutchinson, 2013, p.12). Many police departments and school districts struggle over the question of who pays for the SRO. The estimated cost of putting an armed officer in every public and private school was \$50,000 to \$80,000 per year (each SROs annual salary), which added up to approximately \$12 billion per year (Hill, 2013).

The same NCES survey listed above showed of the schools that have SROs, only 51% of primary schools had a written policy or a similar directive of expectations, roles, or responsibilities of the SROs (p.372). Secondary schools were somewhat higher. Most police departments that employ SROs have some type of policy or guidelines defining the position and listed general expectations, but there is little evidence to support that school districts and police administration coordinated in detail on the functions of the SROs job other than some contract, memorandum, or other understanding (Mckenna, Martinez-Prather, & Bowman, 2016). Implementation of SRO programs began without issue; the schools rarely said no to having an officer on campus. Still, much research conflicted on the SRO's effectiveness regarding safety and crime or perceived crime on school grounds (Zhang, 2018). According to Gauthier (2017) there seemed to be support for the SRO in the school, but claimed there was little evidence to show the effectiveness of their role.

Safety and Security in Schools

A safe and secure learning environment was essential for the mental and physical wellness of adolescents involved in the educational process (Tanner-Smith & Fisher, 2016). Scholars found students desired to feel safe at school, and having a safe climate in class rendered a quality platform for education and student success (Rajan & Branas, 2018). One of the most sizable initiatives in K-12 education to strengthen the safety element and reduce violence was effectuation of the SRO (Sullivan & Hausman, 2017, p. 886). As previously mentioned, the SRO did not specifically address safety, but was there to curb delinquent behavior and build a better relationship with students. Police did not prioritize school shootings and persistent violence as an issue at that time. Today, there seemed a different public mindset, along with the perception of school threats and

violence, mainly produced by recent shootings such as Sandy Hook and the 2018 Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School incident (Barboza, 2018). Yablon and Addington (2018) outlined recent studies indicated that being a victim of violence at school was one of the biggest predictors of fear in students. Consequently, the role of SROs shifted to emphasize more efforts in safety and security. As an example, in 2018 alone, 39 states introduced over 200 types of legislation related to school safety (Harper & Seok, 2019, para. 1).

Violence was not the only safety issue that adolescents faced. Property crimes, such as theft, vandalism, drug related crime, and bullying victimized students (Tanner-Smith, Fisher, Addington, & Gardella, 2018). In prior years, parents considered schools a worry-free place to learn, and a structured environment with rules and regulations. Other than the occasional spat with a classmate, school was not an unsettled world of unpredictability however, now, these early formative years were affiliated with concentrations of police officers, intruder drills, and drug sniffing dogs (Kupchik & Ward, 2014).

Many had not envisioned soliciting the help of a full-time police officer to assist in school related issues, but the 1990s saw an increase in research conducted on fear in adolescents in schools (Perumean-Chaney & Sutton, 2013). A recent report by the National Center for Education Statistics showed approximately half a million students missed school every year because of thoughts that the school was unsafe (Robers, Zhang, Morgan, & Musu-Gillette, 2015). Teachers, staff, and students felt unsafe, which was taking away much needed curriculum time, as well as other school activities in which they would like to be involved. Another NCES study reported student threat rates

during the 2015-2016 school year where 10% of teachers were threatened with violence from a student and 6% assaulted by a student (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017, p. 5). Hence, it was reasonable to assume that schools were chaotic and dangerous, leading to a call for stricter rules and regulations (Berlowitz, Frye, & Jette, 2017). Fisher, Viano, Curran, Pearman, and Gardella (2018) illustrated that a more authoritative school climate was correlated with heightened feelings of safety with consistency of rules and fairness. Others felt that adult and student relations were based on a power dynamic and inhibited learning, especially for troubled (at risk) youth.

Administrators in either case bore most of the burden for regulating safety at school but have only reached so far in a legal aspect to help control violence and crime in this environment (Fisher & Hennesy, 2015). Bonanno and Levenson (2014) suggested it was imperative that police form partnerships, concentrating on prevention with schools because of all the violence that occurred over the past decade in educational institutions. Formulating the SRO into the safety plan, however, was a challenge for both police administration and school districts because reducing crime and making a school safer was a constant and complicated battle that required a heterogeneous approach (May, 2018). Many factors came into play when analyzing, identifying, and understanding a formidable safety plan which was detrimental for the SRO, given the many role conflicts (Pollock, 2014).

School Shootings

“Each new tragedy [in the schools] seems to prompt the same cycle of questions, accusations, and confusion-but few answers” (Lankford, 2016, p. 187). School shootings, motivated by negative relationships that ended badly or revenge against a

teacher, dated back to 1760 in the United States (Nedzel, 2014). At this time, a different type of school shooter emerged, one that was mentally unbalanced and displayed unpredictable behavior, with no remorse or concern for themselves or others (Ioannou, Hammond, & Simpson, 2015). For example, Adam Lanza, the Sandy Hook school shooter in 2014, hypothesized to have suffered from adolescent frustration, which prompted the killings (Rice & Hoffman, 2015). Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, the Columbine shooters, killed 13 people and wounded 21 in under the time span of 15 minutes, which quickly became the standard example of for what society now refers to as school rampage shootings (Farr, 2018).

School shootings and better security presently seemed to be the overwhelming topic when it came to school violence, and many school stakeholders looked to police and specifically the SRO to lead the way for dealing with this predicament in a “quick-fix” action plan (Lapointe, 2016). Dohy (2016) stated, “In order to understand how school security officers are utilized and differences regarding their use in and between all school locales, including suburban, rural, and urban settings, qualitative research may wish to explore this further” (p. 12).

The average mass killing incident in the United States occurred every two weeks, whereas a school shooting happened monthly (Towers, Gomez-Lievano, Khan, Mubayi, & Castillo-Chavez, 2015). It was important to keep in mind, however, that the frequency of school shootings was statistically low, compared to other crimes but examined more closely due to their sensitive nature involving adolescents (Gerard et al., 2016). Between 1982 and 2018, only 17.1% of all mass casualty shootings occurred in schools (Brown & Goodin, 2018, para. 14). Another issue, mentioned by Elsass, Schildkraut, and Stafford

(2016), was the sensationalizing of these events by various media. For example, the advocacy group website, Everytown for Gun Safety (2014), purported alarming statistics following the Sandy Hook incident that claimed the rate of school shootings was one per week which was misleading due to terminology and classification including accidental discharges, gun possession, and suicide. Even though school shootings were on the rise and many questions of safety at schools was an issue, there was little research that focused on mass school shootings that looked to quantify the commonalities and the contrasts of these events (Agnich, 2014). However, in a 2012 Gallup poll cited by Chrusciel, Wolfe, Hansen, Rojek, & Kaminski (2015), taken one week following the Sandy Hook massacre, measured perceptions of the public's view of SROs to prevent shootings and determined one-half of Americans felt police in schools prevented a school shooting, 34% felt this somewhat helped, and 12% assessed increased police officers in schools seemed plausible in remedying the school shooting problem (para. 9).

At the time of this writing, most scholars and experts labeled school shootings as a phenomenon (Jaymi, Schildkraut, & Stafford, 2016). A myriad of factors baffled and frustrated schools and law enforcement in trying to understand causes and solutions where commonalities and profiles of attackers have developed, but there is little evidence that showed a discrete typology (Grondahl & Bjorkly, 2016). Many traits of the shooter appeared at one tragic incident but not at another, making it difficult to psychoanalyze tactics. Shuffelton (2015), for example, pointed out one reason why the cause was in question was the fact that most school shootings occurred in rural areas or small towns, even though gun violence was more probable to occur in a non-school setting in large cities.

School shootings were vast and difficult to keep in context, but with respect to the SRO, it was the most salient. To be effective against the perpetrator, SROs and school administrators needed to understand what a school shooting comprised. Katsiyannis, Whitford, and Ennis (2018) stated the FBI has not yet defined the term “mass school shooting.” This made the solutions difficult for law enforcement to comprehend if they neither knew the characteristics of a situation nor were part of the solution. Bonnano and Levenson (2014), claimed approximately half of the school shootings lasted less than 15 minutes and only a few ended by law enforcement intervention, pointing out many ended by school staff members (p. 3)

Recently, conversations have begun concerning the possibility of arming teachers in metropolitan areas and where there is minimal SRO coverage (Fennelly & Perry, 2014). In 2018 at least eight states permitted school staff to have a gun, and 17 have authorized school districts to permit staff to carry guns if needed (Harper & Seok, 2019). The 2018 Parkland School shooting in Florida gave rise to a great deal of conversation about school security (Lombardi, 2018). Consequently, the threat of a school shooting became realistic, and was something which school administration, staff, students, and law enforcement must be ready for (Gauthier, 2017). Rajan and Branas (2018) wrote the following:

As teachers, school administrators, parents, and policymakers seek to build safer school communities, we need a far better understanding of the implications of arming teachers on the school environment, on a child's development, on student learning outcomes, on existing school safety policies, and on the full costs of such

interventions, including the added responsibilities that it would impose on teachers and school administrators (para. 2).

Many people never imagined this concept, but having explored the SRO's role, it was a tool or aid SROs could use. However, having extra guns at school could also be a detriment, and in a study conducted by Chrusciel et al (2015), evidence suggested both police and school administration favored the presence of an SRO over other security measures, such as arming teachers or other non-police security methods.

Barbieri & Connell (2015) deduced that identifying the reasons for an individual to initiate a school shooting went beyond his or her personal motivations, and some responsibility lay with the schools, parents, and other officials to see signs and prevent these events. Society, and especially an SRO, cannot expect to deter or prevent every school shooting. The idea that the perpetrator possessed tendencies or characteristics of being a potential shooter lent much credence in the way of prevention. Ioannou, Hammond, & Simpson (2015) discussed certain qualities or risk factors present prior to a school attack. These researchers found three distinct categories for the school shooter. The "disturbed shooter" contained many factors, such as playing violent video games, mental disorders, victims of bullying, and others which was oriented around mental and emotional problems. The second category was the "rejected school shooter." This person suffered a rejection, such as a break-up, a family issue involving abuse, or disciplined recently by the school. The third category was the "Criminal School Shooter." This analysis involved looking at fascination with guns and usually displayed a violent past or criminal history of violence.

In contrast, Neuman, Assaf, Cohen, & Knoll (2015) argued there was no uniform diagnosis for the school shooter, but instead, there was an array of symptoms or co-occurring disorders. Nonetheless, experts could not seem to pinpoint the indicators of these violent individuals, saying there are usually signs. Sheely (2018) asserted there was a misconception that mass shooters simply “snapped” one day but this was wrong. Instead, many times, there were recognizable signs, but Gerard, Whitfield, Porter, and Browne (2016) evaluated, “Such studies are important, as understanding the attributes of an individual who will open fire in a school setting, as well as finding common features of the offence, may assist in identifying risk factors and developing prevention strategies” (p. 3).

Another remedy to violence in schools was the discussion of gun legislation where the question remained if the current laws or new laws had an impact on reduction in school shootings (Schildkraut & Hernandez, 2014). This was a contested issue for years, and spanned across many boundaries, not just school shootings, and according to Lankford (2016), even though it may have seemed like a clear solution, this was too politically challenging. A great deal of gun legislation was in fact, put in place, but had varying effects where the hindrance came down to protections based on the second amendment. Congress enacted the first gun legislation (a restriction on handguns) in 1837, and thereafter, many more gun laws have been passed, yet our society is still plagued with gun violence (Schildkraut & Hernandez, 2014). Even if sales of arms stopped tomorrow, there are over 300 million gun-owners (Fritz, 2015). Nedzel (2014) claimed since the passing of gun-free school zones in 1995, school shootings have increased. Wolf & Rosen (2015) concluded that much of the gun legislation was purely

reactionary, and happened immediately following a major active shooter incident.

Steeves and Da Costa (2017) conducted a study of security and small arms (gun) companies who were surveyed after six of the most tragic mass shootings in recent history (Virginia Tech, Binghamton, Fort Hood, Aurora, Sandy Hook, Navy Yard), and examined their stock fluctuation following the shootings. Researchers found there was no significant change on the impact of gun sales following a mass shooting.

A main element related to school shootings was the effect it had on the student; this included enrolment in high-school-aged students or a drop in certain standardized test scores in schools that experienced a shooting (Beland & Kim, 2016, p. 123). The looming thought of an unpredictable violent incident could affect the efforts of adolescents to learn. Thus, keeping students safe in the class at any grade level was a priority in education, and could enhance student performance (Sindhi, 2013). Fortunately, most students exposed to a school shooting recovered, but some suffered severe and acute abnormality (Travers, McDonagh, & Elklit, 2018).

However, Nance (2016b) argued that while police officers were visible in schools and made the public feel safer, the SRO program's ability to do this was questionable. Tanner-Smith et al. (2018) similarly deduced, in a study on school security measures, that visible security operations were associated with student exposure to violence or crime. Additionally, SROs were present at school during a shooting incident and played a questionable part in stopping the perpetrator (Spencer & Anderson, 2018). Nonetheless, the safety and security role of the SRO alone seemed to be an overall welcomed concept because mass homicides have, in fact, found their way into K-12 schools, and even

though they were rare events (statistically), could promote widespread fear, with significant negative impacts (Flannery, Modzeleski, & Kretschmar, 2013).

Bullying

More than just school shootings burdened the SRO when it came to evaluating safety and security. More frequent issues such as bullying, which was one of the most common violent acts, were overwhelmingly present at many schools (Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017). Bullying was a large portion of the SRO's role and along with cyber bullying, was one of the foremost problems plaguing young people today (Patchin & Hinduja, 2016).

Grondahl & Bjorkly (2016) claimed that in response to being bullied, most students never committed any serious acts of violence, but it was still a commonplace issue. Differing scenarios at school commonly placed the SROs in precarious situations, because many times, the act of bullying was not necessarily a crime, but the responsibility rested on him or her (Varano & McKenna, 2016). Police officers usually preferred alternative methods that were preventive, such as education and awareness (Broll & Huey, 2015). The SRO had a vital role in this area, aided by positive relations with students, anti-bullying initiatives, and observant patrols, but if the incident turned criminal, the SRO would then act as a law enforcer. ("Stopbullying," n.d.).

Unfortunately, bullying remained a large problem, and research showed police officers in schools had no effect on its pervasiveness. (Delvin, Santos, & Gottfredson, 2018). Choi, Cronin, and Correia (2016) offered SROs broadened strategies through communication, and used community policing methods to gain trust with the students.

Deterrence

Research which focused specifically on SROs found there were positive effects in the use of deterrence techniques that reduced violent incidents and resulted in positive perceptions from school administration (Swartz et al., 2016). Visible security measures, such as cameras, metal detectors, and SROs or security guards, were a way schools helped create a safer learning environment (Tanner-Smith & Fisher, 2016).

Conversely, Peguero and Bracy (2015) found these mechanisms alone had little effect on student performance, and even found schools with more security in place had higher rates of dropout. The presence of an SRO as a deterrent brought forth much more to adolescents than trepidation; it was the beginning of a procedural justice model where students comply and work with the rules/laws not out of fear but because it was the right thing to do (Van Damme & Pauwels, 2016).

Law Enforcement in Schools

“To limit school resource officers to the role of law enforcement it is not only just a waste of available expertise and dwindling resources; the evidence suggests it may be detrimental to students and the basic objectives of schooling” (Thompson & Alvarez, 2013, p. 135). The SRO who performed safety and security related tasks in a school, as seen in the previous section, is only one aspect of how police officers functioned in the school setting. There were many other issues that called upon the service of an SRO, one of which was the law enforcement role, and this appeared to many as a dominant role (Schlosser, 2014). The most controversial role of the SRO was acting solely as a police officer. According to Burton (2017), “Criminologists have taken an interest in the transformation of schools in the United States into sites of

policing.” The SROs compatibility in education unfortunately involved criminalization of students during the school year, but the factors driving this issue were ambiguous. (Ramey, 2015, p. 197).

According to a survey by the Center for Safer Schools (2018), The SRO spent 50% of his or her time performing law enforcement duties (para. 2). The law enforcer was where traditional police roles emerged, as SROs discharged the legal powers given to him or her. Eklund, Meyer, & Bosworth (2018) assessed the most common crises in schools were student assaults, drug violations, and child abuse and neglect. SROs were involved and took legal action in many cases where traditionally educational entities handled it internally, with discipline or counseling (VanCleave & VanCleave, 2016, p. 236). This is undoubtedly where the SRO shifted to the law enforcer, having used the power of ordinances or state statues to solve the problem at hand. However, some critics suggested there were unintended ramifications that existed and some findings showed the heavy presence of police officers in the schools were associated with an increase in violence (Swartz et al., 2016). Fisher and Hennessey (2016) assessed harsher discipline and criminalizing student problems which included non-criminal behavior, should be left to school discipline policies. An analysis by Education Week (2017) showed that out of 8000 schools surveyed in the 2013-2014 school year, there were nearly 70,000 students arrested.

In contrast, Burton (2017) argued that “policing” students goes back to the progressive era near the turn of the 20th century, where delinquency was better defined and handled through various methods of discipline using administrators and police. Nonetheless, the SRO still had full police powers and served the school district in

curbing violent events, such as fights, bullying, and other serious misbehavior by taking legal action. One common theme in current literature suggested that, many times, the SRO weighed in on far too many issues, being harsh and heavy handed. However, Cervantes and Vazques (2018) found that SROs were prepared to deal with school crisis, due to their time in field and proper training. May, Barranco, Ruddell, and Robertson (2016) identified that there was worry about net-widening in schools, regarding dealing with delinquency. The SRO referred many discipline cases to the juvenile system instead of school punishment, leading to SROs who found a state of perplexity where securitization of a school and maintaining order was top priority yet the sensitivity of student's educational needs was equally important (Theriot, 2013). The role of the SRO having used strict methods of law enforcement was questionable in the overall outcome of the student's success (Peguero & Bracy, 2015). In fact, Dohy and Banks (2017) found students were resistant regarding the presence of SROs when they implemented repressive actions on students to control their behaviors with the presence of an SRO.

School to Prison Pipeline

Public schools play a special part in the lives of many young people where they obtain an education, socialize, and if successful, become productive members of society but to do this, they must have remained safe in school (Nance, 2016a). Yet, social justice advocates noticed police presence in schools and the associated risks (Ispalanda, 2017). Pigott, Stearns, and Khey (2018) suggested that many times police officers took students from the school and entered them into the juvenile justice system. This commonly led to a popular conception called the "school to prison pipeline." The

idea began when school systems in America came under close examination from the harsh treatment of students by SROs. The “pipeline” theory asserted that law enforcement criminalized student behavior while in school with harsh treatment, making schools like prisons, leaving students prepared for the justice system at the age of adulthood (Kupchik, 2016). A common issue among modern day administrators was the proliferation of disruptive and dangerous behavior among students, which was the cause of educational turmoil and safety concerns (Ryan et al., 2018, p. 189). Although students’ actions appeared to be unruly, they were, in fact, acting out the symptoms of their condition. For the untrained or inexperienced SRO, this scenario was dangerous. The first instinct was that of the law enforcer, willing and required to criminalize unruly students or instances of mental illness (Monterastelli, 2017). Mallett (2016) claimed forceful or aggressive treatment of students spawned from the “zero tolerance” policies many schools adopted in the 1990s. As a result, the SRO carelessly referred the defiant child to juvenile courts, rather than focusing on correcting behavior with counseling and then resuming the education process. Muschert, Henry, Bracy, and Peguero (2014), identified zero tolerance mentalities derived from the “Columbine effect,” which was an overreaction to the fear of school shootings that were in fact, rare, causing schools to implement harsher discipline. Similarly, school administrators saw the fear of a post-Columbine age mirroring the post-9/11 fear. This equated to a different and possibly more rigid approach to school safety and behavior of students (Madfis, 2016). Even though SROs were less likely than traditional, police officers to make juvenile arrests, it was still known that the SROs were a large factor in contributing to juvenile arrests (May et al., 2016). Schlosser (2014) suggested “while having police in

schools can help prevent or react to incidents of extreme violence, there remains a need to re-examine and possibly change the role of school resource officers [SROs] in schools” (p.131).

The “pipeline” concept gained momentum in the decade prior to this writing, even to the point of President Obama mentioning it in his 2014 State of the Union speech (Smith, 2015). The 1980s and 1990s showed a substantial increase in youth crime rates, and as a causation, more police went into the schools, criminalizing the environment (Owens, 2017). But with all the discussion, some experts believe this was only a metaphor that held weaknesses, and the real problem was a failure in police oversight and substandard incarceration issues, not hyper-criminalized schools (McGrew, 2016). For all the literature that supported the “pipeline” theory, some studies indicate it was unsupported. An example displayed in a study done at Mississippi State University from 2009-2011 looked at charges brought by SROs compared to “street officers.” The results were that both were just as likely to bring charges to a juvenile for a felony, and SROs were less likely for a misdemeanor (May, Barranco, Stokes, Robertson, & Haynes, 2015).

Furthermore, Wolf (2013) identified another problem, the contention that SROs’ decision-making and arrest procedures had no oversight nor were properly examined by police administration, exemplifying even more the unsettled contention on an exact role. Scholars in the field examined alternative approaches other than arrests, as pointed out by Barrett and Janopaul-Naylor (2016), who advocated making a collaborative effort with mental health resources and SROs to better deal with at-risk youth. Efforts such as these were an attempt to find middle ground which focused on

incarceration only. In all, the enforcer side of the SRO did not seem to eliminate the need for the position, but brought up serious questions about the effectiveness of security on misbehavior and student rights that have even further complicated the role (Servoss, 2014). McKenna, (2016) found it was impossible to specifically place an absolute and concrete designation on how and when an SRO implemented law enforcement functions. The study found when an SRO increased law enforcement duty, there was more consistency of counseling and school-based resolutions than harsh, punitive government involvement. Hence, the SROs leaned toward resolving the conflict and became a mentor to the misbehaving student as opposed to animosity that derived from a rigid stance and therefore, were more lenient (Johnson, 2016).

Although the scholars have debated the “School to Prison Pipeline,” profound solutions were lacking (Berlowitz et al., 2017). Farm (2018) believed SROs were invaluable and should have proper training, as well as awareness of school discipline policies, and should utilize evidence-based interventions for behavior issues, making arrests a last resort.

Restorative Justice

Restorative justice was historically associated with the criminal justice system and referred to methods used to repair victim harm by an offender. This encompassed everyone (suspects, victims, community members) through meetings that focused on a holistic approach for remedy rather than strictly punishment (Payne & Welch, 2015). Song and Swearer (2016) demonstrated that today the philosophy of restorative justice was building in popularity within schools, citing that it was an alternative disciplinary method, compared to traditional ones, and reduced rates of suspensions even up to 90%

(para.1). A shift to this type of thinking disrupts the “school to prison pipeline” and involved the entire school community (including the SRO) which, if applied correctly, resolved conflicts, inequality, and justified school authority (Hirschfield, 2018).

The two systems (schools and the juvenile justice system) that showed common ground where the SRO rendered a distinct role in is bullying. As mentioned previously, bullying was a major problem in schools which many students had experienced, but the typical response from school administration or law enforcement was punitive, and this was the perfect ground for restorative justice intervention (Fronius, Persson, Guckenburt, Hurley, & Petrosino, 2016). In all, this was another tool made available to an SRO for collaborative efforts in not only the success of the SRO, but the favorable outcome of students.

Interaction with students

The relationships between youth and police have been largely problematic over the past several decades (Pepper & Silvestri, 2017). Sullivan and Hausman (2017) explained, “Regardless of the roles that SROs enact, research established the critical role that relationships play in program effectiveness” (p. 887). Whether it was perception from movies, music, television, or actual experiences, both positive and negative relations with police had vital and everlasting impressions (Anderson, 2018). Accordingly, it was especially detrimental for adolescents and their perceptions of law enforcement during formidable adolescent years and as research pointed out, there was a dramatic decline in positivity toward the police (Schuck, 2013). SROs also utilized their presence in school for positive reasons, such as interacting with students and building relationships, despite the implication about police undermining education for the sake of

making arrests (Wolfe, Chrusciel, Rojek, Hansen, & Kaminski, 2015). Rhodes (2015) distinguished that, although SROs generally maintained the customary police role while in the school, much of the time was less concentrated on traditional tasks. She further stated instead, they spent much of their time being counselors and role models who talked to students, gaining trust and better relations. This came from the basics of community-oriented policing that took hold in the 1990s, too, which is a philosophy that stated police were not limited to traditional law enforcement strategies, but were proactive working with the community to build trust and relationships (Gill et al., 2014.). Barnes (2016) mentioned the SRO program puts community policing inside the school viewing the schools as community partners. As stated earlier, security in schools may be the perceived priority of SROs, but not strictly limited to taking up a post at the front door. The SRO had the opportunity to know the staff and students; this was where the SRO would likely find engagement in positive personal student interaction where, if carefully planned, could avoid conflict and yield beneficial results (Schweit & Mansic, 2017). A 2016 study concluded SROs spent most of their day building relationships, which disputed the above the perception that police officers limited themselves to just security responsibilities (Barnes, 2016). The researcher found little concerning relationship building in the literature, even though its origination focused on concepts of the community policing concept. The trust factor alone which the SRO built with students was not underestimated especially as police mistrust was at a very high level in recent years (Bell, 2017). Lee & McGovern (2013) explained trust in police officers led to a whole new perception by the public. Trust with students should be no different, as the SRO strove to build this important type of relationship because negative perceptions and

interactions between law enforcement and young people lessened opportunities for good relations and had profound implications for public safety (Broaddus et al., 2013, p. 49). Overall, there seemed to be a failure in examining the importance of relationship building, which can be a complex matter between the student and SRO but, a positive lasting impression of the police led to critical decisions for a student's future and reduced the stereotypes to improve police-youth relations (Theriot & Orme, 2016).

The DARE Program

Embedded in the heart and soul of police relations for adolescents for over three decades was the DARE program, which was the most used outreach program in law enforcement (Lee, Cameron, Battams, & Roche, 2016). DARE stood for Drug Abuse Resistance Education and was one of the largest catalysts that breached the division between police and the adolescent community. The program reached approximately 75% of all school districts in the United States (Caputi & McLellan, 2016, para. 5). Any scholarly writing about forming relationships with young people would not be complete without the mention of this longstanding globalized program. The DARE program began in 1983 with the Los Angeles police. Realizing that the police alone would never curb the use and abuse of illegal drugs, they partnered with local school district to form a partnership (DARE, 2019).

Although DARE initially revolved around drug education and prevention, the interaction component with the police officer was a substantial part of the program (Nordrum, 2014). Schuck (2013) concluded that a DARE student who interacted with a police officer in a classroom setting will more than likely see a delay in having an unfavorable attitude toward law enforcement.

National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO)

The researcher gave NASRO special attention in this research study because it was the leading organization for SRO guidelines and training, and claimed school-based policing was the most expansive area of law enforcement (NASRO, 2018). The current literature somewhat conflicted with part of the NASRO philosophy; specifically, the conceptual framework of “the triad.” Therefore, an examination of the literature was prudent. NASRO originated in 1991, with the idea of promoting school-based policing throughout the United States, and consisted of over 16,000 law enforcement members from every state, according to the NASRO website (2009). NASRO focused efforts on making schools safer and facilitated credible training for SROs who networked in community and political arenas to acquire funding for training and the promotion of police in schools. Consequently, NASRO attempted the first formal steps to set standards for the SRO to be a resource for guidelines that aided in helping departments utilize funding for their SRO program (“NASRO calls for increased funding”, 2018). As a leader in the field of school-based law enforcement, NASRO displayed excellent leadership and guidance on SRO programs and design, and having done so, promoted best practices to bridge the gap between law enforcement and youth (Zercoe, 2019). NASRO also sponsored and funded most SRO training and annual conferences around the country (Merkwae, 2015).

One concept that NASRO advocated was the triad approach as a basis for an SRO having performed their role in schools. This was comprised of three components: educator, counselor, and law enforcement officer (Ryan et al., 2018, p. 189).



Figure 1. The NASRO Triad showing the SRO's three areas of responsibility in the school.

SROs were not bound to follow the triad by law or any other governmental regulation. Its utilization was only a guideline and it was unclear to what extent the training of SROs as mentors, counselors, or teachers was implemented into practice (Stinson & Watkins, 2014). Furthermore, no valid study showed the three components of the triad had priority for the SRO except for the NCES (2018) which claimed the teaching role was the least common activity the law enforcement officer carried out in the school (primary and secondary). Zhang (2018) identified a different three-part concept from NASRO, stating the SRO had the primary roles of law enforcement officer/safety specialist, problem solver, and an intermediary to the community. He dissected the roles and pointed out that, as law enforcement, the SRO handled any criminal matters or police calls related to the specific school in which he or she served, which included keeping order and arrests if necessary. NASRO also made it clear SROs would not take part in school discipline normally handled by school administration (Ryan et al., 2018). The SRO was a problem solver and assisted the school staff with non-criminal events, such

general disorder that included bullying, arguments, etc., and it also deterred any kind of behavior or situation that turned into criminal behavior. (Bleakley & Bleakley, 2018).

NASRO served a noble cause in the field of SROs, as they continued to campaign for future stability of the many programs implemented by police departments across the nation. Unfortunately, there was still ambiguity on adherence to a unified model, even with this large organization at the forefront (Mckenna, et al., 2016). Nolan (2015) stated no school policing programs have the same principle support and, in practice, the boundaries between them evaporated. Rante (2018) pointed out police departments and school administration were two bodies that held authoritative powers and must work together but the triad model lacks uncertainty and affects the necessary collaboration to be successful.

Role Conflict

What an SRO did compared to what they believe they did, led to role conflict which ultimately impacted students negatively resulting in a unique position they should not be in (McKenna, et al., 2016). According to Schlosser (2014), the SRO had many roles other than the triad which differed greatly and often conflicted with one another, as well as the school administration. The bureaucracy of the school and police organizations were very similar, but still there was a lack of communication and understanding of each other's role (VanCleave & VanCleave, 2016, p. 240). Because an SRO was present in the schools, many administrators and staff have gone to the officer and dispersed duties which did not meet the SRO's perception regarding school discipline or any number of non-police undertakings (Thompson & Alvarez, 2013).

Training

Training for police officers has been vital where many police dealt with incidents abysmally because of minimal or poor training, as witnessed in the 2014 Ferguson, Missouri. Substandard policing was partially to blame in Ferguson where officers were not prepared (Rosenfeld, 2015). This example demonstrated the need for police training and was relevant to the SRO who dealt with adolescents and a vast range of sensitive scenarios (Walker, 2018). Many SROs, however, neither have had proper training, nor an opportunity, which led to unsatisfactory work (Martinez-Prather, McKenna, & Bowman, 2016).

SRO training varied, but most officers typically attended a basic course focused on rudimentary understanding of SRO history and how the SRO was of service to their respective school (NASRO, 2017). NASRO recommended at least three years of street patrol prior to being an SRO (Zercoe, 2019). This training was exclusive to the SRO position and may not have accounted for other scenarios an SRO may have faced in the school. A successful SRO had a good understanding of child development and psychology, as well as good communication skills, which prompted police and school administrators to recruit for these competencies. (James & McCallion, 2013).

Theriot (2013) outlined the following:

Additional training in adolescent development as well as training focused on effective classroom management strategies and the development of collaborative partnerships between SROs and teachers may be particularly beneficial. For example, when approaching a disruptive student, SROs, teachers and principals should have a clear plan about how to effectively handle the student as well as a

clear articulation of teachers' and administrators' expectations from the SRO intervention. An arrest should be the least preferred outcome in this situation and done only in agreement with the teacher and school principal (p. 463).

Even a well-trained SRO cannot work alone, teamwork was a good tenet in working with school staff and other non-SRO police officers. There was no exception for an ill-prepared school incident, such as a shooting or other violent incident where a solidified plan was nonexistent. Students, faculty, and staff should be prepared for anything on campus (Ford, Ford, Frei, Pilny, & Berkelaar, 2016).

Summary

For SROs to be successful, the researcher needed to conduct an exploration, traveling through vague and even sometimes unfamiliar areas where much was to be learned and examined. "To date, there is very little social scientific research regarding SROs and their roles and operations within schools" (Johnson, 2016, para. 2). The literature reviewed in this chapter included three predominant roles of the SRO. The SRO position seemed to need little definition on the surface, but as one researches deeply, the role led to conflicts, vagueness, and confusion, where disagreement from scholars and researchers exists about what the SRO's responsibilities include. Wolf (2013) assessed that, "Limited research exists that explores how SROs perform their various duties in school." Current literature was expansive in the areas of school safety and security i.e., school shooters, and there was also much legal scrutiny of enforcement action against students. However, scholars have undertaken infrequent studies on the comprehensive understanding of how SROs link into these areas because one size does not fit all (Crawford & Burns, 2015). Furthermore, personalized positive contacts with

the police that led to trust building and lifelong relationships that have impacted good citizenship was also in need of role definition.

SROs working daily in the school environment were taking on multiple roles, and where their role derived from varied (McKenna, 2016). Little research considered the longstanding position of how the SRO interacts in the educational setting (Rhodes, 2015). Few states had specific regulations that governed or guided the SRO, which can be grounds for misuse of the position, or at the least, a perceived role that went astray (Counts et al., 2018). The researcher intended to explore the role of the SRO within the designated population and focused on three main categories of safety and security, law enforcement, and personal interactions. The next chapter outlined the methodology used for this study.

Chapter Three: Research Method and Design

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the role of SROs in K-12 schools by focusing on three broad categories corresponding to three SRO professional roles documented in current literature; safety and security, law enforcement, and interaction components. Over time, SROs have entered the public-school systems in varying circumstances and a multiplicity of role expectations by police administrations, school districts, and the respective community. Many times, an SRO's role was ill-defined and best characterized as an implicit function (Delvin, 2015). The researcher selected a qualitative methodology to explore these three meta-categories of SRO professional life .

Qualitative research uses a variety of methods to collect data to show patterns that deal with human interaction, which helps us understand the social world (Luther, 2017). The research instrumentation was comprised of surveys, interviews, observations, and periodic participant phone-ins. The qualitative data collected by the researcher was carefully analyzed, aligned, and coded for common themes for each research question.

The researcher conducted the study in two large school districts, one of which the researcher served as an SRO prior to data collection. The researcher used a purposive sampling group of current and fully commissioned police officers who served as School Resource Officers. The researcher gave the SROs permission forms, which were all returned (See Appendices F, G, & H). The researcher also obtained certification with the National Institute of Health (NIH) for protecting human research participants (See Appendix E). The study was of minimal risk to the participants and the risk of harm or

discomfort anticipated during its course of research did not exceed anything encountered ordinarily in daily life.

Background

Two suburban school districts in a large metropolitan area in a K-12 setting contained 12 SROs apportioned throughout various sites. At each research site, the SROs faced similar experiences with students and staff but managed issues differently resulting in a variation of outcomes. Many times, police administration placed the SROs in unfamiliar territory where they received little “hands on” training. The researcher, having previously served as an SRO, noticed the role was undefined, with little oversight by the respective police agency or school district. The researcher also recognized other SROs appeared to employ a mindset reminiscent of a traditional police method, which leaned toward an emphasis on law enforcement while other SROs let the school manage any issues. The large imbalance of SRO functions locally and nationwide help set the stage for the exploratory analysis.

Subjects

The study included voluntary participant SROs in two Midwest public school districts. The SROs were certified police officers compliant with state standards from the state’s department of public safety. They also officially held the capacity of their position through individual police departments and met all criterion, training, and expectations of the police department guidelines. Particularly, the SROs met or exceeded the Missouri state statute (RSMO168.450) with a minimum of 40 hours of basic school resource officer training (Missouri Revised Statute of 2013). The hours of training varied where some participants acquired more than the minimum as seen in the following figure.



Figure 2. SRO Training hours

Three of the SRO participants were employed by a county wide regional police department and nine participants were employed by a smaller municipal police department. All study participants were part of a non-probability homogenous purposive sample based on characteristics possessed by an SRO population, which met the objectives of the study. Fraenkel and Wallen (2006) noted in qualitative research “Random sampling ordinarily is not feasible, since the researcher wants to ensure that he or she obtains a sample that is uniquely suited to the intent of the study” (p. 430).

The research participants included a diverse group of cultural, ethnic, and gender representation with a wide range of police background as well as a collective amount of SRO experience. According to a study done by Hurley and Buskovivk (2014) the mean age of 400 SROs surveyed was 48 with 19 years of general police experience and nine years as an SRO. However, most of the SROs in this study had less than five years of experience in the SRO position.



Figure 3. SRO years of experience.



Figure 4. Total years of general police experience.

The researcher designed the study for two large school districts consisting of many students making sure the students were unaffected during in the utilization of research methods. Furthermore, there was careful attention given to the study because it

involved police officers that may have contained confidential information. Therefore, the researcher was attentive to incoming data and greatly considered the anonymity of the participants. Consequently, the details were in general titles and language such as using numbers for participants and “school” for the locale. Chapter four will expand upon this information.

Research Setting

Two suburban school districts near a large Midwestern city had a fully functioning SRO and security program for several years and some sites had independent security officials with supplemental security duties such as parking lot patrols, camera monitoring, and assisting SROs when called upon. One school district had a gross enrollment that exceeded 20,000 students while the other was approximately 17,500 (Research Site Websites, 2018a, 2018b). The SROs were spread out at various campuses during the 2018-2019 school year where the study commenced. Each SRO had his or her own school. The researcher received permission to conduct the study by the representatives of both school districts to focus on the SROs respective schools (See Appendix H). The SROs distributed the questionnaire either in their office or the police station in which they work. SRO Observations took place at the school in which they worked. The SRO’s completed the research phone-ins from his or her school, at a police facility, or via cell phone at a remote location.

Limitations

The researcher wanted to study two large and diverse school districts to procure active and experienced SROs with a multiplicity of school/police related situations thereby extracting the richest data possible. Although both school districts were large

and produced qualified participants, similarity existed. Neither school district represented the makeup or sample population of the entire metropolitan area in which the study took place.

Within the two school districts were an ample number of qualified SROs and the researcher selected the participants based on a purposive method that returned the research requests. The twelve participants for the study represented most of the SROs employed in the districts. Fraenkel et al. (2012) stated, "In qualitative studies, the number of participants in a sample is usually somewhere between 1 and 20" (p. 103). The researcher believed a sample limitation was probable and the population was not completely accurate and widely applicable to all SROs as possible even though the SROs were sufficiently represented and within reason for a qualitative study.

The school year began in late August of 2018 and ended in late May of 2019. This was not a full calendar year and both districts had some semblance of a summer school. The summer sessions were for students who wanted to participate in learning or students who needed credit recovery to catch up on curriculum. The researcher only studied the SROs during the regular school year (Fall-Spring) and excluded any summer classes. Selected SROs, in fact, worked during summers and the researcher may have drawn new or more data from the period.

Gender diversity among the SRO participants was an important area. The researcher sent requests to SROs as well as permission paperwork to male and female SROs alike. Only one female SRO returned the forms and agreed to be a part of the study. The female participant, was concerned about anonymity and perceived using pronouns such as "he" and "she" would compromise anonymity in the study. The

researcher referred to all participants as either “participant” or “SRO” and when the author used pronouns it was in the gender-neutral expression of “s/he.”

Another limitation included difficulty in communicating with participants. The researcher, being in the field of law enforcement, knows experienced officers were not good at opening up and did not want to expose emotions or weaknesses (especially to peers). Therefore, by interacting directly with the researcher, who is a police officer, the limitation may have hindered some of the true data and findings.

The researcher wanted to study the SROs in a natural environment through observation. At times the researcher perceived the SROs as performing normal duties, with no effort to modify behaviors. At other times it appeared the SRO’s sensed they were under observation and changed individual actions such as being more proactive and even making statements, “I normally don’t do this, but since you are here...” A change in behavior aligned with the Hawthorne Effect which is awareness of observation and analysis and had the potential to alter behaviors (McCambridge, Witton, & Elbourne, 2014). The researcher did whatever was possible to maintain the integrity of the study.

Research Questions

Research Question 1: How do the SROs participating in this study perform the role of safety/security agent?

Research Question 2: How do the participating SROs function in the role of law enforcer?

Research Question 3: How do the participating SROs interact with students in the school and what are the resulting behaviors?

Research Question 4: What changes, if any, occurred in the participating SROs self-perceptions regarding the three categories during the research study?

Research Question 5: Do the participating SROs conceive the role in some way not covered by the terms in the three categories?

Instruments

The researcher created and utilized four variations of data collection and analysis: Personal interviews (See Appendix A), surveys (See Appendix B), observations (See Appendix C), and telephone check-ins (See Appendix D). The researcher with advice from the dissertation committee designed the four instruments. An SRO of 15 years and an SRO supervisor of seven years, who were experts in the field, both reviewed and vetted the surveys and interview questions and gave input.

Data Collection and Analysis

The researcher met with each participant in person and delivered the surveys. The SROs asked participants to complete a survey designed to prompt participants to express opinions or attitudes and indicate a categorical decision across variables (Salgado, Anderson, & Tauriz, 2015). The surveys were comprised of questions about the SROs background and assessed attitudes on the three focused categories of safety and security, law enforcement, and interactive functions. The researcher distributed surveys early in the study (September 2018 – December 2018) as baseline data. The surveys were evaluated later qualitatively using open coding to assess common themes.

The interviews began using a semi-structured methodology and involved questions like the survey but allowed the researcher to have a more thorough examination. Turner (2010) wrote, “Interviews provide in-depth information pertaining

to participants' experiences and viewpoints of a particular topic. Often, interviews are coupled with other forms of data collection in order to provide the researcher with a well-rounded collection of information for analyses" (para. 1). An audio voice recorder captured participants' responses and stored the file on a password protected external drive. SROs carried out interviews in person with open-ended questions starting with inquiries about the participants' background followed by the three main categories, framed to encourage deeper reflection about the role. The participants engaged in interviews and answered the same 17 questions (See Appendix A). The interview data was intended to render vital insights into SRO activities and reflected the richest data possible. The researcher used memos to capture any impressions or ideas during and after the interview. Upon completion, the researcher analyzed the qualitative data question by question and identified trends in responses and coded them to assess emerging themes.

The SRO administered observations at each participant's respective school enhancing the knowledge of the three focused categories in a naturalistic environment. An observation field report recorded information (See Appendix C). The observations were vital to capture what the researcher sensed (seeing, hearing, perceiving, etc.) of the SRO and the related role. This instrument was utilized under the strategy of participant observations where the goal was to gain a close and in-depth familiarity with the SRO participants in their practices. The researcher conducted participant observations during the school year focusing on SROs in their express environment – the school. The observations looked in depth at non-numerical data as the SROs operated in their natural surroundings. SRO characteristics helped measure the three meta-categories where

inductive content analysis was employed as raw data emerged. Each observation began with a naturalistic inquiry approach making certain the participant operated independent of the researcher's presence. The researcher was also aware of the "observer effect" which is the tendency for the observer to be emotionally involved, deriving from past experiences as an SRO (Fraenkel et al., 2012). The observer suppressed biases and effectuated an objective viewpoint. The researcher analyzed, synthesized, and interpreted the observations into a coherent description in which the SRO was a daily actor in the events of the school.

Participant phone-ins were a method used to record any data that recently occurred and was thought useful to this study. Participants reported information primarily by phone but the researcher also encouraged email communication, in person contact, or written memos. Multiple modes of correspondence increased the possibility of response (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2014). The researcher asked follow-up questions to narrow down information or even expand upon details of the experience if needed. The researcher also utilized the follow-up inquiries to support research question four which assessed changes of SROs perceptions. A report generated by the researcher contained participant data (See Appendix D) and coded for common themes.

Reliability of the Measurement

The researcher created the survey with feedback from professionals in the field. An experienced SRO of 15 years assessed the questions once formulated to ensure validity of content. Two changes made to the survey prior to finalization were as follows. One change pertained to asking about the experience of the SRO early in the survey (survey question #2). The other was the addition of a question about the SROs

involvement with discipline (survey question #11). The researcher made a final draft and applied it to this study (Appendix B).

The same SRO vetted the interview questions with no comments or direction for change. Furthermore, an eight-year SRO supervisor with 35 years total police experience, did an evaluation with no comments for modification. The interviews contained four sections and 15 questions discussed below.

SRO role related topics. The first section of the interviews (question 1-5) served as a platform to build SRO credibility and merged into specific personal questions about SRO roles. The first two questions directly asked about the reasons why they were in this position and how long they have been an SRO. This was a way to have the participant open up and expound upon their tendencies (or lack of) to be in the SRO position and to discuss its longevity. These questions also asked about training (mirroring survey question number three), which was known to be lacking in school-based law enforcement (Martinez-Prather et al., 2016). This section also asked about what the particular SRO contributes to this area of policing, and perceptions of the role.

Safety/Security. The second section (questions 6-9) dealt with the safety and security category of this study. The questions covered the specific role the SRO played in security as well as the biggest concerns in this area. The researcher asked about school shootings as well as the student perceptions of the SRO and safety. School shooting questions were meant to emphasize current phenomenon of violence in schools (Maa & Darzi, 2018).

Law Enforcement Role. The law enforcer role was tendentious in schools and many theorists have branded this role as one that criminalizes students and diminishes

credibility to the SRO program (Chongmin & Gottfredson, 2013; Monterastelli, 2017). McKenna (2016) identified nine different functions that correspond to the SRO law enforcer role.

Table 1

Law enforcer actions

Prevention (crime/infractions)

Enforcement of laws

Code of conduct enforcement

Criminal investigations

Interior patrolling (walking hallways)

Exterior patrolling (foot patrol in parking lots and playgrounds)

Specialized assignments (assisting other police divisions)

Traffic enforcement

Emergency operations

Questions in this section (10-12) of the interview revealed SROs actions in adolescent delinquency and school discipline. The “school to prison pipeline” was also highlighted to elicit SROs’ thoughts compared to current theories in literature.

Interaction. The fourth and final section (questions 13-15) was the interaction component with SROs and students, staff, and the community. Question 13 asked SROs about the amount of time they spend in the role building relationships. Current literature shows that the SRO spends a large portion of time interacting with students in an effort build a good rapport and build relationships compared to the two other categories of

safety and law enforcement (Rhodes, 2015). This question directly emphasized this category. The final two questions evaluated the positive and negative impacts of SROs working with adolescents in a personal and interactive way.

Participant observations placed the SROs in a naturalistic environment (their respective schools). The researcher recorded detailed tasks and interactions and logged information on a self-created observation report (See Appendix C) which aligned with Jorgensen (2015), who suggested a researcher use a “unique method for investigating the enormously rich, complex, conflictual, problematic, and diverse experiences, thoughts, feelings, and activities of human beings and the meanings of their existence” (para. 1). The social science approach for observations enhanced the research experience giving a realistic component to collecting data.

Qualitative Validity

The researcher assessed the validity of qualitative research and considered the following items related to exploration of the SRO’s role. Primarily, ontology factors prompted examination of the existence or establishment of the SROs in schools along with categorizations of functions. The baseline survey questions were about what elements existed and to which categories they belong. Synthesizing data to meet the needs of this study, qualitative methods were chosen to approach the problem and seek answers. A social science approach best utilized the exploratory nature of the study and concentrated on the SROs that embarked on relationships with a vast array of individuals. This methodology relied on descriptive data – the SROs own words and their observable behavior. To better understand the notion of qualitative research, Taylor, Bogdan, & DeVault (2015) pointed out the following six thoughts:

1. Qualitative researchers look at certain meanings people apply to their lives. They need to set aside their own beliefs and views of the world and treat each scenario as if it was happening for the first time.
2. Qualitative research is inductive. They develop the impressions, visions, and understanding from data patterns rather than traditional quantitative means. This is done with a flexible design and an open mindset as information and order begins to form, keeping in mind the theory must fit the data and not the other way around.
3. People are viewed as a whole. In the qualitative practice the setting is viewed holistically and people or groups are not seen as variables. Data or statistics can diminish the human or social aspect where we actually need to see the feelings and experiences of the people involved.
4. Qualitative researchers are interested in how people act and think. They are attentive to how people are acting in everyday life as natural as possible in a way that is unobtrusive. There can be hindrances, however, such as interviews where the researcher must ask questions but he or she can also try to minimize the control.
5. In qualitative studies there is no hierarchy. In other words, everyone matters whether they are rich or poor, young or old. The idea is to look at things from a different vantage point. With qualitative methods the student is as important as the teacher and the patient may be as important as the doctor. All perspectives were taken into consideration for study.

6. Qualitative research stresses the meaningful aspect of data. Many times, research had standardized procedures leaving out the untouched social aspects such as listening to people talk, interact, looking at the literature they compose, or observe body language. This is not a matter of right and wrong or some other binary perception, but meaning assigned to a flow of many factors.

Summary

The nature of exploratory research is to explore and was used to answer the research questions but did not propose to offer a conclusive solution. The style of this research was generally used to examine a problem that has not been clearly defined (Dudovskiy, 2019). Using a qualitative method allowed the researcher to capture expressive information for inquiry into the roles of the SROs at two K-12 school districts in a large metropolitan area in the fall of 2018 and spring of 2019. The researcher utilized these two districts to examine SROs in the environment in which they worked, specifically in the categories of safety/security, law enforcement, and social interactions. The researcher selected a qualitative approach to perform the study attempting to have a better understanding and take note of any new information not known to the scope of the research. The next chapter explained the results from this qualitative exploration study.

Chapter Four: Results

Introduction

The results of this study focused on three predominant roles SROs engaged in as police officers working in the K-12 school setting. Chapter Four explains the comprehensive results from three areas of cynosure which are safety/security, law enforcement, and student/SRO interaction. The researcher reported results which assessed participants' responses and attitudes via a voluntary survey. The researcher also gathered qualitative analysis from interviews. The interviews, in some measure, mirrored the surveys except that interviews allowed opportunity for participants to augment answers through a semi-structured format resulting in expansive data. Additionally, the researcher conducted observations of SROs during their duties noting the three meta-categories as well as any extraordinary functions that added to the research.

Phone-in data from participants reported any relevant day to day information. Phone-ins became notable for this chapter because they were the most frequent, but most concise contact with participants for gathering data and used in support with the other instruments. In all, the researcher compiled 101 phone-in reports. Participants answered follow-up questions when feasible if the subject of the call needed expansion or clarification. Some SROs made phone-ins a weekly summary and gave a chronicle of notable events related to their role as an SRO. The phone-ins were coded for common themes and fused the data with the other three instruments in support of the research questions.

Research Question 1:**How do the SROs participating in this study perform the role of safety/security agent?**

Overall, the participants took an active and serious role as the premier individuals responsible for keeping students safe at school. In this study, 75% agreed or strongly agreed safety and security should be the top priority in what they do. Question eight of the survey exemplified this on a Likert scale by asking SRO's viewpoint on how important safety and security is in their role.

Table 2

Safety and Security viewpoints

Responses	Frequency
Strongly disagree	2
Disagree	1
Neutral	0
Agree	3
Strongly agree	6

Tanner-Smith and Fisher (2016) stressed safety in the school as essential in the educational process and most SROs felt their role in safety was one of educational leadership. P10 stated, 'I am the Sheriff of my own little town. I would say my foremost role is safety and security. I want to make sure everyone is safe in the building and that makes everyone feel better.' P7 oversaw the security of over 2,000 students in one school but seemed to have a content nature and a source of fulfillment as s/he stated, 'This is pretty much the largest school district in the area, but I am proud to be a part of it all. Some like me and some don't but I am here to do a job.' One participant mentioned,

‘The schools are a microcosm of society and it’s nice to be able to keep young people safe as opposed to a whole population like a patrol assignment.’ Although table 2 displayed two participants who disagreed safety and security is the biggest priority, further inquiry explained they did not necessarily disregard it but put other issues such as interaction and other daily operations at the top.

One of the most serious areas of safety and security was the subject of school shootings. This seemed to be the quick response when speaking of safety and security from many of the participants, seemingly without much thought when asked about the issue. One SRO stated, ‘School shootings are the biggest thing that are of concern. It’s an unpredictable event and myself and the school have to always be vigilant.’ Another relayed,

I try to keep the school safe by making it a hard target. My office is in the front and I can see the entry and exit doors and I am always aware of any kind of intruder that might want to do harm. I also look at cameras constantly and see trends and patterns through the surveillance. If an event occurs of this nature I hope that my training will kick in and I can neutralize the threat to keep everyone from harm and danger.

Another participant prioritized a shooting event by saying, ‘A shooting is the biggest thing that can happen here but I am aware of the dangers and do what I can to prevent this act, it’s just a reality of life now.’ Another SRO pointed the specific times when adolescents are vulnerable: ‘I am concerned with outsiders coming in especially at recess. These are times where kids are out of the school and hard to keep track of. As an

SRO I am constantly watching them.’ Only one of the twelve participants (P1) stated s/he was not prepared for a school shooting. The SRO stated,

I feel I am not ready for a school shooting or some kind of intruder with a weapon. There are two organizations involved, the police and the schools.

Neither seem to coordinate and they both think differently. We [fellow SROs] all have had some form of intruder training but it’s not enough and I’m not sure if you an ever have enough training.

The participant elaborated that school shootings are a massive event and coordinating with numerous amounts of agencies and people is overwhelming. The SRO felt the cohesiveness was lacking and therefore neither s/he nor the school was adequately prepared. One SRO summed up the topic by saying, ‘I am prepared as I can be. I have the training and I keep special medical equipment in my office. You cannot ever be 100% ready.’

A second emerging theme was that SROs spent a large percentage of the time securing and monitoring school perimeter doors trying to oversee who comes in the school as well as students who try to leave without permission. In fact, five of the SROs (P1, P2, P4, P7, and P8) had an office located at the front doors near the main officer specifically to oversee this area. One participant stated, ‘I check the doors every day and many times throughout the day. This is a big part of my role in security.’ P2 commented, ‘The school district has private security and I work with them to head off problems before they start. I also do a lot of perimeter checks inside and outside patrolling the school grounds.’ P3 complained s/he found open doors regularly and said it was a constant challenge. P12 spoke about how s/he was well vested in the safety of

the school and said, 'I monitor the doors, always watch visitors who sign in and walk the halls. I helped write the safety plan for the building and I think being active is a key component in school safety.' P9, who explained s/he did not have an office, spent a significant amount of time sitting at a secretary's desk "buzzing people in" at the front of the school. During one observation the SRO rarely left the front area of the school because it was the main entrance and s/he did not want to compromise unauthorized people entering. Other SROs walked around the school and looked for side and rear doors that were unsecured. Another SRO stated, 'Almost every other day or so I find a side entrance unlocked to where anyone could walk in, this is a big safety factor.'

The officers also utilized the concept of deterrence for safety and security measures. Many of the SROs walked the hallways with a proactive approach of being visible. P12 even stated s/he logged over 5000 steps per day in the school on a smart watch. All SROs wore a traditional police uniform daily making it easy to recognize their presence. Many felt this was an effective tool to suppress problematic areas that might arise otherwise such as intruders, fights, or drug use. One SRO stated, 'I am not here to scare anyone but when they see the uniform it reminds people that the police are on site.' Another stated, 'In morning time I stand outside so everyone can see me and that alone has the potential to suppress a lot of bad things.' The utilization of a police car was the second type of deterrent mentioned by participants. One SRO stated s/he parks the police car in front of the school every day and leaves it there and it is the first thing people see when they drive up. Another SRO said, 'Having a marked patrol car has a great effect. It sends the message to the students and the public that the safety of the school is taken serious.' All 12 SROs in this study had a police car and parked it in a

way that was a calculated to be the most effective way possible to deter intruders or other criminal activity. Another SRO summed up this method by saying, 'Being present is a big aspect of this job because when people see me in uniform it is a deterrent. Many times, that solves the problem.' Another one described it as, 'When I park my police car in front of the school every day it sends a message to everyone. Bad guys are deterred from doing bad things and parents and kids feel safer.' A final SRO made a similar comment by saying, 'I park my [police] car in front and usually am at the front doors. When people come to sign in they see me. My goal is to be visible and let the public know the police are in the school.'

Another predominant theme was the use of security cameras. All SROs had access in one way or another to security cameras on school grounds. Participants used them to monitor live streams or recorded footage to investigate incidents reported later. One had the complete camera system in the SRO office. S/he would commonly sit and watch the cameras because it gave a chance to see over 15 areas of the school at one time. This participant stated, 'I do not walk the halls as much but I monitor the cameras constantly. There are many angles and I can see just about everything, not to mention record the activities.' Another comment about cameras was a participant who said, 'There are times when I need the cameras. I can look back several days and see what may have happened. Many times, I will just sit and watch to see what the students are doing in the halls.' Another SRO stated, 'I had an incident where someone broke into the school overnight and I was able to see the video the next day and find out who it was.' One other officer stated, 'I watch the cameras and the kids know they are there, so it is an all-around safety issue.' The cameras were not solely used to watch students or to seek

out crimes, they were a mechanism where the SRO was being recorded in his or her interactions as a protective layer for any accusations or wrongdoing or malfeasants. At the time of this writing the participants were being issued body cameras. This is one of the latest innovations in law enforcement not only to capture evidence but to protect the officer from accusations of wrongdoing. The SROs were wary of this because they felt it violated school and student privacy. During this research, school district attorneys had just agreed it was legal for SROs to wear them and each SRO wore a camera. There were no particular issues that came about and only one SRO commented (during a phone-in) and stated the following: 'I am not sure how I feel about the body cam. It kind of disrupts things especially when talking to students because they lose trust.'

The SRO's utilization for Traffic safety was a theme that also emerged. Many of the SROs at one time or another functioned to assist with traffic control. Many of the SROs only do this for special events such as during holidays or graduation where there are many cars visiting the school. However, four of the SROs directed traffic every day at the beginning and end of school. This was regular duty the school requested to help with parents, staff, and buses to get in and out of the school safely. One SRO helped get students to their cars and assisted in the flow of traffic through the parking lot. The researcher noted when a uniformed officer was assisting, drivers seemed to conduct themselves in a more orderly manner. Another SRO contended with a traffic light occasionally at a busy intersection at the front of the school. The SRO was reluctant to help direct traffic because it was a safety issue for the participant. The researcher noticed this duty was perplexing to the SROs. The participants understood the need for this duty and how it was vital to students, parents, and buses but it drew them away from a

proximity to the school. This made them uncomfortable and one SRO expressed traffic duty should be done by traffic officers. One SRO stated, 'I am there when they need law enforcement but the school I serve usually only needs things such as traffic directing or being a deterrent. Another stated, 'At first I didn't like doing traffic duties but now it is just part of the job and people count on me.'

One other research theme which emerged was collaboration with staff about safety and security matters. Survey question six examined the advantages of being an SRO. Many SROs chose multiple reasons, one which was working with school district staff. This showed the SRO was zealous about partnerships and collaboration with non-police co-workers making meetings more productive. One SRO considered the safety of the school depended on a team approach. S/he considered every staff member was vital to keeping the school secure. The SRO had regular safety meetings with the administration and staff. Another SRO had similar meetings and said, 'Everyone should be on the same page.' Another SRO commented, 'I consider everyone to be part of the safety aspect. We have monthly meetings and everyone has a responsibility to help keep the students and staff safe.' One SRO went to an extreme, beside safety meetings s/he gave staff wide presentations at teacher training days. In contrast, one SRO stated there were not enough safety meetings and suggested there should be more. Regardless of the lack of collaboration with this SRO, the participant was cognizant of the need and worked at improvement. One participant complained that there were not enough staff meetings regarding security but admitted having some was better than a total absence. A final SRO mentioned having a district wide meeting involving safety. The SRO stated,

‘We have district meetings and we talk about many things especially the current threats or safety concerns and it helps us all be on the same page.’

The final theme that came about was training. Although this was not exclusive to the safety/security meta-category it seemed to be a prevalent issue here. The SROs all met the minimum training requirement for state standards (40 hours of SRO specific training). Eight of the 12 participants had the basic 40 hour SRO course. Three exceeded this and obtained 80 hours of SRO training. One SRO had 120 hours of training which included an advanced SRO course as well as supplementary SRO courses. Ford, Ford, Frei, Pilny, and Berkelaar (2016) outlined the importance of a well-trained SRO mentioned in the literature review above. Because the SRO position is very different from traditional patrol duties, the training is beneficial. Participants not only reported on hours of training but commented on the importance SRO training. One SRO stated, ‘The training is important because it lets you know what to expect.’ Many SROs felt beside the basic 40 hour SRO course, there was not enough training thereafter, especially with tactical and safety matters. P10 felt this way and took measures to train alone after hours at the school to be prepared for any large-scale event. S/he wanted to be familiar with the layout of the schools, any hidden spots, and open areas where a mass shooter could cause the most damage. One SRO stated,

We go through a 40-hour course then later have the option to do a three-day course on active shooters, so that’s important but you tend to forget things if they are not done and practiced all the time so we need more tactical training and equipment. This is a serious matter and it’s something I personally don’t want to slip between the cracks.

Another participant expressed, 'Active shooters are a hot topic and I want as much training as possible.'

Many times, the SRO does not have a choice on training because the police department assigns it. Therefore, not all SROs go to the same training courses or have a consistent schedule to attend training. Various organizations may sponsor training; it is a matter of budgeting and convenience (D. Dunn, personal communication, March, 18, 2019). P9 was not satisfied with the basic training by stating, 'I had the state sponsored course but not the NASRO course. They should put all SROs through NASRO.'

Another SRO commented on the inadequacies by saying, 'There needs to be more about juvenile laws in the basic course as well as active shooter training.' Another issue over tactical training came up when a participant stated, 'The 40 hours was a good start but I have had MACTAC [Multiple Assault Counter Terrorism Action Capabilities] and this should be incorporated with the basic class.' Finally, an SRO specifically commented on hours SROs have for training. 'Forty hours seemed like just a start and I would welcome more training.'

There was, however, an SRO in this study that seemed to seek out as much training as possible. This participant stated s/he has been to several training seminars sponsored by the school district that cover various topics such as student behavior, safety, and counseling-based topics. The SRO also attended training sponsored by the police department which included the basic SRO 40-hour training, SRO patrol rifle school, advanced SRO class, and a crisis class. S/he stated, 'I have gone to a lot of training over the years and I think all of it was helpful, there are resources out there and that is the key to get more training.'

Research Question 2:**How do the participating SROs function in the role of law enforcer?**

The law enforcement role of the SRO position showed the least activity of the three meta-categories. The participant surveys exhibited SROs spent less than 20% being a law enforcer.

Table 3

The SRO's role as a law enforcer

Responses by percentage	Frequency
0 - 20%	10
20-40%	2
40-60%	0
60-80%	0
80-100%.	0

Many SROs claimed they simply made few arrests or did not spend much time administering actions resulting in legal oriented conclusions. Additionally, 70% argued that the “school to prison pipeline” was not prevalent at their respective school and they felt they were observant of this issue and not contributing to the unnecessary criminalization of students. In all, this role was a perplexing one because enforcement of laws is an inherent attribute of a police officer yet few times in the school setting enforcement action was taken. One SRO stated, ‘I came to the position ready for anything having a full range of police powers and tactics but I found I rarely act as a police officer making arrests.’

When participants acted as a law enforcer, the incidents mainly involved cases of illegal drugs. SROs said either they or a staff member dealt with student possession or

use of drugs weekly. Consider these SROs were mostly middle and high school level. One SRO at the high school level stated, 'We know there are going to be drugs in the school and I do what I can do keep them out but it's a societal plague they will always find their way into the building.' The types of drugs ranged from marijuana to harder drugs but the most prevalent scenario consisted of the electronic cigarette. P10 stated, 'I have a whole closet full of Juuls [a brand of electronic cigarettes] I confiscated. We don't arrest the kids because it's trivial and the juvenile system wouldn't charge them anyway.' P9 explained, 'We have meetings and we discuss arresting students for drugs but in the end, it comes down to discretion.' Another participant stated, 'I will either arrest and book someone for drugs or issue a summons, I won't have this at my school unless it is a very small amount.' A final SRO pointed that drugs are not overrunning the schools but it is one of the crime categories the school chose to leave to the SRO: 'The administration considers this a legal matter. Of course, there is school policy on drugs but they let us deal with it mostly then we use discretion on what to do.'

Another category that prompted SROs to act as a law enforcer regarded social media. Social media problems have infiltrated schools across the country as referenced by one SRO. The issues surrounding this plight consisted of bullying, threats, sexual offenses, and others as one SRO stated, 'Social media is an everyday problem at the school. The students misuse it for all kinds of things, some of which are illegal.' P12 specifically pointed out, 'I deal with several threats on the school per year and they all come through social media sites. For that, we are acting and making arrests with little exception.' One officer stated s/he deals with multiple issues regarding sex crimes. These incorporate sending underage pictures, online predators (where the victim is a

student), and inappropriate access to websites while at school. Harassment and cyberbullying were also an area the SROs found themselves addressing. Although students did not commonly report this to them, P5 claimed, 'Social media issues cause a lot of problems with teens and I have made arrests for this. It's serious because it's the new form of communication.' Another SRO stated, 'Social media is a bigger problem than we think. The kids are constantly on their phone and there are hundreds of apps they can use for many purposes, some for bad things.'

Fights were another issue the SRO battled, usually operating on a fine line between school discipline and as a law enforcement issue. Many SROs have dealt with fights in the school (or at school sporting events). P4 stated, 'As long as there have been schools there have been fights.' Overall, the participants discussed the severity of fights that occurred. SROs mostly handled these types of issues with discretion which commonly resulted in school discipline. P1 said, 'We have fights occasionally but most of them are handled by the school with suspensions.' Another SRO stated, 'At this level [middle school] the fights aren't really fighting, just pushing and shoving so there would be no reason to make an arrest.' The law enforcement role came into play significantly when the fight resulted in the category of an assault. When this was the case, most of the SROs stated they make arrests. P2 stated, 'If it's a fight we usually break it up but when its determined to be an assault I will either make an arrest or do a report and refer it the prosecutor or juvenile authorities, depending on the age.' A middle school SRO (P3) explained if it is a juvenile that committed the assault s/he will contact the victim's father or mother and see if they want to press charges. If not, the SRO would file a report. In the case of an adult aged student victim, the SRO will speak to the victim to find out if he

or she wants to prosecute. The SROs at the middle schools seemingly used heavy and careful discretion because of the age factor. P4 brought up at this age the students are only 13 or 14 which is very young to have juvenile charges brought against them. These SROs rarely took the law enforcement route unless it was an egregious case. Most SROs pointed out they are simply not around when a fight occurs and then here about it later. P7 seemed dismayed by this issue by talked about multiple issues:

There is school policy, which I don't enforce, but if there is a serious incident such as a fight I will step in if I know about it. Sometimes they [staff] don't tell me everything. Other than that, I let the administration handle the problems and my bosses don't really want me to call them every time something happens.

Participants mentioned a final theme which comprised an element other than direct issues with students. Parents often prompted the law enforcement arm of the SRO. The SROs claimed each of their schools have several parents with custody paperwork for the student or restraining orders against one another. This was exclusively a law enforcement matter because the orders are issued by a court. The schools monitored and helped coordinate parent/student custody but if there were any legal problems a police officer usually intervened. One SRO stated, 'I have a lot of problems with parents. They have restraining orders and inevitably show up at the same event such as holiday parties.' Many of the SROs stated they do not make arrests but just monitor. P9 stated, 'The school lets me know if there is a custody issue and I hang around to 'keep the peace'. That way if something does happen I can take action.'

An overall concern in current literature, exemplified in Chapter two, was the "school to prison pipeline." Although this was not a specific emerging theme, the

“pipeline” theory was reflected in the SROs actions as a law enforcer in this study. According to Khey (2018) this is a theory that is taking students out of the school disciplinary system and instead dealing with their offenses as crimes and the criminal justice increases the likelihood that these teens end up in prison. Scholars have debated this theory and the researcher wanted to know the participants knowledge of this subject as well as their views and approaches. Interview question 12 specifically asked about the “school to prison pipeline.” All but one SRO was familiar with this theory. The SRO who had no knowledge of this stated s/he was not aware of the specific premise. The other participants were all familiar with the “school to prison pipeline” and had different perspectives and implicit actions. P10 stated s/he was familiar with this theory but stated it is not present at the school in which s/he serves. Another SRO stated, ‘From my experience I don’t see schools having kids get into the criminal justice system, they like to handle things in the school.’ Another participant stated they are aware of what this is but said, ‘It doesn’t happen at my school.’ P11 elaborated on the theory by saying:

Here there is no ‘school to prison pipeline.’ I have a say in the arrest but the school would rather have a report but no arrest but if it [an arrest] must be done I will arrest a student. Many of these arrests are for drugs, assaults, or social media threats. The school will do anything and everything to keep them [students] from arrest.

One officer noted that the school interviews the SROs for the position and they try to pick someone who is not arrest oriented and will work with the students and staff showing tolerance and understanding. The SRO explained this contradicts the theory

because the school works with the SRO using teamwork. H/she stated, however, that this can have an ill-effect because sometimes the administration will fail to report certain incidents fearing legal situations will look bad on the school. A final SRO stated, 'There is a legitimacy to this theory but it is student-specific. There seems to be no one large plague of SROs arresting kids and sending them to prison.' The findings showed an awareness of this theory and SROs were mindful their actions of implying law to a student misbehavior could have detrimental effects on their future.

In all, the law enforcement role turned into counseling or deferment to school administration in many cases for consequences. There were occasions the researcher noticed a semblance of restorative justice methods involving the SRO. Many times, this was a meeting with all parties involved in a delinquent act where school administration would invite the SRO to sit in and give input for corrective measures. P3 stated s/he was asked to attend a meeting with two students who were feuding along with a counselor and parents. The SRO noted it was a positive experience and there should be more of this when issues arise at school. Another, however, stated s/he did not feel this type of philosophy works in school and in law enforcement. This SRO stated, 'It's just another version of the same things we have been doing for years, trying to find a way to make everyone happy and fix the problem. There are still going to be good and bad people out there.'

Research Question 3:

How do the participating SROs interact with students in the school and what are the resulting behaviors?

Little doubt existed regarding the positive encounters and interactions between SROs and students. Many functions performed by the SRO involved a variety of contact with students and the interaction component even overlapped with the other two meta-categories of safety/security and law enforcement. An example was P10 who made a point to keep some type of interface with students regardless of the situation (arrests, counseling, reprimanding, etc.). S/he was cognizant that communicating with students not only helped explain the circumstance at hand but exuded a human touch to every adolescent engagement. SRO interactions with students revealed how this component overwhelmingly merges with the SROs function. Survey question 13 posed the statement, *“I feel that positive interaction with the students is essential to being an SRO.”* The statement presented the chance for participants to convey the perception about positive student interactions and the job. Table 5 shows the results.

Table 4

SROs impact/perceptions on positive interactions with students

Responses	Frequency
Strongly disagree	0
Disagree	0
Neutral	0
Agree	1
Strongly agree	11

The responses to this statement revealed a large-scale view that SROs ‘strongly agree’ positive interactions with students are essential in the role. Only one participant selected they ‘agree’. No other categories were selected. The participants were around students every day and interacting is an important part of the job. Theriot and Orme

(2016) emphasized that positive relations with SROs and building trust may have a lifelong impact. The researcher wanted to poll participants on the portion of time spent interacting with students. To better understand the allocation of student interaction time the following table displayed the percentage per participant.

Table 5

The SRO's time spent interacting with students

Participant	Percentage
P1	85%
P2	50%
P3	50%
P4	90%
P5	80%
P6	95%
P7	100%
P8	75%
P9	100%
P10	90%
P11	80%
P12	100%

The mean percentage was 83%. The percentage showed the SROs spent most of the role in an interaction capacity. There was a correlation with the high percentage of interaction and the satisfaction level as well. P9 stated, 'This is one of my most favorite things about the job, talking to kids.' P4 stated, 'Well they [fellow police officers] refer to me as 'kindergarten cop' and I am happy to have that title because the kids are very rewarding.'

The researcher found four specific themes for the interaction component listed as follows. The first category found in the data was rapport building. The NASRO triad does not specifically mention building relationships, rather counseling and teaching, and most SROs stated they do not professionally counsel students but attain good relations and establish good rapport with them. Hence, these SROs recognize counseling and teaching are two of the three triad components and this involves heavy interaction. During times of crisis many SROs not only interact but try to build a rapport to aid the student at the time and for future connections. One SRO, in interview question 15, stated interaction leads to rapport building and could last a lifetime. P4 mentioned, after the Ferguson, MO incident, some of the public and young people viewed the police as negative but building a good rapport combats law enforcement stereotype. Another mentioned the usefulness of this concept can help students overcome anti-police biases. One SRO reported via phone-ins over the research period a unique situation that was a good example for the rapport building approach. P6 noticed a student who was quiet and introverted. The SRO approached the student with little success but over time they began to talk. About mid-way through the school year s/he and the student developed a special handshake. This was exclusive to them only and by the end of the research the student opened up, spoke of his apprehension toward police, and now he has good favor toward the SRO and law enforcement in general. One SRO stated, 'Interacting with the kids allows for rapport building which could last a lifetime.' Another participant stated, 'Building a rapport helps them not to be afraid of us, with Ferguson and social media the police are seen lately as negative.' P5 claimed negative relations are prevalent today with police but building a good relationship with the students can turn this around. Finally,

one SRO assessed, 'We talk to the kids and they like that so building a rapport can break the barriers of biases they may have.' P9 was an exemplar for the interaction component which was specifically noted in observations of this SRO. S/he was at the elementary level and worked very hard to talk and interact with as many students as possible all while keeping in mind not to get them off course for classes. P9 kept regular communication with most of the staff inquiring about any current student problems and was heavily involved in working with the student's families as well. P9 was also a DARE officer making it more engrossing for the interest of making relationships that last. This SRO stated, 'I just like to talk to kids so its natural and this builds a good foundational rapport.'

The second category was trust, a familiar issue with law enforcement, as seen in the philosophies police departments have adopted over the years such as community-oriented police approaches. The SROs in this study seemed bring this method into the schools. The research survey purported SROs felt positive relations with students were important and they agreed their performance in this area was favorable. The results of good relations yielded student assurance which emerged in some of the interviews and showed the SROs never sensed a substantial lack of trust. P8 stated the students display trust with almost anything. Another SRO emphasized if the students trust them, they will tell them almost anything allowing the SRO to better help with their needs. A third SRO stated trust was a priority because they come from varying home environments and could be the only chance a police officer could have positive contact with an adolescent. Trust appeared to make some students feel safe allowing them to concentrate on school curriculum. P3 expressed, 'I think students have a lot of questions about why I am there

so I try to take on the role of a staff member to make the students feel comfortable where they concentrate on their studies.’ Another SRO commented, ‘I make an effort to tell them they are safe at school and that they just simply need to be a student, not scared of external factors.’ One participant said, ‘Everything I do involves student interaction, they see me and know they can trust me with just about anything.’ A final SRO stated the trust issue was very important, ‘I put trust at the top of the list. I don’t know what these kids here have at home but when they are in school they know what I am about and they trust me.’

The next theme was prevention. There were strong indications in the survey correlating role viewpoints by the SRO with aiding young people in avoiding unacceptable social or criminal behavior. One example was the “school to prison pipeline” survey question. The participants addressed the “pipeline” aspect from a prevention facet. Many SRO’s responses construed they are aware of the “pipeline” are not prone to send students to the criminal justice system. The interviews mirrored with this thinking showing the SROs would rather attempt prevention methods. P9 stated s/he tried not to arrest but to prevent. This involved counseling or either by the SRO or trained staff. Another SRO asserted s/he is there to get them on the right path in life and this involves talking to them formally or informally about precluding problems in life. One SRO stated, ‘It doesn’t take much to get to know them [students] and when they come to me for something it gives me a chance to prevent something bigger from happening.’ P10 said, ‘There can be negative views from students due to their outside life but I try to teach and educate them about police so it prevents future problems.’ Prevention was also predominant with this SRO who relayed, ‘I get to the kids early and

teach them right from wrong and try to interact with them to prevent bad habits.’

Another SRO stated s/he preferred not to send students to jail or juvenile detention but instead either work on preventing the situation at hand or allow the school to intervene with counseling. It should be noted prevention and deterrence displayed similar characteristics. However, the researcher noticed the prevention aspect involved a deeper level of communication and interaction thus giving the student a better understanding of a particular problem all while building a good and understanding SRO/student relationship.

The final emerging theme revolved around boundaries. This category, although small in content, was a significant area for the interaction component. Boundaries referred to student interaction with the SRO that “crosses the line” in a professional sense. As one SRO stated, sometimes when there are good relationships the students tend to view them as a friend. The seven SROs that mentioned the boundary issue felt taken advantage of and in some ways questioned their role. One SRO even questioned and re-evaluated the interaction component but did not come to a conclusive decision on role modification. One other distressing finding was an P3 who stated a student followed him/her around at every lunch and recess. The SRO stated s/he avoided this student after about two months of the behavior, contradicting the benefits of the interaction element. P10, however, did not have a problem with this. This participant was assertive and decisive and stated, ‘They don’t touch me and they know that, I am an adult and hold authority but that doesn’t mean I’m not friendly.’

Research Question 4:

What changes, if any, occurred in the participating SROs self-perceptions regarding the three categories during the research study?

Many of the SROs did not mention significant changes in self-perceptions. The researcher asked this question following most of the SRO phone-ins. Using this method, the researcher obtained information from the officer then asked about changes in perception of their role with the specific item for which they called. The few who acknowledged a change expressed the issue to be safety and security measures. P1, who was having problems monitoring doors along with several other staff expectations stated, 'Students leave the school and people come in and out all day so I spend most of my time at the front door. This is not what I see as being an SRO but I do what is best.' Another SRO who commented on the security issue said, 'Sometimes I feel like a 'door monitor' because I spend a big percentage of time constantly checking and locking doors.'

Another change in self-perception was the shedding of the police role and taking on that of a staff member or school district employee. Many SROs spent five days a week at the school as opposed to the police department. They embraced the school and took on an ownership role as stated in interview question nine when one SRO mentioned s/he takes on the role of a staff member and engages in educational leadership. Another SRO stated in interview question 17 s/he is just like a teacher when interacting with students. Many phone-ins involved a semblance of stepping away from a police role and functioned as a teacher or counselor. Although this was part of the NASRO triad some SROs felt it was getting too far from an SRO-like function.

Research Question 5:

Do the participating SROs conceive their role in some way not covered by the terms in the three categories?

On a macro level, the three meta-categories covered most of the duties of the SRO. The participants surmised all three areas were prominent in the weekly activities as an SRO. They pointed out, however, the job consists of more than just these categories some of which are not job related and some that are. Beside the three main categories of this study some of the participants took on various roles in the school on a regular basis. The researcher extracted three themes for research question five; staff versus student interaction, employee relations, and law enforcement credibility.

Professional staff interaction as opposed to student interaction was a theme that emerged and was not a main focus of this study when exploring the SRO's role. P9 summed up this theme by saying:

I spend 98% of my time at the school and away from the police department and fellow police officers. After several years [as an SRO] I feel like the school employees are my colleagues and I spend a lot of time with them. I didn't foresee this but it's feels like where I actually work now.

An example was an SRO who regularly trained staff at staff meetings. S/he did presentations on e-cigarettes and drug issues that faced teenagers currently. S/he also did intruder training alone with the staff to make sure everyone was consistent in the event of a school shooting. P8 and P12 mentioned staff training as well as P4 who claimed it was a way to get to know the teachers and as share current trends in juvenile crime. The other SRO stated, 'I show up at staff meetings and many times they want me to give a talk on a legal subject.' P10 took on a lot when it came to working with the staff. S/he, at one point, gave a six hours course on various law enforcement topics to the staff, taught some

classes (some of which were not SRO related such as history and physical education), and helped at sporting events with coaching strategies.

Another item that became apparent was the interpersonal relations with school district employees. P2 stated, 'I came to this job as a street officer with a rigid attitude but now I am friends with the staff and we even hang out off duty.' Another SRO was elated to say, 'I have made good friends at this school with the staff. I hang out with them more than my fellow police officers. This job is more than just a job, you are part of a family.' P6 explained when s/he came to the school s/he knew no one but now is friends with the principals, administrative assistants, and custodians. S/he further stated s/he goes to NASCAR races with one principal at least once per year.

A third theme was the perception of the SRO job from the viewpoint of other police officers and sometimes supervisors who were not SROs. Many SROs stated there was a belief the SRO was a substandard position within law enforcement and affected the credibility of the position. Some fellow officers referred to the SROs as "Kiddie Cops" or an easy position where the SROs performed no "real police work". One SRO stated, 'I knew I would be facing a lot of ridicule but I really wanted to do this job for the positive things and for the kids.' P10 stated, 'The beat cops don't understand at all what we do and that's a shame because the SRO position is very important and productive for this career.' Other SROs felt the supervisors were not involved much in what they do. They rarely visited the schools or met with school administration regarding the SROs performance or even to discuss collaborative functions with the two entities. This not only caused disappointment and a feeling of isolation but construed to the SRO that

police and school administration collaborating was not important, therefore leaving an absence of guidelines and expectations of the role.

Chapter Five: Discussion

Overview

The purpose of this study was to explore the School Resource Officer's (SRO) role, examining the three foremost functions that current literature purports as being the main areas in which they operate: Safety/security, the law enforcer, and the interaction component. The research setting consisted of two metropolitan K-12 school districts where each of the 12 participants who contributed their time and effort aided in the overall endeavor to better define what the SRO does. The researcher's topic of study materialized during the researcher's professional experience motivating the objective to personally strive and discover the most prudent role and utilization of best practices even though little role-specific research existed and the SRO functions seemed indeterminate. Through evaluating the SROs in their environment (their respective schools) this study aimed to add to the existing body of knowledge on SROs and their operations in the world of education. The literature, at the time of this writing, exhibited the SRO's capacity was a growing one and the role not adequately examined (Theriot & Orme, 2016). Research also showed education was in crisis with school shootings, criminalized student behavior, and questionable tactics of the use of police intervention with students (Kupchik, 2016; LaPointe, 2016; Nedzel, 2014). The goal of this study was to explore what the SRO does, i.e., duties, responsibilities, placement within the school administrative community, the limitations, etc. Chapter Five is the reflection on this journey into the SRO and the practice they undertook. The researcher kept an anecdotal journal as well as research memos to aid in writing this chapter.

Summary of Findings

Performance as a safety/security agent. Overall, the participants understood and appreciated the safety and security aspect of the job. After all, much of the career of a police officer involves this dimension. The researcher explored security and safety components and found although each participant had similar approaches and methods to maintain a safe school, they displayed differences on many levels suggesting standardization was not present. The SROs prioritized and managed the dangers and vulnerabilities at the school, and seemed to comprehend the aspect of this role, meaning the SRO accounted for the core of safety and security. However, there were varying duties and some SROs were frustrated by obligations they did not see befitting them as an officer in the school providing safety. P1 spent most of the time monitoring doors and stated this is not what s/he sees as the SRO role and expressed security is more than this. In contrast, another SRO willingly and happily spent the portion of security related duties sitting at a desk “buzzing in” visitors and claimed this was not the ultimate perception of an SRO but is ancillary to safety. Some of the participants found themselves directing traffic and perceived this as a quasi-safety matter, saying that although this was safety related, the duty took them away from the school perimeter and turned them into a regular traffic officer. This was another example of a role they did not perceive should be part of the SRO’s responsibilities. Considering these role dilemmas, they furthermore found the remedy also created a complex issue of reporting. Confusion loomed about addressing the problem with the police department or the school, this being a common problem (Fisher & Hennessy, 2016; Rhodes, 2015). Research showed that role conflict was prevalent and the function of security roles needed further study (Pollock, 2014;

McKenna et al., 2016; Schlosser, 2014; Dohy, 2016). Based on the participant responses and research observations, research showed the SROs were acting based on the needs of the school which sometimes conflicted with their perception of a comprehensive SRO role leaving them confused and frustrated. Each SRO seemed to capitulate to the situational predicaments and catered to the needs of the school and the police department. Nonetheless, safety and security did not appear compromised to any significant degree, just wavering amongst the participants. The researcher studied these issues and pondered if the infusion of more training would assist in alleviating their dilemmas. Many SROs seemed to want more training and if they had more it may give the SROs more direction, understanding, or leadership qualities to sustain an unadulterated position.

Role conflict appeared not to be the only substantial quandary. Other areas of safety and security such as deterrence, use of security cameras, and training were areas of proficiency among SROs. Participants were skilled in these areas even though many wanted more training. The SROs were very deliberate in utilizing police knowledge and experience as a preventive tool not only for a school shooting preparedness but many other problematic areas ranging from a variety of crimes to student misbehavior. Many SROs commented on how excited they were to have charge of the safety of hundreds and even thousands of students which the researcher interpreted as a large component of integrating educational leadership. As one SRO mentioned in Chapter Four, 'I am the Sheriff of my own little town.' The researcher concluded this type of ownership showed the SRO to be an effective safety presence and consequently alleviated school administration who could readily concentrate on non-security school tasks. Research also

correlated safety readiness and a sound approach to the prevention of student dangers which each SRO accomplished in their own way. (Gauthier, 2017; Swartz et al., 2016).

The phrase “better together” may be appropriate for the SROs collaborating with administration and staff to maintain a safe educational environment. Many SROs found their role working with school employees was not only necessary but enjoyable. This was a chance for officers to disseminate their expertise to staff and strive for a comprehensive approach. This type of cohesion could easily breakdown if an SRO was unwilling to work with others but for this study the SROs were accommodating. One SRO shared, ‘Not only do we train the staff we make the staff trainers.’ Recent literature suggested it is a necessity to have partnerships with school and police and that school administration need assistance in the security of students (Bonanno & Levenson, 2014; Fisher & Hennesy, 2016).

The function of law enforcer. The results of this study showed the law enforcer role was the least prevalent of the three meta-categories. The SRO acted as a law enforcer less than 20% of the time and surprisingly, seven of the 12 participants claimed they spent less than 5% performing this role. Many SROs simply harnessed a “hands off” approach, meaning they would not intervene in law enforcement action unless it was absolutely necessary. This challenged current literature, which stated SROs spend a large amount of time (up to 50%) performing a traditional law enforcement function (Center for Safer Schools, 2018). The NASRO triad even devoted one arm of the three to the function of law enforcer, which means 33% of the time, SROs should be enforcing laws (NASRO, 2018; Ryan et al., 2018). Furthermore, many SROs were happy to say they made few arrests and worked with the school to

find alternative solutions such as counseling or school discipline. These types of remedies were not necessarily indicative of restorative justice approaches as seen in current literature but are in the same realm (Payne & Welch, 2015; Song and Swearer, 2016). Current research also points toward a trend in police officers entering schools and criminalizing students (Burton, 2017; Peguero & Bracy, 2015; Ramey, 2015). This study furthermore contradicted current views on police incarcerating youth as the researcher detailed how SROs rarely introduced students to the criminal justice system via arrests or juvenile referrals. At the time of this writing there exists a large body of theorists purporting the “school to prison pipeline” is widespread (Kupchik, 2016; Pigott et al., 2018). Participants demonstrated the “pipeline” theory was not endemic in the two school districts demonstrating they were mindful of criminalization efforts and their effects. One SRO stated, ‘There seems to be no one large plague of SROs arresting kids and sending them to prison.’ Moreover, seven of 12 participants agreed the “school to prison pipeline” is not pervasive in the region, meaning their role do not regularly involve arresting students or placing them into the juvenile system. After much probative review, the researcher concluded that SROs are neither intentionally nor accidentally contributing to the “pipeline” issue. It should be said, however, a measure of this would only come from outcomes of the students in coming years, i.e., if they ended up in prison. Moreover, the “pipeline” theory is commonly studied in schools where there are disadvantaged backgrounds and little support with alternative programs to assist in fighting delinquency. The two research settings (school districts) do not fall into this category.

Specifically, SROs also displayed an effort to steer away from legal action when feasible related to themes which emerged from this study such as fights, social media issues, parental issues, some drug violations, and tobacco use. In looking at these themes closer, the researcher found SROs simply broke up fights most of the time and rarely dealt with assaults as a police matter (dependent on the victim pursuing charges). An arrest rarely occurred in these situations. Social media and parental issues materialized but were suppressed by the SRO, frequently resulting in legal guidance or discretion where an arrest was non-existent. Although technically a law enforcement function, these issues had no criminalization component in the end. Drugs, however, became a different area. SROs in one district claimed the school district wanted drug offenders arrested without question but this was not the case. Many SROs still chose discretion and not zero tolerance but many times, however, resulted in an arrest. One SRO stated, ‘The administration considers this a legal matter.’

The researcher noticed when an arrest did not occur the default remedy many times was informal counseling. Of these times, the SRO conducted the counseling alone which supports one aspect of the NASRO triad but many of the SROs showed displeasure with the term “counselor” and that talking to students in crisis was simply informal. One SRO stated, ‘We wear many hats and do many informal duties to help out.’ This left the researcher questioning the role of counselor as a component. Research showed that limiting the SRO to simply a law enforcement function was not productive (Thompson & Alvarez, 2013), and the research participants displayed that using alternative methods when feasible was the best outcome for the school.

In all, the researcher ascertained the law enforcer role was found to be a difficult area. The SRO, having full police powers, comes with expectations and needs precise discretion. The SRO's must understand the law enforcement arm and its function, but utilized in the school carefully and mindful of the detrimental effects of student criminalization. Although the study was not conducted in a disadvantaged or impoverished population, the SRO's awareness of harmful practices that keep students out of school and the justice system was credible.

Interaction components. The interaction component proved to be the strongest, most stable, and consistent category. The researcher identified consistent themes suggesting interacting with students was ubiquitous. Data showed the SROs were continually interacting with students and staff and was a platform for many other functions. Interacting with students became a co-occurring role where many times the SRO simply did not separate this into its own category. Even survey questions and interviews which did not specifically target the interaction component, manifested data showing SROs enjoy and strive in this category. For example, P9 was a master at multi-tasking where s/he untiringly communicated with students, staff, and administration as part of any task. P9 was also a DARE instructor and this contributed to the exceptional communication. Two other DARE certified SROs also showed high standards of interaction. Regardless, this made the role one large bundle of ever-changing components showing the variegated nature and art for success in the position. The SRO's convivial nature led the researcher to believe that this is an intrinsic quality and almost a necessity to succeed in the role. School districts and police departments considered and prioritized the amiable personality characteristics when officers apply for the position

(Captain Daniel Dunn, personal communication). All 12 participants agreed positive interactions were essential in the SRO position and they all succeeded in building positive relations. These relations varied from mild to very strong and consistent interconnections. Research stressed the importance of SRO/student relations, that not only are building relationships vital to make an everlasting impression, they are critical for program effectiveness (Anderson, 2018; Sullivan and Hausman, 2017). All four themes extracted from the research were a cohesive work of SROs gaining trust while building relationships where they hoped these methods were effective in prevention and over time produce good citizenship. Research aligns with the overall benefit to the student from a police connection that has multi-faceted benefits (Broaddus et al., 2013; Schweit & Mansic, 2017; Theriot & Orme, 2016).

The study revealed mixed outcomes when looking at NASRO's triad on the teacher and counselor aspect. According to NASRO, these two components are a big part of what the SRO does (as cited in Ryan et al., 2018). Few participants regarded themselves as a teacher. Some occasionally gave talks to classes (other than DARE) and others spoke with staff at meetings. One SRO stated, 'I would love to teach in the classroom more but the curriculum is tight and teachers just don't have the time to devote to an SRO coming in.' SROs infrequently saw themselves as counselors although they displayed many traits of informal counseling. SROs commonly mentioned, "wearing many hats," and counseling students or giving guidance was something they performed with some consistency. The findings showed characteristics of a teacher and counselor role but was not a defined or solidified function.

Changes in self perceptions. Self-perception changes of the role became an area of negativity for some but for most non-existent. This category resulted in little data where the researcher concluded the SRO's role established that any perception of what they did had no comparative value. Each participant had his or her own procedural method, many of which varied amongst each other. The perception formulated by the SRO was suitable for their practice or locale. The preconceived notions which existed by the SRO and what the role might be (based on training accepted practices) had little effect of their operations even though it caused some role conflict. An example of this was the aforementioned issues of traffic directing and persistent door monitoring. Research showed that SROs commonly battle the expectation dilemma and although there are common characteristics for the job there is no universal definition of what an SRO is and does (Hutchinson, 2013; Johnson, 2016; Pollock, 2014).

Many participants revealed an interesting occurrence that the researcher noticed during observations as well. The author mentioned this in Chapter 4 as a persona shift. The shift involved an unintentional phenomenon whereby the participants, at varying degrees, began to shed the role of a police officer and act, think, and characterize themselves as school staff member. This metamorphic action meant integration was unabridged. The placement of an SRO five days a week at a school with minimal contact from one's police agency showed the participants took on an education leadership-like role and showed signs of ownership of this position. The resulting behaviors were positive, displaying fluency in school practice, fitting in to the atmosphere, and a commitment to a specific function. This, however, compromised their tactical establishment and mindset at times to include playing with students at recess, doing

school related tasks contrary to SRO duties, and the absence of a dealing with criminal circumstances everyday compared to a traditional police officer. P11 stated, 'It's a fine line, you have to be part of the school and certain things come with that, at times I don't even feel like an officer.'

Other roles conceived by the SRO not listed in the three meta-categories.

The three meta-categories of this study adequately represented the framework in which the SRO frequently worked, albeit an inter-related fusion of other factors was present. Safety/security, law enforcement, and interactions were the core in participant's experiences, meaning these three roles showed sustainable areas of operation that was consistent throughout all twelve's perpetual function. However, many exhibited varying and diverse functions in methodology that went beyond the three categories of this study as well as the NASRO triad. The three main roles which emerged not listed in the focused categories are discussed as follows.

Student interaction was the concentration of one part of the study but SROs showed they had much interaction with staff members as well, enough to warrant an independent theme noteworthy to this study. The staff interaction was an enjoyable experience, one that SROs did not expect when taking this job. All SROs claimed the social interaction with support staff, teachers, and administrators was positive and beneficial and as a result, fostered good relations with the school in general. The SRO/staff relations reflected the successful integration making the participants part of the "school family" and created a functional and effective SRO. Research supported this product claiming good staff and SRO engagement avoids unneeded conflict and yields beneficial outcomes (Schweit & Mansic, 2017). At times there were conflicts in decision

making and legal issues but the cohesion developed between the SRO and school staff elevated animosity and vexation. Consequently, the SROs interaction became personal at times where most divulged they became personal friends with staff members.

Participants seemed to all have a friendship story ranging from talking about each other's family to traveling off-duty to sporting events.

Another area that materialized involved a contentious relationship with other police officers, and at times, police supervisors. Many SROs seemed to be at odds with non-SRO police officers about the validity of the job. Although disappointing, it had little effect on how they functioned amongst the criticism and laxity. There are many assignments in law enforcement such as traffic, tactical units, narcotics officers, detectives, etc. and commonly viewed as the trendy or "cool" part of the career. Many police dramas do not feature police officers in schools talking to students and the SROs pay the price for this in their respective departments. The researcher heard the term "kiddie cop" several times throughout the research. This was either by other officers or the SROs stating how officers sometimes refer to them. Although this appeared to mildly irritate the participants they overcame the perception, usually laughing at the affront, and persevered in their role. This was still a challenge to the SROs as it made some feel as outcasts in the police family. One SRO mentioned, 'It's a shame I get looked down upon by the guys just because I chose to work with kids.' Although this was not a bright line viewpoint it was present enough to be a small stress factor and could have the potential to impede the SROs from a strong commitment to the school if not repressed. Research points out SROs are police officers and trained and socialized in the police culture, making it difficult to play both roles (Fisher & Hennessy, 2016; Haas et al., 2015).

Some, but not all SROs, claimed supervisors were not involved in much of what they did. This left them with the feeling of unimportance and little direction. SROs further mentioned supervisors rarely visited them at the schools and made little effort to meet with the school administration to discuss policies or performance. This not only caused confusion for the program but left a gap in communication and needed collaboration between the two organizations. This was not only a safety factor in overall tactical planning but did little to aid in helping to define the SROs role. Rhodes (2015) explained the importance of being able to successfully navigate two separate environments (the school and the police department) which could leave the SRO's perception of the job in state of uncertainty.

The researcher noted many times data could not be categorized easily due to the span of ages and grade levels. Drugs were not prevalent in a kindergarten classroom and communication skills for a first grader in crisis would not necessarily work for a high school senior. The research covered K-12 and the findings sometimes only applied to a certain group where data was stronger for a certain grade level. This influenced how SROs functioned and responded to scenarios and settings. The researcher felt it was important to bring out these differences in the findings to convey role variations were sometimes based on grade levels in which the SROs worked. The three levels of school's the participants worked in consisted of elementary, middle, and high schools. The following are findings that note the variations. Elementary SROs quickly became the most active participants to observe. They involved themselves in all three meta-categories but found themselves constantly dealing with small students who wanted attention and lengthy conversation. This was rewarding but it put a strain on the

elementary SRO to complete the necessary daily tasks. The middle school SROs showed fundamental similarity to the elementary level but were in an environment of students making physical and mental transitions in life causing the SRO function to deal with them more maturely. This was the level drugs, tobacco, and social media were taking hold and the participants at middle schools had to handle it carefully. The interaction went down and this was causation for a middle school SRO to be proactive in their contacts keeping in mind that some students did not think it was “cool” to speak with the police officer anymore. Roles were also altered at the high school level where the SROs placed emphasis on security. Interaction was present but at a mature level. The researcher concluded all three levels produced a different SRO believing that although most officers could operate at all levels, the differences are distinct and recognized amongst each participant.

Unexpected Findings

The researcher discovered overall good relationships between SROs and school administration. Despite the concept for police and schools to work together, many times, on a professional level, there seemed to be a distinct divide in situational thinking. On the surface, the group characteristics purported both entities working together sharing a common goal; good outcomes of students and a healthy and safe educational experience for the school. However, some interviews and phone-ins showed SROs felt the cohesion was not optimal at times. Some SROs reported the administration would hide things from them or simply disregard their association with certain incidents. The biggest complaint surrounded administrative officials finding illegal drugs and would not report anything to the SRO. For example, one participant stated s/he finds out on a weekly basis

that the staff found drugs (or a fight occurred) yet the administration never notified the SRO. Another stated, 'They [administrators] will try to minimize what happens.' The SROs experiencing this, felt the administration was apprehensive to bring certain affairs to their attention because police action was probable without the use of discretion by the SRO. Many times, the school wanted to handle certain incidents internally using school discipline and not make it a "police situation." Other times, SROs felt these instances were not deliberate and either the administration was too busy or felt the issue was trivial and SRO intervention not needed.

Some of the SROs experiencing this issue felt an underlying divide that highlighted two differing careers (law enforcement and educational administration) not able to be readily fused. Many admitted day to day operations were satisfactory but other times different viewpoints on managing incidents led to this disunity leaving the SRO to feel the following sentiments: (a) left out of the educational process, (b) questioning the cohesiveness of the relationship with principals, (c) being in a confused state of balancing the law enforcement role with the position of an SRO, and (d) having a constitutional responsibility to take action upon discovery of contraband and/or illegal activity. The emphasis on unity in this study of the SRO's role is consistent with what is in the literature regarding SRO integration in schools. Theriot (2013) referred to the emphasis placed on SROs, teachers, and principals who should have a perspicuous idea of each other's function. As mentioned above, many positive social connections were made between the SRO and staff yet the operational aspect left SROs somewhat discontent.

A second unexpected finding was based on the philosophy that even though an SRO is a specialized position within law enforcement s/he is a police officer first and an

SRO second. Role predicaments can occur within any special assignment in law enforcement. Assignments to a special unit, other than traditional patrol, can cause an officer to lose touch with the mainstream duties (M. Bruegenhemke, personal communication, March 22, 2019). The SROs spent most of the time in a school during the school year performing school related duties. However, during times such as winter, spring, and summer breaks, the police department assigned them back to other duties which could include patrol duties, public relations duties, or other non-SRO functions. These duties seemed to cause minor complications with the SROs and played a factor in job competency and safety. One example was a participant who chose to work in the patrol division during winter break of two weeks. This meant going back to “street patrol” answering police calls and general law enforcement duties. The participant stated s/he forgot how to use the police car computer as well as some of the basic equipment operations. Another participant also worked in the patrol division during spring break and stated s/he was responding to a domestic disturbance and did not recall the details of the domestic assault laws.

Chapter 2 documented school bullying as being commonplace in current literature. However, this study produced very little on the subject even though research shows it is the most common violent act in schools (Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017; Patchin & Hinduja, 2016). The SROs said problems never materialized to support any claims of bullying even though SROs were cognizant of this problem. The SROs took bullying to the extent which consisted of an awareness as every SRO in this study had knowledge of the problem. The researcher therefore surmised either 1)

bullying was not a problem at the research sights or 2) The SROs did not properly recognize the issue.

Lastly, overall data indicated the interaction component showed the highest prominence of the three meta-categories in which the SROs functioned. However, phone-in reports had a higher percentage of safety/security and law enforcement incidents. The researcher followed up with participants and attributed this to a tendency for the SROs to report only appealing incidents such as fights and drug seizures. These types of cases tend to tell a good story as opposed to a student interaction experience which the SRO saw as uneventful. The researcher also discerned the Hawthorne effect may be partially to blame given the researcher is also in law enforcement. The following table represents the frequency of each meta-category via phone-ins.

Table 6

Frequency of categories from phone-ins

Research categories	Frequency
Safety/Security	44%
Law enforcement	27%
Interaction/relationship building	19%
Other	10%

Although there was a higher percentage of safety/security and law enforcement phone-in reports than interaction or other incidents, the researcher attributed this to an “interest factor” meaning SROs typically reported events they felt were appealing as opposed to an insipid, featureless report.

Recommendations

The research study revealed differences on how SROs utilize their role compared to each other, current literature, and the philosophies of NASRO. Hence, the following recommendations for SROs are based on the findings of this research as well as current literature to benefit optimal SRO integration in schools for a successful outcome.

The SRO operated under the oversight of both the police department and the school district causing the SRO to function between these two large entities with polarity. Each organization pulled the SRO in various directions and many times, the institutional heads never or rarely met to discuss the SRO position. This may explain the non-uniformity of the role as its “every SRO for themselves.” The researcher recommends there be more involvement and better and frequent communication between school administration and police commanders allowing the SRO to have a better idea of expectations. SROs could have a monthly collaborative meeting discussing methods and strategies, eventually arriving at a unified practice. McKenna (2016) stated, “Prior research has noted an inherent role conflict in policing in terms of the duties that officers are expected to fulfill” (p.287). This recommendation would give the SRO more direction about the job expectations where a clear understanding of the mission is outlined at the management level. In the end, the SRO should be accountable to his or her chain of command, i.e., the police supervisor who collaborates with district administration regularly.

Both police departments involved in this study had written policies that outline the general duties of the SRO. These policies derived from a law enforcement perspective authored by police management. Many times, schools are unaware or have

not read the police policy and there was rarely exhaustive coordination between the police and schools to refine the SRO duties (Mckenna et al., 2016b). It would not be prudent, however, for the school district to write a directive to the SRO who is not an employee, yet the SRO spends most of the time working with the school administration. The researcher recommends each school district have a written policy or memorandum of understanding (MOU) that establishes and delineates an SRO's mission. The MOU clarifies the roles and the SRO's expectations with all entities of the school. Specifically, the MOU could address cohesion with school security, the separation of law enforcement and discipline, and the denotation of acting as a teacher and counselor.

Many SROs commented about SRO training. The research showed disparities in levels and hours of training as well as unsatisfactory content. Farm (2018) believed SROs were invaluable and should have proper training. The researcher recommends the basic course which is either State sponsored or given by NASRO followed by yearly advanced SRO training on trending school-based law enforcement themes. State and national conferences are also available to the SRO who would benefit by networking and collaborating with other SROs across the state or country. Tactical training should also be incorporated into an SRO's curriculum. Unfortunately, today this is a widespread fear and although the researcher does not recommend that a tactical role dominate the SRO's function, it should be considered.

Conclusion

“The relationship between educational institutions and the criminal justice system is complex” (Owens, 2017, p. 11). Many times, SROs find themselves in the middle of

this intricate position assessing what the real role is and to whom do they serve in this undertaking for a “one size does not fit all” position. The SRO function is a contentious topic in the discussion of resources for schools yet the public demand for safer educational institutions is of utmost importance. As modern law enforcement evolves into expanding and diverse areas coupled with the need for increased service and social justice remedies, the expectation of a purpose-built solution for today’s youth has placed a heavy burden on the SRO, but still questions remain about the role. As noted previously in Chapter 2, there is uncertainty and conflict in the SRO’s function and research on their efficacy. Nonetheless, SROs still manage to bring a sizeable amount of resources and positivity to the world of education. SROs can only persevere and do their best to adapt to working in the world of education, one that may be uncharacteristic to the mainstream functions of a comprehensive law enforcement official.

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Appendix A**INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. How did you become an SRO?
2. How long have you been an SRO?
3. Can you talk about the importance of SRO specific training and what training you have?
4. What do you bring to the position of SRO?
5. How would you describe the role of the SRO?
6. What specific role do you play in the area of safety/security at your school?
7. What are the biggest concerns regarding school safety and the SRO?
8. Do you feel you are prepared to deal with school shootings? Why or why not?
9. How do you think students perceive you as being vital to their safety?
10. How often do you intervene in situations where safety or security is involved?
11. How often do you intervene in situations where you are acting as a law enforcer?
12. Are you aware of the “school to prison pipeline” theory? (If yes) What do you think of it?
13. What are your feelings about the school handling discipline or disruptions (fights, bullying, or being defiant to adults) compared to the legal system?
14. What percentage of the job as SRO is spent interacting with students in an effort to build relationships?

15. What impact does positive interactions have between the SRO/police and students?
16. Are there any negative aspects of interacting with students?
17. How often do you intervene in situations where you are building relations and doing positive things with students?

Appendix B

SRO SURVEY

1. What best states the reason you became an SRO?

- A. To open up opportunities for my career. i.e., to build a better resume**
- B. Because I like working with young people/students**
- C. It seems to be a more rewarding job than traditional patrol duties**
- D. I was assigned to this position**
- E. None of the above**

2. How long have you been an SRO?

- 1-4 years 5-9 years 10-14 years 15-19 years More than 20
years**

3. How much certified training have you received as an SRO?

- ___ None**
- ___ 1-40 hours**
- ___ 40-80 hours**
- ___ 80-120 hours**
- ___ More than 120 hours**

4. Are you familiar with the NASRO triad?

- ___ Yes**
- ___ No**

5. If yes, how much do you adhere to the triad?

- Not at all Somewhat Adhere Not applicable Mostly adhere Strictly Adhere**

6. What is the best part of being an SRO?

- A. The schedule
- B. Working with young people/students
- C. Working with school district staff (change of environment from being in the police department)
- D. The freedom the job offers
- E. The challenge of working in a large school district as the SRO
- F. All of the above

7. The SRO schedule (day shift with weekends off usually) was a big factor in choosing this position.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly
Disagree

8. For an SRO, school safety and security should be the number one priority.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly
Disagree

9. I feel I am adequately prepared for a school shooting incident as an SRO.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly
Disagree

10. What percentage do you act as the law enforcer in the school (making arrests, law violations, police action taken, etc.) as an SRO?

- ___ 0 - 20%
- ___ 20 - 40%
- ___ 40-60%

___ **60-80%**

___ **80-100%**

11. The SRO should be involved in the discipline process.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

12. I feel that the “school to prison pipeline” is a legitimate theory.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree nor Disagree Agree

Strongly Agree

13. I feel that positive interaction with the students is essential to being an SRO.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

14. I have built many positive relationships with students while in this position.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

15. How do you feel the students you serve perceive you as an SRO?

Unfavorable Somewhat unfavorable Neutral Favorable Very

Favorable

Appendix C

OBSERVATION FIELD REPORT

Researcher: Chris Muench

Date: _____

Location: _____

Time: _____

SRO: _____

Grade level: _____

SRO's role in the 3 distinguished categories

Safety/Security:

Law Enforcement:

Student interaction/Relationship building:

Other Notes:

(SROs proactivity, body language of SRO, how students perceive SRO, general attitude toward students, non-verbal cues, fluidity of how SRO functions, does the SRO have a routine?)

Appendix D

Telephone Check-in for SROs

Date: _____

Time: _____

SRO: _____

Location calling from: _____

Subject of call: _____

Any associated police report numbers: _____

Notes:

Appendix E



Appendix F**LINDENWOOD**

Research Study Consent Form

A Qualitative Exploration of the School Resource Officer's Role in Safety/Security, Law Enforcement, and Relationship Building in Two K-12 School Districts.

FOR DEPARTMENT HEAD - CHIEF OF POLICE

Basic information about this study:

- We are interested in learning about what the role of the SRO is.
- SROs will be involved in an interview, an open ended survey, and completing a journal.
- Risks of participation include nothing that is detrimental to their job.

SROs are asked to participate in a research study being conducted by Chris Muench under the guidance of Dr. Francesco Giuseffii at Lindenwood University. Being in a research study is voluntary, and they are free to stop at any time.

The participants will be involved in an interview with the researcher which will be question and answer. The participants will also be filling out a survey in writing.

Observations will be done of the SRO by the researcher. A phone check-in will also be conducted by the SRO to the researcher to record any significant data at it comes in.

This study will range from the start of school 2018 to the end of the school year in 2019.

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research or concerns about the study, or if you feel under any pressure to enroll or to continue to participate in this study, you may contact the Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board

Director, Michael Leary, at (636) 949-4730 or mleary@lindenwood.edu. You can contact the researcher, Chris Muench directly at 314-280-4803 or ctm6927@hotmail.com.

I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I will also be given a copy of this consent form for my records. I, as the administrative head and Chief of Police, give permission for SROs to participate in the research described above.

Appendix G

LINDENWOOD

Research Study Consent Form

A Qualitative Exploration of the School Resource Officer's Role in
Safety/Security, Law Enforcement, and Relationship building in Two K-12 School
Districts.

Before reading this consent form, please know:

- Your decision to participate is your choice
- You will have time to think about the study
- You will be able to withdraw from this study at any time
- You are free to ask questions about the study at any time

After reading this consent form, we hope that you will know:

- Why we are conducting this study
- What you will be required to do
- What are the possible risks and benefits of the study
- What alternatives are available, if the study involves treatment or therapy
- What to do if you have questions or concerns during the study

Basic information about this study:

- We are interested in learning about what the role of the SRO is.
- You will be involved in an interview, a survey, observations, and phone check-ins.
- Risks of participation include nothing that is detrimental to your job.
- No students or minors will be involved or studied.
- No school staff will be involved or studied

LINDENWOOD

Research Study Consent Form

A Qualitative Exploration of the School Resource Officer's Role in Safety/Security, Law Enforcement, and Relationship building in Two K-12 School Districts.

You are asked to participate in a research study being conducted by Chris Muench under the guidance of Dr. Francesco Giuseffii at Lindenwood University. Being in a research study is voluntary, and you are free to stop at any time. Before you choose to participate, you are free to discuss this research study with family, friends, or a physician. Do not feel like you must join this study until all of your questions or concerns are answered. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form.

Why is this research being conducted?

We are doing this study explore what the functions are of the SRO. We will be asking about 12 other people to answer these questions.

What am I being asked to do?

The participants will be involved in an interview with the researcher which will be question and answer. The interview may be audio recorded but only for the researcher's use. The participants will also be filling out a "forced choice" type survey in writing.

Observations of the SRO will also be conducted by the researcher at the SROs convenience and only at the will of the SRO. If during the observation circumstances arise of any kind dictating termination, the researcher will comply. Telephone check-ins will be utilized by the researcher. This comprises communication by the SRO to report any significant or data related event that the researcher would want to record.

How long will I be in this study?

This study will range from the start of school 2018 to the end of the school year in 2019.

Who is supporting this study? The study will be self-supported.

What are the risks of this study?

We will not be collecting any information that will identify you.

We will be collecting data that could identify you, but each survey response will receive a code so that we will not know who answered each survey. The code connecting you and your data will be destroyed as soon as possible.

What are the benefits of this study?

You may benefit from this study. These potential benefits are reflecting on your role as an SRO and helping to define it.

Will I receive any compensation? Two \$50-dollar Visa cash cards will be placed in a random drawing and given to the two winners.

What if I do not choose to participate in this research?

It is always your choice to participate in this study. You may withdraw at any time. You may choose not to answer any questions or perform tasks that make you uncomfortable.

If you decide to withdraw, you will not receive any penalty or loss of benefits. If you would like to withdraw from a study, please use the contact information found at the end of this form.

What if I am injured during this research?

If you think you have been injured as a result of taking part in this research study, tell the person in charge of the research study as soon as possible. Please use the contact information at the end of this form.

Decisions to pay you or give you other compensation for the injury will be made by Lindenwood University. You do not give up your legal rights by signing this form.

What if new information becomes available about the study?

During the course of this study, we may find information that could be important to you and your decision to participate in this research. We will notify you as soon as possible if such information becomes available.

How will you keep my information private?

We will do everything we can to protect your privacy. We do not intend to include information that could identify you in any publication or presentation. Any information we collect will be stored by the researcher in a secure location. The only people who will be able to see your data are: members of the research team, qualified staff of Lindenwood University, and representatives of state or federal agencies.

Your study participation in this study may be observed by a student enrolled in a course taught by the faculty supervisor, Dr. Giuseffi. Please let us know if you are willing to be observed by checking one of the boxes below:

---- It is okay if others observe my participation

---- It is not okay if others observe my participation

How can I withdraw from this study?

Notify the research team immediately if you would like to withdraw from this research study.

Who can I contact with questions or concerns?

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research or concerns about the study, or if you feel under any pressure to enroll or to continue to participate in

this study, you may contact the Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board Director, Michael Leary, at (636) 949-4730 or mleary@lindenwood.edu. You can contact the researcher, Chris Muench directly at 314-280-4803 or ctm6927@hotmail.com.

I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I will also be given a copy of this consent form for my records. I consent to my participation in the research described above.

Appendix H

***(This is the email ready to be sent to the schools)**

To: xxxxxxxx – xxxxxx Schools

I am working on my doctorate at Lindenwood. For my dissertation I am doing research on the role of the SRO. Right now, I have 13 SROs participating in my study and I wanted get your blessing as the representative or xxxxxxxx to conduct some research with the SROs. Some of the research will be conducted outside (police station or other places) but the observation portion will be at various xxxxxxxx schools.

I will be cognizant not to interfere in any school activities or SRO actions. No students or minors will be involved, photographed, or video/audiotaped. No staff, teachers, or parents will be involved. I will abide by all visitor guidelines and will be accompanied by the SRO at all times while on xxxxxxxx grounds.

xxxxxxx, xxxxxx [xxxxxxx@xxxmo.org]

Dr. xxxxxxx,

My name is Chris Muench and I am a doctoral student at Lindenwood. I am doing research for my dissertation on various roles of the SRO. My qualitative study participants will mostly be xxxxxx SROs and some xxxxxxxx Police SROs as well. Since some of them are in the xxxxxxxxxx School District as a courtesy I am making sure this will be okay with you. There will be no names mentioned in the study (officers, schools, specific locations, etc.). I was an SRO for several years and I will not be interfering with their duties while research is conducted. This will include surveys, interviews, and observations all which will take place at their convenience. No students or minors will

be involved. No staff, teachers, or parents will be involved. There will be no photographs or audio/video recording. Please let me know if this is satisfactory.

Thank you,

Vitae**Colleges and Universities**

1994: Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice, with a minor in History from the Southeast Missouri State University; 2014-2015: Master of Science in Criminal Justice Administration from Lindenwood University; 2016-present: pursuing Doctorate of Education in Instructional Leadership (expected graduation date in December of 2019) from Lindenwood University