Public Education Employee Perceptions of School Resource Officers

by

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Abstract

The use of School Resource Officers (SRO's) has become an increasingly popular strategy in attempting to create safe learning environments on school campuses in the United States. The implementation of SROs saw a significant increase following the school shooting at Columbine High School in Littleton, CO on April 20, 1999. As media attention and parental interest drove schools to employ SROs, little was done in terms of uniform selection criteria, training guidelines or documentation of which schools were employing SROs. Furthermore, not much is known about the how SROs are perceived in their role or how effective they are at keeping the school campus safe. This study seeks to bring a greater understanding of the effectiveness of SROs in keeping their campuses safe and the role that adult education plays in formulating perceptions of SROs and regulating training protocols. The goal of this study is to provide meaningful information for school districts, law enforcement agencies, and stakeholders when considering SROs as part of their efforts to make their campuses safer.

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List of Abbreviations

SRO   School Resource Officer

NASRO   National Association of School Resource Officers

U.S.D.O.J. United States Department of Justice

CDC   Centers for Disease Control

APA   American Psychological Association

JCSO   Jefferson County Sheriff's Office

F.B.I.   federal Bureau of Investigation

SHES   Sandy Hook Elementary School

MSDHS   Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School

ACLU   American Civil Liberties Union

MOU   Memorandum of Understanding

D.A.R.E. Drug Abuse Resistance Education

ASU.   Arizona State University

Chapter 1

Introduction

According to Weiler and Cray (2011), the school resource officer (SRO) program in the United States began in schools as early as the mid-1950s but did not start to take its current form until the 1990s as a response to publicized school shootings. While the idea of having uniformed police officers on school campuses may have initially stemmed from a desire for greater physical security, the position has evolved to encompass the roles of educator, informal counselor, and law enforcement officer (National Association of School Resource Officers [NASRO], 2012).

As the SRO position has changed significantly in a short amount of time, there have been questions about the overall effectiveness of preventing concerning behaviors on school campuses. Issues remain regarding the training, selection, and placement of SROs as well. According to Raymond (2010), although SRO programs are prevalent nationwide, little has been done by way of evaluating their effectiveness. The modern concept of police in schools may have begun as a response to high-profile shootings, but the position now involves many duties not directly related to traditional law enforcement roles. Many SROs now spend their entire workday on school campuses. The use of relationships with students and staff mirrors the concept of community-oriented policing. According to the U.S. Department of Justice [U.S.D.O.J] (2014), "Community policing is a philosophy that promotes organizational strategies that support the systematic use of partnerships and problem-solving techniques to proactively address the immediate conditions that give rise to public safety issues such as crime, social disorder, and fear of crime" (p. 3). An officer's integration into the community beyond calls for service increases opportunities for safer outcomes for all stakeholders.

There remains little uniformity nationally when it comes to how SROs are selected and what their overarching mission and job description is (Connery, 2020). While NASRO provides guidelines for SRO selection and training, decisions regarding SROs remain an issue of local control and oversight. Some law enforcement agencies choose to place older, less qualified officers on campuses. Other agencies recruit, select, and train their SROs in conjunction with school officials to create and maintain an ongoing and robust partnership.

Increasingly, the role of SRO is one that intersects with the field of adult education, as they fulfill the roles of both a practitioner and a student. Although utilized in a pedagogical setting, the formal and informal ways in which the SRO interacts with the other adults on campus often dictates how effective they are in their role. Malcolm Knowles (1980) brought the term "andragogy" into the zeitgeist as a way of describing the differences in which adults learn, as opposed to how children learn. SROs are a unique type of adult learner in a field that is ever-changing. They are charged with both providing education to other adults by way of safety training and serving as adult learners themselves in the ways in which they learn about the students they serve and the laws that govern their actions. As Hunter-Johnson & Closson (2011) note, although police are structured in a para-military fashion, an andragogical approach to police work has the potential to prepare officers to be critical thinkers, better decision makers, and improve their communication skills.

Documented and required selection and training of SROs carries with it additional complexities. According to Monson (2019), little is still known about how effective SROs are in the school setting regarding the school campus's safety. Questions remain as to how involved SROs should be in the disciplining of students. Also, at issue is if SROs increase the rates of arrest just by their presence on campus and if arrest becomes a replacement for school-based

disciplinary measures. If an SRO can mitigate an active threat, it is often apparent the role the SRO played. What is not known is how safe schools are under the SRO's presence and relationship-building efforts. Research is inconsistent in identifying the effectiveness of SROs. The viewpoint of both educators and SROs is crucial when streamlining the factors that lead to positive SRO presence on a school campus.

Statement of the Problem

The issue of violence on school campuses has garnered increased media attention, resulting in divergent theories and practices regarding how to keep school campuses safe. According to the Centers for Disease Control [CDC] (2019), "homicide is the second leading cause of death for youth aged 5-18" (p. 1). Although per the CDC (2019), less than 2% of these homicides are school-associated, the youth involved in violent behavior are often students on a school campus at some point during their school-aged years. Coupled with the fact that the American Psychological Association (APA) (2011) noted that violence against teachers is a national crisis, the ability to keep school campuses safe is both critical and complex.

With both students' and teachers' safety at stake, every day school is in session, practices and strategies must be present for campuses to remain as safe as possible. One of the most popularly adopted school safety strategies is implementing the SRO program on K-12 school campuses (Connery, 2020). The prevalence of SROs on school campuses is emphasized by the fact that in 1975, only 1% of schools in the United States reported having police officers on campus; by 2018 the percentage had increased to approximately 58% (Diliberti et al., 2019). While SRO programs have increased rapidly in scope in a short amount of time, very little is known about their effectiveness.

SROs are on campus to protect those on campus on any given day but are they effective at doing so? The viewpoints of those tasked with the daily responsibility of keeping school campuses safe, specifically SROs, teachers, and school administrators, were solicited for this study. Each entity represents an important frontline stakeholder group who make daily decisions that result in the climate and culture of their campus when it comes to the safety of staff and students.

Purpose of the Study

This study's primary purpose is to measure the perception of the effectiveness of SROs in keeping the school campus safe, as viewed by SROs, teachers, and school administrators. By analyzing responses across the State of Alabama, representing multiple public-school districts, this research can help both school systems and law enforcement agencies decide how resources may be most efficiently utilized in the furtherance of school safety. The study can potentially provide information to stakeholders attempting to determine if having an SRO on a school campus makes the campus a safer learning environment than if there was no SRO. Additionally, if a school system currently employs SROs as part of their strategy to maintain a safe learning environment, this study may also provide insights and recommendations that, if implemented, make school campuses safer.

Significance of the Study

Given the attention that violence on school campuses garners, it is essential to understand which strategies effectively provide a safe learning environment. School systems, law-enforcement agencies, employees, parents, and students are all impacted by the decision to either have an SRO on campus or not. If an SRO is on campus, decisions are made daily about how the SRO is utilized in the school environment. This study will provide valuable information to

stakeholders seeking to either implement SROs on campus or seeking to improve their existing program.

Research Questions

The following research questions were be used to guide this study:

1. What is your perception of School Resource Officers as part of your professional role?

   a. What do you think the primary functions of the School Resource Officer are in your school?

   b. Do you believe the School Resource Officer successfully fulfills those functions? Please explain how they do or do not fulfill the functions.

   c. What would you like to see your School Resource Officer do in order to be more effective in his or her role?

2. What context or situations have impacted your experiences and shaped your perception of School Resource Officers?

   a. How often do you interact with the School Resource Officer at your school?

   b. How has your perception of School Resource Officers changed during the course of your career?

   c. Do you perceive School Resource Officers the same as any other police officer? Why or why not?

Assumptions

The following assumptions were made in formulating and planning this study:

   a. That there is no uniform method for selecting School Resource Officers in the State of Alabama. This is based on the varying internal policies of both law-enforcement agencies and school districts.

b. That the role of School Resource Officers is not uniformly understood by SROs, teachers, and school administrators. This assumption is based on previous studies in which respondents have indicated confusion about what the SRO role entails.

c. That those who responded are representative of the full sample and the entire demographic. Respondents included individuals of varying genders and races.

d. That the respondents have done so with candor and accuracy and did not temper answers based on external or internal factors.

Limitations

This study has certain limitations, many related to the sample size of respondents. As School Resource Officer programs and school systems are not universal across Alabama, it is difficult to account for all potential circumstances that may affect the relationship between law enforcement and school systems. The selection of participants in this study was made to account for both school-districts and law enforcement agencies that serve diverse populations geographically, economically, and racially across the State of Alabama. Diversity in study participants was considered as well, to account for differing perspectives related to the effectiveness of School Resource Officers. This includes respondents from differing genders, races, and professions.

This study utilized a phenomenological approach to qualitative research. The lived experiences of the interview participants provided the lens through which data was analyzed. This approach introduces certain inherent limitations in the study, by virtue of the limited scope of phenomenological analysis within the greater framework of qualitative analysis.

Definitions

Terms that will be used within and throughout the study include:

1. School Resource Officer (SRO) - A credentialed peace officer in the State of
   Alabama, who works in collaboration with a public-school system (nasro.org).

2. School Campus - A physical environment whose primary function is to host
   students from grades K-12 for the purpose of public education (Ortiz, 2011).

3. NASRO - National Association of School Resource Officers. A national non-
   profit organization founded as a support for SROs, school administrators, and
   safety professionals working in schools. NASRO provides training for police
   officers serving as SROs (nasro.org).

4. Teacher - a credentialed teacher in the State of Alabama, currently teaching in
   a public school in the State of Alabama. Teachers in the State of Alabama must
   hold a bachelor's degree at minimum, complete an approved teacher education
   program, pass required certification assessments, and maintain a valid Alabama
   teaching certificate (alsde.edu).

5. Administrator - Person serving in an administrative capacity for either a
   public school system, or individual public school, in the State of Alabama. School
   administrators in the State of Alabama must hold a current Alabama certificate as
   an educational administrator, instructional leader, principal, superintendent, or
   career technical administrator (http://www.alabamaadministrativecode.state.al.us).

6. Discipline - Action taken on behalf of a public-school system, or individual public
   school, in the State of Alabama, due to a violation of established policies or
   procedures as a means to maintain control of student behavior (Cameron, 2006).

Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters. The first chapter provides an introduction and context of the research that will be conducted. This chapter provides essential information on School Resource Officers, their role in public schools, the research questions that will guide this study, as well as assumptions, limitations, and definitions germane to the work.

Chapter two is a literature review that provides insight, data, and information vital to this study. The sources utilized ranged from scholarly journals, books, professional publications, dissertations, and others.

Chapter three describes the methods that were utilized to conduct the study, highlighting the qualitative elements of the research, the sample size of participants, and the approach to collecting data. The third chapter also describes the process of data collection and the handling of human subjects that will be involved in the study.

Chapter four presents the collected data and the findings of the study. The data are presented without commentary from the author and is formatted to respond to the research questions.

Chapter five presents conclusions from the study, based on data analysis, and offers future research suggestions. This study's findings are provided to allow future stakeholders information that will prove useful in further studies.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

SROs are a common sight for many who attend, work at, or visit a school building in the United States. So common are SROs that in some school districts they are viewed as an extension of the school faculty. Although widely accepted and oftentimes encouraged, SROs represent a relatively new phenomenon in the world of school safety. In the United States, the images following the school massacre at Columbine High School in Littleton, CO underscored the need to protect students and staff on campus in the event of an active shooter at a school. School districts have placed intense focus in recent years on safety programs and initiatives in an "attempt to choose strategies and processes that will improve school safety, climate, and overall academic outcomes" (Cuellar et al., 2017, p. 3). Despite a commitment to provide a safe learning environment, research has found that school personnel are not always adequately trained to handle emergency response within their schools (Rinaldi, 2016). Brown (2008) surveyed hundreds of educators in the Southeastern United States and found that teachers felt they were not well trained and not prepared to handle a safety crisis at their school. SROs programs have been developed to fill the gap between educators and the need for increased safety measures in schools.

While initially, police presence may have signaled a satisfactory commitment to school safety, SROs at many schools now serve roles far beyond the scope of simply providing physical security to campus. According to NASRO (2012), SROs are encouraged to serve in the roles of law enforcement officers, educators, and informal counselors. This signals a departure from the idea of a law enforcement officer responding to a school campus in the event of a crisis, and rather encourages the integration of the SRO into the daily life of the school.

When considering how to measure the effectiveness of an SRO, it is critical to identify variables that contribute to a successful SRO program. As with many complex issues, measuring the effectiveness of SROs requires a detailed examination of factors that have led to this study. The history of the SRO position predates the Columbine High School massacre but much of what the current iteration of campus policing entails has been shaped by high-profile school shootings. The national attention of the shootings at Columbine High School, Sandy Hook Elementary School, and Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School have all accelerated policy changes that directly affects how SROs operate on school campuses. The attention of these incidents also brings to light issues like SRO training, qualifications, criteria for the assignment, and how increased presence affects school climate.

Landmark court cases have also influenced how SROs perform their jobs and what the limitations of their job duties entail. When precedents are set for what the scope of the SRO reach is as it pertains to search and seizure, use of force, access to student records, etc. it colors how the position is executed nationwide. Court cases also have a ripple effect that influences how school systems approach their handling of the SRO position.

In addition to larger national issues surrounding SROs, complexities such as training standards, continuing education, relationship building, accountability of assignments, statewide SRO databases, adaptability to work with special populations, and myriad other issues all play a role in how effective an SRO is perceived as being in creating safer schools. To produce a full picture of effectiveness, the pieces of the mosaic that build the SRO position must be identified and studied.

Evolution of the School Resource Officer

As the role and prevalence of the SRO has increased, traditional methods for training and accounting of personnel have not. According to the United States Justice Department (2015), there are approximately 19,000 school resource officers assigned to work in schools across the United States. However, only twelve states have laws mandating training requirements for school resource officers (Keierleber, 2015). These laws differ between states. In the State of Alabama, for instance, current laws only require school resource officers to complete active shooter training, but no laws mandate specific training for dealing with juveniles, as opposed to adults (National Center for Safe and Supportive Learning, 2020).

According to Ryan et al. (2018), only 9 states require certified law enforcement officers serve as school-based security and 18 states have no laws regarding the use of law enforcement on school campuses. While some states and local jurisdictions may have standards and requirements they institute for their SROs, there remains a lack of uniform criteria. In addition to the lack of criteria, there exists an absence of a general database that documents which schools have an SRO, and if those SROs are NASRO trained. Specifically, in the State of Alabama, there is currently no account of how many law-enforcement officers serve as SROs, and to which schools they are assigned. This study aims to determine the level of impact SROs have in regard to school safety and examine the perceptions relating to their effectiveness.

Many of the issues regarding the establishment of SRO databases originate from the fact that SRO programs in the United States did not become prevalent until the mid-1990s (Bleakley & Bleakley, 2018). The recency and urgency with which the SROs have been placed in schools have rendered standardization and documentation an issue of far less importance than physical presence and daily interaction with students and staff at school campuses. The surge in

SRO presence comes as the United States has responded to high-profile school shootings with a previously unseen expansion of violence-prevention programs (Theriot & Cuellar, 2014). According to Roberts et al. (2014), roughly 50 percent of all public schools in the United States report the presence of law-enforcement officers on their campus. The expansion of uniformed officers on school campuses is increasingly common as a means of reducing and mitigating criminal acts on school campuses. However, budgetary limitations are often a deciding factor in developing the size and scope of SRO programs. According to Chrusciel et al. (2015), concerns over the cost of an expansive SRO program sometimes dictate alternative measures to increase school safety.

Noteworthy Incidents of School Violence

Several high-profile incidents of mass murder have taken place on school campuses in the United States. These shootings garnered intense media attention and led to subsequent changes in policy and law. Each shooting carried with it unique characteristics and exposed multiple safety issues that came to light in the aftermath of the incidents. SRO staffing and tactics, mental health accessibility and diagnosis, first responder communication, and gun control were some of the topics addressed in the aftermath of the incidents. In the three high-profile shootings detailed in this study, factors of several issues formed a composite picture of what led to the shootings. SRO usage differed at each site, from no officer on campus, to an armed SRO who refused to act to protect students and staff. Each shooting has had a direct affect nationally on the selection, implementation, and tactics associated with SROs.

Columbine High School

As stated in the final report of Governor Bill Owens' Columbine Review Commission (2001) "On April 20, 1999, two students at Columbine High School southwest of Denver murdered 12 fellow students and one teacher." The Columbine High School shooting made the topic of school safety a national and well-publicized issue. McMurdo (2019) goes as far as to state that the Columbine shooting occupies a unique space in American history, school shootings worldwide, and created a media firestorm. McWilliam (2015) even notes that the word "Columbine" has become synonymous with school shootings.

Following the tragedy at Columbine, questions surrounded the police response to the shooting. As Mark (2019) highlights, law-enforcement response to the shooting was littered with miscommunication among responding agencies, lending to a general atmosphere of chaos. Mark (2019) further noted that the response to the shooting illustrated law enforcement's lack of preparation and strategy required to respond to such a fast-moving and violent massacre. Olinger (1999) found that a total of four hours elapsed between the time armed students were first reported in the Columbine library to the time of the arrival of officers who discovered twelve deceased students in the same location.

During the police response to the Columbine shooting, it was discovered that various responding law-enforcement agencies were communicating on a total of fifteen different radio channels (Olinger, 1999). In the aftermath of the shooting, it was noted that this was the first time in American history a law-enforcement Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) team had battled two gunmen at an unknown location inside a school containing children (Olinger, 1999). The issue of SRO presence at Columbine High School was examined in studies following the massacre. Deputy Neil Gardner, the SRO assigned to Columbine High School, was interviewed

on April 26, 1999, by Det. Russ Boatright of the Arvada (CO) Police Department concerning his role on campus the day of the shooting. In the interview, Dep. Gardner admitted that he was not present on campus at the time of the shooting, as he had left with a school administrator to eat lunch at a restaurant (Jefferson County Sheriff's Office [JCSO], 1999).

Deputy Gardner explained during his interview that he responded to the Columbine High School campus upon receiving an urgent radio transmission from the school's janitor (JCSO, 1999). Deputy Gardner arrived in the parking lot of the school, observed one of the suspected gunmen, later learned to be Eric Harris, outside an exterior building door and exchanged gunfire with the suspect from approximately sixty to seventy yards away (JCSO, 1999). Deputy Gardner did not strike the suspect with gunfire, stayed in the parking lot to assist a student escaping the attack, and never entered the Columbine High School building (JCSO, 1999).

In their report, the Columbine Review Commission (2001, p. XIV) clarified their belief of the role of SROs on school campuses by outlining the following:

> The primary tasks of SROs are to enforce the law and to protect public safety. SROs and school authorities alike must understand clearly that SROs are law enforcement officers and, as such, should normally be in uniform whenever assigned to a school. SROs should be trained like other first-responders in rapid deployment tactics in case of a school emergency. If SROs are to ensure the safety of persons within a school, school administrators should provide them with all relevant information about students at the school, unless the information is privileged by law. Police command officials should transmit to SROs all information relevant to school safety, including reported criminal conduct on the part of students at the school.

Sandy Hook Elementary School

According to the report issued by the Connecticut State's Attorney General (2013), "on the morning of December 14, 2012, the shooter, age 20, heavily armed, went to Sandy Hook Elementary School (SHES) in Newtown, where he shot his way into the locked school building with a Bushmaster Model XM15-E2S rifle." The shooter was later identified by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (F.B.I.) (2012) as Adam Lanza. Salam (2017) detailed that once inside SHES, Lanza killed twenty students, six staff members, and himself.

The Connecticut State's Attorney General Report (2013) notes that the first call from SHES to 911 dispatch occurred at 9:35:39 a.m., with the first Newtown, CT police officer arriving on the SHES campus at 9:39:00 a.m. est. No mention is made in the report of an SRO being present on campus during the shooting. Shortly following the SHES massacre, efforts were made to address the mental health needs of students who may be prone to acts of violence on campus. The shift to a mental health approach, as opposed to traditional requests for additional security, was driven by the significant mental health issues Lanza suffered from, as outlined in the Connecticut State's Attorney General Report (2013).

In a departure from the response to the Columbine High School shooting, the Interdisciplinary Group on Preventing School and Community Violence (2013) resisted the idea to fortify physical security measures in schools and instead turned the focus towards Lanza's deteriorating mental health and access to firearms. The Connecticut State's Attorney General Report (2013) refers to Lanza in their report as "the shooter," seemingly in an attempt to avoid bringing unneeded notoriety to Lanza by mentioning his name. The recognition of the mitigating issues surrounding the SHES shooting, and not the lack of SRO on campus, represented a unique approach in the local and national response to a high-profile school shooting. The prevailing idea

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was that the SHES shooting could have happened anywhere, and the location of the shooting was secondary to Lanza's untreated mental health issues and access to firearms.

Parkland High School

According to the Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Commission (2019), on February 14, 2018, former Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School (MSDHS), Nikolas Cruz, acted as a lone gunman on the MSDHS campus and murdered 14 students, 3 staff members, and wounded 17 other people. In contrast to reports commissioned following the Sandy Hook tragedy, the Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Commission (2019) named Cruz specifically and detailed the failures of MSDHS SRO, Deputy Scot Peterson. Unlike both Columbine and Sandy Hook, Dep. Peterson was present on the school campus when Cruz began shooting. Further, the Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Commission (2019) found that Peterson did not even enter the building where the shooting was taking place. The failure of Peterson to mitigate the MSDHS attack eventually led to a criminal indictment and a national debate regarding SROs, their effectiveness, and their roles and responsibilities. Cruz's mental health has also been the subject of inquiry, as has been the school system's systemic failures in addressing Cruz's proclivity for potential violent action.

School Resource Officer Training

"Extensive and comprehensive training for SROs and school administrators is important to reduce the negative outcomes often associated with introducing SROs at schools and increase the potential safety and security benefits for students and schools" (Theriot & Cuellar, 2016, p. 13). As a companion issue to the lack of a centralized database for SROs, the question of the minimum required training is one that has clouded the increase of law enforcement in schools.

According to Pigott et al. (2017), SROs are not required to formally register that they work in a school, schools are not required to report the use of SROs, and law-enforcement agencies do not have to disclose how many of their officers serve as SROs. While best practices and recommendations are in place, there is still no law or directive specifically requiring a threshold of training a law-enforcement officer must receive in order to serve as an SRO.

In developing parameters for SRO training, the concept of self-directed learning provides a viable adult learning theory to serve as a framework to meet the needs of SROs in varying learning and school environments. While there are certainly benefits to standardized training initiatives to ensure uniformity, self-directed learning encourages SROs to take ownership of their learning in considering their educational needs and creating learning goals while implementing strategies that are appropriate for them (Scott, 2006). In collaboration with school system leaders and law enforcement partners, developing personalized self-directed learning plans, SROs may be able to better meet their training needs. A self-directed learning approach also allows the SRO to obtain important knowledge concerning current matters germane to their job that may not be taught through formalized training opportunities.

The role of SRO has expanded to increasingly include elements beyond those of simply enforcing the law. As an example, the City of New Orleans Police Department policy manual (2018) dictates that SROs job duties are inclusive of law-enforcement officer, educator, and informal counselors. Finn et al. (2005) note that in a study of 19 SRO programs, it was found that SROs are not typically given adequate training prior to serving in an SRO capacity. For example, in Florida, one study examining the relationship between increased police presence on school campuses and student outcomes revealed that SRO training provided by a state association was optional for officers prior to serving in schools (Monson, 2019). This study also

found that the number of SROs on a campus was a predictor for school-based arrests (Monson, 2019). These examples illustrate the wide range of qualifications any potential SRO may bring with them to a school campus. Often, the level of training the SRO has received is unknown to school personnel and they have no knowledge of the skill level the officer has in terms of providing a nuanced approach to the SRO position. Specific training for the educational environment serves to strengthen the potential positive impact an SRO can have on a school campus.

Training for Working with Juveniles

According to Schweit & Mancik (2017) due to the complex nature of the SRO position, training is needed both from the school district and police department. The school environment brings with it special circumstances not always addressed through standard law-enforcement training. In addition to formal training, Schweit & Mancik (2017) also address the value of informal training in the ways that the school environment provides opportunities for SROs to hone unique skills. One of the areas that have proven important is the ability to recognize "leakage," which is when a troubled student makes known, either intentionally or unintentionally, their plans for a targeted school attack (O'Toole, 2000, p. 16). The ability to integrate into the school environment and develop relationships with students and staff is a valuable informal skill that blends with formal training to create a safer school environment.

Lack of proper training can also manifest itself by the way of officer misconduct. The most common reason for an SRO to be dismissed from a position or arrested is for sexual misconduct with a female student (Stinson & Watkins, 2014). According to Stinson and Watkins (2014), this finding emphasizes the necessity for training that educates school staff, including SROs, on the importance of establishing boundaries with students and cultivating appropriate

relationships. While measuring the effectiveness of SROs, the administrator and teacher perception may be greatly affected if it is believed the SRO has a penchant for questionable personal behavior. Even if the SRO is capable of competently performing their law-enforcement related duties, negative perception weakens their ability to effectively serve in their role as an informal counselor and educator.

Mental Health Training

In a survey of 126 police officers from five different police departments in Indiana, Wells and Schafer (2006) found that police officers do not feel adequately prepared or trained to effectively handle mental health situations on the job. However, police officers, including those working in schools, are often tasked with responding to persons with mental health needs (Muller, Morabito & Green, 2020). Doulas & Lurigio (2010) argue that "the failure of the school, mental health, and juvenile justice systems to provide seriously distressed youths with coordinated and comprehensive assessment and treatment services has increased the likelihood that they will encounter the police and further penetrate the juvenile and adult criminal justice systems" (p. 241).

While SROs are traditionally seen solely as safety officers within schools, their integration into the school community provides opportunities for their involvement in positive behavior intervention programs, specifically those that focus on providing much needed mental health services within schools. SROs are often not provided with specific mental health training, but collaboration with school-based counselors can help bridge the gap that the lack of training has created in order to improve student outcomes in regard to mental health (Thompson & Alvarez, 2013). Lack of formalized training also presents an opportunity for officers to engage in self-directed learning to remain educated on current best practices and adolescent mental health

information. By providing opportunities for SROs to connect and collaborate with mental health professionals and school-based counselors through a team-based approach, schools can create and implement effective interventions and strategies to foster positive relationships among SROs and students with mental health needs (Thomas et al., 2013). However, collaboration cannot and should not take the place of comprehensive mental health training for SROs.

The School-to-Prison Pipeline

According to the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) (2020), the "school-to-prison pipeline is a disturbing national trend wherein children are funneled out of public schools and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems" (para. 1). The School-to-Prison Pipeline is a descriptor for the process of students being involved in the criminal justice system while in school, thereby increasing their chances of being incarcerated after their school career is over.

The impact of the SRO has also been viewed in a less than favorable light by those who contend their presence has unintended negative consequences. In their examination of SROs and their presence as a challenge to student rights, Theriot & Cuellar (2014) posit that a growing concern is that of SROs criminalizing less serious behaviors and introducing students into the juvenile justice system as a result of an arrest on school grounds. The potential for arrest on school grounds increases when there is ambiguity surrounding the role an SRO plays on a school campus. As an intervention for role ambiguity, Theriot and Cuellar (2014) suggest that "formal governance documents or memorandums of understanding should be created to address how responsibilities will be divided between SROs, school administrators, and teachers" (p. 13).

On the other side of the school-to-prison pipeline argument is the belief that the rise of extreme student behaviors and increased safety concerns within schools has resulted in the implementation of more extreme disciplinary practices on school campuses (Heitzeg, 2009).

Identified predictors of youth delinquency include academic struggles, hard-nosed school disciplinary practices, and school dropout (Christle et al., 2005). The school-to-prison pipeline is seen tangibly on a school campus when a student is placed in police custody for an offense that may be more reasonably adjudicated as a school disciplinary matter. The intervention of SROs in school disciplinary matters, particularly those resulting in the arrest of a student, underscores the need for clearly defined SRO roles on school campus.

The school-to-prison pipeline disproportionately targets male, minority students living in poverty (Mallet, 2017). According to Theriot and Cuellar (2015), SROs are "linked to an increase in arrest rates for less-serious offenses and are overly represented in schools with high percentages of minority populations, their deployment might exacerbate the disproportionate targeting of minority populations" (p. 9). Blad (2015) points out that "while black students made up 16 percent of U.S. public school enrollment during the 2011-12 school year, the most recent year for which federal data are available, they represented 27 percent of those referred to law enforcement by schools and 31 percent of those who were subject to school-related arrests" (para. 19).

Using criminal justice data from schools receiving Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) grant money to hire SROs from 1994 to 2007, Owens (2017) found similar results. Through three-year COPS program grants, 6,631 SROs were hired on school campuses. Owen's (2017) results indicated that the presence of an SRO contributes to the school-to-prison pipeline, as the presence of law enforcement on a school campus increases the likelihood of arrests. However, Pigott et al. (2017) found contradicting results in their study of the school-to-prison pipeline and its relationship with school security and SROs. Examining the 2009-2010 School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS), Pigot et al. (2017) found no direct link between

SRO presence and increased incarcerations of students. In fact, Pigot et al. (2017) argue that SROs are often the target and scapegoat when it comes to blaming someone for disproportionate school dropouts and criminalization of minority students.

The path from school to prison can be mediated by school factors that positively influence students (Christle et al., 2005). In their research, Christle, et al. (2005) examined school factors that were predictors of student delinquency as well as factors that mediated the risk for delinquency in 747 Kentucky elementary schools during the 1999-2000 academic school year. They identified these mediating factors as 'supportive leadership, dedicated and collegial staff, school-wide behavior management, and effective academic instruction" (p. 69). SROs serve as direct connections between law enforcement and the communities in which they work. SROs are often "the most visible and accessible police officers in the community" and should serve as a resource and support for students, rather than an avenue for criminal prosecution (thebestschools.org, 2020, para. 53).

Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities also represent a population disproportionately affected by SROs. According to the United States Department of Justice (2015), "children — particularly children with disabilities — risk experiencing lasting and severe consequences if SROs unnecessarily criminalize school-related misbehavior by taking a disproportionate law enforcement response to minor disciplinary infractions" (p. 1). Many children with special education plans also have behavior intervention plans, outlining what should be done in the case of a behavior situation associated with their disability. However, when an SRO is tasked with intervening for safety reasons, the behavior intervention plan is often not followed. According to The Best Schools (2020), it is critical that schools and SROs partner in order to find "the root

causes in students who present recurrent disciplinary challenges and finding the proper resources to accommodate their needs. As student arrest demographics indicate, factors like disability and family circumstances play into the risk of juvenile incarceration" (Thebestschools.org, 2020, para. 100).

The SRO cannot necessarily be blamed for not following a behavior intervention plan, as they are typically not properly trained to handle special education student needs and are not aware of the content of a student's individual education plan or behavior intervention plan. Meade (2019) suggests that "SROs should be trained in not only the legal and tactical aspects of law enforcement but also how to work with children, including those with disabilities if they are to be placed in schools" (p. 79). Training SROs in the needs of special education students will help establish boundaries and better meet the needs of special education students as outlined in their behavior intervention plans.

In their study of school resource officer perceptions of special education students, May, Rice and Minor (2012) surveyed 130 school resource officers in Kentucky. The results of their study indicate that 54 percent of school resource officers feel that special education student behavior is detrimental to the overall school environment and 85% of SROs agree that some special education students use their special status as a way to avoid consequences for their behavior. In regard to interactions between SROs and special education students, Merkwae (2015) argues that consideration must be given by both schools and law-enforcement agencies to allowing law-enforcement unfettered access to children who do not yet have fully formed brains, and the potential long-term consequences of access paired with a lack of specialized training.

The Impact of School Resource Officers in Schools

Since their inception and subsequent widespread use, SROs have brought about an increased emphasis on school safety at the school campuses they serve. In essence, "as a law enforcement officer, the school becomes the officer's beat" (Johns Hopkins University, 2004). Their presence and integration into the educational setting have caused a shift in how safety is viewed and measured by teachers, administrators, students, and parents. Much of what SROs do for the school is tangible, but the position has expanded its measure of effectiveness. In some cases, SROs are tasked with not only creating a safe campus environment but to also help others feel safe (auburnschools.org, 2018). The impact of SROs is also dependent on who is evaluating the position, as many different stakeholders hold different definitions as to what constitutes effective school-based policing. While officer presence and relationship-building with staff and students may be paramount to some, to others there may be more concrete marks of effectiveness, like reducing criminal incidents on campus.

Crime Reduction

Independent of other issues surrounding SRO programs is the question of whether their presence in schools across the United States is effective in minimizing and deterring crime on the campuses where they work. In terms of reducing violent crime on campuses, Swartz et al. (2015) analyzed secondary data from the 2010 School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS) and found through that there is a uniqueness about utilizing a sworn law enforcement officer, as opposed to a security guard, or other similar personnel, that makes them more effective at reducing school-based violence. This finding illustrates the importance of the distinction between having a properly trained law enforcement officer as opposed to other forms of security. In the State of Florida, however, Sheriffs have been provided the option to utilize non-law-enforcement

personnel as part of the Coach Aaron Feis Guardian Program (The Florida Senate, 2018). Although the program requires specific training, it does not stipulate those individuals participating in the program be sworn law-enforcement officers (The Florida Senate, 2018). Specific training for the educational environment serves to strengthen the potential positive impact an SRO can have on a school campus.

School districts that employ SROs are more likely to have comprehensive plans regarding school safety and have up-to-date safety checks and evaluations on campus (Stern & Petrosino, 2018). Effective school safety planning typically involves school personnel, school resource officers and other law enforcement, students, and community members. In an effort to make schools safer and more prepared to prevent and handle instances of violence, these plans address concerns related to crisis management, physical environment, and the handling of student behavior (Ivey, 2012).

Roles and Responsibilities

The role of an SRO is multifaceted and often challenging to define, as the main focus of schools is to provide students with the opportunity to achieve academically, while the mission of law enforcement is to maintain law and order (Thomas et al., 2013). "First and foremost, SROs are police officers responsible for the protection of life and property through the enforcement of laws and ordinances" (Ryan et al., 2018, p. 189). SROs should serve as safety leaders within the school setting and act as a first responder to critical incidents on campus (James & McCallion, 2013). A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) can serve as a tool to establish SRO roles and responsibilities. According to the U.S. Department of Justice (2013), every jurisdiction with a school and law enforcement partnership should have an MOU that clearly defines the roles and responsibilities of the individual partners involved, including school districts, boards or

departments of education, school administration officials, law enforcement agencies (including SROs), and students and parents (p. 1).

State of Massachusetts Office of Attorney General Maura Healey (2018) suggested that MOUs should serve as a clarification, defining the roles of SROs to ensure they do not and are not expected to take the place of school administrators or counselors for enforcing disciplinary rules or providing mental health services. Details provided in an MOU can help clear up the details that ensure SROs are operating within their predetermined scope. Healy (2018) takes specific care to address the issue of use-of-force in school discipline matters. Healy (2018) points to Massachusetts law, which restricts law-enforcement action for disruptive and non-violent behavior. In addition to protecting students, this also protects the school district and the servicing law-enforcement agency by eliminating confusion as to where the SRO fits in regarding delicate situations.

While SROs are not always specifically trained for the school setting, there is also an issue when school administration does also not clearly define the roles and responsibilities of the SRO on their campus. Because SROs do not have policies specifically addressing their roles and responsibilities, SROs often cross boundary lines that result in negative outcomes for students (Ryan et al, 2018). Specifically, officers are sometimes requested by school personnel to intervene in disciplinary matters. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2020), "schools with a sworn law enforcement officer present at school at least once a week in the school year 2017–18, some 51 percent had officers who participated in maintaining student discipline" (p. 2). Barnes (2016) found in her study of SRO perceptions that many interviewed expressed that they are requested by the school they work at to continuously intervene in discipline issues.

An SRO's established role on campus, or lack thereof, influences how they handle student disciplinary action (Martinez-Prather, et al., 2016). The misunderstanding of the SROs' role on campus by school administration sometimes places SROs in a position where they are compelled to engage with students who are actively participating in behavior that may be criminalized. In addition to a lack of understanding of roles, the school administration may place SROs in areas where victimization among students is more likely to occur, such as hallways or cafeterias (Fisher & Hennessy, 2015). Ryan et al. (2018) suggest that SROs should have a clear understanding that they are prohibited from becoming involved in school discipline infractions that are the school administrators' responsibility.

The misallocation and misunderstanding of the role SROs on a school campus not only potentially criminalizes some student behavior but also creates gaps where there may be a critical need for an officer on campus. The American Psychological Association (APA) (2011) notes that "school violence is multifaceted including pupil-on-pupil violence; damage and destruction to school premises; or attacks on teachers" (p. 4-5). The growing list of issues underneath the umbrella of what constitutes school violence provides many opportunities for SROs and administrators to have a clearer path forward in terms of how to effectively utilize SROs on campus. Raymond (2011) points out that the presence of SROs may potentially make a school administrator's job easier by deterring aggressive student behaviors that include fighting, threats, and bullying. With issues of safety on school campuses relatively clearly defined, both school administrators and law-enforcement agencies have areas of school safety that reveal overlapping interests in areas to address to keep schools safe.

SROs as Educators

Arguably, the most important role that an SRO can play in schools is that of an educator. Because of their knowledge and experience regarding law-enforcement related topics, SROs can act as a resource to students by providing guidance and information on drug and alcohol abuse prevention, domestic violence situations, and other public safety issues (Ivey, 2012). While professional development meetings and other formal learning opportunities for SROs to act as educators are often effective, perhaps the most impactful ways that SROs can act as educators is through informal learning opportunities. Informal learning opportunities are often spontaneous, on-the-spot collaborations between educators based on a situation that arises (Laat & Schreurs, 2013). Informal learning opportunities foster a culture of learning within a school environment and help solidify the role of an SRO as an educational colleague. Professional learning communities, like those established and nurtured through both informal and formal adult learning opportunities result in enhanced instructional quality (Little, 2012). The collaboration of SROs and teachers through professional development can benefit not only the adult learners within the school but also has the potential to improve student outcomes through improved safety preparedness and overall instruction.

Further, Ivey (2017) suggests that if the only experiences that students have with SROs are from a discipline or law enforcement standpoint, there is a missed opportunity to educate students on ways to prevent crime or disciplinary action in the future. In a study of school personnel's perceptions of SROs, Stephens (2012), surveyed school instructional employees from a suburban high school employing two SROs. Of the 177 returned surveys, 69% of school personnel responded that SROs in their schools help increase student knowledge of the legal system, indicating that SROs in this instance played an evident role in the education of students.

Perceptions of School Resource Officers

SROs, students, teachers, and administrators may have, particularly in the absence of an MOU, differing views of SROs and their duties. Additionally, different groups and individuals see the modality of the SRO contributing to the safety of the school in different ways. Police officers who transition from a traditional patrol duty, into an educational environment, may see the role of the SRO as merely a transference of location, while employing the same tactics. This underscores why SRO-specific training is so crucial. Students are keenly aware of the SROs presence in their school, and the tone of their interactions often colors their perception. An SRO who is engaged and focused on building relationships with students is often seen as cultivating a feeling of safety in the school. Conversely, an SRO who criminalizes questionable behavior is seen as someone to be feared and avoided. Teachers and administrators also look to the SRO to help keep them safe while at school. For the professionals on campus, officer presence and visibility serve as a reminder that the campus and its inhabitants are being actively monitored.

Student Perceptions of School Resource Officers

Specific roles and responsibilities aside, there is little debate as to whether or not the SRO on campus is influential. As noted by Anderson (2018), SRO engagement can have vast implications for student populations, leading to either trust or mistrust of law-enforcement based on the nature of interactions at school. Resistance to authority is not uncommon for high school students, and police officers are obvious symbols of authority, perhaps contributing to negative attitudes towards police and SROs in general. While the first interaction many students have with a law enforcement officer is at their school campus, many students have prior interactions with police outside of school that have influenced their perceptions of SROs (May, Rice & Minor, 2012).

A review of the literature regarding student perceptions of SROs yielded mixed results. In his research aimed at examining student and SRO interactions and the impact these interactions had on student perceptions, Theriot (2006) surveyed 1,956 secondary students from a twelve-school district. Theriot's (2006) study found that the more students interacted with SROs, the more positively they viewed SROs. With increased SRO interactions, students in this case also felt safer at school. Feeling safe in school has been linked to positive educational outcomes for students (Thomas et al, 2013). Further, increased instances of SRO interactions were found to be "related to positive feelings about the police in general, better school connectedness and a greater sense of safety likewise support that SROs might make important and positive contributions to the school environment" (Theriot, 2016, p. 261).

In her study of student perceptions of high-security measures in schools including SROs, Bracy (2011) surveyed approximately 3,600 students in two Mid-Atlantic high security public high schools. Results indicated that their schools felt safe and that high-security measures were over-the-top. While students did report they felt safe at school, they also reported many of the safety measures employed by the school as being excessive. Specifically, students indicated the schools were safe without the presence of an SRO. Some students viewed SRO presence as an overreaction to an already safe school, as opposed to the SRO being a primary contributor to the safe school climate (Bracy, 2011). Based on the results, it is evident that students in this study primarily perceived SROs as serving a law-enforcement function, rather than mentors or a campus resource. Stern and Petrosino (2018) came to a similar conclusion after reviewing current research and literature, which indicated a lack of evidence suggesting that students felt that having an SRO on campus made their school safer. School-aged children are vulnerable, impressionable, and the role of the SRO in their life may have long-term consequences.

Ultimately, the view of the role of the SRO by the adults on campus largely determines the interactions between the students and the SRO.

School Staff Perceptions of School Resource Officers

In a study of perceptions related to SRO on the job performance, Rippetoe (2009) gathered data from 104 teachers from a middle and high school. According to the results, teachers tend to perceive the priority role of SROs as safety officers that enforce rules and maintain order on campus, rather than a counseling or educator role (Rippetoe, 2009). This represents not only ambiguity surrounding the roles and responsibilities of the SRO but also demonstrates a lack of communication to classroom teachers on how to utilize an on-campus resource. Teacher perceptions of SROs have the potential to influence how other stakeholders view SROs, including students.

Olive (2019) collected survey data from 212 teachers in Central Florida related to their perception of safety-related to gun violence within their school. The results suggested that teachers generally feel safe at school. Specifically, 72.5% of teachers in the study said they felt safe five out of five days of the workweek, compared to 9.3% that said they did not feel safe any days during the workweek. When asked how to improve on safety at their school, these teachers indicated that SRO presence makes them feel safest at work. Olive (2019) also noted that non-law enforcement security guards do not make teachers feel safer and often make them feel less safe.

Similarly, Leonard (2016) in her research regarding school environmental factors that make teachers feel safe in a rural school in Virginia, found through survey results from 133 teachers that the presence of a school resource officer had a positive effect on teacher safety perceptions. The indication that officer presence alone made teachers feel the school was safer

also helps to explain why teachers may be more liberal in their attempts to utilize SROs for disciplinary matters. If administrators are not always present, and students have no standing to dictate SRO involvement, then classroom teachers yield a substantial amount of power when it comes to injecting SROs into disruptive situations.

School Resource Officer Perceptions

There exists difficulty in locating literature concerning SRO's opinions of their own job duties. As with any member of a school leadership team, the SRO are tasked with important functions and require support in order to effectively discharge their duties. School Resource Officers feel empowered to develop needed safety programs and initiatives when they have the capacity and resources made available to them by the school administration (Hunt et al., 2019). School administrators and school leaders' attitudes towards SROs and their clear establishment of expectations within the school environment for SROs contribute the SROs perceived self-efficacy (Robinson, 2006). In comparing rural and urban SRO programs in Oklahoma, Hunt et al. (2019) found that 93% of 55 SRO's working in rural schools from 2017-2018 felt like they had the capacity to organize personalized school safety initiatives, compared to 74% of 32 of their urban peers.

Contribution to School Climate

Outside of performing their required duties, SROs have unintended roles that contribute to an enhanced learning environment and healthy school climate (Robinson, 2006). A healthy school climate is one that features high expectations for all students, strong relationships, and communication among stakeholders, and is structurally sound (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018). SROs have the opportunity contribute to healthy school climates through

intentional positive relationship building with all stakeholders and meaningful school collaborations. Through these contributions, SROs can effectively build and maintain a positive presence on school campuses.

Relationship Building

According to Steinberg, Allensworth and Johnson (2011), "schools serving students from high-crime, high-poverty areas find it particularly challenging to create safe, supportive learning environments" (p. 1). While this may be true, it is critical for SROs to be a part of the collaborative effort in creating safe, supportive learning environments in all schools. SROs can cultivate a healthy school environment by intentionally working to build positive relationships with students and stakeholders within the school community (Schweit & Mancik, 2017). This can be achieved through increased presence and strategic involvement within the school community. Building strong relationships and an overall healthy school climate is linked to a reduction in school-based violence and bullying, which creates a safer school environment (Benbenishty et al., 2016). Further, it is the quality of those relationships among students, school staff, and the community that improves the school climate and ultimately defines a safe school (Steinberg, Allensworth & Johnson, 2011).

School Collaborations

School and community connections and collaborative initiatives improve student outcomes (Sanders, 2006). In their roles within schools, SROs have the unique opportunity to serve as a direct connection between school campuses and the larger community in which they serve. In recent history, there are many instances of documented collaborative initiatives between SROs and schools that have resulted in positive changes in regards school climate and student

outcomes. One such instance of positive collaboration is the effort of schools and SROs to combat cyberbullying within schools.

According to Stewart and Fritsch (2011), not only does cyberbullying "have the potential to significantly disrupt the educational environment, but it also can result in severe psychological and physical consequences for students" (p. 80). Seeing the rising prevalence of cyberbullying and acknowledging the associated consequences, SROs and schools have collaborated to combat the issue. Cyberbullying is a unique problem for schools, as many of the instances occur off campus, but as Stewart and Fritsch (2011) explain, it is imperative that schools and law enforcement continue to collaborate in an effort to appropriately protect students. By taking proactive measures, the SRO can intervene prior to an instance of cyberbullying meeting the threshold for criminal charges.

Another important collaboration of note is that of SROs and schools in providing drug abuse prevention education. Educators recognize that student drug abuse is a "significant barrier to the achievement of educational outcomes" (Botvin & Griffin, 2006, p. 45). In recent years, drug abuse prevention has evolved from a "just say no" message with suggested alternate activities to drug use to more often a psychological approach that includes social resistance training (Botvin & Griffin, 2006). The Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.) program is a popular program implemented in schools. The D.A.R.E. program curriculum is traditionally taught by an SRO. Immediately following completion of the D.A.R.E. program, evaluations indicate positive student outcomes in regard to student knowledge, attitudes, and behavior about drug use and abuse (Birkeland, Murphy-Graham & Weiss, 2005). Even though these specific effects may fade over time, school district administrators opt to continue the program because of

the positive relationships built among law enforcement and students as a result of the D.A.R.E.
program (Birkeland, Murphy-Graham & Weiss, 2005).

School Safety Planning

In the aftermath of previously noted high profile incidents of school violence, many
schools in the United States saw the instituting of safety-related drills as a means of preparation
for students and staff should a violent incident occur on campus. Specifically, "lockdown" drills
have become commonplace in K-12 schools in the United States. According to the North Dakota
Department of Public Instruction (2011), "A school lockdown confines all staff and students to
the classroom due to a perceived or real threat; isolation of staff and students inside the school
limits exposure to risk to outside contaminants: people, exposures or situations. The practice of
lockdown drills acclimates both staff and students to the process and probability, and ultimately
avoids unnecessary responses." SROs on school campuses are typically identifiable by virtue of
being in uniform, thereby often being seen as an authority when it comes to school safety. The
increase in lockdown drills in schools has also led to increased involvement by SROs as part of
those drills.

The intersection of SRO duties, specifically when it comes to the social and emotional
well-being of students balanced with the safety and security of the school campus. Wooley
(2021) reported on May 26, 2021, that Congressman Ed Perlmutter of Colorado had introduced
bipartisan legislation to authorize the National Academies of Science Engineering, and Medicine
to study the potential mental health effects of lockdown drills and active shooter drills on
students and staff. According to Perlmutter (2021):

Colorado has had more than its fair share of active shooter and school shooting tragedies,

leaving many students traumatized and frightened. We must ensure school safety drills

don't trigger these anxieties and instead give students the knowledge to respond appropriately to threatening situations and potentially help save lives. This research will help inform school administrators as they balance school preparedness with the mental health of students and staff.

This examination of the mental health effects of lockdown drills also speaks to the rapidly changing landscape of school safety in general. Lockdown drills were initially instituted as a result of concern surrounding school violence. In a short period of time, their benefit has come under scrutiny. SROs work in an ever-changing environment and what are considered best practices in school safety can shift rapidly, based on new information.

Landmark Court Cases

Court cases set precedence for what is allowable by police officers in their interactions with the public. Search and seizure practices, use of force protocols, and other policies crafted by law enforcement agencies are all dictated by legal precedence. Similarly, many school policies fall in line with judicial decisions establishing the legality of basic practices. The utilization of law-enforcement officers in the educational setting presents a unique set of circumstances that requires nuance in balancing both educational and law-enforcement related precedence. Increasingly, police interactions that occur on school campuses are proving instrumental in dictating the nature of interactions between law-enforcement officers and students.

New Jersey v. TLO

The decision of the United States Supreme Court in the case of New Jersey v. T.L.O. in 1985 provided a landmark decision that dictated the degree to which school staff was allowed to

perform a quasi-law-enforcement function (uscourts.gov, 2020). In the case of T.L.O., a school administrator searched the purse of a minor student, after she was suspected of smoking cigarettes on campus (uscourts.gov, 2020). The subsequent search for cigarettes produced suspected drugs, drug paraphernalia, and money (uscourts.gov, 2020). The search was deemed legal and created a circumstance to be carefully navigated by both law-enforcement and school administrators.

The standards for the Fourth Amendment protections typically extend to schools, thus inhibiting an SRO's standing to lawfully conduct a search of a student or staff's property. While the SRO may be mandated to uphold Fourth Amendment protections on campus, New Jersey v. T.L.O. set the precedent that school administrators are not bound by the same judicial standard when conducting a search. This decision created a gray area in which a school administrator's authority could potentially be used to aid an SRO by conducting a search on their behalf. New Jersey v. T.L.O. highlighted the importance of an M.O.U., where the roles of the SRO are clearly defined, and provide less opportunity for malfeasance.

The Matter of C.R.M.

New Jersey v. T.L.O. resonates still today and illustrates the nuance involved in the interactions between law enforcement and educators. In the Matter of C.R.M., addressed in the Texas Appeals Court, an Assistant Principal confiscated a backpack being passed around a classroom, searched the backpack, and located two baggies of marihuana inside (Cox et al., 2016). The Assistant Principal interviewed student C.R.M., who admitted that marihuana belonged to him, and C.R.M. was subsequently taken into custody by the SRO on campus (Cox et al., 2016). C.R.M. argued in court that his confession to the Assistant Principal should be suppressed because it was made during a custodial interrogation (Cox et al., 2016).

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The Court ruled that the confession was made to the Assistant Principal while the SRO was not present, then C.R.M. was taken into custody after the confession was made (Cox et al., 2016). The Court made the distinction that the Assistant Principal was not acting as an agent of the police (Cox et al., 2016). This case shows that even over 30 years after New Jersey v. T.L.O. very narrow margins exist as to where an SROs job begins and ends on a school campus. This ruling highlights the importance of every school and law-enforcement employee on campus having a full understanding of the role of the SRO in their school.

E.W. vs. Dolgos

In 2018, the case of E.W. (a 10-year-old student) vs. Dolgos provided an important ruling for SROs to consider in matters where appropriate use of force against a juvenile may be called into question. According to the Virginia Association of Secondary School Principals [VASSP] (2018), Officer Dolgos, an SRO, handcuffed E.W. 3 days after a fight had occurred in which E.W. was suspected of being the aggressor. Officer Dolgos admitted later that E.W.'s apathy towards the fight factored into her decision to handcuff the student (VASSP, 2018). Subsequently, the United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit found that Dolgos had used excessive force, adding thew important distinction that "courts have found that officers should exercise more restraint when dealing with student misbehavior in the school context" (VASSP, 2018).

Complicating the case was that, while finding Dolgos in fact used excessive force, she was also granted qualified immunity in the case, thus shielding her from prosecution (VASSP, 2018). The Court's opinion closed with an important reminder of how they view the relationship between SROs and schools by stating School-based policing is the fastest growing area of law enforcement. While the officers' presence surely keeps the nation's children safe, officers should

not handcuff young students who may have committed minor offenses but do not pose an immediate threat to safety and will not evade arrest. Unnecessarily handcuffing and criminally punishing young schoolchildren is undoubtedly humiliating, scarring, and emotionally damaging. We must be mindful of the long-lasting impact such actions have on these children and their ability to flourish and lead prosperous lives – an impact that should be a matter of grave concern for us all (para. 10).

The Court's ruling provides a recent example of how school-based policing is viewed in legal circles, which is not positively or productively. Complicating matters is the fact Dolgos was granted qualified immunity. So, while her actions were admonished by the Court, she ultimately suffered no legal recourse.

Measuring the Effectiveness of School Resource Officers

A review of the literature indicates that there exists no reliable standard in measuring the effectiveness of SROs. Because research in this area is limited, it is unclear whether SRO programs as a whole are effective means of making schools safer (James & McCallion, 2013). Another weakness revealed in the literature is that SRO effectiveness measures "often focus on just the presence or absence of school-based law enforcement on campus, not on any other factors that might influence the impact of school-based law enforcement, such as how officers are selected, what roles they have in the school, their training, and the support they receive from the school and police administration" (Stern & Petrosino, 2018, p. 3). This study aims to provide insight into SRO effectiveness, beyond simply their presence or lack thereof.

Further, research often focuses on perceptions of school resource officers rather than evaluative data (Myrstol, 2010). Measuring effectiveness simply by crime rates does not provide an accounting of nuanced factors that may or may not lead to an arrest. There is also the issue of

interpretation of crime statistics themselves. Increased arrest rates may lead some to believe

schools are safer by addressing previously unchecked criminal activity. Conversely, others may

point to the presence of an SRO as having a hand in criminalizing behaviors that would typically

not result in arrest. While SRO perceptions do not take into account hard data, they do provide

insight into how their effectiveness is viewed by various stakeholder groups.

VonDenBosch (2019) found in her study, comprised of secondary school administrators,

that "Participants acknowledged that SROs' high visibility and ability to build relationships with

students created an overall positive impact on the school culture and a positive image of law

enforcement for students." (p. 5). Showing an evolution simply beyond responding to a school

safety crisis, this study illuminates the fact school administrators see value in SROs for what they

can do before a potential crisis as a means of mitigation. The ability to connect with students and

build relationships is seen as making the campus a safer place for students and teachers.

Though school SRO utilization, particularly as a response to tragedy, may be seen as a

uniquely American issue, research through Carelton University, located in Ottawa, Ontario,

Canada has produced insights that may help shape the analysis of SRO effectiveness in the future

for schools in the United States. In their study, Duxbury & Bennell (2018) found that in the Peel

region of Ottawa, Ontario, where SROs were present, students reported being less fearful,

students were more likely to receive help from social services, and there were fewer incidents of

bullying and crime. The potential for positive student outcomes, highlighted by Duxbury &

Bennell (2018), would be of great benefit to both school systems and law-enforcement agencies

in the United States. Duxbury & Bennell (2018) were able to show the social and economic

benefits of having SROs present in schools were estimated at 11 times the cost. This highlights

the hidden benefits of an SRO program that often goes unseen. Potentially, an effective SRO

program can ease the cost and burden on other components of the school, social service, and law-enforcement infrastructure.

Through a review of the literature, it is apparent that the current study is necessary to fill some of the existing gaps relating to SROs. This study addresses the need for input from diverse stakeholders to better inform school safety practices. Past studies have addressed SRO tactics and debated if the existence of SROs are beneficial to school culture. A unique feature of this study is the blending of viewpoints from both educators and SROs. The lived experiences of these groups provide future researchers with needed information to build from.

Chapter 3

Research Methodology

In recent history, school safety has been at the forefront of the national news cycle due to high profile events of violence on school campuses. As a result, many school systems in the United States have seen the proliferation of SRO programs (Connery, 2020). While these programs were developed with the intention of keeping school campuses safe, lack of training and evaluation standards have revealed the need for more formal protocols. This study was developed to further explore the perceptions of stakeholders and examine ways to measure the effectiveness of SRO programs.

Chapter One introduced the problem and the purpose of the study. Based on the gap in existing literature, the significance of the study was established. The research questions were presented along with the assumptions regarding the format of the study. Key terms were defined to add context and clarity. Chapter One also outlined the structure of the study.

Chapter Two reviewed existing literature by exploring the key areas of interest regarding SROs and their impact on school campuses. The history of SRO initiatives was reviewed including SRO response to notable instances of school violence. Literature regarding roles of SROs in schools, training needs, and stakeholder perceptions of SROs were also reviewed. It was noted that little research focuses on the perceived effectiveness of SROs in schools and how that perception is experienced by different stakeholders.

Purpose of the Study

This study's primary purpose was to measure the perception of the effectiveness of SROs in keeping the school campus safe, as viewed by SROs, teachers, and school

administrators. Further, the researcher sought to identify varying roles of SROs in the State

Alabama and identify similarities and differences among stakeholder perceptions. According to

the literature, SRO roles and perceived effectiveness vary greatly from one school campus to

another. Therefore, it is critical that school system and law enforcement leadership seek to clarify

the roles of SROs in an effort to increase their effectiveness in contributing to a safe school

environment. The results of this study provided information on stakeholder's perception of

SRO's and how it relates to safety on the school campus. This information will help clarify both

how those in close contact with the SRO on a daily basis view their effectiveness, and how they

see the roles and duties of the SRO.

Significance of the Study

The utilization of SROs in a K-12 educational setting has seen an increase in large part

due to states taking legislative action mandating their use (Sawchuck, 2019). Gaining insight into

the perceptions of stakeholders regarding school safety provides future direction for those

charged with keeping school campuses safe. Based on a review of the literature, it is clear there

is a lack of significant research regarding SRO effectiveness and stakeholder perceptions of

SROs. Therefore, there is a continued need for research in this area. Safety is a fundamental

issue on school campuses. Legal issues surrounding SROs and their role in keeping school

campuses safe dictate a need for clarification of SRO roles on school campuses to create an

environment conducive to safety and the well-being of students and stakeholders.

Policing on school campuses is a national issue that has garnered both praise and

criticism. Some suggest that the employment and presence of SROs contribute to school safety,

while others argue that school-based policing creates an environment of increased delinquency

and ultimately does more harm than good. This study is of importance because it contributes to a

limited body of research regarding the perceptions about SROs on school campuses and their overall effectiveness in their roles in making schools safe environments.

By analyzing responses across the State of Alabama, this research helps both school systems and law enforcement agencies clarify SRO roles on school campuses and update SRO policies. The study can potentially provide information to stakeholders attempting to determine if having an SRO on a school campus makes the campus a safer learning environment than if there was no SRO present.

Instrumentation

This study employed Phenomenological Research through face-to-face interviews. Open coding of data throughout the study was employed. Through these interviews, the researcher explored stakeholder perceptions of SROs and their effectiveness in school settings. By considering and using the Phenomenological Research, the researcher had the opportunity to view the problem through the lived experiences of school stakeholders.

The research in this study adhered to Creswell and Poth's (2018) procedures for conducting phenomenological research. The problem of measuring effectiveness of SROs had been determined by the researcher to be best examined through the use of phenomenological research (Creswell and Poth, 2018). As Bernard and Ryan (2010) point out, the importance was to understand the essence of the lived experiences of participants in relation to their interactions with School Resource Officers.

The phenomenon to be studied was identified, and was described to respondents (Creswell and Poth, 2018). The phenomenon in the case of this study is the lived experiences education stakeholders have had, and their perceptions of, School Resource Officers. The

phenomenon was described to respondents, in detail, so they were clear that their interactions with SROs may include any circumstances in which they have interacted with, or witnessed, the SRO on their school campus. This included the "careful description of ordinary conscious experience of everyday life" (Schwandt, 2015, p. 234).

As Creswell and Poth (2018) suggest, the study distinguished and specified the broad philosophical assumptions of phenomenology and employed the technique of *bracketing*. Bracketing was used as a method to set aside my personal experiences in order to more objectively interview participants and better describe their lived experiences. The process of bracketing, as Bernard and Ryan (2010) state, is difficult but when reporting the findings of a study, the least amount of bias, the better. Bias in the case of this study was addressed by committing a portion of the results to a self-reflective writing in which the researcher's potential biases were detailed.

Data was collected through personal interviews with the respondents and followed Creswell and Poth's (2018) recommendation of interviewing 5-25 individuals. Audio recorded interviews with selected stakeholders were scheduled with the intent of interviewing the same number of individuals for each represented group (SROs, school administrators, and teachers).

Because limited research exists regarding SRO roles and perceived effectiveness, there is a lack of instrumentation developed to gather data in this area. Therefore, the researcher developed interview questions based on existing policies, personal experience, and a review of the literature.

Role of the Researcher

For this study, the role of the researcher was to collect data through audio recorded interviews and analyze the data in order to gain a greater understanding of SRO effectiveness, including stakeholder perceptions of SROs. Because of previous professional experience in law enforcement and current employment in education, the researcher possesses some bias. Further, the researcher, as a school system safety coordinator, had professional interest in seeing SRO programs achieve effectiveness in keeping school campuses safe. In the qualitative research process, controlling for personal bias is a key consideration (Creswell, 2018).

The researcher's background knowledge and experience of SRO programs was acknowledged and integrated in the study through reflective practices. This is known as *reflexivity*, which Schwandt (2015) defines as "the process of critical self-reflection on one's biases, theoretical predispositions, preferences, and so forth" (p. 268). The reflexive approach, as Ortlipp (2008) explains, acknowledges the personal values and assumptions of the researcher rather than attempting to control for them. The researcher's personal and career experiences in this research were used to design effective methods for collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the data in a way that is useful and meaningful. These same personal and career experiences were taken into account as part of the bracketing process, in an attempt to conduct the study with as little bias as possible.

Design

Research Questions

1. What is your perception of School Resource Officers as part of your professional role?

    a. What do you think the primary functions of the School Resource Officer are in your school?

    b. Do you believe the School Resource Officer successfully fulfills those functions? Please explain how they do or do not fulfill the functions.

    c. What would you like to see your School Resource Officer do in order to be more effective in his or her role?

2. What context or situations have impacted your experiences and shaped your perception?

    a. How often do you interact with the School Resource Officer at your school?

    b. How has your perception of School Resource Officers changed during the course of your career?

    c. Do perceive School Resource Officers the same as any other police officer? Why or why not?

Participants

In order to effectively answer the research questions, participant criteria were developed. Participants were educational stakeholders within the State of Alabama. Participants were required to serve in an Alabama public school in the full-time role of administrator, teacher, or

SRO at the time of their interview. The selected groups of professionals were selected as participants in order to gain a greater understanding of the research questions from a variety of stakeholder perspectives. Participants were chosen from a variety of racial backgrounds, geographic locations within the State of Alabama, and included both men and women.

Potential participants were recruited by the researcher via phone, email, and in-person conversation. Existing relationships between the researcher and some participants were utilized during the recruitment process. Initial correspondence was sent through email to a large number of potential participants. This email asked potential participants to indicate their willingness to participate and asked questions regarding their demographics. The researcher then generated a list from the feedback. From this list, a participant list was created that included a diverse representation of stakeholders. The researcher ensured that participants met the developed criteria before solidifying them as a study participant.

Because the study focused on perceptions of SRO effectiveness and roles within the State of Alabama, participant criteria and recruiting parameters were developed to ensure that the research questions are answered appropriately from a variety of perspectives. Of note, the student population at the participating schools was not interviewed. This was done with the intention of gathering a more global view of the SRO position. Teachers and school administrators often experience interaction with multiple SROs throughout their careers, as a singular school will experience turnover in the SRO position. The viewpoint of the student is limited in this instance because the years they spend in a school building are relatively short by comparison, and there is a higher likelihood they will encounter the same SRO during those years. Additionally, the experience of teachers and administrators is valuable, as they interact with SROs in a variety of circumstances, as opposed to a narrower scope of interaction

experienced by students. It is important to collect data from a diverse participant group to gain an

understanding of SRO effectiveness and roles from participants with a variety of genders,

ethnicities, and background experiences. While the study focused on Alabama, SRO programs

and stakeholder perceptions have the potential to vary greatly from one school system to the next

within the same state.

Research Procedures

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Approval for this study was requested and granted through Auburn University's

Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research (IRB).

Additionally, the participating school systems have provided approval of this study.

Data Collection

To collect data aimed at answering the research questions, semi-structured interviews

were conducted. While the same scripted interview questions were asked of all participants, the

researcher did ask follow-up unscripted questions when it was determined a participant's

answers required further clarification in aid of the study. Interviews were conducted via

videoconferencing and one-on-one between the researcher and participant. The interview process

began in May 2021. The researcher recorded the audio of the interviews. The following

questions were asked of each participant:

1. What is your perception of School Resource Officers as part of your
   professional role?
   a. What do you think the primary functions of the School Resource Officer
      are in your school?

b. Do you believe the School Resource Officer successfully fulfills those

functions? Please explain how they do or do not fulfill the functions.

c. What would you like to see your School Resource Officer do in order to

be more effective in his or her role?

2. What context or situations have impacted your experiences and shaped

your perception?

a. How often do you interact with the School Resource Officer at your

school?

b. How has your perception of School Resource Officers changed during the

course of your career?

c. Do perceive School Resource Officers the same as any other police

officer? Why or why not?

Follow-up questions were asked as the conversation led. Additionally, the researcher took

brief handwritten notes during the interview, however, the interviews were audio recorded and

transcribed.

Data Analysis

For the study, the researcher aimed at identifying similarities and differences among

stakeholder perceptions regarding SRO roles and their impact on school campuses. Using the

transcribed interview documents, the researcher conducted a content analysis. Content analysis

reduces the amount of information into manageable chunks, allowing the researcher to easily

access and organize the actual meaning of the data (Schreier, 2012). The researcher identified

key words, concepts, and themes to create a coding system to organize the information and look

for commonalities. The researcher then examined SRO and other stakeholder perceptions of

SRO expectations and looked for patterns or a lack of clarity in SRO roles. The researcher then

used the inductive research process to develop a theory based on the data.

Trustworthiness

It is critical that the researcher establish trustworthiness within their qualitative study.

Trustworthiness can be divided into four categories: credibility, dependability, transferability,

and confirmability (Gunawan, 2015).

Credibility

In establishing trustworthiness, credibility is a key consideration for the researcher. One

way of deepening the credibility of research is through triangulation of sources. According to

Anney (2014), "Triangulation helps the investigator to reduce bias and it cross-examines the

integrity of participants' responses" (p. 277). For this study, the researcher was interviewing

participants from several school campus locations with different roles. These roles include SRO,

school administrator, and teacher. By including a variety of stakeholders in this study, the

researcher considered different perspectives and therefore integrated triangulation of sources to

serve as an avenue for establishing credibility.

The researcher has work and personal experiences that contribute to his credibility as a

researcher. The researcher has experience working in both law-enforcement and the education

field. The researcher has participated in and provided training to SRO's and educators regarding

safety in schools, specifically related to SRO's and their role on school campuses. Working as a

safety coordinator in a public school system, it is a job responsibility of the researcher to create

and propose policies and guidance to stakeholders regarding SRO job expectations. Therefore, the researcher's experiences contribute to the credibility of the study.

Further, the researcher used member-checking for credibility purposes. Through member-checking, the researcher shared interview findings and interpretations with the participants. Once the data was collected, transcribed, and coded, the researcher contacted participants via email and requested their preference in setting up a follow-up meeting or communication through email. If anything was misinterpreted or needed clarifying, the researcher worked with participants to ensure any errors or misinterpretations are corrected.

Dependability and Confirmability

Having detailed and thorough transcription documents is a means to ensure dependability in qualitative research (Gunawan, 2015). For this study, the researcher had all interviews transcribed by an independent transcriptionist. The researcher submitted unedited audio files to the transcriptionist as interviews were completed. The transcriptionist then returned the transcribed interviews to the researcher in portable document format (PDF). The audit trail is further solidified through the researcher's field note journals. Field notes and journaling are often used to create an audit trail as a way for a third-party to measure the dependability of a study's findings (Schwandt 2015). The researcher maintained journals throughout the research process, including data collection and analysis, which provides an opportunity for confirmability.

Transferability

In order to help facilitate transferability, it is important for the researcher provide a thick description of the research process. A thick description is one that includes an in-depth look at each step of the research including data collection and analysis in a way that would make it

possible for another researcher to duplicate the research in a similar setting successfully (Anney, 2014). For this study, the researcher provided a thick description to aide future researchers interested in this type of research.

Summary

This chapter describes the research methodology that was employed for this study. The purpose of this study is to examine stakeholder perceptions of SROs regarding their roles and expectations on school campuses, as well as their contribution to school safety. Participants were educational stakeholders within the state of Alabama and were recruited with a desire for diverse perspectives in mind. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather data in order to answer the research questions. The researcher used content analysis and the inductive research process to organize and analyze the data. Trustworthiness for this study is thoughtfully considered and methods for establishing trustworthiness were used. The following chapter will report the findings of the study.

Chapter 4

Results

In her writing concerning qualitative research, Alase (2017) points specifically to phenomenological research as being advantageous, as it allows for a deeper relationship between the researcher and participant and also allows the participants to explore their lived experiences more deeply. In the previous chapter, I addressed the concepts surrounding the use of phenomenology in my qualitative study. In this chapter, the application of phenomenology in my study will be explained in detail.

The purpose of this study is to measure the effectiveness of School Resource Officers. In order to measure their effectiveness, the lived experiences of education stakeholders from throughout the state of Alabama were detailed. The stakeholders included four currently employed School Resource Officers, four currently employed K-12 public school teachers and four currently employed K-12 public school administrators. Phenomenological research was employed in order to better understand how effective SROs are by virtue of the lived experiences of both SROs themselves, and those who work closely with them in an educational setting.

Table 1: Interview participant demographics

Professional role	School district type	Race	Gender
Administrator #1	City	African American	Male
Administrator #2	City	White	Male
Administrator #3	City	White	Female
Administrator #4	County	White	Male
Teacher #1	City	White	Female
Teacher #2	City	White	Female
Teacher #3	City	White	Male
Teacher #4	City	African American	Male
SRO #1	City	White	Male
SRO #2	City	White	Male
SRO #3	County	White	Female
SRO #4	County	White	Female

The Setting: K-12 public schools in the state of Alabama

The participants in this study represented three different K-12 public schools from across

the state of Alabama. All participants are currently employed full-time, and all SROs interviewed

work exclusively as SROs during the school year. Public schools were chosen because they fall

under the umbrella of the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE), and thus retain

some level of uniformity. Private schools are not subject to ALSDE regulations, thus the role of

the SRO on those campuses is not always comparable to that of a public-school setting.

Additionally, the participants spanned schools housing elementary students, to those housing

high school seniors. This provided insight into hoe SROs are viewed while serving varying

student populations.

I work for a K-12 public school system in Alabama, thereby having pre-existing

professional relationships with many of my research participants. Both those representing law-

enforcement, and those representing public education expressed interest in the research and

believed the results would be beneficial to both professions. Approval for the study was applied for in April 2021 and granted by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Auburn University in May 2021. Upon IRB approval, I contacted participants via telephone and email, and began scheduling interviews.

The Questions

The study was conducted via audio interviews, utilizing Zoom videoconferencing technology. During the interviews, the video function was disabled, per IRB requirements. The interview questions were approved by IRB, and each participant was asked the same questions.

The interview questions aimed to utilize phenomenology not merely as an approach to knowing more about the subject matter but rather to engage in a manner in which the lived experiences of participants at a conscious level (Qutoshi, 2018). Participants were reassured that their identity would remain anonymous throughout the reporting of the findings of the interviews. Additionally, participants were afforded the opportunity at the conclusion of their interview to revisit any of their answers and provide clarity or additional details.

The Process

Interviews for this study were recorded utilizing Zoom videoconference technology. An electronic link of each interview was e-mailed to an independent, IR-approved, transcriptionist. The interviews were fully transcribed and e-mailed back to me in a portable document format (PDF) attachment. I then printed the interviews and retained a hard copy for coding. Prior to the open coding process, I bracketed my personal experiences and potential biases. Accounting for my previous career in law-enforcement and my current work as a Safety Coordinator for a K-12 public school system in Alabama were an important and necessary component to my coding.

Bracketing allows the researcher to temporarily suspend what we think we know and listen clearly to the lived experiences of our participants (Hamill & Sinclair, 2010).

Interview Participants

Participants for the study were selected in a purposeful manner. Consideration was given to the desire to make the sample size diverse in race, gender, location, and years of experience in their current role. I contacted each participant personally, either via email or on their personal phone. Due to my pre-existing professional relationships with the participants, I was able to make contact with them and secure a verbal commitment to the study. Each participant was e-mailed a copy of the Auburn University IRB Information Letter, affixed with the official IRB stamp. In total, twelve individuals agreed to participate, and were subsequently interviewed.

The participants consisted of four K-12 public school administrators, a group that included two white males, one white female, and one black male. The group of four K-12 public school teachers included two white females, one white male, and one black male. The group of four SROs currently serving full-time in K-12 public schools included two white females and two white males. In total, four public-school systems from the state of Alabama were represented.

The participant selection in this study created a unique circumstance in that all three represented groups were interviewed regarding the job performance of one of the participant groups. The results of this study are strengthened by the fact themes emerged across three different groups instead interviewing a group of twelve individuals in the same profession. The weight of the themes and shared experiences across groups created a more robust study with impactful results.

Interviews

Every interview was conducted utilizing Zoom videoconferencing technology. I, along with each participant, disabled the video function on our computers and the interview was recorded using audio-only. Prior to the start of the recorded interview, I reminded each participant that their participation in the study was voluntary, and they were free to revoke their consent at any time. I also notified each participant when recording was to begin and asked the IRB-approved questions of each participant. Follow-up questions were asked where appropriate, in order to gain greater clarity on responses. I also asked participants to explain any acronyms they used. At the conclusion of the interviews, each participant was provided the opportunity to edit, clarify, or expound upon any of their answers. Only after each participant verbally indicated they had nothing more to add to the interview was the recording stopped.

Transcription Coding

After receiving each transcript from the transcriptionist, they were printed, and hard copies were maintained in my sole possession for coding purposes. Open coding was employed, and each transcript was analyzed multiple times for the purpose of identifying emerging and recurrent themes. Hard copies of the transcripts were manually highlighted, and notes were made in the margins to capture larger themes. Once the large thematic elements were determined, they were grouped into categories. The categories were further distilled in order to identify the core key themes that emerged throughout the interview process. Bracketing was taken into consideration during coding, so as to accurately code the interviews and locate the central emergent themes. Further analyzation of the categories revealed five emergent themes that were expressed during the course of the participant interviews.

Emergent themes

1. The process and selection of the SRO contributes greatly to their effectiveness in the school setting.

2. Schools in the United States are becoming increasingly dangerous places, particularly since the Columbine High School shooting in 1999, and SROs are necessary in order to create a safer school environment.

3. SROs are most effective when they are serving as a support for school administrators and teachers and should not be involved in school disciplinary decisions.

4. SROs serve an important function when it comes to making school administrators and teachers safe from potentially hostile parents and guardians.

5. The ability of the SRO to create positive relationships with students, staff, and administration is considered by all stakeholders to be the most important measure of SRO effectiveness.

There were approximately 18 different themes that emerged as a result of thorough transcript analysis. The themes were organized and developed into 5 significant themes that spanned the study. The 5 themes were structured in a way that they best encompassed the participant's shared views from their lived experiences. The 5 emergent themes were those that best captured the essence of what was conveyed across the represented groups. Themes were grouped by wording but also by the context of what the participant was saying. The lived experiences of each participant were uniquely theirs, sometimes worded differently, but clear enough to discern distinct commonalities from multiple participants.

Theme Organization

Each major theme in this study is addressed below, individually. The themes are listed in bold typeface, then followed by a brief explanation. Multiple quotations from interview participants are provided for each theme, across professions, to serve as supporting evidence of the prevalence and importance of the theme to the study.

For purposes on anonymity, all participants in this study have been assigned a title and corresponding number. Quotations attributed to the participants will be identified as "Administrator," then followed by a number 1-4. Teachers will be identified as "Teacher," then followed by a number 1-4. School Resource Officers will be identified as "SRO," then followed by a number 1-4.

Theme One

The process and selection of the SRO contributes greatly to their effectiveness in the school setting.

The number of participants in this study totals 12. Literature is inconclusive as to the number of recommended participants for a qualitative study. Malterud et al. (2015) suggest a criterion for qualitative studies that takes into account the power of the information collected, rather than focusing solely on the number of participants. Malterud et al. (2015) further indicate that "information power" is largely dependent on the aim of the study, sample specificity, use of established theory, quality of dialogue, and analysis strategy. This study considers the elements mentioned by Malterud et al. (2015), by interviewing participants with specific knowledge of the aim of the study, utilizing a phenomenological approach, and rigorous coding. Additionally, the quality and specificity of the dialogue provided by participants lends itself to a strong study.

The theme of SRO selection emerged across multiple participants and for many to be the foundational element for predicting whether or not an SRO would be effective. **SRO #1** offered their views by stating:

"I have a very high view of School Resource Officers and the mission we are undertaking. When the School Resource Officer position is filled by the right person with the right mindset, I have a very positive view of School Resource Officers."

I asked the **SRO #1** to expand on their answer in order to obtain clarity as to what constituted the "right person" in their opinion. **SRO #1** responded:

"So, the School Resource Officer position requires a lot of the same characteristics that a police officer position in general requires, or at least to perform it at a high level. So, someone with empathy, someone with good interpersonal skills, someone with good communication skills, are really essential…I've seen this done and I've seen this done not well, and officers that are engaged, that want to be there…I think that's a very successful aspect of policing."

Administrator #3 spoke specifically of working with a special population in a unique setting, and how it is vitally important to select an SRO who is a quality candidate, by stating:

"…my perception is that they should have a better skill set in working with children and those soft skills and being able to instruct and have a different level of understanding."

SRO #3 also added:

"...first off, you have to select the right person, because it doesn't matter if you give them all the training in the world, if they're not the right person to be in the school environment, then nothing is going to help."

Teacher #4 stressed the importance of SRO selection in how their personal perception of SROs was changed from negative to positive, simply by having a different officer in the role. In describing that transformation, they stated:

"...when you see certain videos of SROs mistreating students, especially students of color, you know slamming them down, things like that – and that just – that didn't change my negative views of SROs, and up until the last year or two when we received an SRO at our school who was completely transformative. And how he viewed his role and how we could work together to improve his role on our campus, that's where my view of SROs began to change."

This response from **teacher #4** underscored the complex issues surrounding the selection of SROs. Long-held personal beliefs and strained relationships between law enforcement and students of color, were affected by the placement of a different officer in the role of SRO. In this instance, SRO selection created a positive culture of safety. To **teacher #4**, a uniformed officer was not adequate in serving the needs of students and staff and change occurred when an SRO better suited for the school environment was placed.

The participant responses shaping this theme mirrored the approach taken by other states in a more official stance. The Tennessee Department of Education (2007) suggests that not only should school districts be involved in the assignment of SROs to particular schools, but they should also be involved in decisions pertaining to the retention of SROs. In her research,

Robinson (2006) also noted that potential SROs should be selected carefully based not only on an interest in working with children but also due to a desire to work with professional educators.

Theme Two

Schools in the United States are becoming increasingly dangerous places, particularly since the Columbine High School shooting in 1999, and SROs are necessary in order to create a safer school environment.

The perception that schools are increasingly dangerous places was an emergent theme among participants. Specifically, historical attacks on schools in the United States created a foundational belief that SROs are a necessary component of American schools to ensure they are safe. **Administrator #4** addressed the issue by stating:

> *"I think that my perception of School Resource Officers has changed. I think a lot of it has come about due to safety issues, when it comes to active shooters or school shooting situations. I don't really recall having School Resource Officers or police officers really in the buildings, with the exception of DARE officers, until after the Columbine shooting."*

SRO #4 added:

> **"I began my career in law-enforcement in 1999, which is right before Columbine** *happened. Columbine changed a lot in regard to how law-enforcement responds to acts of violence on campuses. Even though Columbine had an SRO that day, that position of an SRO in my view of what an SRO is now was not a commonplace thing."*

Teacher #1 also referenced a historical incident of school violence when addressing the need for SROs:

"One thing that just definitely stands out is the Sandy Hook school system's nightmare, where a student – a parent or a son of a parent – at the school came in, and was completely mentally unstable, and took out, you know, several classrooms in a whole school. Definitely that kind of set the bar for how do we grow from that and how do we change the climate, and how do we change the climate…make the public aware that this school district does take the safety of these kids seriously, that it's a top priority?"

Teacher #3 addressed the perception that schools need SROs because of increasingly violent incidents:

"…today's climate with the way schools are – are now that it's just a bit more volatile from the kid's standpoint, from the parent's standpoint…and sometimes a resource officer is there to help with that."

The responses from participants referencing highly publicized school attacks show the influence media attention on mass shootings has on people throughout the United States. Fox (2019), speaking of the media's coverage of mass shootings, remarked:

…who can blame those who assumed the worst given the pervasive media coverage of mass shootings? Although there is little evidence that the risk is anything close to epidemic proportions, despite what some observers have suggested, fear is certainly rampant.

Despite the remote likelihood of a mass shooting on a school campus, heavily publicized incidents served as important markers in the minds of interview participants for this study. The concept of safer schools due to SRO presence is difficult to establish simply through data points. Often, people experience a feeling of safety that is less tangible and more closely related to an overall *feeling* of security. Arizona State University [ASU] (2010) found that while SRO presence may not be directly linked to a reduction in youth criminality, the mere presence of an SRO on school campus can enhance school safety. ASU (2010) also found that the presence of an SRO on school campus can deter potential aggressive and threatening behaviors.

Theme Three

SROs are most effective when they are serving as a support for school administrators and teachers and should not be involved in school disciplinary decisions.

Among the issues addressed in chapter 2 of this study is that of the school-to-prison pipeline. The concept of SROs being involved in school-related disciplinary issues forms one of the tentpole issues when voicing concern for police officer presence in schools. Participants in this study recognized the issue and were clear that while the SRO is effective in many roles relating to the safety of a school, they should serve as a support for schoolteachers and administrators and not part of the disciplinary apparatus.

Teacher #3, when speaking of the primary role of the SRO on campus, stated:

"*To me, it's the support of the administration, and to support the teachers as well. But they are there for the support of the administration when needed.*

SRO #2 provided a clear distinction in roles:

"…I'm an assistant to the administrators here. I let them handle the majority of what goes on here, you know I'm here as an asset to them. They handle all their discipline issues – I provide the security here; I do the mentorship here too…"

Administrator #1, when speaking of the SRO role, stated:

"…the role of the School Resource Officer is really to be somewhat of a supplement to our administrative team at the school…"

Administrator #3 added:

"…I feel like School Resource Officers are to be a support and a bridge between our community and our school system, to support children, and to support the administration and teachers within the schools."

SRO #1 provided perspective from a law-enforcement standpoint:

"I don't see my role as one where I go into the schools and I'm the ultimate authority here. I see my role as one of a guest inside the schools to where when I go to those schools, I'm there to help with what the principal and assistant principal are doing…I want to assist each school as best as possible."

The issue of SROs and school discipline figured prominently during the interview process. Participants were acutely aware of the potential dangers involved in involving students in the criminal justice system based on actions taken by the student on campus and in violation of school policy. Curran et al. (2019) reported that, in their research, 79% of SROs reported not being involved in matters of school discipline. Additionally, Curran et al. (2019) recommended that clear boundaries are communicated when it comes to SROs and school discipline, as the

relationships between SROs and school personnel may sometimes facilitate unseen and nuanced forays into the area of student discipline.

<div align="center">**Theme Four**</div>

SROs serve an important function when it comes to making school administrators and teachers safe from potentially hostile parents and guardians.

An emergent theme that revealed itself through the open coding process of interviews was that of the concern of unruly parents or guardians, and the need for SROs to be present to diffuse potentially volatile situations among adults. This is a theme that was not prevalent during my research into the School Resource Officer program. Concerns typically included the potential for harsh treatment directed towards students by SROs, or, on the other end of the spectrum, the need for SROs to be present in order to prevent a violent attack perpetrated by a student. Rarely was the nexus of SRO and parent interaction mentioned, yet it was prominent during my interviews.

Teacher #1, when speaking about the role of SROs, stated:

"...I've become a whole lot more aware of the situations that they are put in, we have times where parents come into the school angry and mad and definitely our resource officers have to handle that straight on…"

Administrator #3, opining on the presence of SROs, stated:

"...in situations where we have had a tough parent…there is a sense of security and comfort when they [SROs] get here, if that makes sense."

Teacher #2 was more specific on the subject of parents by offering:

"...I know of some situations where we had some hostile parents, no force was ever necessary, but it was nice to have our SRO there...it was a family night of some sort....it was nice to have his presence available because the situation was immediately resolved."

SRO #2, when speaking of their daily routine of working with school administration stated:

"...I'll go to the office and I'll say hi to them, let them know that I'm here, make sure everything's going alright, I check to make sure nothing's came up in the morning like a parent or something..."

The issue of SROs interacting with challenging parents as part of their duties provides a unique adult learning opportunity in a K-12 school setting. The interactions serve as one of the few instances when an adult is in a position to educate another adult in a pedagogical setting.

Tingley (2019) addresses the importance of understanding that difficult parents still have a right and responsibility to their child's education. Tingley (2019) also adds that not all difficult parents were born that way, and their behavior may be a reflection of their own experiences in a K-12 school. This positions the SRO as an adult with an opportunity to help educate other adults on the benefits of healthy involvement with their student's education, while utilizing an understanding that factors in the parent's background may influence their behavior.

Theme Five

The ability of the SRO to create positive relationships with students, staff, and administration is considered by all stakeholders to be the most important measure of SRO effectiveness.

The final, and most prominent theme across the participants was that of the importance of SRO's ability to cultivate positive relationships. The ability of the SRO to develop and maintain positive relationships with students, staff and teachers was deemed by virtually every respondent to be the most vital function of the role of an SRO in the school. In the broader view of school safety, the predominant theme was that by virtue of the SRO having meaningful relationships with those in the school community, a host of potential safety issues can be mitigated.

Included in the interview responses were the following thoughts specific to the theme of SRO relationship-building:

Administrator #3 was straightforward in explaining:

"…I feel like the School Resource Officer is here to build relationships with kids so they can have a trusted adult that is also a representative in the community…"

Administrator #4 spoke about how different the SRO is, compared to a patrol police officer and how they are viewed by students:

"…they're not just seeing the badge at that point; they're seeing the person they've built that relationship with."

SRO #2, when describing his primary function in regard to dealing with students, stated:

"I think a big thing is building a relationship with them, if you don't have a relationship with students, they don't feel like they can talk to you…"

SRO #3 added:

"…when you go into your school, you need to start building positive relationships, because from there a lot of things can stem."

Teacher #2, while describing the primary function of SROs on their campus, stated:

"I guess I go back to building those relationships and building bridges between students and law enforcement…"

Teacher #4 explained what differentiated a new SRO who had been hired to serve on campus, as opposed to a previous SRO who was ineffective, by explaining that:

"…he does a really good job of building relationships with students…you can also see him inside the buildings, talking to students, building that rapport, building relationships…"

SRO #2 provided an expansive explanation to the importance of relationship building on the part of SROs that also blends with Knowles' (1975) concept of self-directed learning among adults.

SRO #2:

"Being present on campus is very important. Being self-motivated; this is not a position for somebody that needs to be constantly managed by higher-ups. This is a position that you have to take it upon yourself. What you get out of it is what you put into it. That might

be for yourself, but it will affect your school in the long run if some type of violence comes on your campus. So therefore, you need as an SRO to grow professionally, but you need to grow personally. And, for example, say you're an SRO that maybe has difficulty relating to different people groups, and they're different from what you are. As a person, and as an officer, you should be learning ways that you can better relate to diverse students, and seeking out trainings, or even just seeking out books that you can read that would help you to become better to handle situations with diverse students. As an SRO you don't want to be viewed as just the one that comes to deal with the "bad" student. Maybe attending a National Honor Society Induction, so these other kids can see you. Go to a basketball game. I'm not particularly interested in sports, but to make myself go watch a girls' softball, and be a part of that so they know that I'm there for them no matter what. And that way, when there is a situation, you have to deal with somebody, they already know you and have that relationship."

Here, **SRO #2** succinctly stresses the importance of relationships between SROs and students, while also acknowledging that learning to be more effective at building relationships is an internal process. This excerpt from the interview of **SRO #2** supports Knowles' (1975) assertion that adults are largely self-motivated to learn and find the means needed in order to facilitate their learning. The positioning of the SRO as an adult learner, and the idea that learning more about the population you serve as a means to facilitate relationships that lead to safer schools, is foundational to the effectiveness of SROs in K-12 public schools.

The phenomenological lens through which the interviews were conducted provided rich detail into the factors that affect the perception of SROs. The lived

experience of all participants colored their views of SROs. Ultimately, there were uniting themes that emerged, though many took different routes to arrive at their conclusions. Some were affected by their relationship, positive or negative, with police officers from a young age. A positive example of a relationship with an SRO at a young age came from **Administrator #4**, who recalled important characteristics of a school-based police officer from their childhood.

> **Administrator #4:**
>
> *"So, there was a police officer in my hometown, and she was very present in schools, and I know that she was a community builder…very, very popular, very, very positive."*

Offering a different perspective on childhood experiences with SROs was **Teacher #4**, who remembered a specific incident from their childhood.

> **Teacher #4:**
>
> *"There was a time when an SRO actually handcuffed a student on campus. And I don't really remember the reason, but to me it placed a negative taste in my mouth regarding an SRO. And, you know, I always knew they were police officers. I knew that hands down, but to me there should be a level of protection of students, and to do that in front of other students really bothered me."*

Other participants were career law-enforcement officers who have witnessed seismic shifts in the profession during their tenure. **SRO #3** noted the difference in SROs from the beginning of their career to present-day.

SRO #3:

"And then I saw the ones who couldn't make it anywhere else in the department, so they said oh, we need to fill this role, we'll just put him over there so we don't have to deal with him. And I saw law-enforcement officers that didn't take care of themselves; I would say even on the obese side. So, fast-forward till today, when I go to teach, and I look out in my audiences and I see young; when I first started there was more of the older generation sitting in that room. Well now, there's the younger generation. The generation you can tell takes pride in themselves, and they stay physically fit, you can tell there's an attitude of I want to be here. I mean we have S.W.A.T. officers in our courses, we have females now… there's more African-Americans and Hispanics, so the diversity of the class is better, which is better for our school climate."

SRO #4 also provided insight into how the SRO role has changed during the course of their career.

SRO #4:

"I began my career in law-enforcement in 1999, which was right before Columbine happened. Columbine changed a lot in regard to how law-enforcement responds to acts of violence on campuses. So as school violence increased across the nation, more and more agencies were putting an officer in a school, and they weren't looking at the role that officer should be playing. It was a body in a school, a badge, and a gun, and it might have been that retired on active duty, or somebody that maybe could not seem to make it on the road and that's who they would put in the school. But things to me from what I've seen over the years, it has evolved where the leadership in law-enforcement recognized

the benefits of having a certain officer in their schools. And now, you see the shift from going from that other type of officer to an officer that has bought into the community-oriented policing philosophy."

The importance placed on the value of relationships by interview participants was found present in additional literature. The Consortium on Chicago School Research (2011) found that positive relationships between SROs and students adds to the culture of school safety through the collection of information and mitigation of threats. LyDay (2021) emphasized that not only are SRO relationships with students vital to a safe school climate, but SRO relationships with staff and families in the school community play an important role in keeping schools safe.

As Webb & Welsh (2019) remind us, knowledge is not universally true but an understanding that individuals have arrived at based on their own observations and interpretations. To this end, the common themes revealed through this qualitative study are bolstered by the fact that each participant has unique experiences that have shaped their perceptions.

Additional Themes

Each of the 5 emergent themes in this study were supported with strong quotations from at least one member in each stakeholder group. During the coding of the interview transcripts, themes of lesser importance were evident and will be mentioned in this section. These themes will be listed in boldface type and be followed by supporting quotations from interview participants. These themes were not mentioned with enough consistency to contribute a foundational role to this study, but they do represent a portion of stakeholder's lived experiences regarding their perceptions of SROs.

Drug Abuse Resistance Officers [D.A.R.E.] were the first consistent law-enforcement presence in schools.

For some participants, they remembered having D.A.R.E. officers in their schools when they were students. According to the D.A.R.E. website (2021), the D.A.R.E. program began in 1983 in Los Angeles, CA with the intent of teaching students about the dangers of illegal drugs. Since its inception, the D.A.R.E. program has maintained that its focus is on education and their officers do not serve a security function on school campuses (D.A.R.E., 2021). The interview participants make a clear distinction between the D.A.R.E. officers of their youth and SROs of today. To them, D.A.R.E. officers conveyed a friendly tone and someone they felt they had more of a personal relationship with.

Administrator #1:

"Growing up, because of D.A.R.E., we did have somewhat of a School Resource Officer. This person in particular was a member of a family member's church and so when I would see them, I would see that same friendly face, and you know I felt like they knew me as an elementary kid.

Administrator #4:

"I think the D.A.R.E. officer's primary role was to reach kids at a very young age, warning about the dangers of becoming involved in underage drinking, tobacco, and drugs, and discussing and making the conversation of peer pressure something more open to talk about at an early age."

What can be seen from these perceptions of the early interactions with D.A.R.E. officers is that the framework for informal counseling and relationship building was in place, and the emphasis of the role was not that of the safety and security of the school campus.

There remains inconsistency in how SROs are deployed throughout school districts.

Some interview respondents remarked that one of the obstacles facing the successful implementation of SRO programs is how many SROs are allocated for the number of schools in their school district.

Teacher #1:

"As a School Resource Officer, I think they are doing the responsibility in the job description they were given. I don't think there is enough manpower for them to be able to adequately fulfill the needs of 1,400 students."

Administrator #2:

"I think it's difficult for our schools, our smaller schools especially, our elementary and our alternative setting schools that have resource officers that are rovers, because they're in and out at various times in the day, not really on a set schedule."

The concept of SRO allocation was not mentioned frequently during the interview process, and in some cases was not seen as an area of concern. The issue of officer allocation does serve as a companion issue to those discussed regarding the effectiveness of SROs. The question of how schools are selected to have a full-time SRO on campus when the number of available SROs is less than the number of schools went unaddressed during the interview process.

Safety, and the feeling of safety, are important.

As previously stated, a strength of this study is that it utilized the lived experiences of 3 distinct groups of individuals. As such, there were instances where respondents said, in essence, similar things, while using unique language. The most apparent instance of this was when interview subjects spoke of the SRO's close relationship with the responsibility of keeping the school campus safe. There was the additional layer of some believing SROs were responsible, to a degree, for creating a feeling of safety among staff and students.

Administrator #1:

"...I look for them to kind of help create a positive environment and a safe environment for the students when they are on campus."

Administrator #2, speaking about the role of the SRO on campus:

"...to provide a hedge of protection for students and staff."

Administrator #3:

"I think the presence of that person on campus does support our faculty in feeling a level of safety..."

SRO #2:

"Well, I think first off, you know, of course we have to provide security for the schools..."

SRO #4:

"Primary function in the schools that I serve is of course the obvious of safety, being that law-enforcement presence on campus to protect those that are on campus every day."

Teacher #3:

"...and just being protection for the kids, the faculty, and staff, I don't know where we'd be probably without them right now."

Interview participants articulated their thoughts differently in their interviews but clearly saw the SRO position as one that provides security for the school. This, in part, explains the shift away from the D.A.R.E. model of school policing but also helps explain why SROs are at times unclear as to what their roles in schools are. They are tasked with protecting the students and staff but not to police the school as they would the general public. The school staff expects the SROs to provide protection but also to educate, mentor, and build relationships. The lack of clearly defined roles for SROs, and a different understanding of those roles among stakeholder groups, continues to be an issue without clear resolution.

Chapter 5

Discussions, Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

Overview

This study focused on K-12 public education stakeholders in the State of Alabama, and their perceptions of School Resource Officers. Four school administrators, four teachers, and four SROs were interviewed. Each participant provided details of their lived experiences with SROs within the public-school setting. The researcher was able to code these interviews and identify major investigative themes that emerged throughout the study. Coding resulted in a total of 5 major emergent themes from the study. This chapter summarizes the significant points of this study and conclusions revealed in chapter four.

Issues considered at the outset of the study included a lack of uniformity surrounding several aspects of SRO programs. A lack of national and statewide databases, uniform training, selection standards, and overall professional mandate were among the issues discussed. The study itself touched on some of these but lent itself more towards participant's personal experiences and how the SRO profession is effective in some ways but lacking in others. The interviews showed little concern for training standards or a macro accounting for SROs. The interviews did, however, reveal questions regarding how SROs are selected and what the core functions of their jobs are. There was a general understanding that SROs are present to keep schools safe but little consensus as to how they are to keep schools safe.

The study also served to address issues about how SROs are involved in school discipline, how they relate to staff and students, and how an SRO can execute multiple roles at once all while remaining a sworn law-enforcement officer. The participants in this study provided depth and personal experiences to their answers. Universally, they agreed that SROs

should avoid arresting students at all costs and were sensitive to the idea that aggressive policing on campus can have long-term negative consequences for students. Respondents strongly agreed that a foundational aspect of the SRO program should be the SRO forming and maintaining strong relationships with staff and students. The stakeholders that were interviewed were particularly concerned with the daily interactions of SROs with staff and students, and not concerned with bigger picture ideas and controversies surrounding police in schools. The interviews conducted, along with a robust literature review, provide context and rich experiences, opinions, and strategies from which other education stakeholders can shape policy, procedures, and facilitate high-level conversations.

SRO Program Establishment

The existence of SRO programs themselves is debated by many in the public education space. This study focuses on existing programs and stakeholder's experiences with SROs. During the course of interviews, the issue of SRO program abolishment was not mentioned. Respondents focused of ways to improve SRO programs but said nothing suggesting they eliminated altogether.

Impact of High-Profile Violent Incidents

As mentioned in chapter one, incidents of school violence that garnered intense media scrutiny have shaped public perception and school and law-enforcement response when it comes to issues of school safety. There was agreement among interview participants that high-profile incidents of school violence, namely Columbine, Sandy Hook, and Parkland, had contributed greatly to either the need, or perceived need of SROs. This was outlined as a major theme in chapter four. Also seen within the context of major incidents has been the full cycle of initial response and policymaking, only to re-examined after being exposed to potential negative

effects. Specifically, we have seen this regarding the efficacy of lockdown drills and the shift of SROs from D.A.R.E. officers, to the role of protector, to more of a hybrid function in which a premium is placed on the ability to foster positive relationships with students and staff.

<div align="center">**SRO Selection**</div>

Another issue raised in chapter one was that of SRO selection. This was addressed by some interview participants. **SRO #1** expressed confusion with the SRO selection process, particularly when it comes to input from school systems.

SRO #1:

"So, you know I would say let the schools say hey, we don't want this guy back and that be worth something. Or, if the school said hey, we really like this guy, we want him over here long term, and that would be worth something too because the school system, and the schools specifically, are major stakeholders with the School Resource Officer position, and I don't feel like they are always treated as such."

Along with the issue of SRO selection was also that of who the SRO ultimately reports to. There was confusion expressed on the part of **Teacher #4** regarding this issue.

Teacher #4:

"I do think it gets kind of hazy when you know…who is the SRO's boss? You know oftentimes you know it's someone on the police staff but that person, I guess from the police department has to back or support the principal, who is the building-level supervisor of that campus. I think the police chief or lieutenant, whoever's over that School Resource Officer, need to support that building-level administrator in their efforts."

These two concerns, how the SRO is selected and who the SRO reports to, were expressed by some participants but not consistently enough in both volume and content to emerge as a standalone theme.

NASRO Triad Model

Also mentioned in chapter one was the foundational aspect of the NASRO triad model (2012) that places the SRO in the role of law-enforcement officer, educator, and informal counselor. It was evident from some SROs that there was familiarity with this concept and that it served as a foundation for the way they approached their job.

SRO # 3:

"I will go back to what we do here, not only do the regular SRO work every day of the mentor, and the public safety educator, but if something does happen, we turn into investigators…"

SRO #4 was even more specific in separating the specific roles I outlined in chapter one.

SRO #4:

"Primary function in the schools that I serve is of course the obvious of safety, being that law-enforcement presence on campus to protect those that are on campus every day; to respond to incidents, but also to be a prevention piece. Following the NASRO triad, and their training, they have a triad concept of law-enforcement, informal counselor, mentor, and educator."

Administrators and teachers who participated in the study failed to mention the triad concept, lending to the idea that the concept is taught specifically to SROs but is not widely known among other stakeholders.

Strength of the Study

The participants in the study represented diverse backgrounds, experience levels in their professions, races, and genders. The diverse population provided rich detail concerning their thoughts on SROs and their roles in schools. Additionally, the views expressed by participants provided insight into how an individual's experiences with law-enforcement officers early in their life can affect their views into adulthood. Ultimately, the participants in the study focused on ways to improve the utilization of SROs in schools or highlight existing effective strategies for policing in schools. Despite some school districts across the nation, including those in Seattle, WA; Portland, OR; Charlottesville, VA; and Edmonds, WA choosing to cancel or suspend contracts with local law-enforcement agencies (American Bar Association [ABA], 2021), there was no mention in participant interviews of eliminating SRO positions in schools.

A unique function of this study is that it the participants represent three different professions speaking to a singular topic. The primary themes carry added weight, as they are not simply the lived experiences of a homogenous groups, but rather were codified by the fact they emerged across multiple disciplines. As unique themes emerged across all three groups, credibility was added to the potential implementation of strategies based on the results of this study. When commonalities are expressed across groups, rather than majority opinions of a homogenous group, it provides layers of understanding and experience blending together across disciplines to produce credible results.

The Role of SROs in Schools

The qualities of an effective SRO and the primary responsibility of law-enforcement officers in schools appears to have undergone a significant shift over the last few decades. Over 35 years ago, Phillips and Cochrane (1985) listed 7 objectives of SROs in schools:

1. To improve police image

2. To inform students about what the police do

3. To make young people aware of dangers

4. To inform students about the law and the rights and duties of citizens

5. To develop a sense of social responsibility

6. To foster crime prevention

7. To encourage the flow of information between schools and police

While some of the objectives are loosely mirrored in this study, it is clear that the landmark school shooting incidents of Columbine, Sandy Hook, and Parkland changed the way SROs operated on school campuses. Phillips and Cochorane (1985) view the law-enforcement officer on a school campus as one of that as an authority figure, with little emphasis on the need for the SRO to develop personal relationships with students as a means of mitigating student-initiated violence.

Summary and Analysis

This section provides a summary of findings related to the research questions for this study. In chapter four, examples from interviews were provided as support for important themes

that emerged during research. This section is a broader summary of participant's answers to the research questions they were asked.

Research Question One

1. What is your perception of School Resource Officers as part of your professional role?

    a. What do you think the primary functions of the School Resource Officer are in your school?

    b. Do you believe the School Resource Officer successfully fulfills those functions? Please explain how they do or do not fulfill the functions.

    c. What would you like to see your School Resource Officer do in order to be more effective in his or her role?

This question was met with a wide range of answers from respondents. The perception of SROs by administrators and teachers was largely dependent on either SROs they had encountered as a youth, or SROs they currently worked with. Their interactions based on personal lived experiences was largely how they viewed SROs as a whole. The SROs who were interviewed all had a positive view of the profession, and one that is vital to the daily operation of a safe school. Current SROs interviewed all took pride in their position as an SRO and acknowledged that the profession of law-enforcement is becoming increasingly difficult.

Answers regarding the primary role of the SRO on campus were consistent in nature. Participants believed that SROs are there to keep the campus safe primarily from external threats that may enter the school campus with the intent to cause harm. SROs tended to view their role more expansively. There was recognition that generally there exists in modern American society a strained relationship between law-enforcement and citizens. SROs tended to view working with school-aged children as an avenue to repair that strained relationship with a new generation

of citizens. Aside from keeping the school safe from external threats, teachers and administrators viewed the expanded role of the SRO differently than did the SRO respondents. Teachers and administrators desired SROs to assist with directing traffic on the school campus, assisting with the creation of safety plans, and teaching students about laws.

The opinion of whether or not SROs were successfully carrying out the functions of their perceived primary roles again varied and was largely dependent upon the positionality of the respondent. SROs generally believed they were doing a good job of fulfilling the functions of their job. Teachers, though more limited in interaction with the SROs, largely believed the SROs were carrying out their job duties well. Administrators had a higher level of SRO expectation and were satisfied in some areas of the SRO's job performance, while they clearly had unmet expectations in other areas. Administrator dissatisfaction centered largely on lack of communication between the SRO and school, and ambiguity as to what the SRO was expected to do by their law-enforcement agency. The lack of communication and understanding of roles was expressed as a needed area of improvement.

Suggestions as to how the SRO could be more effective in their role revealed some frustrations on the part of multiple stakeholders with law-enforcement agencies. In the interviews, there existed a desire on the part of participants for the SROs to be more involved in the daily operation of the school. A disconnection was revealed as to what the SROs were allowed to do at the school, and this disconnection, in the opinion of participants, largely fell on the law-enforcement agency's lack of a clear mandate for what the SRO should be doing on the school campus. Participants were sometimes unsure of the criteria used to select SROs, and if the SROs were supposed to report to their law-enforcement agency, or the school building administrator.

Research Question Two

2. What context or situations have impacted your experiences and shaped your perception of
   School Resource Officers?

   a. How often do you interact with the School Resource Officer at your school?

   b. How has your perception of School Resource Officers changed during the course of
      your career?

   c. Do you perceive School Resource Officers the same as any other police officer? Why
      or why not?

All respondents provided detailed answers as to their lived experiences with SROs and
how it shaped their current views. Multiple respondents were significantly impacted by a
singular SRO as a youth, both positively and negatively. Some administrators recalled an SRO or
D.A.R.E. (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) officer serving as a mentor and positive example
to them when they were a student in school. This early exposure both led to a positive perception
of SROs and also a raising of expectations for the current SRO they were working with. One of
the teachers who was interviewed recalled seeing a classmate handcuffed by an SRO when they
were in school and how the event was traumatizing for many of the students who witnessed it.
The SROs who were interviewed provided a more detailed perspective of how the SRO position
has changed during their years of service. Multiple participants have had careers spanning over a
decade, and they described a significant evolution in the way SROs are selected and the way they
are treated within their own law-enforcement agencies. Some SROs remarked that when they
began their career in law-enforcement the SRO position was filled mostly by older officers who
were typically unmotivated, in poor physical shape, and were simply fulfilling an obligation the
law-enforcement agency had to staff the school with an officer. Present day, though, they

remarked that the SRO position is competitive and sought after by a diverse applicant pool that often bring an advanced skill set to the position. This shift in personnel was viewed as a positive change.

Virtually all participants indicated they interact with their SROs frequently. For administrators, this was mostly on a daily basis. The exception was for a school whose SRO was split between multiple schools. Teachers responded that they interacted with SROs less frequently than administrators but still to a satisfactory level. Daily interactions between SROs and administrators were a priority for most administrator and SRO respondents. Teachers were of the opinion that SROs would be available if they were to need them and that it was important to see them in the hallways, interacting regularly with students.

The perception of SROs over the course of each participant's career was largely shaped by recent history, as detailed by the theme that major incidents of school violence had necessitated the use of SROs. For some of the teachers, there was a relatively neutral opinion of SROs early in their career, then the perception changed once they had experienced an incident with either a student or parent in which they relied on an SRO for assistance. Once a personal need was realized, then perception shifted towards a belief that SROs are a vital member of school personnel.

The perception of SROs in relation to how other law-enforcement officers are viewed provided an array of answers. There were administrators who still held a view that SROs are not taken as seriously as law-enforcement officers in traditional roles. Among the SRO respondents, there existed a sense of pride that SROs are different in a positive way. The SRO participants indicated that the SRO position required a more specialized skill set than those officers working patrol are required to have. One SRO spoke of the challenges experienced within their own

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agency to be respected by their peers and administrative staff. While the participant viewed the SRO position as one of importance, requiring specialization, they felt their department did not value the SROs as a whole and there remains a lack of understanding as to what is required of SROs on a regular basis.

Comparisons to the Literature

In chapter two, I referenced how the national incidents of school violence at Columbine, Sandy Hook, and Marjorie Stoneman Douglas had shaped school-based policing. These incidents also served as reference points for the interview participants. Many interviewees made mention of these national incidents and how each of them affected the way they viewed the role of the SRO.

Many participants in this study also mentioned the importance of who is selected to serve as an SRO. This concern aligns with the issue exposed by Ryan et al. (2018) which indicated that in the United States there exists 18 states with no laws regarding the use of law-enforcement officers on campus. The concerns with who is selected to serve is adjacent to the issue that many states have no specific laws pertaining to SROs, and only 9 states require that certified law-enforcement officers serve on campus (Ryan et al., 2018).

In chapter two, much was addressed in terms of the training SROs have access to both before and during their time serving in the position. While the issue of training was mentioned by some participants, it did not take on the level of importance that was anticipated, based on the literature. Schweit & Mancik (2017) noted that due to the complex nature of the SRO position, training is needed both from the school district and police department. According to the interview participants, this idea paled in comparison to the importance of selecting an SRO who

is invested in building relationships with students and staff. As mentioned in chapter 4, **SRO #4** did discuss the need to SROs to continue to learn about the changing aspects of school-based policing but that was more closely aligned with individual self-directed learning than any sort of official training from either a law-enforcement agency or school.

As addressed in chapter two, the U.S. Department of Justice (2013) has recommended that school systems and law-enforcement agencies enter into a Memorandum of Understanding [M.O.U] in order to clearly delineate what an SROs roles and responsibilities are on a school campus. This was indirectly referenced several times in participant interviews. Many participants, across represented professions, indicated confusion as to what the SRO's duties on campus entail, and if there were any governing principals to serve as guide. Despite many opinions of SROs and their perceived effectiveness, there is still a lack of cohesion and understanding, which would generally be solved by the existence of an MOU.

Methodology

This qualitative study utilized a phenomenological approach. The lived experiences of participants were recorded via audio interview. The audio interviews were independently transcribed, and the transcriptions were open-coded. The methods for this study closely followed standards set about by Creswell & Poth (2018).

Limitations

This study was limited primarily by geography and sample size. The study included only participants representing K-12 public schools in Alabama. The study participants represented stakeholder groups inclusive of school administrators, teachers, and SROs. There are other public school stakeholder groups that were not present in the study. The study was limited to the

State of Alabama. This limitation is significant for this particular study, as previous chapters have indicated SRO programs can vary greatly from state to state. The study is also limited by the nature of qualitative work itself, which does not deal with statistical data in the manner quantitative studies do. Further, phenomenology is concerned with the lived experience of the participant, thus potentially narrowing the scope of the qualitative study.

<center>**Recommendations for Practice**</center>

A primary recommendation of this study is the development of criteria for potential SRO applicants. Study participants stressed the importance of the selection of who serves in the SRO role. Despite that prevailing opinion, there is no clear national or state standard for an officer who wishes to serve as an SRO. Pre-determined criteria would aid in the selection of the SRO and provide clear minimum qualifications.

Another recommendation is that the selection of SROs should be a joint venture of both law-enforcement agencies and school districts. Since the SRO will spend virtually all their working day on a school's campus, school administration should be able to provide input as to who is selected to fill the SRO role. Joint selection of applicants also ensures that law-enforcement agencies are not placing SROs in schools and forcing administrators to adapt to personnel they had no say in.

The existence of a thorough MOU serves to address many of the issues addressed by interview participants. When an MOU governs the relationship between law enforcement agencies and K-12 schools, specific SRO duties are clearly outlined and provide detailed professional boundaries, thus eliminating potential misunderstandings. The MOU provides a path to where the SRO knows where they are expected to act in a law enforcement capacity. This

supports the goal of SROs building quality relationships on school campus, as their duties, and when they are to be executed, are clearly defined.

Lastly, opportunities for SRO and student engagement and relationship-building should be available to the SRO prior to stepping on campus. All interview participants stressed the importance of relationship building as a means of creating a safe school climate. Despite that consensus, the opportunity for the SRO to develop relationships with staff and students relies almost exclusively on the SRO's ability to find non-instructional time to speak with students in an informal manner. The likelihood of effectiveness on the part of the SRO is increased if there are already opportunities for integration into the school community. Schools that create clubs, teaching opportunities, and other structured avenues for students and staff to interact with the SRO display a commitment to the most important aspects of successful SRO programs.

Recommendations for practice carry with them adult education opportunities that may not currently be in place on K-12 public-school campuses. The process of constructing an MOU presents a circumstance in which educators and law-enforcements agency representatives are educated on the details of each other's profession. This facilitates not only cooperation but an understanding and new professional perspective. SROs are in a position to educate K-12 school faculty and staff on school safety best practices, within an adult learning community. Educators are similarly situated to educate SROs on the inner-workings of their profession and the nuances that come along with working in a K-12 environment. While this mutual understanding can create stronger relational bonds among adult professionals on campus, it can also prove beneficial in a more tangible way. As education continues between SROs and education professionals, more informed decisions take place in critical areas such as special education, search and seizure, and appropriate interactions between students and law-enforcement officers.

Recommendations for Future Study

This study has provided valuable information regarding the role of SROs in public schools and suggestions for how that role may be better defined. The study would also prove valuable in other geographic areas, as this study was limited to the State of Alabama. Additionally, a study which included current students as a participant group could potentially yield meaningful insights into the lived experiences of students and how they experience SROs. The study is also replicable in a private school setting and could similarly produce valuable information to be utilized outside of a public-school setting.

More expansive questions, while utilizing the same groups included in this study, would yield a fresh collection of data. Granular questions aimed at the relationship between law-enforcement agencies and school districts would also provide valuable insight.

Summary

In some regions of the United States, there is debate as to whether or not SROs should be present in schools. This study does not focus on the potential abolishment of SRO positions. Instead, the lived experiences of those education stakeholders were recorded in an attempt to determine how SROs are viewed and what characteristics make an SRO effective or not. The initial selection of the person who serves as an SRO is the greatest predictor of their ability to positively contribute to a safe school climate. The selection of those SROs should be predicated on the applicant's desire and ability to form and maintain meaningful relationships with staff and students at their assigned school. SROs should possess a skill set that does not rely solely on police tactics but includes an understanding of the sensitivity required to work in a school environment.

In the absence of formal mandates, school systems and law-enforcement agencies should work together to create an environment where the applicant best suited to work in a school setting is selected. Structures should be in place to set the SRO up for success, and an MOU should be in place that clearly defines what the role is of the SRO on campus. SROs should be removed from involvement in school disciplinary processes and should strive to ensure all members of the school community are safer because their presence.

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Appendix A

Institutional Review Board (IRB) Exemption Review Application

Auburn University Human Research Protection Program

EXEMPTION REVIEW APPLICATION

For information or help completing this form, contact: **THE OFFICE OF RESEARCH COMPLIANCE**
Phone: 334-844-5966   Email:IRBAdmin@auburn.edu

Submit completed application and supporting material as one attachment to IRBsubmit@auburn.edu.

1. PROJECT IDENTIFICATION   Today'sDate _____ 4/1.02021 _____

a. Project Title ___ Alabama Public School Education Stakeholders Perceptions of School Resource Officers

b. Principal Investigator. Bryan Christopher Hardman _____ Degree(s) Bachelor of Arts, Master's, Ed.S.
Rank/Title__ Ph.D. Candidate _____ Department/School Educational Foundations, Leadership and Technology
Phone Number__ (334) 750-7336 _____ AU Email __ bch0047@auburn.edu

Faculty Principal Investigator (required if PI isa student) __ Dr. Jonathan Taylor
Title__ Associate Professor _____ Department/School__ Educational Foundations, Leadership and Technology
Phone Number__ (334) 844-4460 _____ AU Email __ jet0060@auburn.edu

Dept Head__ Dr. James Satterfield _____ Department/School__ Educational Foundations, Leadership and Technology
Phone Number__ (334) 844-4460 _____ AU Email __ jws0089@auburn.edu

c. Project Personnel – Identify all individuals who will be involved with the conduct of the research and include their role on the project. Role may include design, recruitment, consent process, data collection, data analysis, and reporting. Attach a table if needed for additional personnel.

Personnel Name Dr. Jonathan Taylor _____ Degree (s) Ph.D.
Rank/Title Associate Professor _____ Department/School__ Educational Foundations, Leadership and Technology
Role Faculty Primary Investigato
AU affiliated? ■ YES   ☐ NO   If no, name ofhome institution _____
Plan for IRB approval for non-AU affiliated personnel? _____

Personnel Name Bryan Christopher Hardman _____ Degree (s) B.A, M.S, Ed.S.
Rank/Title Ph.D. Candidate _____ Department/School Educational Foundations, Leadership and Technology
Role Primary Investigator (PI.) _____
AU affiliated? ■ YES   ☐ NO   If no, name ofhome institution _____
Plan for IRB approval for non-AU affiliated personnel? _____

Personnel Name Lauren Stegner _____ Degree (s) B.A, MBA .
Rank/Title Academic Advisor _____ Department/School Berklee College of Music
Role Transcriptionist
AU affiliated? ☐ YES   ■ NO   If no, name ofhome institution Berklee College of Music
Plan for IRB approval for non-AU affiliated personnel? _____

d. Training – Have all Key Personnel completed CITI human subjects training (including elective modules related to this research) within the last 3 years?   YES ✓   NO ☐

> **Allow Space for the**
>
> **AU IRB Stamp**

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e. Funding source – Is this project funded by the investigator(s)? ☑ YES   ☐ NO
Is this project funded by AU?   ☐ YES   ☑ NO   If YES, identify source __N/A__
Is this project funded by an external sponsor? ☐ YES ■ No If YES, provide the name of the sponsor, type of sponsor (governmental, non-profit, corporate, other), and an identification number for the award.
Name __N/A__   Type __N/A__   Grant # __N/A__

f. List other AU IRB-approved research studies and/or IRB approvals from other institutions that are associated with this project.
__N/A__

2. Mark the category or categories below that describe the proposed research:

☐ 1. Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices. The research is not likely to adversely impact students' opportunity to learn or assessment of educators providing instruction. 104(d)(1)

■ 2. Research only includes interactions involving educational tests, surveys, interviews, public observation if at least ONE of the following criteria. (The research includes data collection only; may include visual or auditory recording; may NOT include intervention and only includes interactions). **Mark the applicable sub-category below (i, ii, or iii).** 104(d)(2)

■ (i) Recorded information cannot readily identify the participant (directly or indirectly/linked); **OR**
   - surveys and interviews: no children;
   - educational tests or observation of public behavior: can only include children when investigators do not participate in activities being observed.

☐ (ii) Any disclosures of responses outside would not reasonably place participant at risk; **OR**

☐ (iii) Information is recorded with identifiers or code linked to identifiers and IRB conducts limited review; no children. **Requires limited review by the IRB.***

☐ 3. Research involving Benign Behavioral Interventions (BBI)** through verbal, written responses (including data entry or audiovisual recording) from adult subjects who prospectively agree and ONE of the following criteria is met. (This research does not include children and does not include medical interventions. Research cannot have deception unless the participant prospectively agrees that they will be unaware of or misled regarding the nature and purpose of the research) **Mark the applicable sub-category below (A, B, or C).** 104(d)(3)(i)

☐ **(A)** Recorded information cannot readily identify the subject (directly or indirectly/linked); **OR**

☐ **(B)** Any disclosure of responses outside of the research would not reasonably place subject at risk; **OR**

☐ **(C)** Information is recorded with identifiers and cannot have deception unless participant prospectively agrees. **Requires limited review by the IRB.***

☐ 4. Secondary research for which consent is not required: use of identifiable information or identifiable bio-specimen that have been or will be collected for some other 'primary' or 'initial' activity, if one of the following criteria is met. Allows retrospective and prospective secondary use. **Mark the applicable sub-category below (I, ii, iii, or iv).** 104(d)(4)

☐ (i) Biospecimens or information are publically available;

☐ (ii) Information recorded so subject cannot readily be identified, directly or indirectly/linked; investigator does not contact subjects and will not re-identify the subjects; OR

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☐ (iii) Collection and analysis involving investigators use of identifiable health information when use is regulated by HIPAA "health care operations" or "research or "public health activities and purposes" (does not include biospecimens (only PHI and requires federal guidance on how to apply); OR

☐ (iv) Research information collected by or on behalf of federal government using government generated or collected information obtained for non-research activities.

☐ 5. Research and demonstration projects which are supported by a federal agency/department AND designed to study and which are designed to study, evaluate, or otherwise examine: (i) public benefit or service programs; (ii) procedures for obtaining benefits or services under those programs; (iii) possible changes in or alternatives to those programs or procedures; or (iv) possible changes in methods or levels of payment for benefits or services under those programs. (must be posted on a federal web site). 104(d)(5) (must be posted on a federal web site)

☐ 6. Taste and food quality evaluation and consumer acceptance studies, (i) if wholesome foods without additives are consumed or (ii) if a food is consumed that contains a food ingredient at or below the level and for a use found to be safe, or agricultural chemical or environmental contaminant at or below the level found to be safe, by the Food and Drug Administration or approved by the Environmental Protection Agency or the Food Safety and Inspection Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The research does not involve prisoners as participants. 104(d)(6)

New exemption categories 7 and 8: Both categories 7 and 8 require Broad Consent. (Broad consent is a new type of informed consent provided under the Revised Common Rule pertaining to storage, maintenance, and secondary research with identifiable private information or identifiable biospecimens. Secondary research refers to research use of materials that are collected for either research studies distinct from the current secondary research proposal, or for materials that are collected for non-research purposes, such as materials that are left over from routine clinical diagnosis or treatments. Broad consent does not apply to research that collects information or biospecimens from individuals through direct interaction or intervention specifically for the purpose of the research.) **The Auburn University IRB has determined that as currently interpreted, Broad Consent is not feasible at Auburn and these 2 categories WILL NOT BE IMPLEMENTED at this time.**

*Limited IRB review – the IRB Chairs or designated IRB reviewer reviews the protocol to ensure adequate provisions are in place to protect privacy and confidentiality.

**Category 3 – Benign Behavioral Interventions (BBI) must be brief in duration, painless/harmless, not physically invasive, not likely to have a significant adverse lasting impact on participants, and it is unlikely participants will find the interventions offensive or embarrassing.

3. PROJECT SUMMARY

a. Does the study target any special populations? (Mark applicable)

Minors (under 18 years of age)   ☐ YES ☑ NO

Pregnant women, fetuses, or any products of conception   ☐ YES ☑ NO

Prisoners or wards (unless incidental, not allowed for Exempt research)   ☐ YES ☑ NO

Temporarily or permanently impaired   ☐ YES ☑ NO

b. Does the research pose more than minimal risk to participants?   ☐ YES ☑ NO

Minimal risk means that the probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research are not greater in and of themselves than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or test. 42 CFR 46.102(i)

c. Does the study involve any of the following?

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Procedures subject to FDA regulations (drugs, devices, etc.)	☐ YES ☑ NO
Use of school records of identifiable students or information from instructors about specific students.	☐ YES ☑ NO
Protected health or medical information when there is a direct or Indirect link which could identify the participant.	☐ YES ☑ NO
Collection of sensitive aspects of the participant's own behavior, such as illegal conduct, drug use, sexual behavior or alcohol use.	☐ YES ☑ NO
Deception of participants	☐ YES ☑ NO

4. Briefly describe the proposed research, including purpose, participant population, recruitment process, consent process, research procedures and methodology.

The purpose of the proposed research is to obtain the perspectives of education stakeholders on the effectiveness of School Resource Officers. The perspectives will help in measuring the effectiveness of School Resource Officers. The proposed participant population includes four currently employed K-12 public school teachers in the state of Alabama, four currently employed K-12 public school administrators in the state of Alabama, and four currently employed School Resource Officers currently serving in K-12 schools in the state of Alabama. Participants will be recruited via e-mail and phone call, based on preexisting professional relationships established by the P.I. All participants will provide written and verbal consent to the interview process. All interviews will be conducted via Auburn University Zoom technology. Interviews will be audio recorded, and the video of the interviews will be disabled. Audio recordings will be downloaded to the Cloud, via a private Zoom link. The private Zoom link will be shared with Lauren Stegner, the project transcriptionist, only. The audio interviews will be transcribed, and sanitized, with all identifying participant information removed. Transcribed interviews will be e-mailed back to the P.I., at his Auburn University e-mail address. The transcripts will be open coded by the P.I., and the emergent themes will be detailed in chapter four of the researcher's final dissertation, as part ⊞

5. Waivers

Check any waivers that apply and describe how the project meets the criteria for the waiver. Provide the rationale for the waiver request.

☐ **Waiver of Consent (Including existing de-identified data)**

☑ **Waiver of Documentation of Consent (Use of Information Letter)**

☐ **Waiver of Parental Permission**

All retrospective information will be de-identified.

This study meets the Waiver of Documentation of Consent criteria, as all personal identifiers of participants will be excluded from the interview process. There exists no more than minimal risk to the participants, as participants will not be personally identified, and interviews will be conducted via Zoom, with video capabilities disabled. Transcribed interviews will be sanitized by Lauren Stegner, with all identifiable participant information removed prior to being sent back to the P.I.

6. **Describe how participants/data/specimens will be selected. If applicable, include gender, race, and ethnicity of the participant population.**

Participants will be selected through P.I.'s professional relationships with School Resource Officers, teachers, and school administrators. Strong consideration will be given to the diversity of the participant population. The participant population has not been finalized, but will be comprised of significant inclusion from minority populations, to include an anticipated even number of male and female participants.

7. **Does the research involve deception? ☐ YES☒ NO If YES, please provide the rationale for deception and describe the debriefing process.**

N/A

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8. **Describe why none of the research procedures would cause a participant either physical or psychological discomfort or be perceived as discomfort above and beyond what the person would experience in daily life.**

The research procedures would not cause discomfort beyond what would be normal for general conversations about school safety, and all interviews will be conducted without any personal identifying information. Additionally, interviews will be conducted via Zoom, and the video option of the interview will be disabled.

9. **Describe the provisions to maintain confidentiality of data, including collection, transmission, and storage.**

Data collected will be held confidentially, as the recorded interviews will be saved to a dedicated, password-protected, Auburn University Zoom link. The Auburn University Zoom link will be shared by the P.I. only with the transcriptionist. The transcribed interviews will be e-mailed from the transcriptionist to the P.I. only, on the P.I.'s password-protected Auburn University e-mail account.

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10. **Describe the provisions included in the research to project the privacy interests of participants (e.g., others will not overhear conversations with potential participants, individuals will not be publicly identified or embarrassed).**

Personal details and identifiers will not be made available during the interviews. Interviews will be conducted in a secure space with no other individuals present at either the participant's location, or the P.I.'s location. Individuals participating in the proposed research will not be overheard by others, nor will they be publicly identified or embarrassed.

11. **Will the research involve interacting (communication or direct involvement) with participants?**
    ☒ YES ☐ NO If YES, describe the consent process and information to be presented to subjects. This includes identifying that the activities involve research; that participation is voluntary; describing the procedures to be performed; and the PI name and contact information.

All participants will be presented with an information letter, affixed with the Auburn University IRB stamp, detailing the research procedures to be conducted. Participants will be given the option to opt-out of participating in the research at any time during the course of the study. Participants will be made aware that their participation is voluntary, and that interviews will be conducted via Zoom, in a secure location, and that their personal identifying information will not be used. The participants will all be provided with the P.I.'s name and Auburn University e-mail address.

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12. Additional Information and/or attachments.

   In the space below, provide any additional information you believe may help the IRB review of the proposed research. If attachments are included, list the attachments below. Attachments may include recruitment materials, consent documents, site permissions, IRB approvals from other institutions, etc.

   Included in this request are the CITI training documents for the P.I. and F.P.I., approval from Auburn City Schools to conduct research, and and information letter for participants 19 and older is also attached.

Principal Investigator's Signature Bryan Christopher Hardman Digitally signed by Bryan Christopher Hardman Date: 2021.04.18 19:36:16 -05'00' **Date** 04/18/2021

If PI is a student, Faculty Principal Investigator's Signature Jonathan Taylor Digitally signed by Jonathan Taylor Date: 2021.04.27 12:47:12 -05'00' **Date** 04/27/2021

Department Head's Signature *James Battlefield* **Date** 04/28/2021

Appendix B

CITI Program Certifications

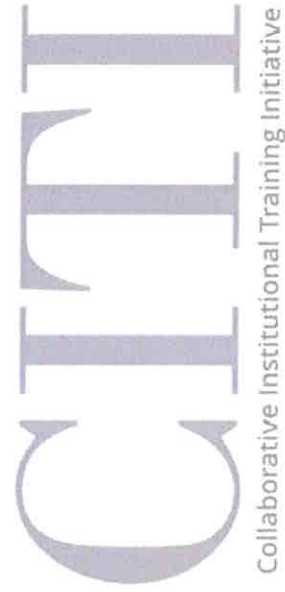# CITI PROGRAM

This is to certify that:

Bryan Hardman

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

IRB Additional Modules (Curriculum Group)

Records-Based Research (Course Learner Group)
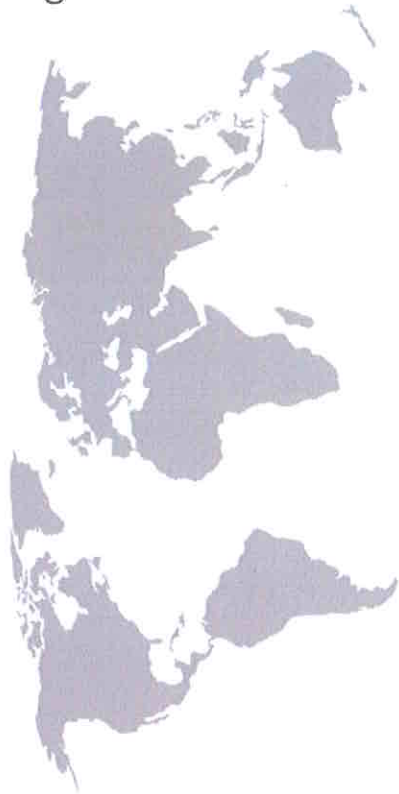
1 - Basic Course (Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Auburn University

Completion Date 26-Jul-2020
Expiration Date 26-Jul-2023
Record ID 37633323

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME. Do not use for TransCelerate mutual recognition (see Completion Report).

CITI

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?wa54f9775-d5ce-43b1-ad52-d1ae653e599a-37633323

CITI PROGRAM

Completion Date 29-Jul-2020
Expiration Date 29-Jul-2023
Record ID 37155645

This is to certify that:

Jonathan Taylor

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

IRB Additional Modules
(Curriculum Group)
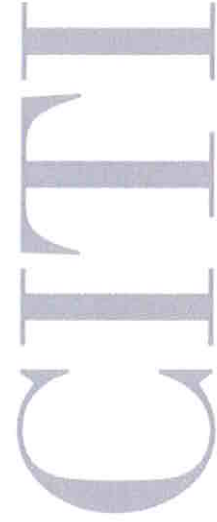
Internet Research - SBE
(Course Learner Group)

1 - Basic Course
(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Auburn University

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.

CITI

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w9204e0f1-f31f-43f1-9230-9eff21e0e370-37155645

CITI PROGRAM

Completion Date 29-Jul-2020
Expiration Date 29-Jul-2023
Record ID 37155627

This is to certify that:

Jonathan Taylor

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

IRB Additional Modules
(Curriculum Group)

Defining Research with Human Subjects - SBE
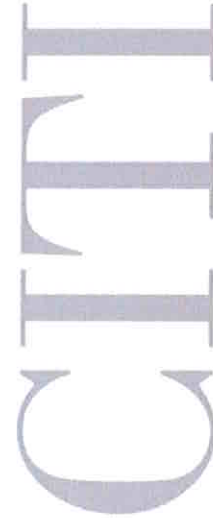(Course Learner Group)

1 - Basic Course
(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Auburn University

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.

CITI
Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?wdf12d150-db29-48f2-809b-b34a4493529f-37155627

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COLLABORATIVE INSTITUTIONAL TRAINING INITIATIVE (CITI PROGRAM)
COMPLETION REPORT - PART 1 OF 2
COURSEWORK REQUIREMENTS*

* NOTE: Scores on this <u>Requirements Report</u> reflect quiz completions at the time all requirements for the course were met. See list below for details. See separate Transcript Report for more recent quiz scores, including those on optional (supplemental) course elements.

- **Name:** Bryan Hardman (ID: 9269018)
- **Institution Affiliation:** Auburn University (ID: 964)
- **Institution Email:** bch0047@auburn.edu
- **Institution Unit:** EFLT
- **Phone:** (334) 887-1903

- **Curriculum Group:** IRB # 2 Social and Behavioral Emphasis - AU Personnel - Basic/Refresher
- **Course Learner Group:** IRB # 2 Social and Behavioral Emphasis - AU Personnel
- **Stage:** Stage 1 - Basic Course
- **Description:** Choose this group to satisfy CITI training requirements for Key Personnel (including AU Faculty, Staff and Students) and Faculty Advisors involved primarily in Social/Behavioral Research with human subjects.

- **Record ID:** 37633324
- **Completion Date:** 26-Jul-2020
- **Expiration Date:** 26-Jul-2023
- **Minimum Passing:** 80
- **Reported Score*:** 82

REQUIRED AND ELECTIVE MODULES ONLY	DATE COMPLETED	SCORE
Belmont Report and Its Principles (ID: 1127)	26-Jul-2020	3/3 (100%)
The Federal Regulations - SBE (ID: 502)	26-Jul-2020	5/5 (100%)
Assessing Risk - SBE (ID: 503)	26-Jul-2020	4/5 (80%)
Informed Consent - SBE (ID: 504)	26-Jul-2020	4/5 (80%)
Privacy and Confidentiality - SBE (ID: 505)	26-Jul-2020	4/5 (80%)
Students in Research (ID: 1321)	26-Jul-2020	4/5 (80%)
Unanticipated Problems and Reporting Requirements in Social and Behavioral Research (ID: 14928)	26-Jul-2020	3/5 (60%)

For this Report to be valid, the learner identified above must have had a valid affiliation with the CITI Program subscribing institution identified above or have been a paid Independent Learner.

Verify at: www.citiprogram.org/verify/?k022ff002-67c6-4181-a146-25ad2022558e-37633324

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI Program)
Email: support@citiprogram.org
Phone: 888-529-5929
Web: https://www.citiprogram.org

COLLABORATIVE INSTITUTIONAL TRAINING INITIATIVE (CITI PROGRAM)
COMPLETION REPORT - PART 2 OF 2
COURSEWORK TRANSCRIPT**

** NOTE: Scores on this Transcript Report reflect the most current quiz completions, including quizzes on optional (supplemental) elements of the course. See list below for details. See separate Requirements Report for the reported scores at the time all requirements for the course were met.

- **Name:** Bryan Hardman (ID: 9269018)
- **Institution Affiliation:** Auburn University (ID: 964)
- **Institution Email:** bch0047@auburn.edu
- **Institution Unit:** EFLT
- **Phone:** (334) 887-1903

- **Curriculum Group:** IRB # 2 Social and Behavioral Emphasis - AU Personnel - Basic/Refresher
- **Course Learner Group:** IRB # 2 Social and Behavioral Emphasis - AU Personnel
- **Stage:** Stage 1 - Basic Course
- **Description:** Choose this group to satisfy CITI training requirements for Key Personnel (including AU Faculty, Staff and Students) and Faculty Advisors involved primarily in Social/Behavioral Research with human subjects.

- **Record ID:** 37633324
- **Report Date:** 26-Jul-2020
- **Current Score**:** 82

REQUIRED, ELECTIVE, AND SUPPLEMENTAL MODULES	MOST RECENT	SCORE
Students in Research (ID: 1321)	26-Jul-2020	4/5 (80%)
Belmont Report and Its Principles (ID: 1127)	26-Jul-2020	3/3 (100%)
The Federal Regulations - SBE (ID: 502)	26-Jul-2020	5/5 (100%)
Assessing Risk - SBE (ID: 503)	26-Jul-2020	4/5 (80%)
Informed Consent - SBE (ID: 504)	26-Jul-2020	4/5 (80%)
Privacy and Confidentiality - SBE (ID: 505)	26-Jul-2020	4/5 (80%)
Unanticipated Problems and Reporting Requirements in Social and Behavioral Research (ID: 14928)	26-Jul-2020	3/5 (60%)

For this Report to be valid, the learner identified above must have had a valid affiliation with the CITI Program subscribing institution identified above or have been a paid Independent Learner.

Verify at: www.citiprogram.org/verify/?k022ff002-67c6-4181-a146-25ad2022558e-37633324

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI Program)
Email: support@citiprogram.org
Phone: 888-529-5929
Web: https://www.citiprogram.org

COLLABORATIVE INSTITUTIONAL TRAINING INITIATIVE (CITI PROGRAM)
COMPLETION REPORT - PART 1 OF 2
COURSEWORK REQUIREMENTS*

* NOTE: Scores on this Requirements Report reflect quiz completions at the time all requirements for the course were met. See list below for details. See separate Transcript Report for more recent quiz scores, including those on optional (supplemental) course elements.

- **Name:** Bryan Hardman (ID: 9269018)
- **Institution Affiliation:** Auburn University (ID: 964)
- **Institution Email:** bch0047@auburn.edu
- **Institution Unit:** EFLT
- **Phone:** (334) 887-1903

- **Curriculum Group:** IRB Additional Modules
- **Course Learner Group:** Records-Based Research
- **Stage:** Stage 1 - Basic Course

- **Record ID:** 37633323
- **Completion Date:** 26-Jul-2020
- **Expiration Date:** 26-Jul-2023
- **Minimum Passing:** 80
- **Reported Score*:** 100

REQUIRED AND ELECTIVE MODULES ONLY	DATE COMPLETED	SCORE
Records-Based Research (ID: 5)	26-Jul-2020	3/3 (100%)

For this Report to be valid, the learner identified above must have had a valid affiliation with the CITI Program subscribing institution identified above or have been a paid Independent Learner.

Verify at: www.citiprogram.org/verify/?kc09b9a0b-2719-48f2-bfdb-fe1e27cc4093-37633323

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI Program)
Email: support@citiprogram.org
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COLLABORATIVE INSTITUTIONAL TRAINING INITIATIVE (CITI PROGRAM)
COMPLETION REPORT - PART 2 OF 2
COURSEWORK TRANSCRIPT**

** NOTE: Scores on this Transcript Report reflect the most current quiz completions, including quizzes on optional (supplemental) elements of the course. See list below for details. See separate Requirements Report for the reported scores at the time all requirements for the course were met.

- **Name:** Bryan Hardman (ID: 9269018)
- **Institution Affiliation:** Auburn University (ID: 964)
- **Institution Email:** bch0047@auburn.edu
- **Institution Unit:** EFLT
- **Phone:** (334) 887-1903

- **Curriculum Group:** IRB Additional Modules
- **Course Learner Group:** Records-Based Research
- **Stage:** Stage 1 - Basic Course

- **Record ID:** 37633323
- **Report Date:** 26-Jul-2020
- **Current Score**:** 100

REQUIRED, ELECTIVE, AND SUPPLEMENTAL MODULES	MOST RECENT.	SCORE
Records-Based Research (ID: 5)	26-Jul-2020	3/3 (100%)

For this Report to be valid, the learner identified above must have had a valid affiliation with the CITI Program subscribing institution identified above or have been a paid Independent Learner.

Verify at: www.citiprogram.org/verify/?kc09b9a0b-2719-48f2-bfdb-fe1e27cc4093-37633323

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI Program)
Email: support@citiprogram.org
Phone: 888-529-5929
Web: https://www.citiprogram.org

Appendix C

Application for External Research

Auburn City Schools
Application for External Research Approval

For information or assistance contact The Office of the Associate Superintendent, 855 E. Samford Avenue, P.O. Box 3270, Auburn, AL 36831
Phone: 334-887-1906

Part I-General Information

1. Proposed Start Date of Research Observation/Data Collection: 4/5/2021

2. Anticipated Duration of the Study: 2 weeks

3. Title of Research Project: Measuring the Effectiveness of School Resource Officers

4. Researcher's Name: Chris Hardman

5. Name of Sponsoring Institution: Auburn University

6. Department or Division: Department of Educational Foundations, Leadership and Technology

7. Address: 3084 Haley Center, Auburn, AL 36849-5218

8. E-mail address:bch0047@auburn.edu   Office Phone: (334) 844-4446   Cell Phone: (334) 750-7336

PART II-Purpose

9. Clearly state the purpose of this project.

   The purpose of this study is to measure the effectiveness of School Resource Officers in their roles on k-12 public school campuses in the State of Alabama.

10. Briefly describe the methodology to be used.

    Qualitative interviews will be conducted with individuals who are employed and affiliated with k-12 public education in the State of Alabama.

11. How will the results of this project be used? (Publication, Presentation, Dissertation, etc.)

    Dissertation

12. Will a summary of the findings be made available to Auburn City Schools?   Yes ☒   No ☐
    If no, please explain.

Part III-Subjects

13. Describe the participant population (include the number of participants needed) you are asking to include in this project.

   I am requesting to interview two ACS administrators and one ACS teacher for this project

14. Describe why this participant population is being selected.

   The population selected represents a portion of the agreed-upon population my dissertation Chair and I determined will provide information beneficial to my study.

15. What basis will you use to recruit/select those participants from the population to be included in the study (if not adequately explained in #13 above)?

   Varying perspectives will allow a more complete picture as to how SROs are viewed in terms of their roles and responsibilities in keeping campuses safe.

16. Will any Auburn City Schools employee(s) be required to invest any time in distributing information, collecting data or in any other way contribute time and effort to this research project? **If yes, explain.**

   Yes ☒   No ☐

Participants will be required to participate in an interview lasting approximately one hour. These interviews will be conducted outside of normal business hours, will be recorded, and participants will not be compensated.

Part IV.-Summary

		Yes	No
17.	Will all data collected be anonymous?	☒	☐
18.	If data is not anonymous, will it be confidential?	☐	☐
19.	Will there be any compensation or incentives for participants?	☐	☒
20.	Has this study been approved by an Institutional Review Board?	☐	☒

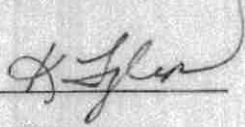Additional comments or questions from the researcher:

I consulted with my dissertation Chair, Dr. Jonathon Taylor, in December 2020 regarding IRB approval. He has instructed me to complete IRB request for approval in March 2021, with data collection to begin immediately thereafter.

Researcher Signature: _B. CHHL_   Date Submitted: _1/5/2021_

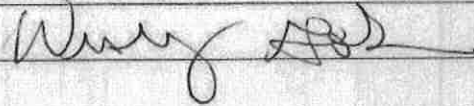For Auburn City School Use Only

Date Received: _1/5/2021_   Received by: _K. Tyler_

Approved: _✓_   Not Approved: _____   Date: _____

Comments: _____

ACS Administrator Signature: _Wendy Able_   _1/5/21_

Appendix D

Information Letter

AUBURN UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATIONS, LEADERSHIP AND TECHNOLOGY

(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS AN IRB APPROVAL STAMP WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN APPLIED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

INFORMATION LETTER
for a Research Study entitled
" **Alabama Public School Education Stakeholders Perceptions of School Resource Officers"**

You are invited to participate in a research study to *describe the effectiveness of School Resource Officers*. The study is being conducted by *Bryan C. Hardman, P.I.* under the direction of *Dr. Jonathan Taylor, F.P.I.* in the Auburn University Department of _Educational Foundations, Leadership and Technology. You are invited to participate because you are a public school education stakeholder in the state of Alabama and are age 19 or older.

If you decide to participate in this research study, you will be asked to participate in an anonymous, voice recorded interview. Your total time commitment will be approximately 60 minutes.

The risks associated with participating in this study are minimal. To minimize these risks, we will ensure anonymity.

If you change your mind about participating, you can withdraw at any time during the study. Your participation is completely voluntary. If you choose to withdraw, your data can be withdrawn as long as it is identifiable.   Your decision about whether or not to participate or to stop participating will not jeopardize your future relations with Auburn University, the Department of Educational Foundations, Leadership and Technology or the researchers.

Allow Space for the AU IRB Stamp

Version Date (date document created): 02/09/2020

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Any data obtained in connection with this study will remain anonymous. We will protect your privacy and the data you provide by <u>ensuring anonymity through secure location interviewing and a privatized interview link provided via Auburn University Zoom technology</u>. Information collected through your participation may be used to fulfill an educational requirement

If you have questions about this study, *please ask them now or* contact <u>Bryan C. Hardman</u> at <u>bch0047@auburn.edu</u> or <u>Dr. Jonathan Taylor</u> at <u>jet0060@auburn.edu</u>

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Auburn University Office of Research Compliance or the Institutional Review Board by phone (334)-844-5966 or e-mail at <u>IRBadmin@auburn.edu</u> or <u>IRBChair@auburn.edu</u>.

HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED, YOU MUST DECIDE IF YOU WANT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT. IF YOU DECIDE TO PARTICIPATE, THE DATA YOU PROVIDE WILL SERVE AS YOUR AGREEMENT TO DO SO. THIS LETTER IS YOURS TO KEEP.

_____
Investigator's signature   Date

_____
Print Name

_____
Co-Investigator   Date

_____
Printed Name

> **Allow Space for the AU
> IRB Stamp**

Version Date (date document created): <u>02/09/2020</u>