

KELLY, CHRISTOPHER, Ed.D. The Perceptions of School Resource Officers Regarding Their Effects on African American Students and the School-to-Prison Pipeline. (2021)
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In the wake of the many tragic and heart-wrenching school shootings we have endured in our nation, the need for adding more school resource officers (SROs) to increase the safety measures in public schools was an added emphasis by President Barack Obama, particularly after the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in 2012. Placing more SROs in schools was the centerpiece in President Obama's plan to improve school safety to protect children and reduce gun violence. More currently, in 2018, there were also a number of school shootings throughout the United States. This has led to an outpouring of political activism in the realm of gun control. The political activism has been notably sparked by the student survivors of the Parkland, Florida episode of violence that took place at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School on February 14, 2018.

After reviewing the history of school shootings and episodes of violence in the United States, I was compelled to wonder about SROs' opinions about school shootings and other matters. Few studies in the existing literature include the authentic voices of SROs. The purpose of this study is to give voice to former SROs in order to gain their insights into their perceptions of their training, work, and impact. Furthermore, this study investigated how these former SROs perceived their place in the phenomenon known as the "school-to-prison pipeline." During this study, five former SRO participants shared

their perspectives on a number of topics and in the process hopefully filled a void in the existing literature.

As a result of my research, I found that SROs described how it was different being a cop on the street versus being an officer in the school. I also discovered that the SROs had mixed feelings about the school-to-prison pipeline phenomenon. As a result of my study, I was able to make the following recommendations for local School Boards of Education and law enforcement agencies: *Recommendation 1: There should be minimum requirements that law enforcement officers meet to become eligible to become an SRO. Recommendation 2: Stakeholders of the school should be involved in the hiring process of SROs for their school in particular. Recommendation 3: Local School Boards of Education, the superintendent, central office personnel, school administration, SROs, and other law enforcement personnel need to routinely review, monitor, and track the data about the school-to-prison pipeline for their schools.*

THE PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS REGARDING
THEIR EFFECTS ON AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS AND THE
SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE

by

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Committee Chair

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This doctoral dissertation is dedicated to everyone affected and the families of victims
George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Elijah McClain, Tamir Rice,
Rayshard Brooks, Freddie Gray, Philando Castile, Alton Sterling, Walter Scott,
Eric Garner, Trayvon Martin, Officer Brian Sicknick,
and the countless others who have lost their lives or who are adversely affected
by the two pandemics in the United States—
systemic racism and COVID-19.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation, written by Christopher Kelly, has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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To anyone with a dream or goal in mind, I share with you a quote I often refer to from Denzel Washington's Acceptance Speech from the 2017 NAACP Image Awards: *"Without commitment, you'll never start, but more importantly, without consistency, you'll never finish. It's not easy . . . So, keep working, keep striving, never give up, fall down seven times, get up eight. Ease is a greater threat to progress than hardship. Ease is a greater threat to progress than hardship! So, keep moving, keep growing, keep learning. See you at work."*

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Many school districts across the nation increased school resource officers' presence in their schools after the 2000 Columbine school shooting. For instance, Denver Public Schools (DPS) was one of the school districts that increased the presence of school resource officers (SROs); however, this led to a perhaps unintended consequence. By 2004, the number of students referred to the court system by DPS had increased by over 70%. Forty-two percent of referrals were for minor offenses such as obscene language or disruptive appearance (Teske & Huff, 2011). Clayton County, Georgia, a school district of 50,000, had a similar experience. The district started a SRO program in 1995. By 2003, Clayton County courts had experienced a 1,248% increase in referrals from schools. According to court officials, 90% of these referrals were for infractions traditionally handled by school administrators (Teske & Huff, 2011). Like Denver Public Schools and Clayton County, Georgia, many school systems across the nation have had to reevaluate how school resource officers are used in schools since the 2000 Columbine incident. Since the first SRO program began in Flint, Michigan, in the 1950s, partnerships between schools and the police have been prevalent in America. However, federal incentives beginning in the 1990s significantly increased the number of SROs being used in public schools in the United States (Brown, 2006a; Kupchik & Bracy, 2009; Nolan, 2011).

This dissertation focused on SROs' perceptions regarding their work and their effects on African American students. In this study, I sought to consider what type of training SROs undertook, how SROs believe students perceived them, how SROs impact school safety, and how they understood their role in, as well as their effect on the phenomenon called the "school-to-prison pipeline" (Alexander, 2010). In conducting this study, I interviewed former SROs to gather their authentic perspectives on various topics and issues about the research questions that I state below. Through my study, I hoped to fill a gap in the existing literature regarding how SROs perceived their job training, duties, and responsibilities. Most existing research focuses primarily on how other stakeholders, including school administrators, teachers, students and parents, perceive SROs (Brown, 2006a; Brown & Benedict, 2005; Johnson, 1999; May et al., 2004; Travis & Coon, 2005).

Statement of the Problem

In the wake of the devastating and tragic shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary School in December 2012, President Barack Obama emphasized the need for school resource officers in schools. School resource officer placement in schools was the centerpiece in President Obama's plan to improve school safety to protect children and reduce gun violence. This explicitly called for creating federal incentives for schools to hire SROs and adding up to 1,000 more SROs and counselors to schools across the United States (White House, 2013). In 2013, 144 agencies received funding through the Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) Office in the U.S. Department of Justice to hire 370 new SROs (COPS, n.d.).

In 2018, there were a number of school shootings throughout the United States. Ahmed and Walker (2018) reported that in 2018, there were on average 1.4 school shootings every week in the United States. This has led to an outpouring of political activism in the realm of gun control, as well as serious discussion in the political spectrum about arming teachers to help prevent episodes of violence in schools across the United States. The political activism has been notably sparked by the student survivors of the Parkland, Florida episode of violence that took place at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School on February 14, 2018.

After personally reviewing the list of shootings in 2018, I was compelled to wonder about SROs' opinions about school shootings and other matters. After reviewing the literature on this dissertation topic, I concluded that few studies include the authentic voices of SROs. Additionally, arming teacher/school personnel members and the paradigm shift for some individuals to the philosophy that there is a need for more school personnel members to possess guns to protect the lives of students and school personnel is a difficult political issue. As a Black male, I am particularly mindful of the current problematic relationship between law enforcement and people of color in the United States that stems from multiple tragic incidents of violence from police against unarmed African American men. Therefore, I consider the idea of arming more school personnel members and armed law enforcement officers in the building to be an issue of concern in and of itself.

People of color are already subject to racial profiling, police brutality, and killings in the United States. Moreover, students of color are historically and traditionally the

students who fall victim to the school-to-prison pipeline. Since there is an absence of studies regarding whether SRO programs are successful, or for that matter, what it is that SROs are trained to do, it is difficult to measure the effectiveness of these programs or understand the SROs' experiences. While Myrstol (2011) argues that there is broad support for SRO programs among community stakeholders like parents and students, there is not an abundance of information coming from SROs themselves. I have identified a need to further access and listen to the authentic voices of former SROs.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to interview former SROs and law enforcement officers who were no longer in the SRO role to gain insights into their perceptions of their training, work, and impact. Furthermore, I wanted to research how SROs perceived their place in the "school-to-prison pipeline," specifically related to African American students and other students of color. Similar to how Theriot and Orme (2016) examined the effects that interactions with SROs had on students' perceptions of their own safety at school, this research focuses on SROs' perceptions regarding their relationships with students. This focus was imperative. It is important to note that one negative interaction with law enforcement, whether individually or in a public setting around other students and stakeholders, can change the perceptions of not only students but all stakeholders for the worse. However, if positive relationships are built between SROs, the school, and the community, this will help build and sustain a positive perception among all stakeholders. Through this dissertation, I hoped to emphasize the positive aspects of SROs' relationships with students.

Research Questions

I interviewed five former or retired school resource officers in North Carolina. The overarching research question was: *What are the experiences and perceptions of School Resource Officers (SROs)?* Other questions were:

1. What training did the SROs receive, and how did the training apply to their work in schools?
2. What are SROs' perceptions of their role in the school-to-prison pipeline and their reactions to high-profile cases involved in the Black Lives Matter movement?
3. What effects do SROs feel that they have on school safety?

Researcher Perspective

I became interested in this topic because in my first year as principal a brand-new SRO with no experience as a SRO or in the school setting was assigned to my middle school by the police department. As I began to develop a relationship with the SRO, he divulged his lack of experience and background with schools. This alarmed me, because I immediately thought of all of the issues that could arise in the school setting that could go awry. I also thought about how the SRO would be received by the school community if he was not culturally responsive toward the stakeholders he was serving in my school. I knew I had to give him the background context of my school and bring him up to speed regarding our student demographics. What alarmed me the most was that he told me he did not receive any formal training from the police department or attend any SRO trainings on how to be an effective SRO. Up until this point in my career as an

administrator, I had always worked with SROs who, at a minimum, had previous experience as SROs or had received some type of formal training. Most of the SROs I had worked with had considerable experience as SROs.

After contemplating this information about my newly assigned SRO, I decided to conduct some informal trainings with him utilizing PowerPoints that I had collected over the years from attorney presentations. The slides pertained to the legal aspects of handling student discipline with law enforcement. I also used real case scenarios involving videos where SROs had made the wrong decisions in handling students and other stakeholders. I pulled these videos and information from my *ELC 750: Advanced Seminar in School Law Research* course that I had taken in the spring semester of 2016 in the Educational Leadership program at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. My professor was Dr. Carl Lashley.

In reviewing the information and videos with my SRO, we could have an honest and candid dialog about the proper procedures and protocols that he would need to follow in the school environment. We discussed how vital it would be to establish a good working relationship and build impactful relationships with students and all other stakeholders. Because our middle school was approximately 80% economically disadvantaged, we discussed how poverty impacts students and stakeholders. We also considered how we would have to be even more in tune with community needs when enacting equitable culturally responsive techniques when dealing with students and all other stakeholders. I was able to discuss with him the overarching angle of social justice

and how it applies when working in our environment where students may have only received the meals that are offered in school for the entire week.

After discussing these issues and completing the training, the SRO thanked me and expressed how he had neither thought of any of these types of issues nor had anyone in the police department or law enforcement bring it to his attention. One of the issues that I knew might be sensitive to him was law enforcement being overly aggressive with students of color and how this aggressiveness relates to the school-to-prison pipeline phenomenon. As a Black male and a leader in education, I had thought about these concerns every day, so I did not shy away from discussing these topics with him. The videos that I reviewed with him pertained directly to SROs being overly aggressive toward students of color.

I have often reflected deeply upon this experience I had as a then first-year principal. This is where the idea for this study originated. If I had not taken the time or did not have the knowledge and resources to share with the beginning SRO, he would have gone into his role as SRO oblivious to not only the environment of the public school setting, but with no skills or knowledge to help him manage student behavior, deal with specific emergencies, or begin to relate to students of color who live in poverty. I thought about the many SROs and administrators across the country who may be in a similar situation to mine during my first year as principal. There may be those who may not have formed a relationship with one another or administrators who simply may not know how to train a SRO. I realized how detrimental this could be, particularly the legal aspect of handling student discipline with law enforcement, along with the urgency and importance

of being culturally responsive. I thought about all of the cases I have followed in the news about when a SRO has been overly aggressive toward a student. In most instances the student was a student of color, hence my interest in the SROs' effects on the school-to-prison pipeline.

Upon further reflection, I realized that the administrators' and SROs' extent of experience did not necessarily matter. Any issue could arise if the SRO were not properly trained, and regardless of the years served at a particular school, the SRO may also not be culturally responsive. This deep reflection, and a yearning to explore what SROs think about these issues related to my topic are what led me to want to conduct this study. What motivated me to complete this study was that I would allow readers to hear the authentic voices of former SROs about the issues they encounter and affect daily in public schools. By interviewing former SROs, I emphasized the positive aspects of their relationship with students and their views concerning the topic of this dissertation.

Brief Description of Methods

In this study I utilized a basic qualitative study approach. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) state that qualitative researchers conducting a basic qualitative study are interested in (a) how people interpret their experiences, (b) how they construct their worlds, and (c) what meaning they attribute to their experiences. In a basic qualitative study, the researcher is interested in understanding the meaning a phenomenon has for those involved. "Meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting" (Crotty, 1998, pp. 42–43). For this study, I interviewed five former or retired SROs in North Carolina. It was important that I chose to interview former or

retired SROs so they could reflect upon their careers as SROs and provide their adept point of views. After interviewing the five SROs, I analyzed the data I collected from the interviews through qualitative coding. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) describe coding as “nothing more than assigning some sort of shorthand designation to various aspects of your data so that you can easily retrieve specific pieces of the data” (p. 199).

Significance of This Study

Given the current state of relations between people of color and law enforcement in the United States, it was essential that I allowed the voices of former SROs to be heard. In this study, I accessed the voices of the former SROs because this is an identified area in education that needed to be explored and shared as much as possible for the betterment of all schools and communities. My study relied on the former SROs being directly involved with the topic and reflecting upon their own perspectives. This study is uniquely significant in that I lent an outlet for the former SROs to voice their perspectives, which have not traditionally been included in previous studies. Paramount to my study was understanding how these former SROs viewed their own presence in public schools, including their feelings regarding staffs’, students’, and the public’s perceptions of safety at school; their sense of their impact on African American students in particular; and their beliefs about how their work affected the phenomenon titled the “school-to-prison pipeline.” This study makes a formidable contribution to existing research by allowing SROs the opportunity and voice to attempt to bridge and mend the fragmented relationship in the United States between law enforcement and people of color, particularly the African American community.

Overview of Chapters

In Chapter II, I examine the literature concerning school resource officers. I review scholarship that regards students' and stakeholder's perceptions of SROs, as well as the interpersonal relationships between students and SROs. I also focus on SROs' effects on crime and the "school-to-prison pipeline." Additionally, I explore how SROs perceive their own job duties and responsibilities and how they are trained to become SROs. In Chapter III, I present the methods I used in this study, while in Chapter IV, I report the findings of the data collection. I conclude in Chapter V by answering the research questions, connecting my findings to the existing research, and examining the study's implications.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this literature review, I concentrate primarily on literature focusing on students' and stakeholders' perceptions of SROs, the interpersonal relationship between students and SROs, SROs' effect on crime, and their understanding of the "school-to-prison pipeline." Additionally, I consider a few understudied areas I identified in the literature, including how SROs perceive their own job duties and responsibilities and how they are trained to become SROs.

A common theme among the literature surrounding my topic is that, in general, principals and teachers are supportive of SROs being assigned to schools. This was a finding throughout multiple pieces of literature pertaining to my topic. Studies that have considered students' and parents' perceptions of SROs, however, have revealed that these stakeholders have more conflicted feelings about having SROs in schools.

I organized Chapter II to begin by considering research related to stakeholder perceptions of SROs, including the perceptions of students, teachers, principals, and school personnel, as well as the perceptions of parents and community members. I also include a discussion of the school-to-prison pipeline. I next discuss literature related to the connections between SROs and safety in schools. Finally, I examine how SROs are trained.

Stakeholder Perceptions of SROs

The majority of research that examines the significance and impact of SRO programs focuses primarily on how other stakeholders perceive SROs. Since their introduction into schools, SROs have affected the attitudes and perceptions of school administrators, teachers, students, and parents. In general, principals and teachers are supportive of the SRO concept, believing that the presence of police in schools improves school safety and climate by deterring student misconduct and delinquency (Brown, 2006a; Brown & Benedict, 2005; Johnson, 1999; May et al., 2004; Travis & Coon, 2005). Some studies involving students represent an ambivalent portrayal concerning the introduction of police into the school milieu (Bracy, 2010). Compared to what is known about the perceptions and attitudes of school administrators, teachers, and students, much less is known about parents' perspectives. There are a few existing studies regarding how parents and communities perceive SROs. The limited research that has been done suggests that although parents are generally supportive of assigning police officers to schools, they worry that the presence of police might give the impression to students (as well as the larger community) that their school is a dangerous place, when in fact it is not, and that children might feel as though they are under constant police surveillance (Myrstol, 2011; Travis & Coon, 2005). I begin by examining students' perceptions.

Students' Perceptions of SROs

A common concern throughout existing literature was whether or not students feel safe in schools. As a Black male, I was not surprised that most students who feel safe in schools are mainly White students—particularly White male students with higher grade

point averages. Contrarily, students who attended schools with higher levels of dysfunction and disorder felt less safe (Eisenbraun, 2007; Lacoë, 2015; McDevitt & Panniello, 2005; Noaks & Noaks, 2000; Perumean-Chaney & Sutton, 2013; Varjas et al., 2009). As someone who has lived through the public education system through the lens of an African American and who currently serves as a public school leader, I found that the literature concurred with my own belief that African American students are more susceptible to being victimized by violence in schools (e.g., Cedeno et al., 2010; Lacoë, 2015).

Another theme that I found in the literature, albeit not too often, was the role that poverty plays in SROs' treatment of particular students. Theriot (2009) found that students at schools with greater economic disadvantage had a higher number of total arrests, and more arrests for assault, weapons possession, disorderly conduct, and other charges than schools with less poverty. Theriot points out that it may be taboo to connect the relationship among poverty, crime, and ethnicity; however, as a Black male, I do not find the relationship taboo at all. I certainly feel that it needs to be addressed as a major contributing factor to the school-to-prison pipeline. I am willing to argue that students of color from impoverished backgrounds are much more likely to fall victim to the school-to-prison pipeline. Although the literature does not point to this specifically as a cause, many studies name these factors as contributing factors to students falling victim to the school-to-prison pipeline. Research has found that impoverished and ethnic minority youth are disproportionately involved with the juvenile and criminal justice systems (Theriot, 2009).

Several studies have examined students' feelings of safety at school. These studies have generally found that males, older students, students with higher grade point averages, and White students often report feeling safer at school, whereas students who report higher levels of victimization or who attend schools with higher levels of disorder tend to feel less safe (Eisenbraun, 2007; Lacoë, 2015; McDevitt & Panniello, 2005; Noaks & Noaks, 2000; Perumean-Chaney & Sutton, 2013; Varjas et al., 2009). Among ethnic and racial minority students, African Americans often feel especially vulnerable to being victimized by violence (e.g., Cedeno et al., 2010; Lacoë, 2015), although some research has found that feelings of fear and safety among racial groups can vary across school settings and locations (Bachman et al., 2011; Theriot & Orme, 2016). Theriot (2009) also suggests that school discipline discrepancies result from the clash between middle-class school systems and low socioeconomic status students.

A common belief throughout American society and education is that students feel safer knowing there is a School Resource Officer in their school. However, not all students feel safe knowing there is a SRO on campus. Depending on their ethnic background or their prior experiences with law enforcement, many students may feel alienated or marginalized by the mere presence of SROs. Furthermore, Jackson (2002) points out that when introducing SROs into an environment that is supposedly designed for providing education in a non-threatening way, school administrators must understand that students view SROs as more threatening than gang members or bullies. Law enforcement officers in schools may provide a psychological benefit for administrators, staff, parents, and the adult public. However, their presence may pose a psychological

threat to students, who may view police as a threat to their freedom to move about, have open conversations, and experiment in legal activities that may be socially unacceptable to SROs and administrators.

Theriot and Orme (2016) point out through their study the effect that interacting with SROs has on students' perceptions of their own safety at school. To conduct their research, Theriot and Orme (2016) compiled 2,015 surveys completed by students enrolled at 12 schools located in a school district in the Southeastern United States. Students were allowed to complete the survey in class with no interference from administrators, SROs, or outside researchers. Theriot and Orme (2016) utilized a validity screening process described by Cornell and Loper (1998). The percentages of students involved in this study were: 64% White, 32% Black, and 2% Hispanic. The survey involved 60 questions asking students about demographics, their feelings about school, perceptions of school safety and police, school violence that they have experienced or witnessed, their feelings about the SRO at their school, and their number of interactions with the SRO at their school. The study used latent class analysis (LCA) to group students by their reported safety at school. Theriot and Orme (2016) state that

Latent class analysis identified two groups of students, one who felt safe and another who did not. Regression analysis showed that interacting with SROs was unrelated to these feelings of safety; instead, African American students and victimized students felt less safe while males, students with more school connectedness, and students with more positive attitudes about SROs felt safer. (p. 130)

A strong argument could be posed that historically, minorities (African Americans in particular) would fall into the category of not only “victimized students” but part of a population victimized by law enforcement in the United States in general.

According to studies, it comes as no surprise that African Americans do not feel as safe in school as their non-African American counterparts. According to Theriot and Orme’s (2016) demographic characteristics (Model 1) from their study, African Americans were more likely to be classified as *Unsafe* than other racial groups.

There were also no differences in age or gender, although a larger percentage of *Unsafe* students are African American. Almost all *Safe* students (96%) reported having two or more good friends at school compared to a smaller percentage of the *Unsafe* group (89%). Furthermore, feeling unsafe was associated with experiencing significantly more school violence. These students also reported less positive attitudes about SROs and lower levels of school connectedness than their safe counterparts. (p. 139)

Theriot and Orme’s study highlights the complexities of the relationship between SROs and students concerning their feelings of safety. There are various factors to consider when gaging students’ feelings regarding their safety; however, given Theriot and Orme’s study, the one constant that remains is that African Americans are more likely to feel unsafe at school—even with the presence of SROs.

Brown and Benedict (2005) analyzed data on student perceptions of school police officers and school security officers obtained from surveys administered to predominantly Hispanic students from a majority Hispanic community. The data revealed that most of the students viewed the officers positively; however, compared with research that has been previously published concerning how adults perceive the police favorably,

these Hispanic students viewed the officers less favorably than adults. An interesting concept that regression analysis revealed in Brown and Benedict's (2005) study is that gender has a varying impact on different measures of attitudes toward the officers. Compared to the generalized notion that SROs deployed in public school systems mainly come from local police departments, Brown and Benedict (2005) tackled the concept of an independent police department employing both police officers and security officers. Students were given a survey with several dozen questions. They indicated their demographic information and school security-related information, such as if they had anything stolen from them at school and perceptions of the SROs and security personnel.

It is important to note from Brown and Benedict's (2005) study that even though the majority of students evaluated in the study recognized the SROs and security guards positively, the percentage of students who evaluated the officers positively pales in comparison to the percentage of adults noted in their study of the almost 14,000 people residing in the 12 metropolitan areas located across the United States. Smith et al. (1999) reported, "A majority of nearly 80% or more of the residents in each city were satisfied with the police in their neighborhood" (p. v). As a Black male and as a member of the minority population in the United States, I am not surprised with the comparison data of the approval ratings for the SROs and security personnel being approximately only 70% derived from the Hispanic students in the Brownsville Independent School District, to that of adults living in the 12 metropolitan areas located in the United States. Brown and Benedict's (2005) study fails to mention the actual demographic makeup of the 12 metropolitan areas in the United States, as it did with Brownsville, Texas. The

racial/ethnic makeup of any area plays a significant factor in the outcomes of the perceptions surrounding police officers and SROs, as Brown and Benedict's (2005) study seemingly displays.

One area that has been significantly studied that may contribute to the criminalization of student behavior by SROs is juveniles' attitudes toward the police. Theriot's (2016) research about juvenile attitudes toward police suggests that the insertion of police officers at schools might be challenging and potentially harmful for many students. Arresting students for minor offenses, such as disorderly conduct and other minor issues, was not the reason SROs were originally implemented in schools beginning in Flint, Michigan, in the 1950s, their presence being increased after the 2000 Columbine school shooting, or for the federal incentives for schools to hire SROs in the aftermath of the tragic shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary School in December 2012. Since the implementation of SROs in public schools, SROs arresting a majority of minority and impoverished students, versus that of middle- to upper-class White students, has become the norm for the arrest of students for minor offenses in schools (Theriot, 2016).

SROs, Students, and the School-to-Prison Pipeline

The SRO, along with all other law enforcement officers and school officials, plays an integral role in the phenomenon of the "school-to-prison pipeline." Michelle Alexander, in *The New Jim Crow* (Alexander, 2010), characterizes a scenario regarding how students, particularly students of color, are targeted by law enforcement, which increases their chances of being devoured by the school-to-prison pipeline. In this

instance, these students were targeted by law enforcement at the behest of the school administration.

SWAT raids have not been limited to homes, apartment buildings, or public housing projects. Public high schools have been invaded by SWAT teams in search of drugs. In November 2003, for example, police raided Stratford High School in Goose Creek, South Carolina. The raid was recorded by the school's surveillance cameras as well as police camera. The tapes show students as young as fourteen forced to the ground in handcuffs as officers in SWAT team uniforms and bulletproof vests aim guns at their heads and lead a drug-sniffing dog to tear through their book bags. The raid was initiated by the school's principal, who was suspicious that a single student might be dealing marijuana. No drugs or weapons were found during the raid and no charges were filed. Nearly all of the students searched and seized were students of color. (Alexander, 2010, p. 76)

SROs can be a major factor in the school-to-prison pipeline because they are the arresting officers when it comes to students either breaking state law or local school board policy. Often SROs are forced to arrest students due to a zero-tolerance policy that the school board has engrained in their policy or policies. An example of zero-tolerance policies would include a "no drug" policy where a student possessing some over-the-counter pills may be charged by the SRO and receive the same punishment as a student who possesses marijuana. Another example would be a sexual harassment policy in schools where students cannot hug or kiss. This means a teenager who hugged or kissed another student could be suspended along with being charged with sexual harassment. Over-policing and zero-tolerance policies enable school security and campus police to punish students for the smallest infractions (Advancement Project, 2000). Winn and Behizadeh (2011) point out that zero-tolerance policies and practices in schools have become one of the greatest contributing builders of the school-to-prison pipeline. The

“zero tolerance revolution” (Parenti, 2008, p. 70) has resulted in students being pushed out and an “overrepresentation” of African Americans in school suspension rates is well documented (Gilliam, 2005; Gilliam & Shahr, 2006; NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, 2005; Noguera, 2003; Winn & Behizadeh, 2011). Furthermore, Winn and Behizadeh (2011) claim expulsions and suspensions from school increase the likelihood for incarceration, thus making African American students prime candidates for the movement from schools to jails.

Mallett (2017) argues that the pipeline disproportionately affects and involves certain child and adolescent groups—those who experience poverty, students of color, students who have special education disabilities, children and adolescents who have been traumatized or maltreated, and young people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT). Mallett (2017) divulges that most existing research finds that these students neither misbehave more nor are more prone to causing school-based problems, but they are more often unfairly targeted by the school and police personnel (Carter et al., 2014; Kupchik, 2010). The reality is that Black and Latino students are entering the school-to-prison pipeline more than their White and Asian peers, even though the normalizing of expectations for incarceration has profound consequences for poor youth of color (Meiners, 2007).

Winn and Behizadeh (2011) add another element to the cause of the school-to-prison pipeline. They argue that the lack of opportunities for youth to engage in literacy practices such as reading, writing, and speaking feeds the school-to-prison nexus. In America, the lack of opportunities, regardless if it is for the youth, people of color, or

people with disabilities, is an age-old issue that perpetuates and promotes the prison system. This is mainly due to these individuals not acquiring the opportunities due to a lack of literacy and education. One could draw an abstract comparison with slavery in the United States. African slaves were denied the opportunities to read, write, and learn speaking skills because slave owners feared that slaves would learn how to obtain their freedom or even learn how to take over their plantations. Winn and Behizadeh (2011) assert

A key link between inequitable school policies and prisons is low-quality education or a lack of education. Official policies such as zero-tolerance discipline and unofficial policies such as overrepresentation of students of color in special education affect the quality and quantity of education students receive, which affects students' academic achievement and opportunities. (p. 150)

The Perceptions of School Personnel Regarding SROs

Coon and Travis (2012) conducted a study where they selected a broad sample of public schools. The study consisted of a nine-page questionnaire that included prompts from the *School Survey on Crime and Safety* (National Center for Education Statistics, 2000) and the *National Assessment of School Resource Officer Programs Survey of School Principals* (Finn & Hayeslip, 2001). The study received responses from 1387 principals from all over the nation. A part of the questionnaire was for the principals to identify the law enforcement agency used in their school. From that information, a survey was also mailed to the 1,508 law enforcement agencies identified by the principals as supplying their SROs. Slightly less than half of the principals claimed that a SRO was assigned to their schools. The principals who reported a SRO in their school explained

that the main reason for their presence was due to the national attention that school violence has received. The principals who responded that they did not have a SRO in their school explained that there was no need for a SRO at their school, or funding was not available to place a SRO in their school. Principals of schools without SROs reported that they believed their school did not require one. However, law enforcement was more apt to respond that schools without a dedicated police officer would benefit from having one assigned to the school. In their responses, police respondents indicated that police officers were assigned to a particular school because the school had problems with disorder. However, most law enforcement officers claimed that if a SRO were not assigned to a school, then there was not necessarily a need for a SRO at the school.

Stakeholders' perceptions of SROs in schools vary, though they significantly affect how the community, students, and school personnel interact with people in these positions. Myrstol (2011) argues that even though there is broad support for SRO programs among the community, there is very little information regarding how these attitudes towards SROs are shaped. Some perceptions are influenced by factors that have been instilled in individuals from their own life and cultural experiences. Overall, stakeholders, including students, parents, teachers, and school administrators, approve of assigning sworn police officers to schools; however, we have gathered very little information and knowledge concerning the factors that shape these attitudes and beliefs. Given the near absence of SRO program impact evaluations, there is little reason to think that people's confidence in these initiatives is based on evidence of their effectiveness (Myrstol, 2011).

Generally speaking, everyone wants safe schools; however, given the number of SROs one has at their school, the interaction between SROs and the public, or the reputation of a SRO, stakeholder perceptions of the SRO may be negative or positive. Often the perceptions of SROs may not necessarily match reality. It may take only one negative experience or one negative newsworthy incident to sway a person's perception of SROs. Groups that are directly impacted by SROs tend to support SROs in general. This would include students, teachers, and other school personnel. Due to the lack of evidence regarding the effectiveness of SRO programs, one must conclude that one's perceptions of SROs come from one's interactions with SROs. Parents may be a bit apprehensive about the idea of SROs in schools, perhaps due to the fear of the unknown. There is always the chance as a parent that their son or daughter could have an incident with law enforcement at school without parents' knowledge. Administrators must ensure that the SROs are acting at their behest only.

SROs and School Safety

Theriot (2009) wanted to test the hypothesis that schools with SROs have more total arrests and more arrests for charges like disorderly conduct and assault than schools without a SRO. To test the validity of the hypothesis and the impact of SROs on arrests in schools, Theriot (2009) compared and contrasted the number of arrests in three consecutive school years at 13 schools with a SRO and fifteen schools without a SRO in one school district. The study focused on one county in the southeastern portion of the United States. These schools were located primarily in urban and suburban settings. A larger percentage of students at schools with a SRO had economic disadvantages

compared to schools without a SRO. These schools also had a larger number of minority students as well. Theriot (2009) found that middle schools and high schools with a SRO had fewer arrests for weapons possession and assault charges, yet significantly more arrests for disorderly conduct charges than schools without a SRO. Theriot's (2009) study found that there were 216 more arrests for delinquency at schools with a SRO than at comparison schools. As hypothesized, the most common charge at SRO schools was disorderly conduct, followed by other charges and drug-related charges. At schools that did not have a SRO, the main charges that occurred were drug-related, followed by disorderly conduct, and possession of alcohol and public intoxication. Though having a SRO at school does not predict more total arrests, there was an increase in the number of disorderly conduct incidents at SRO schools compared to those at non-SRO schools. This finding is consistent with the belief that SROs contribute to criminalizing student behavior. According to Theriot's (2009) research findings, having a SRO at school significantly increased the rate of arrests for disorderly conduct by over 100%.

Goggins et al. (1994) evaluated a cooperative program established between police and the Akron Public Schools. Since 1991 the program utilized off-duty law enforcement officers to build relationships with students, escort and remove nonstudents from the school buildings, get involved with students participating in criminal activity, and making presentations to students in classrooms. A schoolwide survey was utilized as the major part of the study, which revealed that police cooperation within public schools could be perceived as beneficial by all stakeholders. The study showed that students and school staff felt that police at schools increased safety and reduced drug problems and gang

activity, although some students perceived the officers to be unnecessarily aggressive at times.

SROs being overly aggressive toward students is its own issue entirely. Even though Goggins et al. (1994) mention this issue in their study, none of the studies I have found specifically address this issue. Concerning SROs being overly aggressive, because there is not a substantial amount of research in this area, it is hard to generalize how and when this occurs. More specifically, there is not a substantial amount of data and/or research to support claims about how ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, or the age of students might influence the targets of SROs' aggressiveness. While there is at least anecdotal evidence that SROs are generally more aggressive towards minority students, there is no systematic research to support this assertion.

May et al. (2004) point out that despite the widespread use and popularity of SROs, limited empirical evidence suggests that SROs are effective agents in increasing school safety. May et al. (2004) utilized a questionnaire to which 128 principals in Kentucky responded. The survey included (a) many closed-ended questions asking principals about the duties of SROs at their schools and their perceptions of school safety at the school; (b) several open-ended questions asking principals to provide their opinions about the problems with schools and the SRO program; and (c) several closed-ended questions asking their opinions about the prevalence and incidence of factors affecting school safety. May et al. (2004), utilizing a multivariate model, examined the perceptions of these principals across the state of Kentucky regarding the impact they felt SROs had on problem behaviors in their schools. The majority (64.8%) of the principals were

males, and an overwhelming proportion (92.2%) were White. Their ages ranged from 27 to 55. As previously stated, May et al. (2004) conducted their research using multivariate linear regression, which showed that the only variable that had a statistically significant impact on the principal's perception of the effectiveness of the SRO at his or her school was the frequency with which they met with the SRO's law enforcement supervisor. Principals who met with the law enforcement supervisor regularly tended to perceive that their SROs had reduced crime in their schools, with the amount of board and law violations at the school having minimal impact on their perceptions of the SRO.

Presumably, SROs play a vital role in making students feel connected to the school culture because SROs provide the baseline for safety and security for the student body and staff. A student's interaction with a SRO can shape a student's feeling of connectedness with their school. Contrarily, Theriot and Orme (2016) found that the phenomenon of students interacting with SROs was unrelated to these feelings of safety; instead, African American students and victimized students felt less safe while males, students with more school connectedness, and students with more positive attitudes about SROs felt safer. Students often express positive opinions about their SROs, routinely report acts of crime/delinquency to SROs, and frequently seek counsel from SROs about legal and personal problems (Hopkins, 1994; Johnson, 1999; McDevitt & Panniello, 2005). At the same time, students take issue with overly aggressive or authoritative officers and worry about being harassed and "treated like criminals" by SROs (Bracy, 2010; Myrstol, 2011; Travis & Coon, 2005).

Being treated like criminals is an interesting construct brought to light by Myrstol's (2011) article. After all, one would think that students and criminals would not fall into the same category ever. However, given the behavior of a student or a SRO, this categorization can begin in an instant in schools. Bracy (2010) described a student who remarked that the SRO is initially pleasant, but if you upset him, he will follow you in the halls and search for opportunities to take you to the office. An unfortunate consequence of tasking SROs to deal with student misbehavior has increasingly criminalized traditional school disciplinary issues and exacerbated the school-to-prison pipeline (Bracy, 2010; Mukherjee, 2007).

The philosophy of students being connected to their school is directly associated with violence prevention. Karcher (2002) found that students who committed violent acts were likely to feel disconnected from teachers, while Valois et al. (2002) observed that less attachment and commitment to school predicted later violent behavior among adolescents. Given the amount of time students spend at school, it is no wonder that students who do not feel connected are more susceptible to an episode of violence and more prone to exhibit violent behaviors within schools. Theriot (2009) alludes to the fact that the presence of SROs at school might make students feel safer and thus less likely to feel the need to carry a weapon for protection. These enhanced feelings of safety also might contribute to better feelings about school in general, a stronger sense of connection to school, and a better school environment.

SRO Training

There is a lack of scholarship regarding SRO training. Studies suggest that traditional police training often does not provide adequate instruction on topics relevant to school-based law enforcement, such as prevention and early intervention, diversion, adolescent and developmental psychology, and substance abuse (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2011). Therefore, I discuss some of my experiences with the topic and review North Carolina's training for SROs. According to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NC DPI) and North Carolina State Board of Education, SROs serve as comprehensive resources in the schools to which they are assigned. The NC DPI and the Center for Safer Schools' (2009) research derived definition of a SRO is: a certified law enforcement officer who is permanently assigned to provide coverage to a school or a set of schools. SROs are valuable resources for their schools. They are specifically trained to fulfill three roles: they first and foremost are law enforcement officers whose primary purpose is to "keep the peace" in their schools so that students can learn and teachers can teach; secondly, they are law-related counselors who provide guidance on law-related issues to students and act as a link to support services both inside and outside the school environment; and thirdly, they are law-related education teachers who provide schools with an additional educational resource by sharing their expertise in the classroom. Beyond these identified roles, and perhaps most importantly, SROs are positive role models for many students who are not exposed to such role models in today's society. Their presence in the schools sends a strong message that violence is not acceptable.

Although this may be the ideal training goals recommended by the NC DPI and NC State Board of Education, I previously gave an account where the SRO that I was assigned in my middle school had received no training. I can also give numerous accounts of the SROs whom I have encountered as an administrator in various schools and school systems in North Carolina who did not receive any formal training outlined by NC DPI and the NC State Board of Education.

In theory, every SRO in North Carolina should adhere to the training that NC DPI and the NC State Board of Education outline. The reality is that every SRO does not experience this training. Even SROs that I knew that had multiple years of experience as a SRO did not attend any specific training in the area of being a law-related counselor or a law-related education teacher. I find it interesting that the NC DPI website defines the SROs role and job description as such. I understand that they want to paint SROs in the most favorable light and ensure that the public knows that all stakeholders are as safe as possible in schools. Still, the reality I have witnessed is that SROs are not well-versed in the areas of counseling and law-related teaching, and in their overall job role and responsibilities as a whole.

NC DPI and the Center for Safer Schools (2009) reports that in a survey of SROs across the United States, The Center for the Prevention of School Violence reported that 50% of SROs spend their time on law enforcement duties, 30% of the SRO's time is spent on their law-related counseling role, and 20% of the SRO's time is spent on the law-related education teaching role. Given this national survey of SROs that NC DPI has

taken and displayed to the public on their website, it seems to want to emphasize that SROs should conduct counseling additional to law-related teaching (NC DPI, 2009).

But one must ask what training SROs actually receive. NC DPI does a good job of explaining what the SROs should be trained in; however, they do not elaborate on what specific training allows them to be equipped with the competencies that NC DPI defines as their job roles and responsibilities. The website lists some trainings that are available to stakeholders, including law enforcement officers, such as RISE Regional Trainings, Youth Mental Health First Aid, Bullying, Crisis Intervention Team Training: Recognizing Youth Related Emotional and Mental Health Crisis (CIT-Youth), Critical Incident for School Faculty and Staff, Policing in Schools: An Inside Look at Policing Outside the Box (POTB), and Understanding and Planning for School Bombing Incidents (UPSBI). However, I have given specific examples of where I have worked alongside SROs with no formal training of the kind that NC DPI defines. I believe that there is a lingering question of, are all SROs trained with the competencies that I have listed, and are they proficient in the areas of a law-related counselor or a law-related education teacher? Even though I would like to say yes, I know there are SROs untrained in these areas before becoming or while serving as a SRO.

The National Association of School Resource Officers (n.d.) offers basic training for SROs in various areas, such as the Teenage Psyche, Human Trafficking, and Developing Successful Relationships with Diverse Students. However, SROs have to pay to join the Association. This would be something that SROs would join independently, or the actual law enforcement agency would decide to send their officers to these trainings.

Depending on the number of resources a law enforcement agency wants to pour into these trainings, it remains their decision regarding the amount of training their officers will receive, if any. Mark Keierleber (2015) laments that the rise in police confrontations with students are more high profile, mainly due to cell phones and social media. These incidents capture what youth-rights activists and federal officials argue that SROs lack the training needed to interact effectively with children, especially Black, Hispanic, or disabled children. These students are equated to the school-to-prison pipeline theory because they are being “funneled from the classroom to the courtroom” (Keierleber, 2015, para. 8).

Whether through traditional professional development sessions or on-the-job training, it is clear that SRO training is portrayed to the public to give the impression that they receive the training they need to be effective in schools. While it is great to say that all SROs should be trained effectively in these areas, the reality of what I have experienced in my career in administration is that not all SROs are well-versed in all of these areas, particularly in the areas of law-related teaching and acting as counselors. On some rare occurrences, we have seen as a nation that when schools face an active shooter situation, SROs may not be that well-versed in keeping the staff and students safe, and they may not act as needed when facing this situation. Also, the multiple high-profile incidents where SROs have acted over-aggressively towards students suggests that they may not be proficient in the area of respectful policing.

In general, police officers must complete police academy training to become a law enforcement officer. To become a SRO, one must first complete the qualifications to

become a police officer. According to the National Association of School Resource Officers (n.d.), SROs must have obtained their high school diploma and be at least 21 years old. The National Association of School Resource Officers also offers a variety of classes and trainings for SROs. Part Q of Title I of the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968, as amended, defines the SRO as “a career law enforcement officer, with sworn authority, deployed in community-oriented policing, and assigned by the employing police department or agency to work in collaboration with school and community-based organizations” (United States, 1968, p. 75).

The State of North Carolina requires 16 weeks of training, but depending on the city or department in North Carolina, the training could range anywhere from 16 to 40 weeks. During the weeks of training, potential officers are trained in pursuit driving, defensive tactics, the use of firearms, and NC law. Also, depending on the city or department, potential officers may learn basic Spanish, receive diversity training and learn about domestic violence, sexual assault/harassment, community policing, and many other topics. This is essential to know when discussing the training of SROs, because depending on what type of school a SRO is assigned to, they may not have received diversity training, which may serve as a bit of a culture shock depending on whether or not the officer is accustomed to dealing with people from particular demographic backgrounds. For example, this could pose serious challenges not only for a White SRO who in a school where the majority of the students are minorities and economically disadvantaged, but it could also be challenging for students and all stakeholders to form a trusting relationship with the SRO. However, even though SROs may not necessarily

receive diversity training, it is important to know whether the officer can be effective or has had success with a particular demographic. Picking a SRO to go into a school is a vital decision, usually made by the actual law enforcement agency itself.

Keierleber (2015) points out that little data has been collected on the actual level of training SROs have received. Keierleber also reports that only 12 states have laws that specify training requirements for officers deployed to classrooms and that these laws are inconsistent. The 12 states that Keierleber reported that specify training are New Jersey, Maryland, South Carolina, Tennessee, Indiana, Texas, Alaska, California, Colorado, Missouri, Arkansas, and Mississippi. Nina Salomon, a senior policy analyst at the Council of State Governments Justice Center, stated that

All officers are getting a certain level of training that they're required to get as police officers. The additional training that we're talking about—on youth development, on working with youth, on prevention and de-escalation—hasn't typically been received by the majority of law enforcement that work with youth inside a school building, or that are called to campus. (Keierleber, 2015, para. 15)

Keierleber's report conflicts with the NC DPI and NC State Board of Education regarding the training SROs receive. Keierleber's report speaks to the notion to which I keep referring about the experiences that I have encountered as an administrator. Even though NCDPI may advertise that SROs receive the type of training that conflicts with Keierleber's report, I am not surprised that North Carolina was not represented as one of the 12 states that specify training.

Finn et al. (2005) compared 19 school resource officer programs and divulged the lessons they learned. They report that the vast majority of the 19 programs included in the

study provide adequate training, but frequently not in a timely manner. The study also accounted that few of the 19 programs train SROs before they go on the job, not because of a lack of funding, but rather because training is generally not offered after SROs have been selected before they go on the job. A few of the programs found was to provide pre-service training by having the most long-standing SRO become certified as a SRO trainer or having a new SRO shadow an experienced SRO before going on the job.

A number of programs arrange in-service training, including advanced SRO training. SROs funded by COPS in Schools grants receive mandatory comprehensive training provided by the COPS Office. Program supervisors in one large program provide in-service training for SROs every two or three months. Training in problem-solving techniques is especially needed because most SROs are not familiar with the approach. (Finn et al., 2005, p. 47)

According to Finn et al. (2005), SRO training falls into two categories: pre-service and in-service. Both are vital for a plethora of reasons:

- Because few SROs have experience teaching in the classroom or practicing counseling and mentoring youth, they need to be trained in basic teaching and counseling skills.
- SROs need training in child psychology and behavior in order to be most effective as counselors and mentors—and to know when to refer students for professional help.
- There are complex issues associated with enforcing the law in a school that many SROs are not initially ready to handle, such as legislation and case law related to search and seizure involving minors, interrogating juveniles, and privacy.
- SROs may need help to “unlearn” some of the techniques they learned to use on patrol duty that are not appropriate in dealing with students (for example, resorting too quickly to using handcuffs or treating misconduct as part of a person’s criminal make-up when in a student the behavior may be an example of youthful indiscretion).

- SROs need guidance in how to collaborate with local principals and assistant principals from whom they will receive day-to-day instructions, requests, and complaints.
- SROs need to learn how to work effectively with parents. (p. 48)

However, few programs train SROs before they go on the job. Some SROs have been on the job for as long as a year before they receive training. As a result, the National Assessment's mail survey of 322 law enforcement agencies found that many SROs engage in activities for which they have not been trained, especially teaching and mentoring.

The 2002 NASRO School Resource Officer Survey also found that between 17% and 34% (depending on the topic) [of responding SROs] have not received specialized training in topics such as adolescent child behavior, counseling skills, . . . and related issues. Rather than the training cost, the delay typically reflects the problem that training is offered only periodically, often not during the interval after SROs have been selected and before they go on the job (Finn et al., 2005, p. 49).

Specified training for law enforcement officers that enter the school environment is crucial to the SROs' overall understanding of students at their age and how to relate to them and all other stakeholders on various issues. As I previously conveyed, the environment of the school setting could lead to major potential issues for the SRO and all stakeholders involved. There must also be a level of understanding of how to deal with a particular demographic of students and a cultural understanding of these students. In 2010, the Southern Poverty Law Center filed a lawsuit against the local police department in Birmingham, Alabama, for using excessive and unconstitutional force by pepper-spraying students for minor misbehavior at school. At issue was the district's routine

practice to use mace against high school students to break up fights and other similar disciplinary infractions (JW. Ex. Rel. Williams v. A.C. Roper, 2011). Between 2006 and 2011, police officers who patrolled Birmingham City Schools pepper-sprayed students more than 100 times. The federal judge made his decision on September 30, 2015, that Birmingham police department officers had indeed violated the civil rights of high school students when officers used chemical spray to subdue them for minor behavioral issues. The judge said that he would not restrict the use of pepper spray but ordered new training and procedures to be developed by November 15, 2015 (US Dist. Ct. 2015).

Conclusion

In this literature review, I focused on existing research about the perceptions of SROs from stakeholders including students, teachers, principals, school personnel, parents, and the community. I also focused on the impact of SROs on school safety and the training SROs receive. A few understudied areas that I identified in the literature relate to how SROs perceive their own job duties and responsibilities, and how they are trained to become SROs. Given the lack of scholarship about the specifics of the training SROs receive, I conveyed my own experiences with the topic and reviewing North Carolina's training for SROs. Finn et al. (2005) compared and contrasted 19 school resource officer programs and divulged the lessons they learned. Training was one essential element in having an effective SRO at schools. Above all, "the right personality" summed up the ability to be an effective SRO. "Three attributes that seem to be the core of the personality characteristics that make an officer an effective SRO . . . An outgoing, caring, but no-nonsense personality is needed" (Finn et al., 2005, p. 39). What I

have found throughout my research is that the literature concentrates primarily on students' and stakeholder's perceptions of SROs, the interpersonal relationship between students and SROs, SRO's effect on crime, and the "school-to-prison pipeline."

The majority of existing research that examines the significance and impact of SRO programs focuses primarily on how other stakeholders perceive SROs. A common theme amongst the literature surrounding my topic is that in general, principals and teachers are supportive of the SROs being assigned to schools. Usually, these stakeholders as employees of the school and school system are generally supportive and believe that the presence of police in schools improves school safety and climate by deterring student misconduct and delinquency (Brown, 2006b; Brown & Benedict, 2005; Johnson, 1999; May et al., 2004; Travis & Coon, 2005).

After identifying the main themes in my review of the research literature, I found an absence of studies in the area of SRO training. This is an area for further study, focusing primarily on what SROs are trained to do in the public-school setting. I also found a lack of attention to how SROs understand their work and roles, their experiences with students of color and the school-to-prison pipeline, and their sense of how other school stakeholders perceive them and their work. In addressing these topics, this study contributes to society regarding the public awareness of SROs and the scholarly conversation represented in the literature review. Even though there is a lack of scholarship in the area of SROs, I believe the importance of SROs providing safety to all stakeholders in the public-school setting will continue to be a frequently visited topic as

mass shootings and episodes of violence continue to be a rampant issue throughout the United States.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

This study aimed to research how SROs perceived their role in public schools and the “school-to-prison pipeline,” specifically related to African American students and potentially other minority students. Winn and Behizadeh (2011) assert that school expulsions and suspensions increase the likelihood of incarceration, thus making African American and minority students the leading candidates for the movement from schools to jails. I also wanted to gain SROs’ perspectives on how they felt they impacted crime and safety in their school districts and how they felt other SROs impact crime in schools across the nation. An additional goal of my research was to discover SROs’ experiences in schools. Moreover, I gathered information on how SROs responded to situations in the school setting and the type of training the officers received before and after their placement in schools. To achieve these research goals, I conducted interviews with five former SROs who are no longer in the role of SRO in North Carolina.

Preliminary/Pilot Study

In my pilot study, the data I used was a dataset of interview data from five former SROs outside my current school district. In the interviews, I had planned to use the interview questions I had created until I was informed that I was not following the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process outlined by The University of North Carolina at Greensboro to conduct my interviews with the former SROs. Because I interviewed

five former SROs outside my current school district who were either retired or no longer serving in the role of SRO, I submitted a description of my study to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) via the process outlined by The University of North Carolina at Greensboro where, given the nature of the study, the IRB ruled that my study was not bound by human subjects regulations. Regardless of whether or not the IRB ruled that my study was not bound by human subject regulations, I hoped to gain the former SROs' perspectives on how they felt they impacted crime in their former school district, and how other SROs impact crime in schools across the nation. I made an asserted effort to make the interview environment as comfortable as possible so that I could gain honest answers from my interviewees. I also wanted my subjects to feel comfortable enough to share any other thoughts or experiences they felt were pertinent to the dissertation topic.

When using the scripted questions while conducting interviews, I found that it was not an organic process. I found myself forcing the questions I had prepared on the SROs regardless of the responses they provided. I was only following the set of scripted questions that I had created before conducting the interview. While conducting the interviews, my goals were to gain specific responses to the questions I asked them. I realized then that there needed to be a more organic feel to my interviews with the SROs. In essence, I needed to have some questions to show that I was attempting to understand the SROs' backgrounds and what motivated the SROs to become officers of the law. Overall, I needed to create a more personable environment with my interview process when interviewing SROs. I accomplished this by conducting my interviews utilizing the "semi-structured" interview format. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) describe the semi-

structured interview questions as more flexibly worded, or the interview is a mix of more or less structured questions. Furthermore, I settled on conducting a basic qualitative study. I realized that I needed to be more personable with my approach and allow the SROs to guide the interviews by allowing them to expound upon their own experiences from their personal and professional backgrounds.

Most interviews in qualitative research are semi-structured; thus, the interview guide will probably contain several specific questions that you want to ask everyone, some more open-ended questions that could be followed up with probes, and perhaps a list of some areas, topics, and issues that you want to know more about but do not have enough information about at the outset of your study to form specific questions. (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, pp. 124–125)

By going through the pilot data collection process and conducting interviews with these SROs, I have found that I needed to refine my data collection instrument. Because I settled on conducting a basic qualitative study, I needed to gain data from the SROs in a more general and open-ended sense, i.e., I needed to ask questions such as: Why did you become a cop? What has your experience been before and while being a cop? How did you like school in general growing up? What influenced you to become a cop? How do you feel about school shootings when they occur? In your opinion, what can be done to stop these school shootings? How do you feel about the student-led marches about gun control? What are your thoughts about arming teachers? These were some of the general questions that I included in my interview guide when I went back and refined my data collection instrument.

Research Questions

The overarching research question that guided my study was: *What are the experiences and perceptions of School Resource Officers (SROs)?* Other questions were:

1. What training did the SROs receive, and how did the training apply to their work in schools?
2. What are SROs' perceptions of their role in the school-to-prison pipeline and their reactions to high-profile cases involved in the Black Lives Matter movement?
3. What effects do SROs feel that they have on school safety?

Specific Methodology

I conducted a basic qualitative research study in which I interviewed former SROs about their experiences. “Qualitative researchers conducting a basic qualitative study are interested in (1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 24). The basic qualitative study involves focusing on how participants make meaning of their lives and organizational roles they may play. By utilizing the basic qualitative research method, I captured how the former SROs interpreted their own experiences concerning the main research questions. I also felt it imperative that the former SROs shared their previous experiences concerning what caused them to become law enforcement officers. By the SROs sharing their previous experiences and what exactly drove them to want to be a police officer, I was then able to “connect the dots,” so to speak, as to why the individual may have wanted to become a SRO.

In a basic qualitative study, the researcher is interested in understanding the meaning a phenomenon has for those involved. “Meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting” (Crotty, 1998, pp. 42–43). Also, “the overall purpose [of basic qualitative research] is to understand how people make sense of their experiences” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 24). Through my interview process with SROs, I elicited the authentic voices of their own experiences. After I conducted my interviews with the former SROs and transcribed their responses, I then coded the transcripts to identify four common themes across all of the transcripts. These themes, stated as full sentences, constituted the study’s findings.

Setting

The setting for conducting the interviews was outside of the school district in which I am currently working. I set an appointment to meet with the former SROs face to face to conduct my interviews with them. I conducted the interviews in a quiet location where there were minimal interruptions. I asked each former SRO before his interview where he felt he would be most comfortable to hold his interview. I was open to meeting and conducting the interviews with the former SROs in almost any public location where they stated they felt most comfortable.

Participants

I interviewed five former SROs in North Carolina. I relied on the dissertation committee members’ expertise to assist me in identifying a former SRO to interview to complete a total of five interviews. I mainly identified former or retired SROs I knew from school districts with whom I had previously worked. I knew that some of the SROs

with whom I had previously worked were no longer SROs. One of the former SROs I had worked with had very recently retired at the end of the school year.

I chose retired SROs to interview because I felt they could provide a wealth of knowledge regarding the subject at hand. Through their career experiences, they were able to provide unique insight into the past as well as the future. The retired SROs had also worked in other capacities in law enforcement, so they were not limited to only telling me about being a SRO. The retired SROs were able to speak from vantage points of having other law enforcement experiences. Because most of the former SROs were retired and the one who was still a current police officer was no longer a SRO, the study was exempt from human subjects monitoring as described by the IRB at UNC Greensboro. I was able to conduct my interviews with the former SROs after gaining IRB approval.

Data Collection Methods

I interviewed five former or retired SROs in North Carolina. I conducted the interviews utilizing in-depth interview questions to gain data in a more general and open-ended manner. I felt the former SROs answered my questions as openly and honestly as possible. The methods I used to collect data were audio-recording the interview and taking notes during the interview. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) convey that the most common way to retrieve interview data is to audio-record the interview. Audio recording ensures that everything said is preserved for analysis. Additionally, this method allowed me to listen for ways to improve my questioning technique. Furthermore, taking notes during the interview allowed me to write down what I felt needed to be highlighted when

coding the interview transcripts. I share my semi-structured interview protocol in Appendix A.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis is an ongoing process that involves breaking data into meaningful parts to examine them. The ultimate goal of qualitative data analysis is “to make sense out of the data” (Merriam, 2009, p. 203), with an intentional effort toward answering the research questions (Savin-Badin & Major, 2013). Answering the research questions was paramount because they formed the basis of the study. My goal was to make sense of the interview transcripts through the method of coding. I identified five common themes across all transcripts. I went about coding my transcripts by identifying and organizing quotes from each SRO into different categories depending on the nature of the SROs’ answers and remarks. Bernard (2006) succinctly states that analysis “is the search for patterns in data and for ideas that help explain why those patterns are there in the first place” (p. 452). I discovered highlighting the quotes with different colors to be very effective in terms of identifying which quote belonged in a particular category. Ultimately, I found that there were some commonalities in terms of the themes that I identified from coding transcripts and the themes identified in the existing research.

Researcher Positionality/Role

The researcher is considered an instrument of data collection (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). I was the instrument in collecting the data through my interviews with the former SROs. I do not have any personal issues with SROs or law enforcement in general. However, as an African American male and a minority in the United States, I am fully

aware of the police brutality and killings that occur towards people of color in the United States. Therefore, I was keenly aware of my interactions with SROs and law enforcement to present myself in the best possible manner, so I would not give them reason to view me negatively.

Furthermore, my initial thought was to interview current SROs in my school and school district. However, I settled on interviewing SROs who were not in my school district. I chose those who were retired or no longer in the SRO role. Because I am the principal of a public school, I felt that the former SROs would also want to present themselves in the best possible manner when interviewing with me. This positionality did have the possibility of complicating the former SROs' responses to the interview questions. However, because I was keenly aware of this notion, I attempted to make the environment for the interviews as comfortable as possible so that I was able to gain honest answers from the SROs. The SROs were comfortable enough to share other thoughts and experiences they felt were pertinent to the dissertation topic. What led me to the dissertation topic was the constant growing racial tension in the United States, including, but not limited to, the police brutality and killings of mainly people of color, incidents of SROs being overly aggressive towards minority students in schools, and the increase in school shootings and violence across the nation.

Trustworthiness/Ethical Considerations

Because I interviewed former SROs outside of my current school district and SROs that are either retired or no longer serving in the role of SROs, I submitted a description of my study to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) via the process as

outlined by The University of North Carolina at Greensboro to be approved for next steps. I endeavored to follow Tracy's (2013) advice that "A relational ethic means being aware of one's own role and impact on relationships and treating participants as whole people rather than as just subjects from which to wrench a good story" (p. 245). Though qualitative researchers can never capture an objective "truth" or "reality," I used a number of strategies to increase the "credibility" of the findings. As Wolcott (2005) suggests, "I [sought] to increase the correspondence between research and the real world" (p. 160). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) describe "adequate engagement in data collection" as adequate time spent collecting data up to "saturation." In this basic qualitative study, I strived for "adequate engagement in data collection" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 246).

I stored all of the data I collected confidentially in the UNCG Box. Additionally, I utilized a clinical reflexive journal technique to ensure trustworthiness. "Reflexive journaling can help one to develop insight, self-awareness, and analytical thinking. It can extend one's practice knowledge by bringing greater therapeutic understandings into awareness" (Barry & O'Callaghan, 2008, p. 61).

Limitations

One limitation to my study was that I had a small sample size of only five participants. This negatively impacted the possibility of generalizing the findings. Another limitation was that these participants worked in different locations, so I could not make inferences about how locations affected their perspectives.

Conclusion

My goal was to research how the former SROs perceived their role in public schools in conjunction with the school-to-prison pipeline, specifically related to students of color. I also acquired the SROs' perspectives from their professional and personal experiences. Given the study's research questions and the background interview questions that I posed (see Appendix A), I was able to access the in-depth psyche of these former SROs. Given the small amount of research that provides the authentic voices of SROs, my study adds to the existing research of true accounts from former SROs. By utilizing a basic qualitative research study, I gained their perspectives regarding how they felt they impacted crime and safety in their school districts and how they felt other SROs impact crime in schools across the nation.

An additional goal of my research was to discover SROs' experiences in schools. Gathering authentic responses from former SROs on how they responded to certain situations or, if given a hypothetical situation of how they would respond as a SRO, was key to my study. Another topic I explored with my interviewees was the type of training the officer received before and after their placement in schools. The methods I used when collecting data were via audio-recording the interviews with SROs and taking notes during the interviews. I improved upon my questioning technique by acutely reviewing and reflecting the audio-recordings and notes from each interview. Additionally, utilizing the "semi-structured" interview format provided me more flexibility in the nature of the interviews. Making sense of the transcripts through coding, I was able to identify four common themes across all transcripts.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

In this study, I sought to consider what type of training school resource officers (SROs) undertook, how SROs believe students perceived them, how SROs impacted crime, and how they understood their role in the school-to-prison pipeline phenomenon. For this study, I interviewed five former SROs to gather their authentic perspectives on various topics and issues pertaining to the research questions. Through this study, I hoped to fill the gap in the literature regarding how SROs perceive their job training, duties, and responsibilities. Most existing research focuses primarily on how other stakeholders, including school administrators, teachers, students, and parents, perceive SROs (Brown, 2006b; Brown & Benedict, 2005; Johnson, 1999; May et al., 2004; Travis & Coon, 2005).

After reviewing the literature for the dissertation topic, I concluded that there were a meager number of studies that reflect the authentic voices of SROs. Higgins's (2020) study drew from 26 interviews with SROs to explore the motivations for engaging in non-law enforcement roles and activities in public schools. In another study, SROs perceived threats differently in different school contexts, which suggested that racial composition of schools may motivate these differences. This study analyzed interviews with 73 SROs from two different school districts that encompassed schools with a variety of racial compositions (Fisher et al., 2020). In Gottfredson et al. (2020), 75% of the SROs

reported that their presence increases the likelihood that a disciplinary incident would be recorded in school records.

One of the main research questions that I hoped to answer through this study was: *What were the former SROs' experiences while serving in the role of SRO?* I also hoped to answer if any of the SROs received any formal and/or informal training to become a SRO and how their past work experiences affected them in their role as SRO. I hoped that if accessed the authentic voices of the SROs, we would all be provided their point of view on important topics and their knowledge of the school-to-prison pipeline.

Since I began writing this dissertation, many major high-profile cases have occurred involving unarmed African American men and women who lost their lives at the hands of law enforcement officers. George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery are just a few of the high-profile names of African Americans who have lost their lives at the hands of law enforcement officers since I began writing this dissertation. Given the current state of relations between people of color and law enforcement in America, it was paramount that I allowed the voices of the former SROs to be heard. One of the common themes of my findings was that the SROs had personal reactions to high-profile cases involving the police and Black men. This focus was and still is very important. It is imperative to note that one negative interaction with law enforcement, whether individually or in a public setting around other students and stakeholders, can change the perceptions of not only students but all stakeholders for the worse. However, if positive relationships are built among SROs, the school, and the community, this would

help build and sustain positive perceptions. Throughout this study, I hoped to emphasize the positive aspects of SROs' relationships with students.

After completing my interviews with the five former SROs, a common theme that I deduced from my interviews was that most SROs received some sort of formal training specifically to be SROs. Additionally, many of the SROs had their own individual work experiences before any formal training or becoming an actual SRO that they brought to the role. Many of the SROs felt their prior experiences assisted in heightening their sense of awareness. Many of the SROs also felt that their prior work experiences aided them in the role of SRO as well. Other common themes in my findings include that the SROs had mixed feelings about the school-to-prison pipeline phenomenon, and the SROs described how it was different to be an officer on the street versus being an officer in the schools.

This study relied on the SROs being fully engaged in reflecting upon their own experiences and perspectives. Furthermore, this study is uniquely significant because I lent an outlet for the SROs to voice their perspectives, which there is a limited amount of in existing studies. In Chapter II of this study, I examined the literature concerning SROs. I reviewed the scholarship that regards students' and stakeholder's perceptions of SROs, as well as the interpersonal relationships between students and SROs. I also focused on SROs' effects on crime and the school-to-prison pipeline.

Additionally, I explored how the SROs perceived their job duties and responsibilities, and how they trained to become SROs. In Chapter III, I presented the methods I intended to use in this study. In this study, I accessed the voices of the former SROs. Getting their perspectives on education, incidents happening throughout our

communities and the United States, and their overall views on the school-to-prison pipeline were areas that needed to be explored and shared as much as possible for the betterment of all schools and communities. Given this previously mentioned notion and the timeliness of this study during what has been deemed the “second pandemic-systemic racism-has lingered . . . for far too long . . . growing racial tensions and the killings of Black citizens have called into question the role of education in promoting awareness, as well as perpetuating or fighting injustice” (Ascione, 2020, para. 6). I hope this study makes a formidable contribution to the existing research by including the authentic voices of former SROs, in conjunction with attempting to provide a bridge and mend the fragmented relationship in America between law enforcement and people of color, particularly in the Black community.

Here in Chapter IV, I first provide the SRO participants’ biographies. Next, I present the four main themes that were found throughout my research.

Participant Biographies

I provide a brief biography for each participant in this study and utilize pseudonyms to identify them in their biographies and throughout this study. These biographies offer a general glimpse into each participant and hopefully provide a humanizing context for each participant. For the participant biographies, I focus primarily on how long the former SROs worked in law enforcement and in what capacity, their work and education histories, and their familial upbringings.

SRO Knight

SRO Knight is an African American male. SRO Knight spent a total of 19 years in law enforcement, 12 of which SRO Knight spent as a SRO. SRO Knight is now retired. SRO Knight is originally from the northeastern part of North Carolina. He grew up in a northernmost county in NC, in a small town he said people used to call “Sharay.” SRO Knight said this town was close to the Bahama, North Carolina area. He had three brothers and four sisters, and they all used to farm. They had what he would consider a close family. His mother stayed at home and did not work, and his father worked at a school in Durham, NC. They all farmed and farmed for themselves. SRO Knight recounts that he and all of the male children got up and went to work on the farm in the mornings to crop tobacco until around 8 o’clock at night. His father did not believe in women working on the farm or cropping tobacco, so he said that he had never seen his mother or his sisters pull tobacco. He and his brothers would pull all of the tobacco and hang it up. SRO Knight recounted his entire family always eating together with everyone sitting down and eating at one time. He said no one would come in late to eat, or come later like now in modern times. His mother and father always encouraged his siblings and him to care for their sisters and brothers and let them know that they would not always be here.

SRO Knight’s parents instilled in him to treat everyone fairly and show respect. They also taught him that not everyone is going to respect him, but that he should show respect as much as possible. Additionally, he always liked helping people and he wanted to make a difference in his community for the people that he would eventually serve as a law enforcement officer. What motivated SRO Knight to become a law enforcement

officer was that he had a sheriff in his neighborhood when he was growing up, and that something about the sheriff's car and uniform enticed him. He also relished the career days when law enforcement officers would come by the school and he would get a chance to crawl through the police cars and look at them. Furthermore, SRO Knight had a state trooper in his neighborhood growing up whom he would regularly see. The state trooper would encourage him to stay in school and get his education if he wanted to become a law enforcement officer like him. He also had several family members who were law enforcement officers: a cousin who was part of the Durham Police Department, a cousin who was an officer at Duke University, and a cousin who was a state trooper in New Jersey. He also had other cousins who were law enforcement officers.

What influenced SRO Knight to become a SRO was that he heard there was a vacancy for a middle school SRO in his department while he was an investigator. He thought it would be a great experience to work in the schools and make a difference for students. He always liked working with students. SRO Knight had a conversation with his Chief at the time and she encouraged him to apply and let him know that he would have to attend school if chosen as the candidate to fill the position. SRO Knight had the inclination to become the SRO at the middle school specifically because he observed officers getting calls to go to the middle school many times. He would listen to the department radio and officers would be getting calls to go to the middle school. He felt that if he became the SRO at the middle school, he could make a difference. In my interview with SRO Knight, he stated, "in fact, I prayed. I said, I hope I can—they'll pick

me for this position, because I think I can make a difference. And that's what happened, I got it."

SRO Virginia

SRO Virginia is from the northeastern part of North Carolina, where he grew up in Semora. SRO Virginia was a law enforcement officer for 26 years, with the latter 13 years of the 26 years being spent as a SRO. SRO Virginia is an African American male who recently retired from law enforcement. Growing up, his mother stayed at home. His father was a sharecropper and he also worked in a tobacco factory. His father worked the third/late-night shift in the tobacco factory and he farmed in the mornings and evenings, giving him very little time for sleep at night. SRO Virginia had seven brothers and sisters and was part of a stable nuclear family. His father passed away when he was 15 years old, and his brothers stepped in to fill the fatherly void for him.

He recalled his time in school as a normal experience, although he did encounter being bullied at a younger age in elementary school. However, when he arrived at middle school, he grew physically from being one of the smallest students to one of his class's biggest students. In middle school, his physical stature and prowess prevented him from being bullied further. SRO Virginia graduated from a high school in the northeastern part of North Carolina. Afterward, he went to work the third shift at a textile mill and took classes for Nursing Assistant and Emergency Medical Technician (EMT). He went on to work in the area of healthcare, dealing with mentally challenged children patients.

He performed this job for a few years and then had the opportunity to work at UNC Hospitals. SRO Virginia worked as a medical technician in the emergency room

trauma unit for approximately 3 years. He served as a medical technician where he would help restrain patients, particularly if the hospital police did not get there in time. One night, when the police came into the hospital after he had performed restraints, they asked who had done them. Everyone said that SRO Virginia had performed the restraints. After this occurrence, the public safety administrator gave him a letter stating he was being transferred to the public safety division, which is what led SRO Virginia to his initial start with his career in law enforcement. He was brought into law enforcement by way of the hospital police and completed rookie school. At the end of rookie school, SRO Virginia was asked by the public safety administration if he wanted to continue with them as hospital police or if he wanted to transfer somewhere else. During this time, they were hiring law enforcement officers in the county where he was raised. SRO Virginia wanted to work in his hometown county, so he applied and was hired to work in his hometown.

It is imperative to note that SRO Virginia really did not care much for law enforcement as a young man. He had a bad experience that he endured when a law enforcement officer severely mistreated him. He described the incident: he was walking, and an officer got in his face while he was a student at Piedmont Community College. He wondered why the officer was doing this and told him that he would not treat anyone this way. After this encounter, SRO Virginia did not want to have anything to do with law enforcement officers. Ironically, he was the only one in his family to become a law enforcement officer and eventually a SRO. This incident was instilled in his psyche and he used it as motivation throughout his career to always remember that he was not going to treat anyone the way this officer treated him. Enduring this incident helped him

navigate through his years in law enforcement and treat people the opposite way he remembered being treated by the officer when he was a student at Piedmont Community College.

SRO Bill

SRO Bill grew up in and is originally from the northeastern part of North Carolina. He had a twin sister and a younger sister. He joined the Navy when he was 18 years old and eventually retired from the military before joining the Sheriff's Department in a county in the northern part of NC. While he was in the military SRO Bill worked undercover narcotics in Virginia for approximately 5 years, half of his approximately 10 total years in the military. While in the military, he also worked on torpedoes, explosives, and air launch weapons. While in the military, he described himself as the person who "was always the first one to take charge, the first one to lead, and the first one to do the right thing." After leaving the military, SRO Bill wanted a career that would give him satisfaction in helping people and law enforcement was his choice. SRO Bill went straight from retiring from the military to joining the sheriff's department, where he served for 20 years. For 14 and one-half of those 20 years, he served as a SRO before retiring from law enforcement.

SRO Bill is a White male. His father worked making equipment, carpets, and other items for vehicles. His father was also a police officer for approximately 2 years, although SRO Bill said that did not factor into his own decision to become a law enforcement officer. Although SRO Bill's mother worked for approximately 4 or 5 years

at a textile manufacturer, she did not work all her other years. Even though he self-describes that he grew up poor, none of that bothered him. SRO Bill said his family was

just normal everyday people and had the best childhood you could ever imagine. I had such a good family that things like that just don't affect me. You know, to me, everybody's human. Whether you got money, you don't have money, depending on your race. What religion you are, it don't matter, because I know what it's like to live that life . . . but that's why I treat the kids the way I do. You can overcome.

SRO Maximus

SRO Maximus grew up on the outskirts of Greensboro, North Carolina and graduated from a high school in the Guilford County Schools system. SRO Maximus is a White male. He grew up less than one-fourth of a mile from a predominantly African American community and grew up in a foster home setting. He was a basketball player and many of his friends growing up lived in the predominantly African American neighborhood. His father worked for the federal government, and he had seven brothers and sisters. His mother played organ and piano in the church, sang in the choir, and played multiple instruments. SRO Maximus acquired a plethora of work experiences. He worked in the tobacco field, labored in a textile mill, and sold vinyl siding. He attended Elon College; however, he did not graduate. His best friend was a police officer, and he had a cousin who was a law enforcement officer with the Greensboro police department. SRO Maximus was attracted to the position mainly because of the benefits of being a law enforcement officer. He also had the people skills that he felt were necessary when being an officer of the law.

SRO Maximus was a law enforcement officer for 29 years before retiring. He served 12 years in the street working patrol in East Greensboro, 6 years as a detective, 3 years in the field, and the remaining 8 years as a School Resource Officer. Being a SRO allowed him to engage with the best parts of street policing, and he loved the fact that he did all of his own investigations when anything law enforcement-wise pertained to the school.

So I think, consequently, based on my background in sports, my background working, and as it turns out in the school district that I was going in my whole career, having investigated, having the ability to speak to people, I—it was just the best job I ever had, best combination.

SRO Columbus

SRO Columbus was born in York County, South Carolina, and grew up in Whiteville, North Carolina. SRO Columbus has approximately 7 years of experience as a law enforcement officer. He was a SRO for approximately one and one-half years. SRO Columbus is a White male. SRO Columbus has two sisters, and he is the only law enforcement officer in his family. His parents raised him to be a gentleman and respect all people for who they are and what they are about, not for what they have. His mother worked as a nurse for approximately 32 years, and his father's occupation was an electrical engineer for a little over 30 years. His father was frequently absent due to his occupation, so it was mainly his mother in the household regularly. His mother pushed him to excel, even though he recollects there were times when he did not listen to his mother's advice.

Growing up, SRO Columbus struggled academically and got into mischief in school. His senior year of high school, he was recommended by the administration to attend alternative school for his behavior. While attending alternative school, he realized that the path he was headed down in his life was not a positive one. SRO Columbus wanted to change his behavior to steer his life in a more positive direction in order to become successful. SRO Columbus self-identified that he had excellent teachers and phenomenal SROs throughout his educational career. They were always willing to help him and all other students. He does not have any complaints in terms of his educational experience. Intrinsically, SRO Columbus realized that being recommended to alternative school his senior year was just a product of his own behavior and he did not blame anyone for this occurring. Now he realizes his mother was right in the advice and encouragement she used to give him, even though he may have not listened to the advice she gave him in his adolescent years.

Prior to becoming a law enforcement officer, SRO Columbus worked as a member of the Volunteer Fire Service. He always wanted to work in a profession where he could be there for people on their worst days, and bring peace and a helping hand to those in need. SRO Columbus also worked as security for the hospital in Columbus County, NC. He enjoyed it, mainly because he was helping people. He went on to work at the local County Detention Center along with the Taber City Corrections. SRO Columbus lost his mother during this time and before her death, she told SRO Columbus that she wanted him to fulfill his dream of becoming a law enforcement officer. He knew then that he would stop at nothing in order to fulfill his dream. SRO Columbus worked hard,

saved his money, put himself through school, and become a law enforcement officer.

Being an officer of the law allows him to fulfill his desire to help people.

Summary

Their commitment to helping people, in some instances, led the SROs in this study to enter law enforcement and then eventually to become SROs. Some of the SROs had a familial and spiritual connection with becoming law enforcement officers. Such was the case with SRO Columbus who was told by his dying mother that she wanted him to fulfill his dream of becoming a law enforcement officer. Also, SRO Knight stated that he prayed that he would be picked for the position of SRO. These instances illustrate how much the study participants prioritized wanting to fulfill their desire of not only wanting to become a law enforcement officer but eventually a SRO. Even for SRO Virginia, SRO Maximus, and SRO Bill, who did not necessarily have a familial or spiritual connection for becoming a SRO, the one constant that remained was that they all wanted to work in professions in which they were continuously helping people. For all of these SROs, their career journeys led them to not only help students, but also teachers, administrators, staff members, and the communities they served as SROs.

Findings: Main Themes

In this section, I reveal and discuss the main themes from the participant interviews. These findings represented commonalities among the participants' responses. One of the main themes the SROs divulged was how an officer needed to conduct his or herself differently as a cop on the street versus an officer in the school. When interviewing the former SROs, I found a dichotomy between policing on the streets

versus that of policing schools. Later in my study, I explain how I personally, as a Black male, grapple with this notion of a dichotomy of policing.

Furthermore, I explore the reactions of the SROs pertaining to high-profile cases involved in the Black Lives Matter movement. Additionally, I was pleased to find that most SROs received formal training specifically to become SROs. Many of the SROs explained what experiences were needed to be an effective SRO. The SROs agreed that they are an important and valuable presence in schools. When it came to the school-to-prison pipeline phenomenon, I explore the mixed feelings that the SROs had about that theory.

The SROs Described How It Was Different to Be a Cop on the Street, Versus Being an Officer in the School

I found when interviewing the former SROs that there is a dichotomy between policing on the streets, or “beat,” as it is often referenced, versus that of policing schools.

SRO Virginia said,

There’s a big difference between a street officer and a school officer. You have to—you have to be quicker and you—let’s see, how can you put it? You’ve got to be stern, but you got to be where you’re fair. Make sure that you know, before you act. Because a child, you can talk a child down. You may be in the street where you got to act. You go A to C, whereas at school you can just go stay at A and talk to them. And the other one you might put hands on, put them down, whatever, but the school, you know, the kids got rights, and they—you’ve got rights in the public, too, but it’s more rights for a student . . .

I asked the participants if there were some officers out there who became SROs without any training: *Do you feel like they should be placed in the schools at all if they haven’t had the training?* SRO Knight responded,

Maybe for just to fill in. Maybe about a week or two, not permanently. ‘Cause it kind of, you got to change your mindset a little bit. Being on the street and work in the school is completely different. It’s a different aspect, you know, you’ve got to—kids gonna have their little spats and so it ain’t like on the street you just take them and do what you got to do, but in the school you gotta go talk with ‘em.

SRO Knight alluded to this dichotomy by referencing the varying mindsets needed to conduct themselves professionally as a cop on the street versus an officer in the school. Presumably, according to the descriptions that SRO Virginia and SRO Knight provided about this dichotomy, it requires an officer to be more aggressive on the streets. This aggressiveness entails a physical sense if necessary, compared to the aggressiveness needed in schools.

SRO Bill brought this dichotomy between policing on the streets versus policing in the schools to light. He said,

I always took an administrator with me when I went to something like that, if they . . . the teacher say I got it, no, you ain’t gotta come, but I think that’s good, too. The main thing is, I think a SRO, when they go to a school, they need to get to know the administrator good. What is—well you know, they got the policy book for the school.

On the streets, officers would not take anyone with them. If the officer on the streets did take someone with him or her, it would be a fellow law enforcement officer. I know that SRO Bill had other SROs in the school with him when he was a SRO, so it was interesting to hear that he elected to take an administrator instead of another SRO. This displays the difference in just mindset alone from SRO Bill and SRO Virginia in their views about how they had to act differently as a law enforcement officer on the streets versus being an officer in the schools.

Furthermore, the idea that the SROs chosen to serve in schools must embody the personality to be an effective SRO in schools was brought up by SRO Knight. The budgetary challenges that some law enforcement departments may have to fund to keep an effective number of SROs in schools was also mentioned. I conveyed to SRO Knight that I was principal of a school where the police department had a shortage of officers and we received a new SRO each month due to the shortage. In an ideal situation, you would have the same SRO over several years to keep some stability and all stakeholders knowing the SRO and vice versa. SRO Knight said,

you said, number one, budget. What they said, they don't have the budget to pay officers and equipment for the school . . . and plus sometimes it's kind of hard to find an officer to go into the schools. A lot of them [law enforcement officers], you know, don't want to do it. I don't want to be confined in their place all day. I just can't deal with students. Some of them, you know, a lot of them tell you.

SRO Bill was quite candid not only about his personality when he was approached to see if he was interested in becoming a SRO, but also the personality of what he deemed to be a non-proactive SRO. Both of these were very interesting dynamics to hear as the interviewer. I could imagine this would be the perception of many stakeholders if this is how an ineffective SRO carried on his or her daily job duties and responsibilities. SRO Bill said,

The majority of the time, if you get somebody that wants to stay in an office all the time and watch cameras, wants to sit in the cafeteria all the time, don't want to walk around and do stuff, then they're not being proactive. They're just taking up a spot. Not only did I walk the halls, not only did I get up when the cafeteria clean, changed classes. When they did change class due to—throughout the day, if I thought I saw something, I'd go back, view the cameras, see if there was any concerns that I needed to be worried about. I walked outside the school. I even

walked the bleachers down on the football field, just to get my exercise with vest and gear on. But you gotta be going, you gotta be moving. I don't like stopping and talking to nobody no longer than 5 minutes. They might be getting your attention, so something else can happen. I'm always one of those weirdos that thinks all the time.

The idea that both SRO Knight and SRO Bill brought up is that it is sometimes hard to find an officer to go into the schools, because many of them do not want to be confined to one place all day, be proactive or deal with students. This speaks to the differences of being an officer on the street to that of one in the schools. SRO Knight elaborated more about these differences. He said,

Once becoming a SRO, it helps you. It helps you, kind of calm you down a little bit and plus you work with your administrator and see how they can handle students within—in the streets you may put your hands on them, but you see him just talking to him or her to talk to a student. You know, you pick up a lot of that. You can't—I tell them all the time, look, you can't do in school like you do on the street. You can't just grab and slam them. You've got to kind of, you have to communicate with them first, you see.

Throughout the interview process with my participants, there almost seemed to be an understood notion that some people do not view SROs as “real” law enforcement officers, which aligns with the dichotomy between being an officer on the streets versus an officer in the schools. I asked SRO Knight to elaborate more on what he meant in terms of people not perceiving SROs as law enforcement officers. SRO Knight said,

Some people, some perceive you, some teachers, some students, parents said, thank you for being here. Some will tell ya, you know, I don't think we need an officer in the school. Or I don't see, I don't see where it's doing no good. I think it cause more problems. But it will—it made a big difference to me in my aspect. 'Cause you have so many teachers that will tell you that I wouldn't be here if it weren't for you. Students, you know, we want the students and officers to be able

to communicate with each other, let 'em know that we're just human just like you. You know, we got a uniform and a gun, we're no different than you. And you can talk to us anytime. That's the way I presented myself . . . I'll do everything I can to help you.

A glaring difference between law enforcement officers on the streets versus SROs is the everyday job duties and responsibilities pertaining to SROs. SRO Knight explained,

The main—number one is safety, you make sure your school's—you make sure you walk around, you try to get that Code 300 box together in case something does happen, so you know everybody [is] on the same page. Everybody knows what they got to do. You're not wondering, what I am going to do? What am I going to do? . . . Safety's number one. You got somebody out there that's armed and trained, kind of if something goes bad, you have somebody on campus right then that should be able to react. He may, response time maybe 2, 3 minutes away, but a lot of things can happen within one minute, 30 seconds. You got somebody on campus right there that's ready to react, and I think it's very important to have one, and I'd like to see them in the elementary schools, also. That's what I think would be good. But definitely it needs to be in high school, depending on how big the school is, may need two or three . . . So you can help guide who's coming in, try to take a situation in control, and I think it's [SROs] definitely needed in the schools. All schools.

Given that providing safety for students and staff is the SRO's top priority, when I inquired SRO Knight to comment about the school shooting incidents that had occurred all across the United States, he said,

I feel bad. It hurts. Especially when you hear that the school resource officer went the other way. I told my wife, I couldn't—I don't believe it, I don't believe that happened. You're there to serve and protect students first, staff, and all. And it just, I mean it's hurting me so bad, just hearing about them shootings, some of them little young innocent kids get killed, and when you could have made a difference, but you choose to go the other way. If it—'cause it's close to my retirement, or whatever, I'm not gonna get involved, I don't—you don't need to be there. You should go to the sheriff's and say "look, take me out of this school and I don't want to be there" . . . school shootings, it bothers you, it bothered me so bad because I wish I—I think a lot of times if I'd been there, could I [have]

made a difference. And I felt like I would have. That's what I feel, but just wasn't there to say it.

SRO Virginia gave his perspective on his job duties in reference to him charging students. This approach differs from working on the beat, because law enforcement officers will respond to calls as they happen and decide to charge only when necessary. However, what SRO Virginia described when he began in the role as a SRO was that the school board directed him to charge students for every infraction that he possibly could. SRO Virginia explained,

When I first started out, it was charge everything in the world. Anything a kid did they charged, and any—every fight was charged. They would take him downtown. They were put in jail, if not, they didn't make bond. And as the years went on, everything went different. But they saw the point that all these kids were even either going to prison or they were being knocked out the opportunity to go to college, because some of the criminal charges that they done had on them in school, something that really the school should have [taken] care of. And it should have been up to the school to do it, but they put it on the officers. So the officers charged like they told them to charge, and we had files, huge files from certain years back in the early 2000s. Like 2009, '10, we would have 200 or 300 charges a year, and, you know, but it was for stupid stuff . . . Everything you got—you did, you got charged for.

I asked SRO Virginia explicitly who decided to charge students for everything and whether this change could later be reversed. He replied,

It was the school board, because they were the ones that said that, you know, what they wanted done. You know, and then when they changed, they came back and they let us know, okay, the administrators got this to do. Principals and administrators got this to do. If it's criminally inclined, you got this list of what got to be charged and what ain't got to be charged. So, what, hey, what mandatory charges, we could do it. Other than that, we'll let the school handle it.

This example suggests the dichotomy between being a SRO in a school district versus a law enforcement officer on the street. SROs work at the behest of the school district and comply with the school board directives, i.e., the school administration. For the instances SRO Virginia described, he was simply complying with what he was directed to do as a SRO, which was to charge students for every infraction possible. Contrarily, a law enforcement officer on the street has a level of autonomy to not necessarily charge everyone for every infraction against the rule of law.

With information passed down from the school board of the list of mandatory charges and allowing the school to handle any other disciplinary infractions on the school level, SRO Virginia explained,

you try to help them [students] as much as you can, sometimes you might overlook stuff, not knowing they overlook it, you know, you don't know, you know, nobody willfully overlooks stuff, but you might be there, okay, he's doing good, he's going to class, he's not starting no trouble, but he still could be the same one selling marijuana, selling drugs, because he's staying under the radar. So you gotta be smart and diligent with all that. Being able to differentiate between the two.

Additionally, SRO Bill provided his view on the impact that SROs have on schools and students. He explained,

I think they [SROs] have a good impact. As many kids as come to me and said, "Miss Richardson did this, Miss Richardson did this." "Come on dude, come into the office." I look at him and I said, "Dude, why did she do that?" "Because I did this." I said, "Do you realize how much Miss Richardson loves you guys? Do you realize how much time she spends at home working on stuff? Do you realize how much money she spent out of her own pocket so you guys will have what you need in the classrooms?" And them coming to me discussing teachers, administrators. Them coming to me with things that happened in the community . . . I know somebody who doesn't have any food. "Okay, dude, what's his

name?” And there’s actually one guy, I can’t remember those kids’ names, I actually went to Walmart 5 years in a row and brought him a ham and turkey for that family and took ‘em to his house the night before Thanksgiving so they would have something to eat.

SRO Maximus provided a contrasting view of what it was like to be an officer on the beat prior to becoming a SRO. SRO Maximus self-described himself as an “aggressive police officer” before becoming a SRO. He conveyed,

I was an aggressive police officer. A really, you know, if I, you know, if you’re selling dope on the corner to the high school kids, I’m gonna bust your butt. You know? But I’ve just never—I wasn’t the one that got off on, man, I arrested 15 people this week, and consequently, I got to arrest people that did rob banks, because I was in service not doing chicken scratch stuff. I don’t know, maybe I just approached it because I wasn’t all amped up to be a police officer and I mean we all go through that initial, it’s in our blood, man, we’re pumped up, I really, I—man, these days off are long, I want to go back to work. But if you can get through that without really crossing lines, which it’s emotion and adrenaline’s a powerful thing. It really is. And if you’ve got somebody like me, I was bullied in high school. It’s really—you can pick the ones out that were bullied most of the time because they’re the ones that try to get a little too much authoritarian. Not that they’re out there trying to hurt people, but they’re the ones going, well I’ve got the authority now, and now you have to do what I say.

It was both interesting and ironic that SRO Maximus mentioned that he was bullied in high school. Even though SRO Maximus attended high school many years before his interview with me, he still asserts that he was a victim of bullying in school as a student.

SRO Knight claimed he did not know the severity of the problem with bullying prior to becoming a SRO. SRO Knight displayed firsthand the difference in knowledge base of a street cop versus that of a SRO. He said,

I didn’t think bullying was that bad ‘til I really went into the school. And I heard about it, read, even read some about it. But for seeing it for real, I said bullying.

Maybe not the parents, that's not bullying. Because you'd be surprised how you see it makes, how it makes the student feel. And they are scared, frustrated, don't want to go to school, some don't want to eat. I said, "You know, I have seen, why didn't you come in the cafeteria?" "I'm not hungry today, I'm not hungry." But you—then you find later on they had been bullied in the cafeteria, and I just—it's a bad feeling, it's more than I thought, it's more actually than I thought it was.

SRO Virginia displayed a similar reaction as SRO Knight did with bullying when SRO Virginia became the SRO on the high school level. He explained,

When I got here in 2006, I was like, my mind was blown, and I could not realize that it was that much fighting, that much drugs, all that in the school, and they only had one officer. And that was—it ran me ragged. And then finally the principal at the time said he needs some help. So they finally went to the school board, they got me one. That helped a little bit, and then knocked things down, and finally they said we had a big fight in the cafeteria and she said this ain't enough either, so she got me one more. At one time we had three, and then we kind of like slowly broke things down, and they saw that we weren't gonna go for it, and they started calming down. And now we really don't have that much on fight issues because they know we're gonna deal with it. So then we were able to draw back to two officers.

As SRO Virginia realized when he first became the SRO on the high school level, he commented further on the personality and persona needed to be an effective SRO. In particular, he needed to deescalate physical altercations among students and reassess the role the SRO plays in deescalating these types of incidents. He said,

the escalation, you know, if you're breaking up a fight, break up the fight and let it go. Don't be an escalator of the fight. You know, don't be an agitator. You know, stuff like that. And, you know, the situation, they're going to come to you with parents, maybe need help with that, parents and stuff. You know, you got to relay them to counselors and all that kind of stuff, some of the stuff you don't have to put on yourself, don't do it.

Additionally, SRO Maximus commented on his role as SRO as it pertained to students fighting. SRO Maximus conveyed, “if two people are there fighting, you can’t stand there and go, hey, guys, stop, hey, guys, you know, you—I mean, because if they hurt each other, and you’re standing there, you’re negligent. So usually, they would listen to me.” SRO Maximus went on further to say that about once every 18 months, he had to reestablish his dominance like the lion at the head of the pride. He said that a student would challenge him, usually a student from another school or maybe a new student in a group home who did not know SRO Maximus. SRO Maximus recollected,

I have one guy that took three swings at me. And finally, for all intents and purposes, I suplexed him, and I held him there. And I told the principal, I said, “That’s the one he was fighting,” and I just held him there. Now I was a little older and my quads were going, why did you do that? You know, but they saw it. He still got it. So I didn’t have anybody challenge me for 18 months.

SRO Maximus went on to recount a story where he tackled a rather large registered sex offender that had sneaked on campus one day in front of approximately 400 students. He identified this account as one of the best things that happened. SRO Maximus said,

Statutory rape is what he was, and he had put on a bookbag and was walking through the hallway. Well, the principal stopped him and run him off campus without calling me. So, I’m sitting there thinking to myself, something suspicious about this guy. Bell rings, here he comes back on campus, he sees me come out the door, he takes off. I’d already called a car. A car stopped him across the street . . . the officer gets out to engage him and this guy reaches in his pocket like this, and of course the officer gets ready to draw down on him and at this point I take off running. This is lunch. There’s 400 kids on that front lawn. I didn’t stop running, I was always taught run through the tackle. When I hit that kid, I picked him up . . . When I walked back across the street after picking up this 250-pound pretty easy, a kid walked up and said, “Officer [Maximus], you could do that to

any one of us if you could do it to him,” and I said, “No, guys,” I said, “listen, here I’m a SRO. I’m a loving, empathetic guy. When I crossed that sidewalk, I turned back into a police officer.”

SRO Maximus’s candid description of the incident involving the sex offender, and his statement that “when I crossed that sidewalk, I turned back into a police officer,” displays that he recognized the dichotomy of being an officer on the street versus a SRO. If you take SRO Maximus’s statement literally, “when I crossed that sidewalk, I turned back into a police officer,” he would not even identify himself as a law enforcement officer being a SRO. Instead, SRO Maximus would only identify himself as a law enforcement officer when crossing the sidewalk, meaning crossing onto what would be considered off campus and then only effectively becoming an officer of the law once being off campus. However, after conducting my interview with SRO Maximus, I know that he took his role as SRO very seriously as a law enforcement officer. SRO Maximus was simply furthering the notion that the SROs self-identify how it is different to be a cop on the street versus being an officer in the school.

The Majority of the SROs Received Formal Training Specifically to Become SROs and Many of Them Had Pertinent Ideas of What Experiences Were Needed To Be an Effective SRO

When I interviewed SRO Knight, he indicated that he had been trained to become a SRO. I asked SRO Knight to elaborate on the type of training that a SRO must have before being placed into a school. He responded,

I went to Vance County Community College, had a SRO class for 2 weeks, and they teach you all about schools, about the law, what you can do, can’t do. Then you had to do a presentation that you give in front of the class, it’s like a 15-minute presentation you had to do. So, the case, they said that the teacher or

something might want you to speak to the class, the students, then you have some—you have to kind of be familiar what to do, how to how to present yourself. Yeah, they already had all the law enforcement training, all your training, that's combined with the SRO, so since you already had all that—all your law enforcement training being in law enforcement 5 years, all you had to do was just go to this class, and you had to pass. You had some tests, and you have to pass your test, at the end, they got an end-of-grade test for that week, and once you pass that, then you'd be a school resource officer.

SRO Virginia also indicated that he went to SRO school when he went to Virginia. He had been in a school year, and he learned the tactical and situational side of being a SRO from SRO school. When I asked SRO Virginia specifically about what type of training he was taught and acquired, he stated,

I was taught about situationals and stuff like that and taught you about the law, and how the law is different between the street and in the schools and how to, well, how you could actually, you know, get yourself sued. They taught you how to not be sued, and they taught you how not to be in a room with a young lady or how to approach different—the females and ascertain to the males, and they taught you how to public speak, all that, and taught you how to teach. And they taught you the laws of those schools, high schools go like, you know, you can't take a child and interview them without their parents and all this kind of stuff and you can't snatch a kid out of the classroom without their behavior, you know, suitable without administrating and all that stuff. But they taught you what you needed to have not to get sued and not to get your department sued.

I inquired from SRO Bill if he had been trained to become a SRO. He responded,

The first school I went to was the Great Families program, where when kids get in trouble they go to court, and they order the whole family to attend classes. So, we had 6-week classes that we sent the parents and the kids, we actually taught it. So, I went to that, that was 2 weeks in California. And after that, there was a conference that covered gangs, music, trends, laws, juveniles, I mean, just all kinds of stuff at these conferences that you have to go to. Once I got done with that, I come back here. Then I went to Fayetteville, I think it was 4 weeks for SRO school. Then I went to another school for teaching a great program, gangs, distance education, and training, 2 weeks. Every year, we do some type of—some

type of in-service training at the sheriff's department that pertains to our job. And usually it's crossing over into deputies, I mean, street patrol and everything like juvenile justice, we have to go through that every year. There for about 6 or 7 years, we traveled the country once a year for 2 weeks to attend conferences, and that was just the SROs that did this. We had a training over at PCLA one year . . .

The idea that SROs should obtain experiences before entering a school as a SRO seemed to be prevalent among the SROs. More specifically, I inquired what kind of experiences would lend to SROs becoming more effectively equipped to enter the school environment. SRO Bill gave me a specific answer to this in terms of how many years he felt an officer should have experience with court, jail, and on the streets. He explained,

the way I think it should work, work in the jail for a year. Go to the court for a year. Jail, you know the criminals. Court, you know how to testify. Then you hit the street. Should have a minimum requirement of 2 or 3 years on the street and be a volunteer to go to the schools. If you're a volunteer and you go to the schools, stay there long as you want if they can't find anybody to fill a position. And they have to tell somebody to go to the schools, make it one-year billet, or one-year assignment, and then replace him. No need to let his frustrations go and let him get a bad attitude and do a job that he doesn't want to do. But I can tell you now, every SRO that's been in these schools that didn't want to go, loved it. There ain't a person here, that I know of, that don't—that doesn't love it, that appreciated it. Our pay is higher, we can get extra duty, you know, working ball games and stuff like that. The hours aren't bad. And actually the work ain't bad neither, so, you know, I haven't seen anybody that they didn't like it. I've seen one or two that got burnt out. But I hate to tell you this, but the day I left is how I worked the day I come in. And you know how I was. I was balls to the walls all the time.

Even though SRO Columbus had not been formally trained to become a SRO, given his former experience as a SRO and his past and current law enforcement experiences, he provided his perspective on what experience a SRO would need before being highly effective in the role. SRO Columbus also referenced “with the law changing

of the 18 now” (what was known as the “Raise the Age” initiative, which prevents older youths from automatically being charged as adults in many crimes). This law change became effective on December 1, 2019, and entails that 16- and 17-year-old individuals who commit crimes in North Carolina will no longer automatically be charged in the adult criminal justice system. According to the NC Department of Public Safety (2019), in 2017, lawmakers raised the age of juvenile jurisdiction for nonviolent crimes to age 18, following years of research, study, and education on this topic. SRO Columbus stated,

It [specific experience(s)] would definitely not hurt, by no means. Especially to catch up on juvenile law. Juvenile law is a big one, you know, working streets, working patrol, you know, we deal with juveniles here and there, stuff like that, but when you’re constantly, you know, working under, especially at the elementary or middle school or something like that, you’re dealing with constant juveniles and now, you know, with the law changing of the 18 now, you know, you just—you’re going to encounter, so people need to be understanding of the juvenile system, how it works proper, you know, paperwork processing and stuff like that.

I inquired from SRO Maximus if he had been trained to become a SRO, or if he had gone through any particular training. He stated,

there is a SRO class and there’s a SRO convention every summer where they go through some of the training stuff, I quit going to it because after 22 years, I’m looking around like, y’all didn’t know this stuff? You know, and like I said, “I was fortunate enough to work in East Greensboro where a vast majority of my students came from.”

I am concerned by SRO Maximus’ decision not to attend further SRO training. Even though I am not necessarily knowledgeable of all the information reviewed in the yearly SRO convention and SRO class, I do question if this was a healthy attitude toward the

SRO convention that he had at the 22-year mark moving forward. One would assume the convention may review new, pertinent information each year. And, if nothing else, the convention could provide a much-needed refresher to the information that all SROs needed to know.

SRO Maximus went on to elaborate about the experience and training needed to be an effective SRO. He said,

If you take an officer that's got 3 years of experience in the street, now you're putting him in a school where he's not had any investigative training, but unfortunately, most of our SROs now, usually they'll stay a long time, if you let them, but you're either made for the job or you [aren't]. The ones that aren't made for the job, you know it pretty quick. Now the nutso part about this is when you get sheriffs and superintendents, oh, well, we want to move the SROs to a different school every year. Well, it took me 3 years to learn my clientele, my teachers, my staff, my school. Why would you take somebody that knows everybody and move them? Unless he's a screw up?

SRO Columbus also commented on the experience he felt law enforcement officers needed before placement in schools. He stated,

You know, had to pull somebody who, who's got time, you know, dealing with the citizens, not somebody fresh out of school, who, you know, still trying to learn everything and you don't want to, you don't want to put somebody that's, you know, you don't want to have somebody, you know, watching your kid, or, you know, protecting 400 students who, you know, is going to be hesitant of what to do. There definitely needs to be training. If you can't—if your training cannot be done prior to fulfilling the spot, I think there needs to be a deadline with maybe 3 months, within 3 months' time, and, you know, you take this position right here, you need to be sent off to school to get, you know, get certified.

Furthermore, I asked SRO Columbus if he was trained to become a SRO. SRO Columbus answered,

Actually, I was not, I was not sent to SRO school, which is not—it's not a requirement to my understanding in order to become a SRO. In order to get the position, now as far as, you know, beginning as a SRO and moving forward, yes, most agencies do send you to a SRO school. However, I've not been there.

SRO Columbus knew about the training SROs must have to hopefully become a better SRO. SRO Columbus referenced a SRO certification class to which law enforcement officers can be sent. He stated,

The SRO division actually has, you know, phenomenal training that's out there, but it goes back to defunding the whole police, the police department, and stuff like that. If the money's not there, and, you know, these classes are obviously, you know, there's some free classes, but basically mostly your free classes are gonna be online classes, you know, you can skip on through, you pass the test, and be done with it, which you don't really learn much. As far as being able to actually go to a, you know, a college or something along them lines, to actually have one-on-one contact with a breakdown of everything, you know, that's what works best for law enforcement. We're more—it's more of a hands-on kind of thing. But again, that costs money and somebody just don't have the money to send it.

Although SRO school is not necessarily a requirement to become a SRO, like the other SROs, SRO Columbus had a plethora of other work experiences that assisted him once he acquired the role of SRO. Before becoming a law enforcement officer, SRO Columbus was a Volunteer Fire Serviceman, and like SRO Virginia, worked in the hospital prior to becoming a SRO. SRO Columbus worked security in the hospital, whereas SRO Virginia worked as a medical technician in the emergency room trauma unit in the UNC Hospitals. These are just a few examples of the occupations that these SROs had that aided them once they filled the SRO role. Regardless of their occupations before becoming SROs, they each had a commonality of wanting to bring peace and

helping people in need. I believe SRO Maximus summed it all up best when he said, “but it still comes down to you can either do that job [SRO] or you can’t, you know, and not everybody can do that job. Not everybody can be a police officer, not every police officer could be a SRO.”

The SROs Had Mixed Feelings About the School-to-Prison Pipeline Phenomenon

Even though the SROs may not have been able to define the school-to-prison pipeline phenomenon in detail, once I gave the SROs some background on the theory, they could elaborate on their perceptions of it. For example, I explained to SRO Knight that the school-to-prison pipeline is a theory that particular students or subgroups of students fall victim to the court system throughout their lives because they started engaging with the court system while in school and now, they are just continuing their criminal behavior. I asked SRO Knight if he felt SROs contributed to the school-to-prison pipeline. SRO Knight responded,

I think they contribute, because some of them [students], you can make a difference to them, you can change them. I’ve seen in some of them that no matter what you do, they’re not gonna change. You can talk your head off, try to do things for them, do different things, talk with them, work with them, and they stay the same. But some, you know, hardcore, staying in trouble, you know, if you stick by, I try to stick them in middle school or at the high school, see how you’re doing, check on you, hey, man, just checking. Oh, Sergeant Knight, how you doing? It changed. Some of them changed. And then, you know, I think because you communicate with them talk with them, let them see an officer, a lot of these officers are just arresting people . . . I try to work with you any way I can to keep you out of the prison system later on down the road. I can see where you hid it. Some of them, you know, you think in his mind, I said, oh, Lord, this guy, I know that this girl, they ain’t gonna be that much, soon as they get 16 they go, I know where they going. But you see some of them turn around and you see them out later on, I said, wow! That’s great. And I had a little boy tell me about a month ago, he ain’t a little boy now, he 20 something, he said, Sarge, now I sure appreciate what you did for me at Summit. I said, wow. You know, I thought,

what did I do? You know, he just, he was, and I thought about it, he was one the students headed down the wrong road. His mom would want me to call him, talk with him, bring him to school, mentor him. I told her I couldn't do it out of school but I did, you know, we come to school, I steal some time, and me and him get together and do some things, help him with his homework, do some things. And he said, you know, you've made a difference. I said, wow. That, to me, that stuff is worth a million dollars to me. Yeah, that was a good feeling. I think it does happen.

This example that SRO Knight gave of the 20-year-old telling him that he appreciated what he did for him shows that SROs can make a difference in the lives of students, without SROs even knowing it. One would conclude that SROs can have an important effect on students by modeling professional behavior and truly caring for the students they serve. This example that SRO Knight gave about mentoring this student by helping him with his homework and spending time together shows that SROs do not have to do something dramatic; they just need to show that they care and take an interest in wanting to assist students become the best they can be. Even though SROs cannot do this with all students, as in the example given by SRO Knight, SROs can still make a huge difference in students' lives by displaying the ethic of care each day in their position.

Furthermore, I asked SRO Virginia if he were aware of what is referred to as the school-to-prison pipeline, and what it meant from his point of view. It is important to recall that SRO Virginia identified how the school board decided to demand that SROs charge students for "everything in the world," as he explained. Furthermore, SRO Virginia expounded that "they [the school board] were the ones that said that, you know, what they wanted done." This brings up the important point of decisions being made, whether it be politically or for whatever reason, to enable charging students for every

possible infraction. From an equity and equality standpoint, the school board should have known who these charges will affect disproportionately, given their own discipline data in their school system.

Although I do not have the data for this particular school system for the era mentioned by SRO Virginia, it still is very troubling to hear SRO Virginia's description of being directed as a SRO of the school system to charge students for every infraction. As an educator, a parent, and a Black male, this bothers me to my core to have heard this from SRO Virginia. This is exactly the phenomenon of the school-to-prison pipeline—it impacts students of color disproportionately more than their White counterparts. As a Black male, I wonder when the Board of Education decided and directed the SROs to charge students for every infraction; did they know which race of students this would disproportionately impact? I would suggest that the Board of Education had to have some inclination as to which race of students that charging for every infraction would impact more forcefully. Furthermore, I suggest that these are the type of decisions made within an organization, in this case in the school system, that are inherently systemically and systematically racist. This is mainly because decisions similar to this almost always disproportionately affect people of color, in this case, students of color, particularly African American students more so than their White counterparts.

I asked SRO Virginia, when he reflects on his career as a SRO, were there any group of students or any particular students he felt the mandate to charge affected more than any other students? SRO Virginia responded,

I think it affected all of them, but the thing it is, is back in the day, they had—a lot of officers had the perception that if I charge this kid, I can get them some help. And I always was like that, how am I charging this kid, getting this kid some help, because this kid's gonna go to court. This kid's gonna spend money the family ain't got, going to pay a lawyer, and they give 'em, it takes the money away from rent and house payment they might lose their residency and all that kind of stuff, you had to take all of that in consideration, so. That was rough to think about back in the day, though we did, not like—it was just ridiculous.

SRO Virginia mentioned that the school board eventually changed their mandate regarding charging students for every possible infraction. He said the school board informed all of the SROs, principals, and administrators that their mandate had changed. SRO Virginia said the change was to charge only if the charge was criminally inclined. The SROs had to then follow the list of mandatory charges according to the state of North Carolina. SRO Virginia said if it was one of the mandatory charges, they could charge the student; otherwise, they had to let the school handle it. SRO Virginia went on to say,

You know, weapons and—you know, the weapons and the drugs and all that stuff, that's mandatory, sexual assaults. But, you know, the altercations, that's, if he know, hey, you can charge or don't charge, but you know, the thing of it is now the way they got it in the court system is they do the same thing that the school would do. When you get to court with it, they're gonna do the mediation at the court level, so why—just do it at school instead of wasting the court's time?

In my interview with SRO Bill, I asked him was he aware of what is referred to as the school-to-prison pipeline, and from his point of view what it meant and what he thought about it. SRO Bill indicated that he did know what it meant. He stated,

I do not believe that there is a school-to-prison pipeline. Unless somebody was really stupid and did a major crime here in the schools, I did not take them uptown. Even though _____, when he was stealing stuff out of the cafeteria and giving it to kids, I wrote him a ticket. I don't believe that. If you

bring a knife and you're going after somebody with it, and you got a gun, it's your third fight, etc. etc. Yeah, you need to take a ride, you need to see what uptown life is all about. And—but I don't think it's a school-to-prison pipeline, I still think it's family. I still think that it's the single households or the parents who don't care. And the gangs in the neighborhoods and the parents don't watch 'em and all that stuff. And I'm aware that when kids go to jail, that the people that are in there influence them, teach them things, and do things like that. But I don't believe that we send people to jail in order to—and it turns them into criminals for the rest of their life. I don't believe that. I'll never believe that.

It was very interesting to hear that SRO Bill did not believe that SROs perpetuate the school-to-prison pipeline theory. I felt that he had an excellent grasp of what the school-to-prison pipeline entails and was able to clearly articulate why he felt the way he did. SRO Bill alluded to the households, families, and the “parents who don't care” as he to be the factors contributing to this cycle as opposed to law enforcement.

SRO Bill was the only SRO to directly identify this family connection as the reason for students getting wrapped up in the court system stemming from school, continuing to adulthood. As an educator, I find this intriguing because in many instances as educators we identify familial patterns when it comes to common behaviors and student success in school. Often, we attribute students' successes or failures to family and/or parents or guardians, even though we know students act independently of their families in the school environment. As educators, we know there are factors beyond our control outside of the school environment with which students must contend. This often directly impacts students in the school environment. The fact that SRO Bill did not identify SROs or law enforcement as being a contributing factor to the school-to-prison pipeline I believe speaks volumes regarding this theory. Instead, SRO Bill identified the students' family background and upbringing as being the largest determining factor that

would either contribute or not contribute to students becoming involved in the school-to-prison pipeline.

SRO Bill also classified his style of charging juveniles as a type of early intervention strategy for students, to hopefully scare them enough when they are juveniles when most incidents do not stay permanently on their records before reaching 16 or 18 years old when it will become permanent on their record and cause them harm when they cannot get it off. Depending on the level of the offense for the juvenile when he took the case to the magistrate, SRO Bill explained,

when—every time I bring a case in, I'll tell 'em. Look, this fool's done fought five times since he was at _____. He needs some consequences. But the majority of times I went up there I tell 'em what's going on. I need to say, hey, take it easy on him. Put him on a contract. Don't take him to court, take him to court. Don't do much community service, you know, I try and base it on the crime and how severe it is. But I like to get their attention. I like to do that.

I probed further with SRO Bill and I asked him directly if he felt that SROs contribute or do not contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline. SRO Bill responded,

Based on society's definition of school-to-prison pipeline, yes. But what's going through our [SROs'] minds is not that. We don't just lock people up because we can. We try and do what's right. You know, we try and take the proper route to make these people that we arrest better people. So I think society is taking that out of context. I think they're using, well, 100 Blacks to 24 Whites, 8 Mexicans, 3 Asians were arrested last week. So therefore, more Blacks have been arrested. And disproportionately, no. We're not arresting them disproportionately. We're arresting people based on the crime. But I just don't like the way they talk about the school-to-prison pipeline, I really don't. When they tell administrators, you need to back off charging, you need to back off suspensions, because Blacks are getting this done to them. I told the supervisor, I said, what the hell's the damn problem here? That doggone administrator knows better than anybody else. How many fights they've been in, they look at their record. They know what the appropriate punishment is. They know whether to suspend them 10 days, long-

term, they know whether to ask a SRO to charge, they know this stuff. Quit covering shit up. I mean I used to [get] mad all the time at that. And you got, even you being a Black male, you know, I know you've heard it. I know you've heard it.

It is significant to note that I conveyed for the record during the interview with SRO Bill that the school-to-prison pipeline is just a theory that has not yet been proven. As I mentioned previously, I find SRO Bill's view of charging juveniles as an early intervention very interesting. As an educator, I had never thought about it in those terms before my interview with SRO Bill. I understand the philosophy that SRO Bill conveyed. Additionally, it was apparent that SRO Bill was cognizant of the race factor concerning the school-to-prison pipeline theory. SRO Bill even acknowledged the disproportionality of African Americans being arrested more than other races, i.e., Whites, Latinos, and Asians. Although SRO Bill feels that it does not have much to do with race as to why students of color are charged more than other races per se, he feels that SROs charge based on who is committing crimes. However, it is significant that SRO Bill alluded to the disproportionality of students of color, particularly Black students, being charged more than students of other races. SRO Bill even went so far as to reference my own race of being a Black male and expressed that I have an innate understanding of the school-to-prison pipeline and how it affects students of color, particularly Black students more so than other students.

Additionally, I asked SRO Maximus for his definition of the school-to-prison pipeline. SRO Maximus answered,

The lack of discipline in schools and the lack of consequences and the lack of corrective behavior, and like I said, it's not about arresting kids. The consequences don't have to be formal charges. But when they get out in the real world, there's gonna be consequences. As a police officer, if somebody steals your stuff, we want you to come to us and not take matters into your own hands. We are advocates for victims, yeah, arrest is part of our authority, but we are advocates for victims of crime. We don't want you taking matters into your own hands . . . there has to be some structure similar to what society actually is. It's all part of the learning process to me. By not providing consequences when they get to court and turn 18 years old, they're gonna be blindsided.

SRO Maximus alluded to the same philosophy that SRO Bill expressed by referring to learning process for improving student behavior before they turn 18 years old. SRO Maximus indicated that, at 18, the students would be blindsided by the court process and, as SRO Bill put it, getting anything placed on their record permanently regarding charges. I find it ironic that both SRO Bill and SRO Maximus had the same thing in mind regarding wanting to provide intervention for students before the charges become permanent. You also see the caring personality of the SROs, particularly SRO Bill and SRO Maximus, thinking about the records of students after criminal offenses become part of an individual's permanent record. This shows that these SROs are thinking about the students' future wellbeing, even if it is in the sense of law enforcement not wanting them to receive permanent charges on their record. With these former SROs working in law enforcement, they know firsthand the detrimental effect that compiling a record early on in one's adulthood can have.

I asked SRO Maximus to elaborate a little more about whether he feels SROs contribute or do not contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline. SRO Maximus explained,

Quite frankly, I think that overall, if the job is done correctly, they don't contribute to it, they prevent some of it . . . if you got a kid that gets in three or four fights and there ain't no consequences, well, he's gonna think this is okay. And he's gonna go out and beat somebody up or he's gonna kick somebody in the head and then cause an injury that he can't reverse, come George Floyd. So, if you're saying, well, no police officers in schools, I don't know that that point in time exists anymore . . . And so to blame it on law enforcement, well, law enforcement, if you don't want them to advocate for the victims, what have you got in place to make restitution? Because, I'm sorry, it don't replace a \$250 cell phone, especially if it's somebody that's just as lower income as you are.

SRO Columbus's response to my question regarding the school-to-prison pipeline was somewhat different than the other SROs. SRO Columbus conveyed that he had heard of it, but he did not know much about it. SRO Columbus stated, "I understand that, you know, the school situation, you know, some, you know, kids joke around and oh, being in school is like being in prison. Well, actually, there is a big difference." SRO Columbus went on to say,

Yeah, I've worked both of them, there is a big difference. Um, but the school-to-prison pipeline, you know, everybody has choices as you get older and you become an adult and everything like that, you have to be accountable for your actions. If you choose that life, like I know, I know outstanding, you know, ballplayers in this county alone who could have been, you know, they could have been famous, could have been NBA, NFL, MLB, whatever they wanted to do, but instead of focusing on the career and longevity, they focused on the crime life, the gang life, whatever, and now they're, you know, you know, 30s to 50 years old standing on the corner of a street drinking a 40 right now when, you know, they made that choice, you know what I am saying? As a law enforcement officer, I didn't tell them, I didn't make them do that, you know what I am saying? I mean you, Mr. Kelly, you didn't make them do that. So, I mean, people's got to be accountable for their actions.

SRO Columbus elaborated further when I asked him if he felt SROs contributed or did not contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline. SRO Columbus said,

I think we have the capability to influence, you know, students to become better as—than they ever imagined, you know, our job is to be uplifting as well, you know, to these students, you know, even though, you know, you got students who live in a terrible home situation and it breaks my heart, you know, because there's kids out here who don't get food, who don't get the love and attention that they deserve and stuff like that. But when they come to school, you know, you got kids who love to go to school simply because they are noticed, they have the—they get the attention that they want, stuff like that. And when they get the attention, you've got to work hard too, you know, as far as the school-to-prison, you know, to prison pipeline, you've got to work hard. It is an ongoing battle to make these kids understand that they are worth it. They are worthy in this life, you know, this world, and you've got to be able to persuade them and stuff like that. Are you going to win with every single one of them? Absolutely not. Absolutely not. You know, there's kids that I graduated with, and you know, and that's, you know, pulling life sentences right now because they chose a different lifestyle. And I know, and as far as the school situation, the school did not teach them to live that life. They—you know, teach them to excel and to be, you know, entrepreneurs or, you know, to just excel in everything that you step forward if you decide you wanted to do to fulfill your dream.

SRO Maximus initially mentioned that if SROs do their job correctly, then they would not contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline. However, this leads to the question of what about SROs who do not do their job correctly; what exactly constitutes SROs doing their job correctly? SRO Maximus commented,

If you've got that consequence of that charge for that child to work off, is he more likely to participate in community service, in counseling, and things like that? Parents say, well, you got a parent [who doesn't] want to be involved. We've got this kid that's been in five fights. We got to correct this behavior, because sooner or later, he's gonna get hurt, and mom and dad is gonna come up [and say], well, why didn't you do anything? And, then turn it right back around on you. So, when you talk about classroom-to-prison pipeline, who's really causing that? Is it the officer because they make a charge? Is he supposed to just ignore a gang fight on campus? Is he supposed to ignore that teacher that got assaulted and hurt her back? Is he supposed to ignore—I mean . . . the teachers deserve protection, too.

The SROs had Personal Reactions to High Profile Cases Involved in the Black Lives Matter Movement

Even though the officers described being a different person when they used to work the beat, they each commented on the killing of the unarmed African American male, George Floyd, who was killed by a Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin when he kept his knee pressed down on Floyd's neck for 8 minutes and 46 seconds. When I asked SRO Knight about the incident and if he had any feelings about it, he responded,

Yeah, well, Floyd. I think that's, that was sad. Real sad. An officer put his knee on his neck and back 8 minutes or something, they said. Over eight minutes. With—the man was cuffed. I think three or four more officers were there. And I don't know what his motive was. And these officers that were there with him, why didn't someone say, hey man, hey, let up on him, let him up, let him up. People got there telling 'em, he can't breathe. He was saying he can't breathe. He was saying he can't even call momma one time. And I don't want to know what his motive was or how he felt. He don't need to be in law enforcement. He's locked up now. I think that's the spot for him, for what he did, but I don't understand what the motive was behind it. Why he did this off—this guy like this. Just because he was Black? They had some interaction before he was definitely wrong, but why you gonna put our knee on the guy, he cuffed, three more officers there with you, four, it—but it didn't make no sense.

When I probed further into questioning any other incidents involving African Americans with SRO Knight, I referenced the incidents involving Breonna Taylor in Lexington, Kentucky, and Ahmaud Arbery in Georgia. I asked SRO Knight was there anything else he would like to share about these types of incidents. SRO Knight responded,

What happened when the young man [Ahmaud Arbery] went jogging. These two guys thought he was a burglar. Going to take his life. And one was a former

deputy and the other was a former DA. So, you know, how do you think Black people look at the law enforcement and DA . . . But, you know, it's just too many Blacks getting killed by White law enforcement officers, and it's making it tough for all officers. Nobody don't trust you. Even if you're Black, they say, well, you're the same as they are. You're an officer, but I'm not. I'm different, you know, and, but people don't see that. All they see is all these young Black men getting killed and these White officers, some of them getting off free, clear, and it's sad. Something will have to change. But this violence, tearing up everything, beating folks and, you know, burning down things, and—it's not gonna change nothing. You have to make a stand, make a peaceful stand, and you got to get trust back with law enforcement with Blacks. Young Black men it's really tough, they go—I've seen some told me when a cop stopped me and I just put my hand up here like this, I don't move. I said you're doing the right thing. And I said don't reach for nothing, unless he tells you to reach. You know, just keep your hands up there like 10 and 2. Hold the wheel or whatever you want to do. I said, you know, it's real sad, but it's—for now.

Additionally, I asked SRO Virginia how he felt about the killing of George Floyd.

SRO Virginia said,

Well, first thing is I'm first stating that I've dealt with a variety of different kids and different nationalities and I've dealt with co-workers that were different nationalities and different personalities and I have seen where, you know, some treat different nationalities different. And I've seen where administrators and teachers treat different ones unfairly, or either look over stuff when they could have taken care of and would like that certain last little event we had here in the United States, with them actually filming that, if they hadn't had it on film, this would never got out. But with the new technology and the videos and the cell phones, that's what's really bringing all, everything to light. And they even got it down to the point where this—they timed how long this man had his knee in the man's throat, and how long it would have been before he died. And they said he had already died before they had moved him, and that's how it must [have] taken time, and they said that the guy, they showed it, when he wrenched his knee more into his throat, like he was actually trying to do that. And I mean, most law enforcement officers just grinch at that. You know, I was in law enforcement for 26 years. I never shot nobody, and I ain't—I don't know where that technique came from, that must be from some old kind of training, but I've never been trained to put my knee in nobody's neck. You know, because they always told us it don't take eight pounds to break a person's neck and kill them. So, you know, I didn't think then about that, I thought that was really negative and that wasn't for me. And like I said, I've never had to really—I've had to fight a lot, but I never

had to brutalize anybody. I never had to really beat nobody for no reason because once you get handcuffs on them, you got control of them so what did you get out of still hitting them? You know, we had a pendulum where you go up, you escalate and then you de-escalate the same way, and you go up to meet the threat and you go down with the threat, so, I lived by that, and let it go. That's the same thing I did with like the kids, with the fights and stuff once we break them up, we calm them down, we calm down, and everything is over with. I didn't slam them on the walls and all that kind of stuff either. I've seen some bad SRO videos and I was like, well, what were they thinking about? You know, you can't do that to nobody, just not less a child.

SRO Maximus also provided his views on high-profile cases involving Black men. SRO Maximus said,

Well, the Floyd, Mr. Floyd, and I don't know all the details. I mean, very little really has been put out about, hey, I know they said something about a counterfeit bill. I'm not sure why the police were originally called, I'm sure they—I don't know why four officers would respond to one counterfeiter . . . You've got bad police procedure. There was no reason to have a knee on him anywhere after he was handcuffed. We're taught to avoid neck, solar plexus, groin, things like that, we're taught to avoid those, now obviously, if you get a knockdown, drag out fight, you win, that's how you survive. But you got a guy handcuffed. There's no reason to hold him down. If he's still fighting, you tie his feet. The minute he says he can't breathe, you let him up. And that's how police officers are trained. That's how the majority of us are trained. Even if you're in it, like Rodney King, for instance. The four officers beat him beyond what needed to be by a question. I've seen the whole video from start to finish. The 11 standing around, when you get in a fight, and you turn that fear into anger, that's an emotion. It's gonna happen in an adrenaline situation. That's when those other officers have to step in and say, you take a break. That's what watching your six, no, it's not just keeping somebody off your back.

Something that I found very interesting from SRO Maximus's commentary was that he identified the thing that bothered him the most was that the former officer who killed George Floyd, Derrick Chauvin, had 19 years of experience as an officer of the law. SRO Maximus expounded upon the fact that in this particular incident, Derrick

Chauvin was the senior officer on the scene in terms of the number of years of experience. SRO Maximus explained that, by Chauvin being the senior officer on the scene, the other officers may have been hesitant to interfere due to Chauvin's greater years of experience compared to them.

SRO Maximus provided a varying view when it came to the high-profile Black Lives Matter case of Michael Brown and shared his feelings about the cases of Eric Garner, Trayvon Martin, and Ahmaud Arbery. SRO Maximus said,

A different example's Michael Brown. That was grossly misreported. That guy committed a strongarm robbery and punched a police officer in his face while he was in the police car so hard that it caused a traumatic head injury, then tried to take his gun, pulled a guy over, got out of his seat belt and then re-approached him and the nine witnesses all painted a very different picture than what the media painted . . . So any of these cases, Garner, Trayvon Martin, and the Trayvon Martin case stinks for a lot of reasons, to me, I mean, that's that whole vigilante, you know, I've got a gun, therefore, I'm invincible. A gun should be used for protection. We, police officers, investigate suspicious people, not you. The Arbery case. I don't know a lot of details about that. But what I do know is neither one of those guys had a uniform on. You can be a hell of a witness until that uniformed officer gets there and conducts that investigation properly. You want to call him in as being suspicious and hassle him, fine, there's a way to investigate that without being unprofessional, mean, whatever, there's a way to approach that. But you jump out of a pickup truck with your full beard and your short pants on and you got a rifle, I don't care if he was Al Capone. That's just all kinds of dumb. That's gross negligence that resulted in a death.

I inquired from SRO Bill how he felt about the George Floyd case as well. SRO Bill explained,

If you're guilty, my wife will ask me all the time, she says, well what do you think about this case, you know, we were like watching independent discovery. And well, what do you think about this? I can't tell you. Well, why not? I don't know all the facts yet. And his latest one with George Floyd, she said, what do you think about this one? I said, I can't tell you, you know me, I have to have the

facts. But I can tell you right now, it don't look good. And, you know, now you got two different autopsy results that say the exact opposite thing. But I've never put my knee on somebody's neck. It's true. Where the head goes, the body will follow. But I've never put my knee on nobody's neck, I'll put it on his shoulders. But I've never put it on nobody's neck, and that was wrong. Especially, 9 minutes went by, and then it's 6 minutes and something, something like that. They actually say it, we need to get EMS or let off of 'em 'cause he wasn't responding. They couldn't find a pulse, and that fool kept his knee on him. I hope they upgrade it to first grade murder. And I hope he goes away for life or gets the death penalty. Because look at what he's done to us. I mean, look what he's done to the country.

SRO Columbus commented on George Floyd and incidents occurring with law enforcement officers, and the impacts on people of color, primarily in the African American community. SRO Columbus stated,

What happened to Mr. Floyd was most definitely unfortunate. I do not agree with the matter. We—I have never been trained to, you know, take a knee and place it on a neck of a suspect, you know. Sometimes in situations you have to do things, and I'm not justifying what, you know, that officer did by no means, but sometimes in situations when you're in—fighting for your life, you know, you—sometimes you have to do things that you do not want to do. In order to regain control of the suspect at the time. As far as, you know, what video coverage I've seen on it, you know, that's—I absolutely disagree with the matter. I've always been trained, you know, when you place somebody in handcuffs, I don't care if I have to fight for my life, if I'm covered in blood or whatever. Once the handcuffs are on, the threat is stopped. You do not continue to punish or to bring pain upon somebody just because a simple matter they—if they got the best of you, well then they got the best of you. It all stops there. You know, I never, when I've been trained, we never leave people laying on the ground. We always sit 'em up. I always ask 'em, you okay? Do you need rescue? As far as what's going on in the world, you know, I'm all for change . . . We are all children of God, that's how I look at life. Um, I just, as far as, you know, the Black Lives Matter movement, I'm all for it.

The question of whether there is something that can be done to stop unarmed African Americans from being killed by law enforcement is regularly posed soon after an

unarmed African American is killed at the hands of law enforcement. I asked the SROs if they felt there was anything we could do to fix this problem in our nation, specifically the profiling of African Americans, particularly Black males, and just the overall violence we witness aimed at people of color. SRO Knight responded,

I think if the communities, you know, get their ministers, get ministers, not anybody, really true ministers that really love the Lord, come out, right, and get the community together, let them come out and talk. We could have a peaceful meeting, White and Black can talk about different things. Let 'em know that, you know, we're here to help you with, we're not, I'm not that officer that was in, that put the knee on Floyd's neck. We're not him. We're completely different. And get together, come together, it's gonna take time. It's not anything that's gonna be fixed a month or two, it probably gonna take years, years, down the road to get this fixed, if it can be fixed. And I pray that it can be fixed, because something will have to be done. If not, we're going to start losing more lives. More officers are going to be getting killed. They are going to ambush them for no reason at all.

SRO Virginia said,

if you educate the people, then [they become] . . . aware that they are brought to justice for what they did. If you do something wrong, they got to pay the cost. I mean, you know, everything you do, it's a you gotta pay—you got—it's a charge for it, or whatever you want to say, how you want to say it, the consequence, that's a good word for it, there's a consequence for your actions.

SRO Bill's view varied somewhat in comparison to SRO Virginia and SRO

Knight when it came to the issue of solving this problem in our nation. SRO Bill said,

You cannot stop it. What people don't realize is whether you're in law enforcement, whether you're an administrator, a teacher, whether you're a security guard at GKN, whether you're a worker at McDonald's, no matter where you go, there's going to be bad people. People in HR need to learn how to weed these people now. If they can weed those people out, it would cut out a lot of your headaches. You're not going to stop it. Sin is second nature, I mean sin is prevalent in this world. Hopefully, the—I hope the rapture comes soon because

I'm getting tired of this crap, myself, but I just don't think you can stop it. But as far as for just general racial stuff, I've always done the best I could. I have to realize, too, that not everybody can I stop from saying the "N" word. But even this year, in January at PCLA, I was sitting in the cafeteria and two or three of them kept dropping the N word, I said, look guys, that's enough. I said, I don't—I don't do it, I don't expect anybody else to do it. [The students said] But we are Black, I say look, say it one more time, I'm gonna write you up. I can't charge you for saying it, unless you say at me, attempting to fight me. But go ahead and keep saying it. Every time I hear it, I'm going to write you up. Three days in a row I wrote 'em up. They got punished. They quit saying it. We need to stand up for what's right.

Though an alternative view when compared to those of SRO Virginia and SRO Knight, SRO Bill provided a very interesting perspective regarding the human resources aspect of not only law enforcement, but other occupations as well. After SRO Bill's response, I shared with him that there is an old adage that goes, "the best time to fire somebody is before you hire them." Interestingly, he shared his view about human resources, particularly about the George Floyd incident, because Derek Chauvin, the officer who put his knee on George's neck and killed him, had over 18 complaints on file. SRO Maximus conveyed about the George Floyd incident, "if that's a one-year officer, that 19-year man's supposed to go over there and go hey, get up. That one-year officer ain't gonna feel comfortable going to that 19-year man [Derek Chauvin]." Ultimately, this correlates to impacting the public as it did with the George Floyd incident. "He [Derek Chauvin] should have been gone a long time ago" (SRO Bill).

SRO Bill's reaction to the George Floyd incident revealed the psyche of SRO Bill. Because SRO Bill had stated he had to react differently when working on the street versus working in the school, it is clear what SRO Bill's position is concerning Derek Chauvin and the officers involved in the George Floyd incident. The notion of an officer

having to act and react differently in schools versus on the street resonates, because for SRO Bill, it is clear that it is not a matter of dealing with race, but rather addressing the inhumanness of Derek Chauvin and the other officers, which ultimately led to Floyd's murder.

Additionally, SRO Maximus commented on what he believed could prevent these incidents from happening against unarmed African Americans and the violence aimed at people of color, with the hopes of ultimately fixing this problem in America. SRO Maximus conveyed,

So should he [Derek Chauvin] be arrested? Yeah. Did they necessarily have to arrest him the next day? Well, it will prevent all the—it ain't prevented jack. It ain't prevented jack. Protests bring awareness . . . the first thing that everybody has to realize is I don't know what it's like to be African American. You don't know what it's like to be a police officer. I don't know what it's like to be a teacher, though I've been in the classroom some. We have got to try to understand, we're never going to fully understand, but we have got to get to a point where we can communicate, and unfortunately the ones that want to be on TV don't want to communicate. The ones that write about this stuff, they're—I don't know, I believe that 95% of the people in this country, no matter who they are, believe in three basic things, they will work for a living, they want to obey the laws of the land, and they believe in some form of religion or worship.

I ventured to gain another perspective on the impact of human resources in law enforcement. Specifically, I inquired from SRO Columbus how officers are disciplined and the procedures that are utilized to hold law enforcement officers accountable. SRO Columbus explained,

There's always, we have written reprimands, you know, the verbal coaching days of saying, you know, alright, you know, SRO Columbus, you know, don't do that again, you know, they would pop you on the hand, you know, learn from your mistakes, them days is over. Everything—if it's not on paper, it did not happen. If

I've got to—if, you know, if I do something in violation of, you know, my policy, whatever, even if it's just saying, you know, hey, don't do that again, you best believe there's gonna be a paperwork trail saying spoke with SRO Columbus, advised him, you know, what he done was wrong, he's advised not to do it again. Will you please sign and date it. The reason being that, because, you know, it was getting to the point to where, you know, if I tell SRO Columbus not to do it again, there's no documentation. Six months later, he does it again, he'd say, didn't I tell you 6 months ago? SRO Columbus would be like, no sir, I didn't—you didn't tell me that. Well now we can say, you remember 6 months ago, you signed this paperwork after we did a verbal coaching order, something like that? So, we got that, depending on what is really, depending on what is done, as far as how far it goes up the ladder . . . as far as reprimand process, you know, you got your verbal coaching sheets, you got your writeup forms, and everything is kept on file.

SROs Agree That They are an Important and Valuable Presence in Schools

During my interviews with the SROs, they assessed what effects they feel SROs have on school safety, whether through examples they gave handling various incidents or explaining the primary job role and responsibilities of SROs. All SROs expressed the most important aspect of a SRO's job is to ensure the safety of all students and staff in schools. Some of the SROs even provided their feelings regarding SROs who may not have carried out their primary job duties and responsibilities of keeping all stakeholders safe.

SRO Knight expressed what effect he felt SROs have on school safety. He conveyed,

I think it makes a difference [to have SROs in schools]. But you can have some [people] . . . you know, kind of like I don't think we need an officer in the school. But I think it does make them safe. Some of the students say I'm glad you're here. I had some students at the school saying I'm glad you're here. And I think it does make a difference. They know you got somebody there just in case something, like I said, if something goes down, it doesn't take but a few seconds. A lot can happen. And you got somebody that right on the spot right there and right then can react, can call in, say, hey, this is where we at, this is what we need, and it

makes a difference at school. I think—I had more, a lot more positive than negative. Hell, anything you do will have some negative, have some negative, you know, some people. Some parents was I don't feel like you need no officer in this school. This school is alright. But I feel like it's good, it's good to have one, we need it.

In terms of SROs' required job responsibilities and duties and how SROs effect school safety, SRO Knight said,

Number one is safety of the students. Then you go on a bus lot in the mornings, you walk around, make sure that everybody changed the buses right. Because you see some people can walk in off the street and come up and you get into the crowd, you don't know. And then inside the school you kind of patrol the halls, patrol the classrooms. I used to go in some classrooms just sit down for a while. The administrator if I—told me to do it. You know, if I wouldn't mind. I talked to my chief, she said, yeah, that's fine. I want to check with the administrator first before we did anything. Go in the classroom, sit down, and just especially in a problem classroom. The teacher in that classroom kept having problem after problem after problem. I sit in the back somewhere. It's made a difference sometimes, when I have a—when she sends a student out, I take them out and talk with them. Cafeteria, monitor the cafeteria during lunch time, but that's a lot of fights break out during lunch, class change. I try to like to be in the halls kind of moving around. Different up and down the halls, you know, don't be in the same spot all the time or they know where you're going to be at. It's just surprising. And just, I always told the students and the parents you talk to me anytime. You got my cell, school got my cell, you call the sheriff department got my cell, you can call me anytime day or night. It doesn't matter.

When I asked SRO Bill how SROs effect school safety and their primary job roles and responsibilities, SRO Bill had previously put quite some thought into this. He said if he knew I was going to ask him this question, he would have brought me “a 5-page” description of the things effective SROs do and are responsible for on a daily basis that effects school safety. SRO Bill expressed,

SROs affect school safety by maintaining evidence, charge, liaison, school safety, teach classes. What I mean by teach classes, the G.R.E.A.T. program, and like Mr. _____, he always had me come in and do a special when he did the Hindenburg, about how to try and find out what happened with the Hindenburg. Juvenile law, criminal law, I [had] gone in classes and told them what they could be charged with, get an answer, question and answer series to feel the pulse of the school. You know, a lot of times we hear things out of town and then we come in and tell y'all, hey, this is getting ready to happen, this is going down, this just happened, there's been a shooting, a stabbing, going to be a retaliation, you know, it's just a lot of things that we do in the schools to protect the principals [from] irate students. I hated it when there was an irate student and the principal say, no, you can just wait outside. I hated that. I needed to be there to protect the principal. I never said nothing to a principal about it, but I made sure I stood by that door just in case. Help with crowd control on the buses, help with pickups and drop-offs in the mornings, it's just so many things that we do. Sit in the cafeteria, monitor the cafeteria, walk the halls, look for trouble. Decipher graffiti. Notify administration what gangs were present in the school. Who was doing things associated with gangs? There's just so much.

I dug deeper into my questioning of SRO Bill to get a more elaborate point of view from him regarding what his specific experience was like as a SRO. I gained SRO Bill's feelings about what effects he felt SROs have on school safety and how his own experience as a SRO determined this. In terms of SRO Bill's job routine and the information he provided, SRO Bill said,

From staff and students, it's been wonderful. A lot of—I'm very proactive, as you noticed, you know, I waited by the bathrooms, I waited at the T Wing, I didn't stay in my office all the time. I was looking for the crap to start. So those that the crap started, and the parents did not like me too well, because I believe in doing what you got to do. And I've told kids this in my class, I don't mind charging you. I like charging you. Sarge _____, how—Sarge, how dare you say that? I said, look, I need to get your attention before you turn 16. At 16 you go to jail, at 18 the uh, everything stays on your record. I need to get your attention before you turn 18, that if I can do that, then when you go get a job, you don't have to put anything on your resume that I charged you with. But I need to get you in all these programs. I need to get you into the court system. I need to have this done, these tests. Freedom House, counseling, I need get all this stuff done to make you a productive person instead of letting you just thug it through life. So, and most of

them agree to it. Most of them agreed with it, but as you know, when you see a kid you're dealing with and a parent walks in and you come up to the main office to get the parent, you know where they got it from.

I inquired from SRO Virginia what effects he felt SROs had on school safety.

SRO Virginia said,

First, you know, number one is the security of the facility and in the grounds. Okay, and then it's to deal with any criminal activity that's within the school, and in breach of peace situations far as fighting and arguing and cussing, keeping all staff and students safe. To be a bold person for the school. To be that I would look for a person who would be the go-to for the kids and employees, you know, they need information, they need counseling. It's a lot. Like—it's like being a preacher, a teacher, and counselor, all that stuff and all in one thing at one time. We should be doing probably more than we—than we [are] doing, but the jest of it all is that we got to be them eyes and ears and we got to make sure that the safety of the kids and then the facility is there. I mean all the rest of the stuff, the teaching, and the counseling and stuff, that's fine, but when called upon you got to act within a split second and take care of eyes.

SRO Knight expressed some of the precautions that could be taken for SROs to fulfill their primary responsibility and ensure school safety and explained some efforts he took during his tenure as a SRO. He said,

I think if they had one door, only one door for students to come in and I feel like they need to be scanned when they come in . . . Metal detectors, check the book bags, and all. But a lot of them, you know, didn't come that morning. Came late, some during the day, walk in. If you see a student, you know that he acting one way, then you see he completely different, you need to keep an eye on that student, that's somebody to counsel or somebody to talk with it—him or her either one, and see what—is there something going on at home? Is it something at school, bullying, or what it is. You gotta keep an eye on the student, get to know your students, that's what I try to do. I try to get to know all my students, try to, the best I could. So when they come in, completely different, I would say you know, hey, you okay, Joe, you know, you alright? You know, I try to find what's going on. You can look at a person, and I sit around and watch, the cafeteria,

doing the hall, class change, and I walked into the classroom to look at somebody, you can look at their face and eyes and telling to me, something ain't right.

Preventing school shootings or the way SROs handled guns and school shooting incidents is a major part of what the participants identified as how SROs affect school safety. The many previous school shootings is the impetus for school districts increasing law enforcement presence within schools. The thought alone of bringing guns into schools to threaten stakeholders' safety is scary enough in itself that the participants identified the prevention of school shootings as a major component of how SROs affect school safety. SRO Bill recollected,

We found a couple of guns here at the high school. We've had word of a gun being at _____. I have tried my best to walk around these schools, look for bricks that are used to open doors, kick doors open for teachers because they're cool. Look for places where somebody could disrupt the power. I try and keep my—I even, like at a certain school in this county, anybody can enter those front doors. The secretaries are so busy, they can't track where the people come in, walk straight into the office or not. They let 'em in, they talk to somebody. Secretary gets distracted, they right—go right or they go left. I said in one school, a girl come in and checked out her lesbian girlfriend at a middle school, and then they called me 5 minutes later and say this just happened. Well, why didn't you check ID? Why didn't you do what you were supposed to do? If you're too busy, you need to stop what you're doing and do what's right to make sure these kids are checked out. And I went and chased those two girls down, ended up arresting one of them from the high school, who was skipping school, and coming to get her girlfriend from the middle school, which you got to be proactive, you got to look for things, when you find things you got to let your administration know what's going on. Once I do that, it's out of my hands. The administration and the school superintendent is the one that does budgets, enforces procedures, makes repairs. All I can do every year is make my recommendations and hope they go by 'em.

School shooting is tearing my heart out, but I ain't gonna lie to you. I'm really hard on people for about 6 months after a school shooting. But I don't slack off two inches after 6 months, I'm still giving everybody heck, still won't let parents

come through the hallways without visitor passes. But if we don't do that, then there's gonna be more.

Additionally, SRO Knight and SRO Virginia provided their remarks about school shootings and how SROs affect school safety. SRO Knight said,

Oh man, I tell you. I do, because I hope [to] God we don't have no more. I pray that we don't. I think about that one in Florida. I said . . . I feel so bad. It was a child, you send your child to school to learn. It supposed to be a safe place for them, then you get that call, something going on, shooting, and it's devastating.

SRO Virginia commented,

it's traumatic, I mean, to be honest, I mean to actually feel that could happen here, it was horrible, I mean, it's horrible to even to the point where you know, you really have to have an officer in a school, you know, that—this day in time, we should be progressing beyond that, instead of being where you got an officer today you should be where—you should have peace with them. But it is mandated that you had to have an officer there because it would get out of hand too quick. And if they don't know you got an officer there, they will do it, and I can't—it hurts me to my heart just to think about those kids dying for no reason. And they didn't have nobody to protect them, and they didn't have no protection.

The idea of arming teachers and staff members in schools has been a topic frequently discussed due to acts of violence occurring in schools. I personally feel this idea of arming teachers and staff members would take away from the job role and responsibility of SROs because ultimately this is the SROs' primary job role—to keep teachers and staff members safe. Concerning how arming teachers and staff members in school would impact overall school safety, SRO Knight provided his views when he said,

It can be good and can be bad. Practice, you know, is good. But you get in a real situation, what would they do? Some of 'em would panic. Might even shoot their

selves, shoot a student, their own self, you know, a student. I don't think it's—I don't think that'd be a good idea for teachers to have. Let somebody experienced with a gun, have experience, where you going to keep it at? On your body or whatever? The students could overtake you and take your gun if they see it. If they wanted to. So, that's for—that's the guy that's tough, because I've seen people in the situation go through training a lot. Do we do the real practice, actual—uum, I don't want to do this. Take me out. I can't do it. So that's a bad time, something going bad and you got the gun there, and you—what am I supposed to do? I don't, you know, you panic. That ain't, that's not good, so I don't think teachers need to be armed. Maybe the administrator, a level-headed administrator [who's] familiar with a gun. I think that'd be something, too.

In terms of affecting school safety, SRO Knight provided his view of society and the need to have SROs in schools, given the type of society in which we currently live.

This was a fascinating construct SRO Knight provided, seemingly addressing the type of society we live in as the reasoning for needing SROs in schools. Other than the isolated incidents we found through news media outlets, I never thought about it in these terms as it being a societal issue. But when you factor in all of the school shootings and episodes of violence that have occurred, it is no wonder SRO Knight also identified this as a societal issue. This would include things such as, but not limited to, stricter gun control laws, mental health screeners, background checks and providing accurate information to law enforcement officers as soon as possible. SRO Knight said,

I think for good, as for now, the way that society is, I miss schools. I know, I don't know, I don't know if we have one here that rolls around. Just thought last year of elementary schools, but I think they need one all day, every day, because you got little kids there. That's where most likely someone is going to come to it. It may be even a high school student, whatever, but I feel like you need somebody there then that's going to react. I don't want nobody to be at that gonna run, if something [goes] wrong, run the other way, run with the crowd. You got to be ready to stand. And I feel like it was good if we [had] them in all schools. At least one. Some middle schools, if you have enough students, need two. High school out here I think need three, two or three, at least, every day. I think it's good. I

never thought that day when I went to school that I would see officers in school all day. [An] armed officer. I never, when I went to school, I said, I never thought that. But now, I got granddaughters, I got one going to _____. Going to start. So, I wish I had an officer today every day for her, and all students, not just for her, all the students and staff, and my little—other granddaughter will go to _____. Has one drop in every so often, but, you know, I feel like you need them in all schools now. It's for the sake of the kids, 'cause people now, like then they used to be, might have been, we just didn't see everything going on, and didn't know. But society [changes] each year and it's not getting better. But I think it'd be good to have one in all schools.

The idea of SROs handling incidents when they arise in schools is critical in how SROs affect school safety. The SROs described many incidents they were involved in and how they handled them to maintain staff and student safety. In some instances, when they handled incidents, the SROs described how they had to go into action and get physical with whoever was threatening school safety. SRO Virginia described an incident when he was working a basketball game, and the two teams got into a physical altercation, igniting an ensuing melee not only involving the team players, but the members in the crowd. SRO Virginia said,

We had a basketball tournament and the two teams weren't even from the school, they were from the other schools and they were playing in the championship game, and I looked at my partner . . . [who] was working with me at the time, I said we know none of these people. If something jumps off, we won't be able to handle it. It wasn't 2 minutes later, both teams got in a fight. So, we had two teams and two sets of people from different parts of the state that we didn't know who they [were]. So, we went ahead, pepper-sprayed people, tased people. They tore up a lot of property, and we arrested a couple, and they went and had to do, pay the money and everything for everything that they did, and they got charged, but the thing of it was, it was way too many people with two people. By the time we [more officers] got there we got one or two of them under arrest, the rest of them scattered. And there was—nobody knew anybody because it was from other counties. That was . . . about the roughest one I had had. I mean, to see that actually out of the stands and have all these people. Had players coming out of the

locker room, fighting. That was horrible, and especially when you know you can have two people to try to stop it all.

SRO Bill described an incident to the one SRO Virginia detailed, when a fight occurred at a football game at which he was working. SRO Bill said,

At a football game here at the high school, [I happened] to look across the field, and over by the bathroom, there's a fight, big fight. So, as I'm running down there, down the hill, calling on the radio, got a fight over by the bathrooms. I turn around and look back and there's a whole slew of students following me. With the kickoff coming at me for the second half. When we get down there, I think it was 10 SROs or 10 officers that night. All of us grabbed somebody. Put them on the ground, handcuffed them, charged them. Had one guy, hey man, brush these ants off of me, these ants are all over me from when I was on the ground. I said, there's a fence right there, dude, rub up against the fence. What do you mean, you ain't gonna brush them off of me? I said, dude, I didn't tell you to lay on the ground. I'm giving you an out, but I'm not gonna use my hands in your sweat and brush those ants off of you. I'm just not going to do it. So, we took them all uptown and processed them. Some of them, depending on how they listened, I wrote them a ticket in the parking lot, and sent them on their way, but the real buttheads that just didn't want to shut up, they [spent] some time in jail. They got to realize, it's over, leave it alone.

SRO Bill also described an incident of domestic violence that occurred in a school that he handled. Incidents like this that SRO Bill described could have severe detrimental and possibly fatal outcomes for those involved. This incident he handled has implications regarding how SROs affect school safety. SRO Bill conveyed that after handling a domestic violence incident in the school, he did have one girl get mad at him. SRO Bill said,

I happened to be coming down the hallway, come by the office and this girl come by crying. So, I stopped her, I said, ma'am, what's wrong? Nothing. She wouldn't tell me nothing. So, I went in my office, pulled up the cameras, and her boyfriend done drug her down the hallway by her hair. So, the first thing I did, I went and

grabbed the administrator, told him what I had, we grabbed him and placed him under arrest for domestic violence. Then called her up to the office and talked to her. She didn't like that, felt that I stepped in. Well yeah, that's what my job is, is to step in.

These SROs' examples of where they had to go into action truly display the effects that they each had on school safety. Additionally, incidents involving gangs and gang violence has led to an increased need for SROs in schools. SRO Knight gave an example of an incident that had gang implications. SRO Knight said,

With middle school. Had an incident one day. These two young men. One of them saying claim you was a Blood, one claim he was a Crip. Usually have little arguments going on for weeks. We watching them, you know, trying to watch them change class and everything, and we had another incident going on. Then they changed classes and administrators, we was all tied up in another area. Then a fight broke out. So, I left the administrator, we had them two students, first students in the office sit down. So, I left them. Me and the female administrator we ran up there at the hall, and they was in it, full blown fight. So I had to get and grab 'em, one, hold him down, pushed the other one, kicked the other one, kept pushing the other one back until the administrator got there . . . would not listen to none of my commands. Cussing, get the "F" off of me . . . I had to put him down and cuff him. Then brought him to the office and sat him down. And _____ put him in another room and brought him up. And parents came up, we told 'em, I have to charge them, both of them. But that one had to be in cuffs because he would not stop. Couldn't get him under control. Had to—we had to put him in the floor, and cuff him, and then finally put them in the office. This student was so combative, would not listen, kind of bump up against me. Bump up against me a couple of times. I said, look, man, you gotta stop. He wouldn't stop, pushed my hand back. Pushed my hand back again, I said, this gonna have to stop. So I took him down.

SRO Knight's example displays the effects SROs have on school safety. This was a belligerent student who was assaulting SRO Knight by continuously bumping up against him. If this student or any student would act this way toward an officer of the law, or any staff member for that matter, this would directly affect school safety. Given this

student's behavior, having required SROs in the school would be necessary to coral this student and deescalate the situation. Regarding how SROs affect school safety and what a challenging task it is to deal with young adolescence, SRO Virginia said,

I mean, it was a difficult task. I mean, it's very hard to deal with young adults like this, especially when they're very, very belligerent and very, very vocal, and they don't exactly want to do what you want them to do. But if it's a way that, you know, you learned, we did a class called verbal judo, and I never thought it would work, but it's the way you talk to 'em. You know, you don't get above them, you don't get below them, and you look at them eye to eye and they'll come to you. And it works. And I dealt with them and I got found—I found a way to get to the heart. And, and they got to mine. So I mean, it made me made me treat them even better, you know, even—because I had children the whole time. And I didn't want my children to see me abuse nobody else's child, and I didn't want anybody abusing my child so I'm keeping the quality of that.

Depending on the size of students and the intensity of the incident, more than one SROs may be needed or warranted depending on the situation. In fact, SRO Bill said,

SROs are needed in high school, definitely, because the boys are big here, and the crimes are usually a whole lot more violent. Sometimes in middle school with the gangs, it can be more violent, but I think at the high school and due to the number of people at the school should determine how many SROs you have. But I think it's excellent for high school. I still harp on that middle school, which I was a middle school SRO for 12 years. Now over the first 7 years it wouldn't do any good to tell me to go somewhere and do something. Because we had something going on all the time . . . I mean everywhere, I was having six and seven cases a day. I mean, it's unreal. They know, when—every time I bring a case in, I'll tell 'em. Look, this fool's done fought five times since he was at Northern. He needs some consequences. But the majority of times I went up there I tell 'em what's going on. I need to say, hey, take it easy on him. Put him on a contract. Don't take him to court, take him to court. Don't do much community service, you know, I try and base it on the crime and how severe it is. But I like to get their attention. I like to do that.

On a smaller scale, aside from SROs trying everything they can to prevent school shootings, episodes of violence, fighting, drugs, etc., SROs still cannot ignore simpler acts that break the law. SRO Maximus described an incident of what I would consider to be on a smaller scale in terms of the level of severity of infraction against the law. Regardless of what end of the scale the illegal incident falls, it displays the effects that SROs have on school safety. SRO Maximus said,

When I was in uniform and worked out every day, I was a lot bigger. This kid walks by me and is gonna stick his key in the door to open up his Jeep Cherokee and not even acknowledge the fact that I'm standing there. Where'd you get that sticker? Oh, I was gonna give it back to her as soon as I got \$5 to pay for my own sticker. I said how much [does] gas cost to run this Jeep? Oh, well, uh, uh, uh— anyway, long story short, I cut him a break. I wrote him a citation for misdemeanor larceny. I knew he would go through first offenders, but this kid wasn't getting it. Okay. First offenders, that charge will be gone, okay, because he was 18, old enough to know better. Well, mom comes to the school. Mom says to me, well, thank you for correcting him, we've taken his cell phone for a week and we've grounded him for a week and I'm sitting here thinking, a week? My daddy would—blew. And so she handed me back the citation and we won't be needing this anymore. I said, yeah, you will, and make sure he's in court because I'd hate for him to get in an order for his arrest for not showing up to court. Well, I don't understand, I just told you that I punished him. And I said, yeah, I have, too. Well, can't you cut him a break? He's never been in trouble before. I said I did, I didn't charge him with the felony. Stormed out on me.

In my interviews with the SROs, they directly and/or indirectly expressed the effects they feel SROs have on school safety. The participants gave examples from when they handled incidents when they were in the role of SRO. They also explained the job role and responsibilities of SROs, which in turn is linked to the effects SROs have on school safety. It came as no surprise that the SROs expressed the most important aspect of a SRO's job is to ensure the safety of all students and staff in schools. Some of the

SROs also expressed their dismay about SROs who may not have carried out their primary job duties and responsibilities of keeping all stakeholders safe. When questioning the SROs, the effect that SROs have on school safety and what role this plays in students' feeling of connectedness to the school surfaced. SRO Virginia said,

Yeah, I mean, when they [students], when they—they expect you there. That's a connection, and if you're not there, they are going, wait, where were you at? You know, if something jumped off, where was you at? They will ask you that. You know, and if you there, they will tell you, yeah, you did a good job. Appreciate that. You know, and I had them to the point where they will come to me and say such and such is going to happen. What do you mean? Be on your job. Third lunch, it's gonna be something happening third lunch, just be on your job. Most of the time, you knew it was a fight. Let you know, and you show up, and it's there, and you look at him, and "I told you." And you gotta build trust with 'em. So they, and then they know that something jump off, they [SROs] coming regardless, because they [students] done seen them in action.

As an educator and a parent of a child in the public-school system, it was reassuring and refreshing to hear the SROs' perspectives of what they identified as their primary responsibility—ensuring the safety of all students and staff—and that they took it seriously. In fact, SRO Virginia said "that once they learned their resource officer, they [students] know that this person is gonna lay down their life down for them." I inquired from SRO Virginia if he felt like the students feel that or know this innately, that SROs will lay down their lives for them. SRO Virginia replied, "they feel it."

Summary

In this study, I explored what type of training SROs undertook, how SROs believe students perceived them, how SROs impacted crime, and how they understood their role in the school-to-prison pipeline phenomenon. Each SRO I interviewed had his own

unique perspective on each of these topics, and they were all able to lend their authentic voices on the matters. Through this study, I attempted to fill the gap in the literature regarding how SROs perceive their job training, duties, and responsibilities. One of the major goals of my research was to determine if any of the SROs received formal or informal training to become a SRO, and how their past work experiences affected their role as a SRO. I accomplished this goal in the completion of the findings section of this study.

Touching upon the Black Lives Matter-related high-profile cases of unarmed African American men and women who lost their lives at the hands of law enforcement officers brought about some serious emotions for me personally as a Black male. Even though I did not express emotion in any of my interviews with the SRO participants, each time the subject surfaced about the killing of unarmed African Americans, I cringed internally. George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery are just a few of the high-profile names of African Americans who lost their lives at the hands of law enforcement officers since I began my study. I kept thinking, given our race, any one of these Black people could very well have been me or any member of my family.

CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

After the many heart-wrenching school shootings we have endured in our nation, the need for adding more school resource officers (SROs) to increase the safety measures in public schools was an added emphasis by President Barack Obama, particularly after the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in 2012. Placing more SROs in schools was at the forefront of President Obama's plan to reduce gun violence and protect students by enhancing school safety. This explicitly called for creating federal incentives for schools to hire SROs and adding up to 1,000 more SROs and counselors to schools across the United States (White House, 2013). Even after President Obama's initiative to increase SROs and counselors in 2012, there were still an excessive number of school shootings in the succeeding years. Ahmed and Walker (2018) reported that in 2018 in the United States, there were on average 1.4 school shootings every week. One of the most notable high-profile episodes of violence occurred in Parkland, Florida, at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School on February 14, 2018. After the school shooting in Parkland, Florida, the student survivors of the school shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School have notably led the charge to an outburst of political activism in the realm of gun control, as well as serious debate in politics about arming teachers to help prevent episodes of violence in schools across America.

After personally reviewing the list of shootings over previous years, I developed a strong urge to gain SROs' perspectives on a variety of topics, including their feelings about school shootings, their experiences and training they received to become a SRO, their perceptions of the school-to-prison pipeline phenomenon, and their reactions to high-profile cases involved in the Black Lives Matter movement. Throughout this dissertation research, many incidents occurred in the realm of the Black Lives Matter movement, most notably the killings of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor. Given the climate of the relationship between law enforcement and people of color, particularly Black people, as a Black male, I wanted to gather the personal reactions of these SROs to high-profile cases involved in the Black Lives Matter movement. Given my relationships and understanding of SROs, I felt there was a need to provide the authentic voices of SROs to gain their insight on many poignant topics. I truly believe that my study will make a formidable contribution to existing research by allowing the SROs to provide their voices in conjunction with attempting to bridge and mend the fragmented relationship between the African American community and law enforcement in America.

Analysis

For my research, I interviewed five former or retired SROs in North Carolina. After examining the existing literature related to this dissertation topic, I came to realize that there are a small number of studies that include the authentic voices of SROs. I was shocked at coming to this realization because I expected to find more studies that included the voices of SROs, particularly as it pertained to anything related to the topic of

this dissertation. While Myrstol (2011) argues that there is broad support for SRO programs among community stakeholders like parents and students, there is little information coming from SROs themselves. I identified that there was a need to add to the existing literature by accessing the authentic voices of former SROs.

The purpose of this study was to interview former SROs and law enforcement officers who are no longer in the SRO role to gain their insights and perceptions. These insights included their feelings about school shootings, their experiences and the training they received to become a SRO, and their views and reactions to the high-profile cases involved in the Black Lives Matter movement. Analogous to the method in which Theriot and Orme (2016) examined the effects that interactions with SROs had on students' perceptions of their own safety at school, my research project included a focus on SROs' perceptions of their place in the school-to-prison pipeline and the effects SROs feel they have on school safety.

My overarching research question was: *What are the experiences and perceptions of School Resource Officers (SROs)?* I found that **the SROs described how it was different being a cop on the street versus being an officer in the school.** The SROs conveyed that as a street officer, you must be sterner and more aggressive, and possibly get physical with subjects more often than as an officer in a school. As an officer of the law, one must have a different mindset in the streets than that of an officer in the schools. The SROs described it as one has to act instinctually on the streets and be more aggressive toward any subjects one may encounter. Whereas, being a SRO, one mainly utilizes verbal tactics toward students and tries to reason with them more than you would

with subjects on the street. One of the SROs described that with a student, you could talk a student down. On the street, you have to act physically, and you may go A to C, whereas as an officer in the school, you can just stay at A and talk to them. The officer also described utilizing the tactical method of verbal judo on students that he found successful as a SRO in deescalating situations verbally with students.

Goggins et al.'s (1994) study evaluated a program that utilized off-duty law enforcement officers to ultimately build relationships with students, mentor, and affect students who were participating in criminal activity. Some students from the study perceived the officers to be needlessly aggressive in some occurrences. However, the study revealed that the students and staff felt the off-duty officers increased safety overall, and reduced gang-related and drug activity. SROs being overly aggressive toward students could be addressed on a case-by-case basis, particularly with the incidents we become aware of through local or national exposure. Even though Goggins et al. (1994) mention this issue in their study, none of the studies I found in the research literature addresses this issue specifically, even Goggins et al.'s (1994) research. There is no substantial amount of research in this area, therefore, it is hard to generalize how and when officers are deemed to be overly aggressive with students. Albeit there have been some noted isolated incidents where officers have been overly aggressive towards students, my findings suggest the contrary of SROs being unnecessarily or overly aggressive towards students. Through this research, I identify that officers are more aggressive as cops on the street than in the schools. School environments in which officers are overly aggressive may adversely affect the school to where the school is

viewed as a dangerous place. Additionally, the children might feel as though they are under constant police surveillance (Myrstol, 2011; Travis & Coon, 2005). SROs who are overly aggressive may impact the school environment to the point that the environment becomes one of disorder and disarray. Students who attend schools where there are higher levels of dysfunction and disorder felt less safe than their counterparts (Eisenbraun, 2007; Lacoë, 2015; McDevitt & Panniello, 2005; Noaks & Noaks, 2000; Perumean-Chaney & Sutton, 2013; Varjas et al., 2009). Moreover, it comes as no surprise that African American students are more susceptible to being victimized by violence in schools (e.g., Cedeno et al., 2010; Lacoë, 2015).

In an additional research question, I asked: *What training did the SROs receive and how does the training play out in their work in schools?* I found that: **most of the SROs received formal training specifically to become SROs, and many of them had pertinent ideas of what experiences were needed to be effective SROs.** The type of training a law enforcement officer receives to become a SRO encompasses teaching officers about schools, law, situational awareness, and reviews you can and cannot do as a SRO. Many of the SROs went to what was designated as a SRO school to become a SRO. One of the SROs conveyed that he was taught in SRO school how to avoid getting sued, to not be alone in a room with a young lady, and to approach and ascertain female students differently than male students.

Furthermore, in training, they were taught how to speak publicly and guided on how to lead instruction with students. Additionally, another SRO explained that he attended a 2-week conference where gangs, music, trends, and juvenile law were

discussed. He also attended SRO school and then another school for teaching the G.R.E.A.T. program. Every year, SROs would do in-service training at the sheriff's department about their job. The in-service training would cross over into street patrol and juvenile justice, and they would have to go through that every year. In Brown and Benedict's (2005) study, the authors found that SROs deployed in public school systems mainly come from local police departments. SRO Columbus was not sent to SRO school by his police department, and due to a shortage of officers at his precinct one year they rotated a new officer in and out of the school each month.

The training plays out in the SROs' work every day the SROs are on the job in schools. All of the SROs expressed that they had a strong urge and desire to help students and staff, and most importantly keep all stakeholders safe in schools. Theriot (2009) alludes to the fact that having trained SROs in schools, students feel safer and thus less likely to feel the need to carry a weapon for protection. These enhanced feelings of safety also contribute to better feelings about school in general and a stronger sense of community in schools. Myrstol (2011) argues that there is broad support for SRO programs among the community as well. The SROs all wanted to bring and keep the peace in schools, which keeps the learning environment in schools conducive for learning. All of the SROs did not necessarily have a family member or a spiritual connection that motivated them to become a SRO; however, the one constant that remained was that they all wanted to work in professions where they were continuously helping people. For all of these SROs, their career journeys led them to not only help students, but teachers, administrators, staff members, and the communities they served as

SROs. Part Q of Title I of the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968, as amended, defines the SRO as “a career law enforcement officer, with sworn authority, deployed in community-oriented policing, and assigned by the employing police department or agency to work in collaboration with school and community-based organizations” (p. 75). In general, principals and teachers are supportive of the SRO concept, believing that the presence of police in schools improves school safety and climate by deterring student misconduct and delinquency (Brown, 2006a; Brown & Benedict, 2005; Johnson, 1999; May et al., 2004; Travis & Coon, 2005).

In another research question, I asked: *What are SROs’ perceptions of their role in the school-to-prison pipeline and their reactions to the high-profile cases involved in the Black Lives Matter movement?* I found that **the SROs had mixed feelings about the school-to-prison pipeline phenomenon**. Over-policing and zero-tolerance policies enable school security and campus police to punish students for the smallest infractions (Advancement Project, 2000). Winn and Behizadeh (2011) point out that zero-tolerance policies and practices in schools have become one of the greatest contributing builders of the school-to-prison pipeline. When I interviewed the SROs and gave them the context that I was trying to deduce their perceptions of their role in the school-to-prison pipeline, the SROs had mixed feelings in their answers to this particular inquiry. Some of the study participants felt that SROs contributed to students not falling victim to the school-to-prison pipeline by positively influencing students’ lives and steering them in the right direction, away from a life consumed in the justice system.

Contrarily, SRO Virginia provided the example of when he first started out in the role of SRO: “it was charge everything in the world. Anything a kid did they (SROs) charged, and any—every fight was charged.” This construct that SRO Virginia provided from the era when he and other SROs charged students for every infraction possible coincides with the school-to-prison pipeline philosophy. It is important to note that SRO Virginia conveyed that the decision to charge students for every infraction came from the school board and not law enforcement, and that they eventually moved away from this practice of charging students for every possible infraction.

Michelle Alexander, in *The New Jim Crow* (2010), characterizes a scenario regarding how students, particularly students of color, are targeted by law enforcement, which increases their chances to be devoured by the school-to-prison pipeline. The reality is that Black and Latino students are entering the school-to-prison pipeline more than their White and Asian peers, even though the normalizing of expectations for incarceration has profound consequences for poor youth of color (Meiners, 2007). The “zero tolerance revolution” (Parenti, 2008, p. 70) has resulted in students being pushed out, and an “overrepresentation” of African Americans in school suspension rates is well documented (Gilliam, 2005; Gilliam & Shahr, 2006; NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, 2005; Noguera, 2003; Winn & Behizadeh, 2011). Furthermore, Winn and Behizadeh (2011) claim expulsions and suspensions from school increase the likelihood for incarceration, thus making African American students prime candidates for the movement from schools to jails. When it came to the SROs’ perceptions of their role in the school-to-prison pipeline, they had mixed feelings regarding their role in the

phenomenon. Despite the fact the SROs had mixed feelings when it came to their perceptions of the phenomenon, the reality is that SROs do indeed play an integral role in the school-to-prison pipeline.

I also found that **the SROs had personal reactions to the high-profile cases involved in the Black Lives Matter Movement**, such as the George Floyd and Ahmaud Arbery killings. George Floyd, an unarmed Black man, was killed by police officer Derek Chauvin as Chauvin kept his knee pressed down on Floyd's neck for 8 minutes and 46 seconds. Ahmaud Arbery, another unarmed Black man, was fatally shot and murdered after being racially profiled and pursued by three White male residents while simply jogging through the neighborhood. The SROs commented on the killings of these unarmed African Americans. One of the SROs specifically commented on the George Floyd killing, saying that officer Chauvin and the other officers involved did not belong in law enforcement. The SRO commended the justice system for working and arresting officer Chauvin and the other officers involved. What I found to be the most interesting in the SRO's responses was that he questioned officer Chauvin's motive in killing George Floyd. The SRO wondered if officer Chauvin killed George Floyd just because he was Black. Unfortunately, this has become a common reaction not only by Black people and people of color but people in general because these incidents of unarmed African Americans being killed in America have occurred too routinely throughout history. The SRO also provided his reaction to the Ahmaud Arbery case and referenced the two White males who took Arbery's life, one was a former deputy and the other was a former District Attorney. SRO Knight begged the question,

how do you think Black people look at the law enforcement and DA? . . . it's just too many Black getting killed by White law enforcement officers . . . Black men getting killed and these White officers, some of them getting off free, clear, and it's sad. Something will have to change.

Finally, I asked: *What effect do SROs feel that they have on school safety?* I found that **SROs agreed that they are an important and valuable presence in schools.** Even though May et al. (2004) suggest that limited empirical evidence exists to suggest that SROs are effective agents in increasing school safety, through my interviews with the SROs, they expressed the effects they feel SROs have on school safety. The SROs provided examples from when they handled incidents during their career as SROs and explained their primary job role and responsibilities as SROs. All of the study participants expressed the most important aspect of a SRO's job is to ensure the safety of all students and staff in schools.

The SROs conveyed that SROs are needed and believe that it is necessary for them to be required in schools. This notion of the SROs believing they need to be required in schools is because they identified that SROs provide the needed safety for all stakeholders in schools. The SROs identified that you have a law enforcement officer who is armed and trained on campus who can quickly react if something goes awry in terms of safety. Response time was alluded to as being a major factor of their support of requiring SROs in schools. SRO Knight expressed,

you got somebody out there that's armed and trained . . . on campus right then that should be able to react. Response time may be 2, 3 minutes away, but a lot of things can happen within one minute, 30 seconds. You got somebody on campus right there that's ready to react.

Given Ahmed and Walker's (2018) report that there were on average 1.4 school shootings every week in 2018 alone in the United States, I agree with the SROs' notion that SROs need to be required in schools for the safety and wellbeing of all students, teachers, and staff.

Discussion

As a leader in education, conducting this study allowed me to research an identified passion of mine that I feel often may be taken for granted, but we all know is the most important—the notion of keeping all students, teachers, and staff members safe in schools. As a new principal, I trained a new SRO assigned to my school who had never been a SRO before. I trained the SRO about the proper procedure that we would follow at our school if any incidents arose that would require our attention. I remember reviewing key incidents that had garnered local and national news media attention as well. As my career in education has progressed, I have been very fortunate to work with some of the most outstanding SROs that I could have imagined. I have learned an enormous amount by building relationships and working together with SROs over the years.

Nevertheless, as Myrstol (2011) asserts, there is very little information coming from SROs themselves. Even though I hope this study contributes formidably to the existing literature, I was only able to compare and contrast my findings with the limited number of studies involving the authentic voices of SROs. Throughout my research, I was curious about what other SROs outside of my study would have to say regarding topics closely related to my research questions. I would have been intrigued to find out what other SROs or former SROs would have commented on concerning the research

questions. Even though the Black Lives Matter movement cases that the SROs commented on in my study were relatively recent regarding the writing of this dissertation, I would have been interested to hear the personal reactions of other SROs or law enforcement officers about their reactions to the killings of unarmed African Americans by law enforcement. As a leader in education and a Black male who has worked and continues to work closely with SROs and law enforcement, getting the authentic reactions of law enforcement always remains paramount to me. Even amidst the contentious relationship between the African American community and law enforcement in America, I am still a firm believer in giving voice to both sides if possible. I often feel in education, much like in law enforcement, isolated adverse incidents involving educators or law enforcement officers sully the reputation of our professions when in reality, it is only a very small percentage involved. Consequently, I was inclined to want to get on record with these SROs and allow them to provide their voices on a myriad of subjects to add to the existing literature.

Why SROs Are Important

Simply stated, SROs are important because their top job duty and responsibility is to keep all students, teachers and staff members safe in schools. The presence of police in schools improves school safety and climate by deterring student misconduct and delinquency (Brown, 2006a; Brown & Benedict, 2005; Johnson, 1999; May et al., 2004; Travis & Coon, 2005). Contrarily, students who attended schools with higher levels of dysfunction and disorder felt less safe (Eisenbraun, 2007; Laco, 2015; McDevitt &

Panniello, 2005; Noaks & Noaks, 2000; Perumean-Chaney & Sutton, 2013; Varjas et al., 2009).

As a leader in education, I can testify that SROs are important not only for keeping all stakeholders safe, but if the environment is deemed safe, then it, in turn, makes the overall educational environment more conducive for learning. I have witnessed in multiple school settings where the SROs are a part of the school environment in a non-threatening way. The SROs were infused into the staff very similarly the way any other staff member would be. If done effectively, SROs build relationships with students, teachers, administrators, staff members, parents, guardians and community members to make it a more community policing type of atmosphere within schools. In this type of environment, all stakeholders felt comfortable approaching the SROs and engaging in conversation with them. Just the SROs' presence alone in these schools makes all stakeholders feel more comfortable and safer in the school environment. Theriot's (2009) study suggests that SROs' mere presence in schools makes students feel safer and less likely to feel the need to carry a weapon for protection. These heightened feelings of safety might also contribute to a stronger sense of connection to school and improve the overall school environment.

May et al. (2004) suggest that despite the widespread use and popularity of SROs, limited empirical evidence suggests that SROs are effective agents in increasing school safety. Given this construct by May et al. (2004), I had to formulate from my findings why I ultimately, along with my interviewees, felt that SROs are effective in increasing school safety. I identified substantial quotes from my interviews with the SROs. They

expressed the effects they feel SROs have on school safety, gave examples from when they handled various incidents in schools, and explained their primary job role and responsibilities of SROs. Some of the study participants even provided their sentiments about SROs who may not have carried out their primary job duties and responsibilities and how this negatively affects school safety. I was able to deduce from my interviews with the SROs that they are effective agents in increasing school safety, even though there may be limited empirical evidence to support this assertion. It is important to note that even given the limited empirical evidence to support this notion, all of the SROs I interviewed expressed that the most important aspect of a SRO's job is to ensure the safety of all students and staff in schools with the idea that if done effectively, school safety will increase dramatically.

Recommendations

After analyzing all of this information in totality, I offer the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1: There should be minimum requirements that law enforcement officers meet to become eligible to become a SRO.

- Law enforcement officers should have a minimum of 2 years of experience working as an officer on the street.
- Law enforcement officers should have prior experience working in the jail and in court.
- Law enforcement officers should have in-depth knowledge of juvenile law.

- SRO School is strongly recommended for law enforcement officers to attend before becoming a SRO.
 - Law enforcement officers who meet these requirements should volunteer to become SROs.
 - In the event an officer cannot be found who fits the previously mentioned criteria, the SRO candidate who is chosen should only be assigned for one year in the school.

The SRO participants in this study provided substantial noteworthy information that supports this first recommendation I am making. SRO Bill provided a blueprint for the experience needed that would assist in identifying an effective SRO candidate. SRO Bill said, “work in the jail for a year. Go to the court for a year. Jail, you know the criminals. Court, you know how to testify. Then you hit the street.” Of course, becoming an eligible SRO candidate would all hinge on a law enforcement officer meeting the threshold of having at least a minimum of 2 years of experience working as an officer on the street, given this first recommendation. Having this minimum experience as an officer on the street is paramount for a plethora of reasons, such as allowing an officer to gain vital experience dealing with the public, while gaining overall law enforcement experience. SRO Columbus agreed with this notion. When I inquired what experiences were needed to be an effective SRO, Columbus stated, “working the streets, working patrol . . . need to be understanding of the juvenile system, how it works.”

Several of the SRO participants had attended some form of SRO school, which I strongly recommended for law enforcement officers to attend prior to becoming a SRO.

SRO Maximus stated, “there is a SRO class and there’s a SRO convention every summer where they go through some of the training.” These examples from the SROs align with my first recommendation and further support the recommended minimum requirements that law enforcement officers should meet to become eligible to serve as a SRO.

Furthermore, once meeting these requirements, a law enforcement officer should have the option of volunteering to become a SRO. In the event an officer cannot be found who fits the previously mentioned criteria, the SRO candidate chosen should only be assigned to the school for one year. The impetus of the one-year assignment is considering the mental and social emotional aspect of assigning officers to schools who did not want to be in the schools voluntarily. You want to allow the officer back on the streets after a one-year assignment in the school so if they develop or already have a negative attitude toward being assigned in schools, the officer will not be forced to continue past one school year.

Recommendation 2: Stakeholders of the school should be involved in the hiring process of SROs for their school in particular.

My second recommendation asserts that stakeholders of the school should be involved in the hiring process of SROs. Like any position within schools, one must find the “right fit” when hiring someone for a position. As important as the SRO’s job is to keep everyone safe, finding the right SRO for this role is probably as important. Input in the hiring process must be included to find the right SRO for any particular school community. The school stakeholders can collaborate and dialog about the qualities and likenesses would fit the entire school community. In many instances, SROs are placed at

schools without the school community having an inclusive voice throughout the placement and/or hiring process. Without representation from the school involved in the hiring or placement process, the school runs a huge risk of placing an officer who may not be a good fit for the school, which could adversely impact the school community. In too many instances, SROs are placed in schools without stakeholders from the school community having input into which officer the school receives. However, if stakeholders in schools are given the opportunity to participate in deciding on the hiring or placement of an officer in schools, it is paramount that stakeholders seek a SRO with the right characteristics for the role. Above all, “the right personality” summed up the ability to be an effective SRO. “Three attributes that seem to be the core of the personality characteristics that make an officer an effective SRO . . . An outgoing, caring, but no-nonsense personality is needed” (Finn et al., 2005, p. 39).

Recommendation 3: Local School Boards of Education, the superintendent, central office personnel, school administration, SROs, and other law enforcement personnel need to routinely review, monitor, and track the data about the school-to-prison pipeline for their schools.

- Local School Boards of Education regularly revamp their policies where the pipeline disproportionately affects students of color in their schools.

Local School Boards of Education, the superintendent, central office personnel, school administration, SROs, and other law enforcement personnel need to routinely review, monitor, and track the data pertaining to the school-to-prison pipeline for their

schools. The reality is that Black and Latino students are entering the school-to-prison pipeline more than their White and Asian peers, even though the normalizing of expectations for incarceration has profound consequences for poor youth of color (Meiners, 2007). Therefore, local School Boards of Education need to regularly revamp their policies where the pipeline disproportionately affects students of color in their schools.

For my third recommendation, it is important to note that, as SRO Virginia pointed out in my interview with him, SROs often are just carrying out the policies that the school board has established at the behest of the school administration. SRO Virginia explained, “when I first started out, it was charge everything in the world . . . it was the school board, because they were the ones that said that, you know, what they wanted done.” Sometimes these policies that the school board has established encompass zero-tolerance policies, which leads to over-policing within schools. Hence, this leads to an increase in students falling victim to the school-to-prison pipeline because over-policing and zero-tolerance policies enable school security and campus police to punish students for the smallest infractions (Advancement Project, 2000; Alexander, 2010). Winn and Behizadeh (2011) point out that zero-tolerance policies and practices in schools have become one of the greatest contributing builders of the school-to-prison pipeline.

Furthermore, Winn and Behizadeh (2011) claim expulsions and suspensions from school increase the likelihood for incarceration, thus making African American students prime candidates for the movement from schools to jails. The school-to-prison pipeline

entails that particular students or subgroups of students fall victim to the court system throughout their lives because the criminalization of their behavior begins in schools and continues on throughout their adulthood. In *The New Jim Crow* (2010), Michelle Alexander more intensely characterizes a scenario regarding how law enforcement targets students, particularly students of color, which increases their chances of being devoured by the school-to-prison pipeline.

Final Thoughts

One result from the findings that surprised me and that pleased me was that most of the SRO participants received formal training to become SROs. This was the exact opposite of what I was thinking before conducting this research. I believe the experience that I had as a new principal, where I trained the brand-new SRO who was assigned to my school who had not received any formal training to become a SRO resonated with me. I remember that experience very vividly. Since that experience, I have been operating with the lens that many or most SROs have not received formal training to become SROs. However, given the nature of SROs' most important job role and responsibility of keeping all stakeholders safe, I was very pleased to find that most SRO participants received formal training to become SROs.

Furthermore, something significant that I deduced from conducting my study was that there needs to be more research conducted on what type of minimum requirements and training are needed for SROs to be effective. Additionally, there need to be more studies that include the authentic voices of SROs/law enforcement officers and former SROs/law enforcement officers. SROs often bear the brunt of the blame for the idea of

the school-to-prison pipeline theory; however, there needs to be more research conducted on how policy decisions made by the local school boards in public school systems adversely affect students of color, particularly Black students. I would be remiss if, according to Mallett (2017), I did not include, along with students of color and Black students, other certain child and adolescent groups—those who experience poverty, students who have special education disabilities, children and adolescents who have been traumatized or maltreated, and young people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) as areas where there is a need for more extensive research.

Also, from the findings, this notion that there is a big difference between a street officer and a school officer gave me pause. As a Black male, I personally grapple with this idea mentally because this is the exact thinking from officers that seemingly removes the empathy and overall deductive reasoning from episodes of unjust violence against minorities, more specifically against Black males and females. “You have to be quicker and you—let’s see. How can you put it? You’ve got to be stern, but you got to be where you’re fair” (SRO Virginia). “You just take them and do what you got to do” (SRO Bill). These are examples that some of the SROs from my study used to illustrate the dichotomy between being an officer on the street and being a SRO. Ironically, one of these former SROs identifies as White, while the other former SRO identifies as African American.

This construct of my participants asserting that they were more aggressive as a law enforcement officer on the street bothered me to my core. I would dare say this is the type of thinking by law enforcement that leads to the killings of unarmed African

American males and females. However, after getting the SROs' personal reactions to high profile cases involved in the Black Lives Matter movement, I felt somewhat more at ease. All of the SRO participants felt that Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin's actions, keeping his knee pressed down on George Floyd's neck for 8 minutes and 46 seconds, was wrong and that his actions did not reflect any type of law enforcement training. I became even more reassured that the SROs gave similar reactions to the Ahmaud Arbery case in Georgia. One of the participants referenced other incidents, including Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Trayvon Martin, and Rodney King, who was a victim of police brutality by the Los Angeles Police Department in 1991.

Furthermore, I strongly encourage all law enforcement agencies to require all officers to read New York City Department of Investigation's *Investigation into NYPD Response to the George Floyd Protests* (Garnett, 2020), and that all law enforcement departments implement the Investigation's recommendations as needed. Although I have not identified by which means it should occur, there needs to be some sort of regular communication from SROs and law enforcement to the school community and the general public. Similar recommendations were made in the New York City Department of Investigation's *Investigation into NYPD Response to the George Floyd Protests*:

7. *Community support and outreach*, whether through websites, social media, reporting, or other methods of communication, to educate the community about the agency's authority and efforts to improve policing; and
8. *Transparency and accountability*, through regular public reporting. (Garnett, 2020, p. 107)

Additionally, during the process of completing my study, the “Insurrection” at the Capitol occurred on January 6, 2021. The Insurrection spawned from a rally held by Donald Trump where he urged his supporters to stop the certification of the presidential election he lost. After being told by Donald Trump during the rally to walk to the Capitol and “show strength,” a predominantly White mob of insurrectionists stormed the U.S. Capitol with presumable intent to destroy property, harm U.S. lawmakers, and overturn the results of the presidential election. Some of the insurrectionists were armed, whereas many, if not all of the high-profile Black Lives Matter cases, the African Americans had been unarmed when killed. However, law enforcement’s response to the Insurrection was a more varied reaction than what has been applied to people of color, particularly Black people, in that there was no immediate use of lethal force toward many of the insurrectionists.

I propose to take this notion of a dichotomy between policing in school versus the street a step further and suggest that the Insurrection is clear evidence which suggests there is a dichotomy in how law enforcement in the United States treats White people compared to Black people. In fact, prominent Civil Rights Attorney Benjamin Crump said that moving forward he could forever use the Insurrection that occurred as a legal argument to further the notion that White people are treated differently than Black people by law enforcement in America (TV Episode 2021). As a Black male leader in education, I am deeply concerned that school shootings, coupled with the killings of unarmed African Americans by law enforcement officers in America, continue to be widespread epidemics throughout America. These events weigh heavily on my heart and psyche

every day. I believe SRO Knight said it best in my interview with him when he commented on the Ahmaud Arbery case: “something will have to change.”

Overall, this study allowed me to explore a personal passion by researching an area in education that is important to me. This is the notion of how we keep all students, teachers, and staff members safe in schools. Over the span of my career as a leader in education, I have worked with some of the finest SROs. I hope SROs learned as much from me as a school leader as I have learned from them each day that I strive to build relationships with them, all while observing them in their role. Additionally, I hope that through addressing the topics I have outlined in my study, I will contribute formidably to society and social improvement as well as to the scholarly conversation represented in the literature review.

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APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Background Information

1. Where are you from originally and where did you grow up?
2. How many years of experience do you have as a law enforcement officer and as a SRO?
3. What ethnicity/race do you identify with?
4. Why did you want to become a police officer?
5. Do you have any relatives that are/were law enforcement officers, and if so, did this play a role in you becoming a law enforcement officer?
6. What was your experience like growing up in school and at home?
7. How did you like school in general growing up?
8. Did you have any interactions with law enforcement while you were in school and/or did you have any encounters that made you want to become a law enforcement officer?

Experiences as a SRO

9. What was your experience as a SRO?
10. Describe the type of school(s) you went to?
11. What were your required job responsibilities and duties?
 - a. Do you think that there were some job duties that a SRO should be doing that may not fall under their umbrella of responsibilities?
 - b. Do you feel that there were some job duties that a SRO should NOT be doing that is a part of their responsibilities?
 - c. Do you think that all SROs know their job responsibilities and duties?
12. Did you ever witness or were involved in an incident where you and/or another SRO had to go into action, i.e., get physical with a student and/or stakeholder or address a stakeholder at school or a school sponsored event?

- a. If so, describe the overall incident, i.e., the setting, people involved, what happened, the outcome, etc.
- b. What specifically did you and/or the other SRO do and how did this make you feel?
- c. If you have not, what if a SRO had to go into action, how would this make you feel?

13. How did you come to your decision to become a SRO and what influences and experiences led up to your decision?

Training to be a SRO

14. Were you trained to become a SRO?
- a. Are you familiar with any type of training that SROs must have before being placed into a school?
 - b. Do you feel that some type of required training should be required for officers before being placed into a school?
 - c. If officers did not have to have any required training before being placed into a school, how would you feel about this?

Perceptions of Students of Color and School to Prison Pipeline

15. Are there any subgroup of students, i.e., White, Black, EC, Asian, Native American, etc. that you think feels safer than the other subgroups?
- a. Please explain why, or why not?
16. What first comes to mind when you hear the term “victimized students”?
- a. Are there any subgroup of students, i.e., White, Black, EC, Asian, Native American, etc. that you think are “victimized” more than others?
 - i. Please explain why, or why not?
17. What effect do you feel SROs have on students’ sense of school connectedness?
- a. Please explain your stance.
18. Do you feel that SROs contribute, or do not contribute to the criminalization of student behavior?
19. Are you aware of what is referred to as the School to Prison Pipeline? If so, what does it entail in your point of view?
20. Do you feel that SRO’s contribute, or do not contribute to the School to Prison Pipeline?

Perceptions on SROs' Effects on School Safety

21. What effect do you feel you and other SROs have on school safety?
22. Do you feel that SROs in schools keeps students and staff safe?
23. Do you feel that all students feel safe knowing that there is a SRO at school?
 - a. Please explain why, or why not?
24. How do you feel about school shootings when they occur?
25. In your opinion, what can be done to stop these school shootings?
26. How do you feel about the student led marches about gun control?
27. What are your thoughts about arming teachers?
28. How do you feel about SROs being required to be in schools?
 - a. Do you feel that SROs should be required to be in schools?
 - i. Please explain, why or why not?

Other Stakeholder Perceptions of SROs

29. How do you think other stakeholders perceived you?
 - a. Teachers?
 - b. Administrators?
 - c. Parents?

Conclusion

30. What are your overall views of having SROs in schools?
31. Is there anything else that you would like to add to this interview?