WHO TOLD YOU, YOU WERE A POLICE OFFICER?

MY EDUCATIONAL CASE STUDY OF AMERICAN POLICING

by

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in

Education

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the Study:

The following discussion concentrates on the principal relationships found within the learning environment of American policing, and addresses instructional practices, curricula, and educational philosophies as they relate to learners within the paramilitary structure that governs current law enforcement training. The question becomes: How can the basic educational platform currently being used in California law enforcement police officer training be adapted to include alternative forms of instruction for the purposes of social transformation?

Procedure:

Specifically, I am concerned with examining the educational methodologies and philosophies used during basic academy and in-service training contexts of American policing. I have chosen to investigate the relationships between these aspects for the purpose of determining functional alternatives to the existing educational perspective and practices supporting contemporary law enforcement training.

Findings:

By ascertaining those practices through which police officers can amass critical knowledge and social understanding, training environments can be designed produce police officers that come to rely upon the critical development of their intellectual prowess and the socio-cultural dynamics historically found in American policing to address the imbalances of sociopolitical power for the purposes of communal benefit.
Conclusions:

My conclusions suggest that inservice education that focuses on developing police officers’ ability to take *transformative discretionary actions* (TDA’s) will empower them to become more self-reflective and socially conscious. This approach to inservice training for police officers will enable them to readily actualize their *prior* knowledge and seek additional levels of personal development for mutual welfare and benefit. In so doing, it is anticipated that this type of training of police officers can effect an interactional change that influences the institutional function of American policing.

Chair: ___________________________

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All praises to God in the highest. Jesus Christ, my Lord and Savior. The Holy Spirit, that nourishes me.

Thank you lord, for my wife and children; thank you for my mother and father. Thank you, dear lord, for bringing my committee (Dr. Estrada, Dr. Crowley, Dr. Grady and Dr. Woods) into my life and for their words of guidance and support that have brought my thoughts forward. May you watch over and protect my fellow officers who choose every day to place their lives on the line to protect our constitutional rights and to keep us from those who presume to take them away. Please continue to use my life for your will, in your name I pray, Amen.
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Chapter 1

Hey, Look Out, Here Comes A Cop!

Introduction

In addition to articulating my guiding question, the purpose of this chapter is to sculpt an appropriate context for the statement of my thesis. I challenge you, as the reader, to critically engage the ensuing discussion of American policing and police officer learning. My intention is to generate a transformative discourse that uniformly speaks with an analytical dialogue pertaining to the institutional functions of American policing and the discretionary actions of police officers in the twenty-first century. Throughout the thesis, I will convey many aspects of contemporary law enforcement that provide an empirically rich exploration into the historical institution of white supremacy and capitalism, paralleling the socio-cultural reproduction of police officer solidarity that supports hierarchical oppression of minorities. I will address the systematic acculturation of these biases in the minds of police officers by describing educational methods towards police officer learning that develop critical thinking through a socially conscious curriculum. The intended outcome is to construct a mechanism for socio-cultural evolution within the existing structure of American policing power.

Through my experiences, I will use policing as a lens to discuss the interactions of people and the way we relate to each other. These relationships involve all of who we are, where we come from, and what we aspire to become. Metaphorically, let us use the image of a seesaw or teeter-totter to expose the constant interplay between the ideas and concepts I am discussing in this thesis. Hold the image in your mind’s eye; envision a long plank with two distinct ends supported by a fulcrum. American policing is the
plank; the distinct ends are institutional power and discretionary power, with the fulcrum being police officer education. The educational fulcrum must withstand the pressures exerted on it by the policing apparatus without destabilizing law enforcement as a whole. The apparatus you have constructed in your mind is representative of the interaction between institutional power, discretionary power, and the resulting actions of police officers.

Within the next few sections of this chapter, I will talk about the existence of policing as a political activity, the paramilitary structure of police organizations, and the educational foundations of police officer discretion. These sections are written to give a substantive overview of the police officer condition that will be discussed in various stages during subsequent chapters of my thesis.

**Into Service**

_Imagine yourself driving along as you begin your day’s activities. Your music is playing, traffic is light, and the sun is breaking through the morning clouds. As you make your way towards your first destination, in your rearview mirror, you see a police vehicle just a couple of car lengths behind you. You glance at your speedometer and then look around to see if you may have done something wrong. You proceed as cautiously as you can to avoid being pulled over. You even change lanes to let the officer pass, but the police car follows without hesitation. Before you can begin to assess what is going on, the police officer activates his lights and siren. The split second after your initial adrenalin shock begins to subside, a self-check for wrongdoing flashes through your mind. You ease your car to the side of the road and anxiously wait for the police officer to arrive at your door. In those moments, you become curious as to what the police_
officers are doing. You begin to ask yourself, why are they stopping me? Are they going to be nice? Are they going to give me a break? You recount all you know about how police officers do their job. The officer is now at your window and begins to speak, “Good morning, the reason I stopped you is . . . .”

At any given moment, we see police officers in the community, may speak to a police officer, or have a police officer pull us over while driving. For a variety of reasons, there are times when we seek out a police officer for assistance. Instantaneously, everything we believe about police officers and all they accept as true about the purpose of their duties, and how they fulfill these purposes, will come to bear on the outcome of the interaction. Throughout our repeated personal and publicized encounters with the police, we come to realize policing is a function of state power and governance in the lives of people. Equally important to the overarching democratic struggles faced in American society are the underlying concerns regarding American policing.

These discussions of dominance and oppression have existed in America since its inception, and policing enacts them. In the postmodern era, policing is accomplished by a professional law enforcement model that sustains the classist separation of people and communities according to differences of race, gender, socio-economic, and political status. Collectively, the socio-cultural decisions police officers make determines the ethos of law enforcement. To rectify the social disparity produced by law enforcement we have to begin considering the selection of police officers, their training, and the way they are educated to carryout their duties.
Presently, with limited focus on projected learning needs of the profession, American policing prepares police officers by utilizing instructional methods constructed from past practices of the profession. This is evidenced especially where the intellectual processes needed to achieve transformative professional objectives is concerned. Historically, and in the midst of recent democratic struggle, American policing serves to maintain civil order among masses divided by numerous social issues. Today, this is evidenced by the role policing plays in America’s civil unrest regarding illegal immigration.

Police officers are on the political frontlines separating the masses: between those who are free and those who are struggling to be free. Similarly, an internalized struggle is occurring as police officers labor to compartmentalize their personal beliefs, their responsibility to duty, and the choices they will make. Regrettably, the ethos of law enforcement has not assessed these paradoxical concerns on a socio-cultural level within the profession. “These stories exclude more explicitly political stories about street-level policing and struggles with police bureaucracies. Thinking of policing as an apolitical activity is in sharp contrast to empirical reality and normalizes deference to police expertise on law and order issues” (Lyons, 1999, p. 37). The challenge is determining the role American policing will serve in the future development of American society, while counteracting the historical influences that have corrupted American policing practices.

With respect to positions of dominance in America, these stories are implicitly about criminalization, and need addressing through appropriate discussions of socialization, acculturation, and assimilation of police officers. This raises a question: “How can the basic educational platform currently being used in California law
enforcement police officer training be adapted to include alternative forms of instruction for the purposes of social transformation?" The response to this question has many emergent possibilities. Law enforcement has historically been concerned with the concept of preparation instruction through ongoing in-service training. The form of preparation instruction used by police educators is aligned with essentialist educational philosophies, in that essentialism concentrates on essential skills that have a tendency to be occupational and considered germane to sustaining standardized levels of police officer proficiency. The instructor is held in regard as the subject matter authority and seeks only to transmit his or her experiential knowledge to learners. This method of instruction is used in the police academy setting and during in-service trainings. The California Commission on Police Officer Standards in Training (POST) mandates ongoing trainings for the purposes of maintaining perishable skill sets learned by the police officer in the basic academy. "Perishable skill sets" is an industry term often used to describe those activities, actions, or processes police officers use on a routine basis during the performance of their duties.

As we begin to discuss changes to the educational foundations of American policing, an understanding of American police culture is necessary. Fundamentally, American policing is a political and a contested task of governance, and we need to change the way we talk about policing (Lyons, 1999). We have to consider the act of policing as a personal responsibility and a social responsibility for police officers to actively take part in community affairs. All too often, we want to disassociate ourselves from the antagonistic actions of police officers, but we are collectively responsible for social offenses committed by police officers. This is so, because enduring policing
power is a function of American government and the American public tolerates acts of civil oppression exhibited by police officers.

Re-conceptualizing the way police officers are taught, and changing policing practices within our communities, will lead us into the beginnings of a social evolution in America. These changes will not only affect American policing, but American democracy and American culture. Transforming the education that supports American policing ideologies also requires a change in the organizational structure of police agencies, which greatly affects the way police officers interact among members of the community. Research has indicated, “Given two equally effective community policing agencies, the agency that makes the greatest use of resources beyond its direct control and with a flatter organizational structure should be viewed as the most effective” (Lyons, 1999, p. 41).

**What’s The Hardest Part of Being a Police Officer?**

*Picture yourself standing on the street corner looking in the storefront window of a local merchant. As you begin to think about what you are surveying, another item catches your eye, and then another. Before you know it, several minutes have passed and you have figured countless ways to pay for the items you want. Just before you are ready to enter the store, out of the corner of your eye, you catch a reflection in the store window. Not quite sure what it is you have seen, you turn around to take a better look. Walking towards you is a police officer. The officer's uniform is neatly pressed and the boots shined to a high gloss. You can hear the leather of the officer's duty belt squeaking as the baton clinks alongside the officer's leg. As the officer continues to move closer, thoughts begin to circulate in your mind. Is there something going on? Am I safe? Is the*
officer walking towards me? Have I done something wrong? Before you can turn around to go about your business, the officer says, “Excuse me, can I speak with you about . . . ”

The American criminal justice system is comprised of three major branches. In simple terms, police, courts, and correction(s) are the general labels used to describe the subdivisions or paradigms of the justice system. The court system is the paradigm that governs the administration of state or federal law. Correction(s) is the paradigm that is responsible for incarceration or carrying out sentencing orders decided by the courts. Police, also known as law enforcement, is the paradigm responsible for the criminal apprehension of violators.

The American public and those populations from around the world who choose to venture to America in pursuit of inalienable rights to be free from persecution are all stakeholders in this discussion of American policing. It is a conversation of human interest, of collectivism, and of the liberties needed to exercise one’s free will. American policing is more than a mere function of crime control and relies on communities to share the responsibility in alleviating social offenses. “Research has shown that the police cannot fight crime alone, encouraging police departments to look increasingly to communities for additional crime fighting resources” (Lyons, 1999, p. 40). As it stands, law enforcement marginalizes members of communities in which police officers serve. Undoubtedly, police officers will continue to be ineffectual at addressing social conflict when they exhibit practices that undermine democracy and civic participation.

Contemporary policing models operate according to various forms of resource allocation in a variety of operational contexts. Proactive oriented policing (POP),
reactive oriented policing (ROP), and community oriented policing (COP) are some of the approaches utilized by police agencies to combat crime. Organizational approaches towards law enforcement can range from crime prevention to crime suppression. With the arrival of more advanced forms of technology, the model of computer statistics (COMPSTAT) has emerged as one of the newest policing trends. Under this model, the task of police administrators is to look for prevailing crime patterns through reviewing information gathered by police officers during routine patrol activities, and then allocating agency resources to combat identified criminal elements (Willis, Mastrofski, & Weisburd, 2003). Geographical profiling is another progression in policing. This approach to law enforcement expects to identify criminal suspects by analyzing crime patterns according to the location of criminal activity (Ratcliffe, 2004). These policing models utilize various interdisciplinary approaches (sociology, anthropology, psychology, etc.) to address crime and its related issues. Due to the paramilitary structure of police organizations, apart from the method of combating crime, the concept of span and control limits utilization of police personnel. “Span and Control [is] the optimal number of employees an individual can supervise and remain effective” (Reese, 2003, p. 90). Considering this, as American policing moves into the twenty-first century, without re-conceptualizing existing organizational philosophies and the purposes of law enforcement, further implementation of policing strategies will be limited.

Furthermore, the paramilitary overtone governing law enforcement agencies has a direct influence on American policing. The leadership governing police organizations establishes an ethos that is suggestive of the institutional influences used to construct their individual professional identity, which then transmits to other police officers under
their span of control. The expectations of managers convey an institutionalized construction of what the police officer is to think and do according to the functions of the agency. In essence, it affects what it means to be a police officer.

The chain of command is a rigid bureaucratic organizational structure that limits responsiveness to instances of abuse, especially when superiors within the organization commit those abuses. Likewise, suspicions of misconduct within the organization may be overlooked when upper management perceives that a police officer has done an excellent job, because the outcomes have met the expectations of those in authority. This magnifies structural flaws that can seriously undermine organizational effectiveness, particularly with respect to behaviors long considered personal problems, and when such behaviors become interpreted through policies that carry heavy penalties intended to make an example of problematic officers (O’Hara, 2005). Even though such problems may be atypical manifestations of social confliction within the individual officer, and have little to do with overall functions of the job. The police agency ultimately influences discretion of police officers in the organization. This influence may simply manifest itself in police officers that do what their agency expects in order to maintain employment, or perhaps police officers may express themselves in forms that have a more profound impact on life.

The issues facing American policing in a contemporary context are vast. “Policing can be interpreted--as such a wide range of jobs as law enforcement, as crime prevention, as social work, as clerical work, as therapy--marks a change in progress in the role of policing in American society” (McElhinny, 1994, p. 162). Unfortunately for police officers, the level of isolation regarding professional attitudes and behaviors,
which may exist in other professions, becomes so great that law enforcement suffers higher rates of suicide and alcoholism (O’Hara, 2005). This is one example of how institutional influences on the police officer can adversely affect his or her individual discretion. At the moment of choice, the stress on police officers to meet the various demands placed on them becomes an internalized conflict that results in injudicious action.

As people come from various walks of life, they begin an indoctrination and eventual induction into the professional model of American policing. Indoctrination is a formal and highly ritualized process by which recruits take on the behaviors and customs of police officers. The highly structured learning environment of the basic police academy is based on the paramilitary ethos of law enforcement. Therefore, police recruits are cast into the lowest position of authority within the hierarchical power structure. This environment does not foster academic dialogue or the free exchange of ideas, and predisposes police recruits to limited forms of intellectual development. Thwarting the creation of thought during the police officer’s indoctrination into law enforcement not only imposes, but also systematically builds upon the predominant processes of the past.

Understanding the historical progressions of American policing allows us to address the future refinement of American policing and identify prospective actions to accomplish future ideologies of policing in the next century. To conceptualize the evolution of American policing, Lyons (1999) discusses the work of Kelling and Moore as he presents the following historical framework:

Kelling and Moore divide American policing history into three periods that they call political, reform, and community. The political era (1840s to
the early twentieth century) was characterized by “struggles between various interest groups to govern the police.” The organization of policing was decentralized. Its function was broadly defined to include services beyond law enforcement as these contributed to public order. The police force was integrated into the neighborhoods they served, and they were seen as a collective tool against disorder and a viable avenue of social mobility for new immigrants. The reform era (1920s to 1970s) created the professional model and is characterized by . . . a “remarkable construction—internally consistent, rigorous, and based on the most advanced organizational and tactical thinking of the time.” Reform era policing became a state-centered, hierarchical, law enforcement activity, designed to [withstand] political influence. The core activities (rapid response, random preventative patrol, and investigative follow-up), however, failed to fulfill its new and narrower mission of fighting crime . . . . as a combination of political and reform policing, taking only the best from both approaches characterize the Community era [1970 to present]. Political policing drew its authority from the community, and reform policing shifted to authority based on law and professionalism. The community, law, and professionalism authorize community policing. Similarly, the function of community policing combines an earlier service orientation with professional crime control. It combines centralized and decentralized forms of organization, combines political era tactics such as foot patrol with reform era tactics such as motor patrol, and strengthens a state-centered command and control hierarchy that focuses on law enforcement with professionally managed order maintenance and problem solving. (pp. 42-43)

These periods of change (political, reform, and community) have brought us to the present climate of policing in America. All of these antecedents established American policing objectives centered upon changes to the structure and manner of providing police services or allocation of police resources, but do not change, nor discuss the change of how police officers think, act, or integrate into the community. The future of American policing must begin to focus on: 1) the socio-cultural existence of police officers in American society, and 2) the way in which police officers are educated to fulfill their civic responsibility.
Fake It 'Til You Make It

As night falls, you begin to close-up the house for the evening. You shut and lock the front door. You close and secure the front window that was left open to air out the house earlier in the day. You pull the living room blinds to a close. Pondering the activities you have to do tomorrow, you begin to think about what time to get up, what to wear, and if at all possible, what to eat for breakfast. As you make your way through the house turning off lights, you head towards the bedroom to catch some much-needed rest. As you close your eyes and begin to settle off to sleep, you are suddenly startled awake by a loud knock at the front door. Initially you hesitate, and then the knock becomes louder. As quietly as you can, so your footsteps cannot be heard, you make your way to the front door. Peering through the side window, you can see shadows standing outside. Cautiously turning on the porch light, you look through the eyehole, and here voices call out “Police Department.” You can see a police officer standing there. You speak through the door, asking the nature of their business. The police officer explains, “Sorry to bother you this evening, but . . . .”

Once a respective candidate for policing decides to enter California law enforcement they must complete a series of requisites including attendance at a basic police academy, where they study a wide range of topics, most of which the state board or equivalent governing body has mandated (Buerger, 2004). The California Commission on Peace Officers Standards and Training (POST) determines hiring guidelines and mandates the minimum industry standards for employment in the policing profession. Individual police agencies, according to their hiring practices, will then make the final determination on who is to become a police officer. New police recruits have
the option to attend one of 39 POST-certified basic police academies throughout the state of California (www.post.ca.gov, 2010). Police recruits can complete their basic academy training through intensive, extended, or modular formats. During the standard format for the regular basic course, police recruits are required to undergo a minimum of 644 hours of standardized instruction. Due to the length of time to completion, the modular format of the regular basic course requires a minimum of 730 hours of instruction (California Commission on Peace Office Standards and Training, 2010). In each case, police recruits receive instruction in several courses of curricula divided into 43 individual learning domains. These learning domains provide the police recruit with a set of basic professional skills to function as a police officer.

It can be argued that preparation instruction for police officers exhibits some underlying educational concepts like subject matter competency, and contains learning objectives that are based on existing law enforcement performance standards. However, other important educational concepts are less evident. For example, based on my experiences during basic academy instruction, police officers are not synthesizing subject matter in a way that suggests that personal connections to the curriculum content are being made. I propose the use of educational approaches for police officer learning that include more enriched experiences to reinforce the police officer’s cognitive processes during acquisition of newly learned concepts. Similarly, the myriad of social issues facing police officers in the contemporary setting will need to be addressed at the beginning of police officers' professional indoctrination into law enforcement. Perhaps, through alteration of the basic educational platform, police officers can acquire critical knowledge that supports socially transformative practices. These educational
considerations must also contain an ongoing conversation regarding the contemporary functions of law enforcement. The education of police officers and their learning process has to engage POST standardized curriculum in a meaningful way for the police officer that encourages social transformation. This will ensure that subject matter taught in formal law enforcement settings will withstand the attitudes (subconscious or otherwise) of instructors and will not be unlearned through dealing with "real" practices on the streets (O’Rawe, 2005).

Even after graduation from the basic police academy, police officers are subjected to myopic forms of learning. Police officers are limited by mere acquisition of predetermined knowledge passed on by police educators who employ authoritative pedagogical approaches towards learning. Gladis (2006) encourages police educators to advance their teaching practices by addressing this fact: “We all have different styles, different skills, and different strengths. We’ll all be influenced by other colleagues—valuable resources to help us improve our own instruction” (p. 81). The absence of alternative teaching practices is a direct consequence of a historically closed system of professional knowledge. It is crucial for police educators to seek development of their teaching practices from other professional educators who exist outside the confines of law enforcement. Otherwise, remaining inside the restrictions of paramilitary instructional settings only serves to limit police officer educational advancements.

As stated earlier in this chapter, I have focused my discussion on the education of police officers within the law enforcement paradigm with consideration for the socio-cultural ethos of American policing. Considering that the educational component of my exploration into police officer discretion is seeking ways to bring forth socio-cultural
change to the ethos of law enforcement, we must also contemplate those instructional practices that provide alternative methodologies to basic preparatory learning. The course of action used to identify these alternative instructional practices also presents an opportunity to examine alternative instructional aids designed to facilitate police officer learning. My method for examining these practices will employ various teaching strategies, and then describe those approaches to provide the most meaningful context for evaluating curricular approaches to support transformative police officer discretionary practices. The overarching concept of police officer education in contemporary law enforcement may be defined as professional growth, individual maturity, or some other enhancement associated with ongoing job-related training. However, because the basis of law enforcement is concerned with the social nature of human interaction, I believe the concept of police officer education is more aligned with the socio-cultural enrichment of human beings. It is my assertion that empowering police officers to become more self-reflective and socially conscious will enable them to readily actualize their knowledge and seek additional levels of personal development for mutual welfare and benefit.

The social implications of police officer actions can either increase or grind down democracy. Reese (2003) gives several examples of how the present discretionary actions of some police officers have damaged police services:

The behavior of many police officers, especially in urban centers, is undermining democracy, civility and diminishing trust among significant sectors of the American public. It is the greatest threat to human rights in this country. Racial profiling, excessive force, police brutality, and blatant disregard for civil liberties have magnified the flaws in our democratic society. (p. 95)

There is extensive documentation that vehemently denounces the malicious torture of people by police officers. These inconceivable acts of violence being
committed in a postmodern society are an unfortunate reality. In 2006, John Conroy, author of *Unspeakable Acts, Ordinary People: The Dynamics of Torture*, during an interview with *Democracy Now: The War and Peace Report*, explained:

We want our torturers to be monsters, but it turns out that they’re just ordinary people like you and me. And I can go back and cite you all kinds of psychological experiments in which they have found people will do extraordinary things, inflicting pain on other people, if they are simply ordered to do so, simply following orders someone else is taking responsibility. And it doesn’t require any sort of twisted mind to do this. We are all—most of us given to obedience. And so, I’ve interviewed torturers from around the world, former torturers, and they all struck me as very ordinary men.

Addressing the sociological issues concerning American policing must begin within the individual police officer, because the greatest power extended to police officers is their discretionary power: the power to make socially conscious decisions. Although the hands of individual police officers carry out torturous acts, we must examine the institutional contexts that sanction these actions. As an institution of the dominant culture, American policing is a formalized mechanism that maintains dominant social power. Per se, changing the whole has to begin by making an intimate change within the individual police officer that transcends historical transgressions against segments of American society. If systematic and socially oppressive behaviors of police officers can wear away public trust, then perhaps recurring socially uplifting behaviors of police officers can enhance public trust. Therefore, determining a socially transformative approach that shifts the existing educational platforms in law enforcement towards empowering police officers to become reflective, self-directed, problem-oriented learners will require a critical analysis into the historical culture (practices, structures, training) of American policing.
An effect of pursuing this type of educational development may produce police officers who become more efficient at performing their duties, or perhaps even more effective in dealing with people. However, I believe the personal acquisition (construction) of social knowledge reaches beyond the mere development of a police officer’s ability to do his or her job. Aptly, the contributions of examining the theoretical interconnectedness of educational and law enforcement paradigms will undoubtedly stimulate a deeper inquiry of humanity as it relates to social evolution within a democratic society.

**What Does It Matter, Things Aren’t Going To Change Anyway!**

As I have discussed in this chapter, policing occurs for various reasons and at different levels within our society. The forthcoming chapters take an ever-closer look at the various systematic processes of American policing. In the second chapter, I explain the context of police officer training within the law enforcement paradigm and how instructional practices reinforce police officer behaviors that produce social inequity. I discuss the structure of police organizations and the role it plays in contemporary law enforcement. I lay the historical foundation concerning the nature of American policing.

From an early age, we begin to create social and cultural images of what a police officers is, and the role these officers play in our society. Young children playing cops and robbers evidence their understanding of what police officers are supposed to do and how to act. As we grow older, our conception of policing takes on deeper social implications because stories, experiences, and popular media shape our perception of police officers and American society. In order to examine our interactions with police,
we have to obtain a common awareness of where American policing comes from, and collectively decide the way policing should function in our democratic American society.

To give meaning to the social contextualization of this inquiry, I have chosen to provide a thick description of my life’s journey as an illustration of the path I traveled into and sustained in American policing. The social development of my identity, the development of my educational philosophies, my formal development as an educator, and my formal development as a police officer accompany this discussion for social change.

As I continue to bring the elements of police officer learning to the forefront of my discussion, I assume a critical approach towards defining the purpose of education in law enforcement. The basic alterations that can come from adopting new approaches to police officer learning are discussed for pedagogical implications. A key component to my argument is that changing how police officers are trained does not matter if we fail to evaluate why police officers act and function in certain manners. My thesis concludes with projections and considerations of police officer learning in America. I bring forth my statement of educational philosophies in a reflective dialogue culminating in my journey through the halls of education, while walking as a police officer.
Chapter II
Maintaining the Institution of American Policing and the Wayward Police Officer

Introduction

In this chapter, I lay a foundation concerning the nature of American policing. My depiction begins with training of the individual police officer, continues through examination of paramilitary police agencies, and concludes with the institutional considerations affecting discretionary power. Central to my discussion is the indoctrination process of police officers into the law enforcement profession and their subsequent induction into the policing culture. These considerations are central in supporting my overall thesis. Understanding these processes of police officer indoctrination and induction gives an appreciation for the paradoxical relationship institutional forces have on the discretionary practices of police officers.

Contained in the larger context of American policing and society, the organizational structure of police agencies has a principle interest in maintaining the institutionalized practices in which police officers engage. By presenting a historical context for understanding American policing, I establish a critical dialogue that speaks to policing origins in this country. My critique exposes deep social contexts of white supremacy and violence in American society. Presenting this underlying cultural narrative, with respect to American policing, provides an analytically rich framework to address the institutionalized origins of contemporary law enforcement. Anchored in this discussion is our common history that connects the way we view police officers and the manner in which postmodern policing functions as a form of social control. I will explain the concept of social capital as a platform to evidence the interactional nature between
policing and the policed, including the determination of how policing occurs within communities.

The importance of my discussion exposes the foundations of institutionalized mechanisms of social control, and how discretionary practices of some police officers serve to reinforce the maintenance of classist separation through enforcement of social capital. Furthering my discussion to include the social costs of policing within the community gives us a measured amount of insight to the contemporary issues police officers face when determining how to use their discretionary power.

I Am a Police Officer in Mind and Action

The California Commission on Peace Officer Standards in Training (POST) is a state-level organization that fashions a professional doctrine for law enforcement by gathering information from the experiences of operational police officers. The ensuing policies governing law enforcement training becomes the basis for preparing future police officers. The information given to new police officers concentrates on essential occupational skills, determined by POST, to meet the learning needs of the profession. Characteristically, this essentialist model of instruction assumes a teacher-centered approach in contrast to a student-centered methodology. Therefore, the police educator only seeks to embed organizational respect for authority, perseverance, and sense of duty into the police officer. The aim of the instruction is to instill an institutionalized knowledge. More aptly, this essentialist approach to learning prepares the police officer’s mind to accept the professional rationale of law enforcement and receive the policing culture. This indoctrination is a functional programming of the police officer’s thought process.
The basis of police officer learning is strict accumulation of content knowledge. The testing of content knowledge, transmitted to police officers during the course of their training, is overseen by POST guidelines much in the same way that high school exit exams are administered by the California State Board of Education. For each content area, prospective police officers must obtain minimum percentage scores on multiple-choice examinations specifically designed by POST. This purely quantifiable practice assumes that simple application of the rules is all that is required for effective police work (Treadwell, 2006). The rationale for this manner of preparation accepts the idea that simple memorization constitutes learning, and that police officers who function correctly during the testing process will perform appropriately throughout the course of their employment.

The paramilitary structure influences the nature of police officer training by aligning the learning environment of the police academy to mirror the organizational structure used by police agencies. Constructing the learning environment in this way serves to conform police officers to the naturally authoritative relationships found within paramilitary organizations. Academy instructors are in a position of unconditional authority. The instructor represents the collective base of professional knowledge and expertise. The academic exchange of ideas is restricted to direct forms of conveyance from the instructor. O’Rawe (2005), in a discussion concerning the paramilitary nature of police officer training and cultural transmission of institutionalized knowledge, explains:

Training is important because it forms the basis by which police personnel are equipped to meet the demands of their job and the means by which new ideas, policies, and learning are communicated to the body of the organization. In police organizations, the traditional emphasis has been on
training rather than education . . . Such training has historically taken place in closed, institutional settings often imbued with military overlay. Discipline, respect for authority, and command control structures have been an important part of the ethos and learning of such institutions. (p. 945)

Information flows downhill from the instructor to the police officer and discussions in opposition to that institutionalized base of knowledge are seldom tolerated. The hierarchical nature of the interactions between instructors and police officers disposes of divergent viewpoints as insubordinate. From my experience, open dialogue to facilitate learning through a mutual exchange of ideas between instructors and police officers does not occur. The instruction is principally concerned with instilling practical working skills or the underpinning knowledge required to simply perform core tasks of the profession (Treadwell, 2006).

The vocationally trained police officer that can operate within the institutional processes of law enforcement is more desirable, and has become the organizational norm, in contrast to the comparatively educated officer who can operate according the social considerations of American policing. Although police officers are heavily dependent upon perishable skills, as opposed to more academic bases of knowledge, there is a necessity for a balancing between the two. In the end, though, both training and education compete with the cultural view that experiential learning constitutes the only real preparation for police work (Buerger, 2004).

For police officers, beyond the instructional setting of the basic police academy, the formal process of induction into the policing culture begins in the Field Training Program. The curriculum of the Field Training Program, which seeks to model departmental expectations to the police officer through forms of operant conditioning,
reinforces the institutional knowledge learned in the academy. Depending upon the situation, police officers are required to consistently perform tasks or processes of law enforcement (Treadwell, 2006). For example, academy training teaches a police officer how to apply handcuffs to a person; individual police agencies will train a police officer when to apply handcuffs. A case in point: According to one departmental policy, handcuffs shall not be applied to persons who are under fourteen years of age, while the departmental policy of another agency might state that handcuffs may only be applied to persons under the age of fourteen during exigent circumstances.

To facilitate learning, Field Training Programs pair more experienced police officers with less experienced police officers during operational situations. Under the direction of the senior training officer, inexperienced police officers develop their discretionary power by sorting through the implications of their decisions until they become routine and second nature (Reese, 2003). The training platform requires the new police officer to unquestioningly perform the functions required of law enforcement as set forth by the department’s policies and procedures; there is little place for discussion and negotiation of these practices. Once the program is complete, the new police officer is operational, and begins to acquire the experiential knowledge necessary to construct his or her professional knowledge.

The demonstration of policing activities by more seasoned police officers serves to model behavior for rookie police officers. Dialogue between police officers regarding their activities develops the social nuances of police work. From my experience, rookie police officers will emulate those behaviors and practices commonly displayed by other officers. For example, the use of traffic regulations is a legal pretext for investigating
virtually anyone in a vehicle, and evidence of routine traffic stops suggests disproportional use to stop minority drivers (Cole, 1999). Through apprenticeship, these practices result in institutionalized activities becoming a matter of common practice.

In the law enforcement paradigm, institutional knowledge influences the discretionary actions of police officers. The influence of this knowledge is evident in the policing outcomes that support the organizational perspective of professional police activities. Reese (2003), while discussing the behavioral elements of police officer activities, draws a distinction between knowledge and discretion:

Effective police officers display a variety of distinctive skills and dispositions. They place their well-developed powers of observation at the service of a lively sense of suspicion; they have an ability and willingness to use coercive force; they possess negotiating skill, a working knowledge of the law, and so on. Yet mere possession and exercise of such expertise is not sufficient for someone to count as a good officer—this expertise is, after all, a great aid to corrupt police in maximizing their pay-offs. Officers can only be counted as good when they use their characteristic skills in the right way, and for the right ends. (p. 94)

As police officers engage in discretionary activities, their professional knowledge coincides with their personal abilities. The resulting adjustment to their discretionary practices thereby increases their professional knowledge. For example, “Many female police officers believe they are more likely to stay calm and cool in conflict situations than are male police officers precisely because they cannot as easily resort to force, and so must use talk as a tool instead” (McElhinny, 1994, p. 161). The decision to refrain from using force equates to a form of experiential knowledge that constitutes a basis for parallel development in their ability to communicate, which increases their professional knowledge.
Through successful transmission of police culture, shaping the discretionary practices of police officers is an affective process of combining institutional knowledge, experiential knowledge, and professional knowledge. The situations police officers encounter, through the functions of their duties, shape their discretionary practices to meet the cultural perspectives of their profession that become part of their psyche. Davis (2007) explains,

The system of "blooding" sheriffs by assigning the rookies to the jails for several years creates its own Frankenstein’s Monster: by the time the deputies hit the streets they have a brutal view of communities of color and are habituated to abuses of authority. (p. 46).

The police officer’s acculturation resonates from the organizational customs of his or her agency. The authoritative justification for these practices is a direct extension of the dominant perspective governing the agency. As police officers begin to apply the organizational conceptions of law enforcement to the functions of their duties, their reasoning becomes a systemic quality of the agency.

The totality of police officer’s shared experiences, and their related social manifestation, constitutes the lived curriculum of law enforcement. The systematic incorporation of established experiences creates an institutionalized base of knowledge that results in a collective consciousness towards police work. The prevailing training philosophy of law enforcement, as a matter of tradition, is a system closed to alternative educational perspectives. “For example, New York City officials like to brag that they have the nation’s most professional and well-trained police force . . . . But deadly force, brutality, and abuse of power by officers’ remains a problem in minority communities” (Maclin, 1998, pp. 388-389).
The common bond among police officers is their recognition of a shared socio-cultural ethos. The difference between citizens and police officers is the social space governing policing experiences. The crossing into police culture begins in the basic police academy and indefinitely confers an identity separating police officers from citizens. There are gross mutations of this socio-cultural phenomenon that have placed the ritualized practices of the law enforcement profession ahead of the internal process of becoming a police officer. To better illustrate these occurrences, Reese (2003) discusses:

In court testimony, Perez stated that the police officers mimicked the gangs they monitored. They wore skull tattoos, dressed and displayed the mannerisms of gang members. According to California State Senator Tom Hayden, the CRASH units acted much like an armed fraternity. They hazed new members as a form on inoculating their norms and engaged in illegal activities such as planting false evidence, beating, framing, shooting, and turning immigrants over to the INS for immediate deportation. This unit held award parties at the police academy to celebrate accomplishments of goals. (p. 89)

In terms of organizational efficiency, vocational training still constitutes the basis of professional development for police officers. The institution of policing relies on perishable skill sets to maintain organizational cohesiveness. The acceptance of skilled police officers rather than more educated police officers in promotional processes legitimizes organizational reliance on this current training standard (Buerger, 2004). As police officers, trained in this manner, gain prominence within their respective agencies, they reproduce their acculturated professional ethos. In the same way, there also arises the personal interpretation of what their acculturated processes represent. The resulting cultural subjectivity then becomes a matter of practice for the agency. As an example of this, Reese (2003) gives the following depiction:

Ed Davis followed Parker’s tenure as chief. Davis embraced and further developed the paramilitary culture of the LAPD. He also established an
Us v. Them attitude in the department. He separated the good from the 
bad in Los Angeles. The God-fearing middle class was good; 
homosexuals, Black Panthers and a wide variety of other radicals and 
pornographers were bad. Davis spoke fervently about scrubbing the city 
clean. (p. 89)

The socio-cultural power contained within the ethos of law enforcement overrides the 
basic identity of the individual police officer, and alters the nature of his or her ensuing 
discretionary practices. As described by McElhinny (1994), “Police officers, male and 
female, will say, 'When I’m in uniform, I’m not a woman/man—I’m a police officer.' 
They mean to emphasize that they have set aside personal lives, personal opinions and 
personalities while they are on the job” (p. 165). They have, in essence, removed their 
personal knowledge and chosen to operate according to the aims of the institution.

Follow the Chain of Command, It's There for a Reason

In America, police agencies' adherence to paramilitary structures of command 
regulates organizational accountability. The attainment of superior ranks by police 
officers within the organization reduces their access to collaborative thought processes of 
lower ranks, because the organizational flow of information, culture, and ideas generally 
comes from the top down. Conformity to the structure is a requisite of employment and 
negligent acts of insubordination to the chain of command can result in a police officer’s 
termination. The social maintenance of this structure ensures institutional solidarity. The 
paramilitary structure of police agencies establishes ethos among police officers, which 
constraints and influences social interactions of police officers in the public. The law 
enforcement ethos that binds paramilitary police agencies can also serve to shield 
organizational corruption and disseminate problematic behaviors.
Even though this structure intends to hold a police officer professionally accountable for his or her discretionary actions, organizational degeneracy still manifests in the behavior of police officers. Reese (2003) discusses possible origins of such deviant behavior:

Two basic theories have been posited to explain police corruption, the rotten apple theory and the environmental perspective. According to the rotten apple theory, there are a few bad apples within police departments who were not properly screened and came into the department susceptible to corruption (*sic*). The environmental perspective suggests that corruption is reflective and a result of the political corruption in cities. Politically corrupt cities create environments that are conducive to police misconduct. (p. 86)

Although police agencies intend to reduce disreputable policing activities in accordance to standards of professional performance and organizational statements of purpose, they can also serve to perpetuate the inappropriate activities in which police officers engage. The systematic abuses by the Rampart Division of the Los Angeles Police Department typified a paramilitary police agency marked with habitual manifestations of police officer corruption. The LAPD Rampart scandal “was not the consequence of one factor, but multiple factors. Indeed, leadership flaws, the attitudes and behaviors of a few 'bad' cops, and a seemingly unmalleable paramilitary culture created Rampart” (Reese, 2003, p. 85).

The paramilitary culture gives strength to managerial directives, which predisposes the validity of police officer decisions within the organization. As managers direct police officer activities to meet the organizational goals, the resulting policing actions meet the expectations of the agency. The effect of policing outcomes becomes a matter of achieving managerial objectives. To maintain the performance standards of their agency, the discretionary practices of the police officer reinforce a cultural
adherence to duty. In turn, the organization legitimizes, maintains, and supports the police officer’s actions. Reese (2003) contextualizes the managerial predisposition of legitimized policing activity:

During the mid 1980s, the Rampart area of Los Angeles experienced a significant increase in violent crimes involving gangs, drugs, and weapons. Consequently, the department created CRASH. Its main purpose was to make the area safer. Police officers were given wide discretion in meeting this objective and they were effective. Gang-related crime in the area fell from 1,171 in 1992 to 464 in 1999, a reduction that exceeded the citywide decline in violent crime over the same period. (p. 87)

This proactive approach to policing criminalized behavior affected the organizational expectations of police officers and their discretionary actions in the community. Contemporary policing initiatives designed to increase organizational performance rarely combine service strategies with crime fighting (Lyons, 1999). Unfortunately, organizational initiatives place the institutional needs of the agency above the social relationships police officers have with members of the community.

As police agencies attempt to address public concerns regarding law enforcement practices, a conflicting organizational message develops. The problematic balancing between organizational needs and the needs of the community accomplished through strict discipline and accountability may appease public concerns, but undermines police officer morale (Reese, 2003). Adjustments to other organizational constraints have facilitated a change in some professional processes, and that “is evident in macro-structural reorganizations of police departments to accommodate increasing paperwork and court appearances and in individuals’ interactional styles and psychological adjustments to the work of policing” (McElhinny, 1994, p. 162).
The limited implementation of broad organizational decision-making practices reduces the responsiveness of law enforcement agencies in the twenty-first century. The development of transformative models of policing has to contest with deep-rooted organizational culture. The socially accepted organizational deficiencies that allow patterns of Constitutional violations and misconduct to occur have resulted in instances of excessive force, false arrests, and unreasonable search and seizures (Reese, 2003). These conditioned behaviors of police officers indicate managerial acceptance within the organization. Lyons (1999) explains how traditional managerial expectations affect police performance:

The importance of “serving justice” could be contrasted with the overemphasis on arrests in police work, as currently practiced and evaluated; and non-emergency services could be explicitly connected to the long and horrible tradition in police work of effective order maintenance—a tradition that survives despite professional policing (sic) efforts to degrade it, failure to reward officers for engaging in it, and refusal to administratively support it. (p. 52)

The strict adherence of the rank and file to organizational characteristics makes it easier for police officers to follow suit even in instances of systematic corruption (Reese, 2003). In the LAPD, Chief Bill Parker established a culture that stressed aggressive and proactive policing that created an autonomous organization unregulated by the democratic process (Reese, 2003). The authoritativeness of executive leadership that limits the self-determination of police officers within the organization also reduces public contribution to the agency. Addressing the managerial insulation and isolation of police culture from public scrutiny has been the standard for current efforts to reform policing (Lyons, 1999). The complexity of organizational reform facing paramilitary police agencies might come from a lower level within the organization, but only if management
is willing to relinquish the authority of organizational transmission and solicit input from subordinates.

Police organizational structures and processes tend to adhere to more traditional hierarchal notions; this situation persists despite widespread adoption of community-oriented and intelligence-led policing reforms that call for line officer empowerment and a high degree of autonomy at all levels of the organization (Wuestewald & Steinheinder, 2006). Under the existing structure of command, it will take the forward thinking of current administrators to effect this change toward the future and prepare the next generation of leadership for succession. In their article, "The Changing Face of Police Leadership," Wuestewald & Steinheinder (2006) discuss the advent of shared decision-making in law enforcement:

In addition to formal structures that encourage and capture the productivity of employees, intense training is a critical component of an open system of inclusion and learning. Organizations that use suggestion involvement strategies also tend to invest heavily in human resources, recognizing the potential return such investments can reap. In fact, some proponents contend that training and development of subordinates is one of the primary functions of executive leadership in shared leadership contexts. (p. 89)

Paramilitary police agencies that seek to deliver postmodern police services to communities, through alternative police officer actions, will also require modification of police officer training. The concern is not simply advancing training; it is incorporating a working knowledge that shifts the organizational climate towards developing police officer discretion.

From Whence We Came

Even though American policing is a function of political rule, it can generate other forms of civil authority. Police agencies regulate the amount of authority afforded
to them by utilizing their political power to act effectively against preconceived threats to social order. In effect, police officers have the discretionary power to intercede in the social exchanges of others. The socio-political authority granted to police officers forms their ability to regulate social affairs. Through solidarity, police officers influence the elite with their prestige and political weight among the general population (Martinot, 2003).

Maclin (1998) gives an early account of the socio-political nature of American police authority:

By the mid-1700s, oppressive British search and seizure practices that affected white colonists became a potent political issue throughout the colonies. But resistance to high-handed British intrusions did not inspire colonial officials to check the search and seizure powers of southern slave patrols. (p. 335)

As a utility in the functions of American policing, the construct of whiteness has historically served to discriminate one form of social identity from another. “The meaning of “white masculinity,” in other words, hinged on the existence of subordinated “black masculinity” (Messerschmidt, 2007, p. 81).

The protection of whiteness solidified the existence of non-whites and established the cultural parameters from which policing defined blackness. Creating a system of white supremacy through separation aided in serving the autonomy it sought to deny (Hale, 1998). The social interactions between whites and blacks were dependant upon each other for defining the evolving nature of American policing. Police officers “inhabited an unacknowledged political center in plantation society, the mortar that held together the entire culture of white supremacy” (Martinot, 2003, p. 79). In early-American society, the dominant culture openly used policing as an implement of slavery.
Police officers were a weapon of domination and repression, and served the covert goal to demoralize and extinguish any will to resist the prevailing institution (Messerschmidt, 2007).

The police officer acquires social immunity within the prevailing culture because his or her discretionary actions perpetuate cultural dominance. This has engendered a historic ethos of impunity for police officer use of violence that maintains an institution of peace and social tranquility (Martinot, 2003). Beneath the modern image of a professional law enforcement model that strives to meet the evolving needs of American society exist these remnants of cultural discrimination. The professional standard for police officers to provide an equality of services is at odds with the institutional undertones that have accompanied American policing. The institutional practices of police officers, regardless of their stated purposes, began in stark opposition to democratic participation.

Historically, this way of thinking accelerated during the period of American history (1860-1960) when a climate of racism and intolerance accompanied spectacle lynching. The broad social attitude affecting perceptions and behaviors triggered action from within the “white community during the Reconstruction and its immediate aftermath that stretched far beyond legal definition [of crime]” (Messerschmidt, 2007, p. 87). American policing further served to oppress subjugated cultures in American society by withholding actions that supported equality under law. Hale (1998) provides the following account:

A quarrel between white and black boys over a game of marbles had escalated into a fight between white and black grocers. The black grocers were arrested. Then a white mob let in by law officers took the three men from their cells, loaded them on a switch engine that ran on a track behind
the jail, drove them north of the city limits of sleeping Memphis, and shot them to death. (p. 208)

American policing has an important role in separating dominant and minority identities by targeting those activities or behaviors that threaten to cross social boundaries. For example, “African American men who engaged in any practice defining a masculinity that indicated they were 'acting like a white man' became 'appropriate' subjects for white male violence” (Messerschmidt, 2007, p. 84). The resulting expectations of the dominant culture were transmitted through policing authority into the discretionary power of police officers. The institutional behaviors of police officers supported and justified violence: “Arthur Raper, who studied lynching in the 1930s, estimated that at least half were carried out with police officers participating and that in nine-tenths of the others, police officers condoned or winked at the mob action” (Skolnick, 2004, pp. 106-107).

American policing from its earliest creation, as a means to perpetuate social control, has used violence to maintain a position of authority within our American society. “Police violence and impunity have produced the conditions for paranoia by terrorizing people and forcing them into stances of resistance” (Martinot, 2003, p. 175). The reality of police officer participation in spectacle lynching cemented their professional association with violence in the public consciousness. It was an open display of solidarity with the institution of white superiority. Lynching occurred in public venues where spectators traveled to watch these horrifying events (Hale, 1998). The public acceptance of violence from American policing condoned the police officer’s involvement and extended legitimacy to the discretionary acts of violence. The
unrestricted culture of police officer violence produced a collective whiteness that made class segregation seem modern and civilized (Hale, 1998).

The cultural power these public displays of brutality held extended beyond the event itself, and became implanted in the social consciousness of future generations. “Children of both sexes and colors gathered in groups . . . . The children became as frantic as the grown people . . . . Little faces distorted with passion and the bloodshot eyes of the cruel parent watched with glee the burning body” (Cuevas, 2008, p. 44). The painful social abuses and physical torture committed by police officers is part of the authoritative narrative of American policing. Unfortunately, during the first half of the twentieth century, there was no legal redress for the crimes committed by police officers (Skolnick, 2004). The dominance of these horrific events occupied the social consciousness of African Americans and deconstructed their conceptions of social value. Hale (1998) transcribes one such occurrence:

Richard Wright recalled the impact all “white death” had on young African American men: "The white brutality that I had not seen was more effective control of my behavior that that which I knew. The actual experience would have let me see the realistic outlines of what was really happening, but as long as it remained something terrible and yet remote, something whose horror and blood might descend upon me at any moment, I was compelled to give my entire imagination over to it." (p. 204)

The person who is limited as a human being due to his or her destructive image of self in relation to the social power of his or her existence that manifests negative sentiments is a person confined by a slave mentality. This social affect is a consequence of the circumstances in our American society, and police officers have been an essential component in the perpetuation of this mental construct.
When we consider the relationship between governance and the governed, we come to understand that basic separations exist between those with social privileges and those without. The participatory nature of policing gives people communal identity, and confers social standing upon them. This connotation of class separation has remained a static part of American policing, and police officers have dutifully upheld the division of class. Since colonial America, policing has been a function of the working class. With striking cultural uniformity, the white male working class has maintained this social construction (Fine et al., 2001). The associations of American policing with whiteness have equally been associated with male physicality. The cultural identification of masculinity is a direct function of the habitual exertion of physical force by police officers. The real acts of violence associated with American policing have generated a common reliance on their ominous command presence. The magnitude of this cultural phenomenon sustains the collective establishment of American policing. Even female officers, while recognizing the existence of physical differences, utilize institutional force to establish hegemony (McElhinny, 1994). Social recognition and association with institutionalized masculinity are part of the law enforcement ethos.

As an extension of government, American policing represents the day-to-day interaction between citizens and the liberties described within our U.S. Constitution. The interaction between the act of policing and the effect of policing has constituted struggle and conflict. When instances arise where police officers have blatantly defied normative behavior of the institution, and infringed upon the civil liberties of citizens, then judicial review intervenes to strike a balance. One such interjection occurred in the 1932
Scottsboro case (Powell v. Alabama), which mandated the appointment of counsel for indigent defendants in capital cases (Skolnick, 2004).

In contemporary law enforcement contexts, the rudimentary socio-cultural, socio-political, and socio-economic influences for police officers to exercise their authoritative discretion become apparent. During a discussion of the Constitutionality of police officer discretionary actions, Maclin (1998) expresses:

Discretionary police authority may generate discriminatory searches, seizures, and tension between the police and minority individuals. Even where there is no proof that the police are acting with the specific racial intent, a police intrusion may violate Fourth Amendment norms due to its arbitrary nature. An intrusion can be arbitrary even where there is factual justification for its initiation if it is “conducted at the discretion of [police] officials, who may act despotically and capriciously in the exercise of the power to search and seizure.” Under this view, a pretext traffic stop of a black motorist is a paradigmatic arbitrary seizure. Probable cause of a traffic offense does not negate the arbitrariness of the seizure because the seizure is effectuated for purposes other than traffic enforcement. The officer conducts the seizure because he unreasonably believes that there is a greater chance of finding criminal evidence in the vehicle of a black motorist. While officers may hold these views or are trained to think in this manner, there is no empirical data that supports the claim that police are more likely to find contraband or other criminal evidence in the vehicles of black motorists stopped for traffic violations. (p. 373)

The relationship between government and citizens, framed in the Constitution, represents the interaction between policing and the policed, and law enforcement intrusions into Americans’ Constitutional rights. “Inter community reciprocity must, therefore, include manifestly democratic mechanisms for holding state agencies (most immediately, police departments) accountable for the impact of their decisions on communities” (Lyons, 1999, p. 29).

Since the mid-1990s enactment of the Public Safety Partnership and Community Policing Act of 1994 (Title I), community policing has become a contemporary model of
American law enforcement (Anderson et al., 2007). The concept of community policing consigns an expectation that police agencies conduct a systematic shift away from proactive policing models towards community-centered policing. “Police-community partnerships to address neighborhood problems are expected to empower citizens in communities to overcome their fears and contribute to the coproduction of social order” (Lyons, 1999, p. 15).

Alternative policing strategies that are going to be successful need to emphasize that the number of calls to which officers respond and the number of arrests made are not the only important outputs for officer productivity (Famega et al., 2005). This reinforces the basic argument of police reform in managerial practices that support the nature of policing as empowering democratic participation through positive human interaction.

Lyons (1999) further elaborates on the intricacies of police and community relations:

While the story highlights social resources, it also assumes that communities have the political and economic resources they need to define and defend themselves. It is important to recognize the different ways that stronger and weaker communities participate in politics as a sign of the types of resources they can mobilize. From a community policing perspective, others have observed that stronger communities participate and weaker communities complain. (p. 26)

Although being perceived as antagonists of the community, police organizations like the LAPD have implemented community-policing models (Reese, 2003). Numerous articles discussing the pros and cons of each style have spawned intense theoretical debate. Despite widespread public approval, lack of organizational support can create a situation where police officers play by their own rules (Reese, 2003). Within these organizations, police officers still have the fundamental responsibility to provide services in cooperation
with their respective communities. “Like Progressive Era reforms, prevailing stories about policing and community here are inescapably political” (Lyons, 1999, p. 38).

The underlying notion of community interaction encourages officers to take active rolls in the communities they serve, and with the cooperation of citizens, recognize potential problem areas and apply resources towards solving the problem. The officer must have the working knowledge and necessary skill set to fulfill this duty assignment. A realignment of police officer directives also increases the need for additional training. The natures of police officer training, acculturation, and organization all play a part in directing discretionary activities within these communities. “Fierce neighborhood patriotism can either be utterly divisive or it can become the powerful building block of larger solidarities” (Davis, 2000, p. 50).

The general populace in America, which grants police agencies their authority, is preoccupied with a more contemporary notion of ethnic control. Our socially twisted meaning of humanity conjures that brutality for some becomes acceptable for policing others (Cuevas, 2008). We have extended the social power of police officers through classist motivations perpetuated by racialized misgivings. The social power of American policing to engage in actions that are more punitive, for the purposes of autonomous public regulation, has created a culture of unobstructed authority; this foreshadows, “the otherwise obscure fact that there are alternatives to state action that may still constitute public action” (Lyons, 1999, p. 24). Police officers, as part of the greater American community, are subject to the social norms established by the community. As such, police officers must coexist with democratic values that potentially nourish the fabric of communities (Lyons, 1999). The authority given to American police officers, as
appointed representatives of the community, “places the liberty of every man in the hands of every petty officer” (Maclin, 1998, p. 336).

**The Cost of Freedom, or the Cost of Doing Business?**

As part of our capitalistic society, money equals power, and social capital equals social power. Social capital is a form of transferability and accessibility of one’s ability to move within the prevailing power structure. It is important to understand the concept of social capital because of its prevalence within the context of American policing.

Lyons (1999) defines social capital in the following manner:

> Social capital, unlike physical or financial capital, does not exist in a form that can be separated from the concrete social relations it grew out of, and the value of social capital increases as it is consumed. Social capital is not manifest in currency or land; rather, it “inheres in the structure of relation between actions and among actors.” (p. 29)

Social capital, as used in my discussion of American policing, provides a mechanism to understand the expression of policing power found in the intricate relationships between participants and their social identities. In relation to white hegemonic masculinity, the notions of womanhood and blackness serve as negative referents that historically unite white men (Messerschmidt, 2007). The social capital held within those interactions assumes social accountability within the individuals’ relationships to other members of society. As previously discussed, the power granted to whiteness exceeds the power held within the subordinate group and defines the value of their social worth.

Within the social structure of American policing, social capital creates the common relationships that police officers share in their cultural interactions within communities. Police officers patrolling the daily violence present a moral threshold in the naturalization of immigrants (Davis, 2000). The existence of police officer
participation in the formation of immigrants’ social capital, in this context, serves the institutional representation of the dominant culture. The acquired social capital for the police officer is a function of his or her professional social status. Assuming, transferring, and imprinting the power of social capital is part of the functional interaction among participants. For example, anti-lynching activists who examined the function of violence in Southern culture had barely escaped lynching themselves (Hale, 1998). The culture of socio-segregation is located in all areas of the country and social capital plays a part in defining every ethnic group. American policing operates in the midst of social expressions concerning power, and utilizes social capital maintained by the cultural segregation of citizens.

In contemporary terms, the popular culture seeks to merge various forms of social capital formed in marginalized communities with slight regard to demography, but the effect of law enforcement participation maintains the overriding social order. Therefore, social and legal regulations serve to cement racial identities (Messerschmidt, 2007). In that, the lifestyle of popular culture has an actual manifestation in the lived reality of criminalization and incarceration (Davis, 2007).

The unfortunate condition of conquered cultures is their inability to express their social status beyond the confines established by their social capital, and their social positioning places them in direct opposition to the institution of American policing. There is an overriding expectation that police officers, through their discretionary actions, decrease the production of conflict and social frustration within the dominant culture. The resulting action transfers dominant class conflict by rechanneling antagonisms to minorities (Martinot, 2003). The African American male has been the historical
antithesis of the dominant culture in American society and police have effectively subjugated his existence.

The social enforcement of political legislation designed to criminalize and separate minorities’ ability to assume dominance creates a social capital for migrant assimilation. As compared to the African American plight in American society, this social suppression is a subconscious affront to the premeditated processes of migrant acculturation. Escobar (2008) explains her critical review of this practice in the following context:

What the analysis of these news articles reveals is that discourse designed to discipline and contain Black bodies – criminality and state dependency – gets mapped onto immigrant women, particularly of Mexican origin, and proves useful not only to discipline this group, but migrants in general. Fusing “criminality” and state dependency that occurred with the production of the welfare queen is proven productive to discipline immigrants into “good Americans.” To claim innocence and belonging, immigrants have to renounce criminality and state dependency, ultimately renouncing Blackness. (p. 68)

“The passage of the Thirteenth Amendment (1865) outlawed slavery; with emancipation, former slaves became African Americans” (Messerschmidt, 2007, p. 81). Although liberation of African Americans occurred, their social power remained limited; they lacked the full authority to govern their own identity. Messerschmidt (2007) explains, In fact, emancipation was defined in terms of the ability of former slave men and women to fully participate in [American] life. This meant not only acquiring citizenship rights as African Americans, but also living out the gender ideals dominant in [American] society. (p. 81)

African Americans endeavored to acquire the social capital of the dominant culture, and that social power situated on the basic assumptions of a patriarchal participation. Messerschmidt (2007) describes the way African Americans began to seek the social capital of American citizenship:
With emancipation, their authority within the African American family grew, and beliefs that men and women should inhabit separate spheres consolidated. By 1870, the majority of African Americans lived in two-parent patriarchal family households, in which African Americans embraced the new “cult of domesticity,” women worked primarily in household labor, and men became public representative of the family. African American former slave men now considered it a badge of honor for their wives to work at home, and thereby gained considerable power within the household. (pp. 81-82).

Despite assuming the prominent cultural mannerisms, African Americans remained separated, because those social ideals of the dominant culture are explicit products of white existence.

**The Institution At Its Finest**

The task that American policing performs is specified by the measure of social order required to maintain separation of social power in America. Police agencies are the means that preserve governance in our society. Police officers constitute the visual representation between class divisions within American society and are the social embodiment of separation. The act of policing is an unavoidable part of the larger effort to control social space, and has become firmly established in the discretionary actions that bring these spaces of community to life (Lyons, 1999). American policing is a formally established productive class apparatus that constitutes the cultural exploitation of social biases (Martinot, 2003). The police officer enacts these biases through discretionary suppression of criminalized groups. These practices generally and disproportionately target minorities and the poor (Cole, 1999).

The existence of racially motivated animosity in law enforcement has origins that date back to the slave patrols of colonial America. Police officers in the agrarian society served to protect the white social elite against fear of slave rebellion. On a weekly basis,
slave patrols capriciously searched the homes of slaves for weapons (Maclin, 1998). At the height of the social reconstruction of the New South, “white Southerners transformed a deadly and often quiet form of vigilante ‘justice’ into a modern spectacle of enduring power” (Hale, 1998, p. 201).

The evils of racism provoked the unfettered misuse of police officer authority and erected American policing into a system of institutionalized prejudice. Martinot (2003) writes:

> When police profiling singles out black and brown people, it is not their individual behavior that renders them suspect; instead, the prior criminalization of color becomes the proxy for behavior and renders their behavior suspect in advance. As criminalizing profiling reflects the mode whereby racism excludes those it racializes, the reduction in juridical status produced for the criminalized reflects or repeats the process of inferioritization that accompanies racism’s generalizations. Because the generalization of behavior becomes a euphemism for racialized generalizations, the criminalization of race gets inverted as the racialization of crime. Black behavior, whether illegal or not, becomes criminal; white racist violence, whether prosecuted or not, becomes simply behavior. Generalization, racialization, and criminalization are interwoven and inseparable in an endless reconstruction of whiteness and white supremacy, in which police procedure is today playing a major role. (p. 175)

Over half of Americans believe blacks are violence prone; the depressing conclusion is that this belief is no less characteristic of American police officers (Cole, 1999). The social influence of racial discrimination by the institution of American policing exists on such a scale that our ability to differentiate between race and crime is nonexistent. “In 1993, Reverend Jesse Jackson told a Chicago audience, ‘There is nothing more painful to me at this stage in my life than to walk down the street and hear footsteps and start thinking about robbery—then look around and see somebody white and feel relieved’” (Cole, 1999, p. 41).
The continual resettlement of immigrant and migrant cultures into American society finds established customs seated in economic stratification and ethnic divisions. The cultures’ integration into the existing subdivisions of social power serves to generate new methods of separatism. The institutional structure that utilizes racial superiority has developed according to the evolving definitions of American policing. Even though the power of governance in America continues to employ aggressive policing tactics, the harshness of those more archaic social practices has subsided, partially due to industrialization. Martinot (2003) describes how the practices changed during the industrialization of America:

Though industry emerged in large part from capital that the patrol as control stratum had made possible, it could dispense with the system of patronage at the core of that previous system. White workers realized that the industrial exploitation of white labor already constituted a betrayal of white solidarity, but white allegiance was still deployed as the ethos in which to grant white workers control over black. (p. 82)

As immigrants continued their integration into the American social scheme, new questions of social power begin to emerge, resulting in reorienting racialized policies that historically formed around African Americans. In the past few decades, the merging of criminality with illegal border crossing has racialized citizenship and marginalized access to health care and education (Escobar, 2008). The resulting stratification between the dominant culture and the migrant and immigrant cultures contains the residue of racial struggle. The modern harassment of Chicanos by police officers is reminiscent of the period of segregated drinking fountains in the south (Davis, 2007).

The practice of enforcing separation of migrant and immigrant access to social power is a contemporary form of racial segregation. The fundamental divisions between Chicano/Mexican working class and Anglo upper class that occurred during the citrus era
in southern California continues to frame current social interactions with police officers (Davis, 2007). The racialization of migrant and immigrant populations has sought to utilize the institution of American policing by expanding criminalization.

Furthermore, it expanded the state’s ability to deport non-citizens with criminal records, resulting in an exponential expansion in the deportation of non-citizens. In 1986, for example, there was a removal of 1,978 immigrants for criminal violations. In 2004, the number increased to 82,802, a 41.86% increase. (Escobar, 2008, p. 63)

The acculturation of migrant and immigrant populations into American society has affected American policing because police officers contextualize the formation of their social capital. The dominant preconceptions of criminality, and the social conditioning of migrant and immigrant populations into a criminalized subdivision of social existence, have relied upon the discretionary actions of police officers. Fundamentally, the perpetual negotiation of racial whiteness that conjures criminality moves to detach black and brown communities (Escobar, 2008).

American policing through institutional punishment, systematic persecution, and physical oppression has maintained cultural space in the name of American justice. The apparatus of police agencies is a system designed to dislodge opposition. The institution of American policing serves a political and economic role, and has continuously besieged American populations that have resisted the ideals and progress of capitalism (Cuevas, 2008). American policing evidenced the national class conflict during American industrialization, when the democratic participation of working-class immigrants suffered the ascendancy of the progressive movement that targeted the morality of American ethnocentric masses (Lyons, 1999). At the preference of the dominant class, the subordinated acculturation of immigrant populations emphasized social division through

The institution of American policing and discretionary activities of police officers exist because their intrusiveness is unlikely to impinge the civil liberties of the privileged (Cole, 1999). According to Maclin (1998), “This type of thinking is wrong” (p. 391). The racialized and socio-economic segregations within American society, through policing, maintain the margins between classes. Those who take an oath to uphold the law so often enforce it in a biased way, and with reason, minorities tend to grow up believing that the law is the enemy (Maclin, 1998).

Legislative biases, in order to maintain constructs of social power, have redeployed American policing by criminalizing migrant and immigrant cultures. The institutional obligation of American policing to enforce the dominant position, within the public discourse, has facilitated this acculturation. Racial biases that outwardly govern American policing maintain social order by dehumanizing subjugated cultures. Immigrant groups that seek to acquire civil liberty become situated in collective opposition to the institution of American policing. “These messages that attempt to distance immigrants from criminality are prevalent and central to the mainstream immigrant rights movement because they try to secure the innocence and safety of communities that are constantly under intense policing and violence” (Escobar, 2008, p.
57). Given the historical evidence of violence, achieving social balance in contrast to the institution of American policing through public confrontation is a hazardous endeavor. The actual attainment of social capital is a construct of the ruling class, and any subsequent attempt at conformity of migrants and immigrants to the dominant perspective is treacherous. By participating in the classist ideology, migrant workers who attempt to demonstrate their assimilation intensify their own exploitation (Escobar, 2008).

In terms of institutionalized acculturation, Escobar (2008) presents her rationalization of this process in relation to the dominant structure of citizenship:

Successful integration into the larger society depends on the fit between familial and ethnic social systems on the one hand and the fit between the ethnic social systems and the larger society on the other. The local social environment, including both American and Americanized peer groups, pulls young people into the ethnic community and the more the ethnic community guides them towards normative orientations consistent with those of the larger society, the less those young people are drawn towards the alternative social circles of local youth. (p. 65)

The overwhelming fear of criminalization disciplines migrants and immigrants into the dominant system of citizenship. The identity of “illegal” citizenship particularly assumes a connotation that discourages immigrant brown bodies from accessing state recourses (Escobar, 2008). The stratification of immigrants by law enforcement will consequently govern future cultural assimilation through rigid legislation of immigrant behavior. “In other words, the longer the family’s stay in the US, the higher the likelihood of engaging in crime” (Escobar, 2008, p. 64).

Similar to the theories of racial inferiority that excused slavery, police terror and torture continue to maintain caste superiority (Skolnick, 2004). The modern sensationalism of violence in our popular culture has engrossed the collective
imagination and captivated our social identity. As Americans, we have defined the role of American policing within our society by granting police the authority to use violence, and have shifted the social effect of that decision to encapsulate discretionary actions of police officers. Americans have created separation from the events police engage in by rationalizing the historical effects of American policing as a necessary form of social control. Americans accept these practices as a requirement to combat crime and maintain civil order. Americans’ fascination with violent images has become a commonplace part of sensationalizing the institution of American policing. We turn to imprisonment and the over-policing of selected communities as a socially acceptable fix (Cuevas, 2008).

**Are You Capable of Fulfilling the Duties of a Police Officer?**

The postmodern aims of policing are directed to the construction of a more professional law enforcement identity. This professional identity outwardly attempts to direct individual police officer discretion and to avoid the unfettered misappropriation of policing authority. However, under the law enforcement model, institutional targeting of legislated behavior influences police officers to actively increase criminal populace through proactive arresting of criminal offenders. The criminal behavior targeted by law enforcement has resulted in legislative classification of minorities. The class difference is a biased instrumentality generated for the political purposes of racialization (Martinot, 2003). As police officers identify with the ideals of law enforcement agencies, they enforce a political stratum of control, and the affective goal of their discretionary powers echoes professionalism reaffirmed by criminalization of socio-cultural and socio-economic minorities.
From the onset of my discussion, this chapter expressed an in-depth account of the institution of American policing and the impact those processes have on police officers and the lives of citizens. I propose that police officers are not synonymous with policing. Policing is a larger entity that houses our collective history and contains the obstructions to the development of a more democratic society. As a social institution and mechanism for control, policing is the social process of formalized discrimination reinforced by law enforcement. The existence of policing is an evidenced construction of our human condition. We created it and we are responsible for the outcomes it has on our civility. Police officers are the selected few that choose to place themselves on the front lines between our collective interest and those of the institution. The training of police officers and their acculturation into the profession of law enforcement conditions their decisions to enact the interests of the institution.

The central issue, as I see it, is that current training standards support the institution, whereas education may support individual empowerment to think critically in a socially conscious manner. The content of this chapter provided a clear socio-cultural context for my ensuing discussion of institution and police officer discretion. It is important for us to understand how the processes of our past affect our present positioning. Contained within those artifacts we choose to examine, we can derive a sense of purpose and appreciation. Clarifying who we are, seeing ourselves for what we have become, gives us the perspective to look forward to the possibilities of where we want to be and the obstacles to achieving those possibilities.

In the next chapter, I share my personal narrative as an illustrative example of how I choose to view my place in the world. The importance of my passage to my
current positioning demonstrates my entrance into the law enforcement profession. The manner through which I choose to interpret my life constitutes my methodology for determining those processes that may facilitate change to the basic educational philosophies governing law enforcement training. Changing the educational approaches to police officer learning will transform the socio-cultural ethos of law enforcement, which may facilitate the development of critically thinking police officers that alter the institution of American policing.
Chapter III

The Path I Have Traveled

Introduction

This chapter is a chronicle of my personal, social, and academic growth; this is my journey from childhood to my current self. The following narrative is my introspective and self-reflective account of my life. It summons who I am as a protector and educator: who I am as a man. I have chosen to openly discuss the social expansion of my identity, as an illustrative example of how my experiences give context to my existence and the decisions I make. Sharing my journey provides a descriptive example of the path I traveled into the profession of law enforcement. From one experience to the next, I have carried forth elements of personalized truth (or perspective), through which I filter (or interpret) the next series of events I encounter. As a police officer, this is the nature of my discretion.

The evolution of my educational philosophies, shaped through my experiences, has created my current intellectual positioning. Through my formal preparation as an educator and my formal training as a police officer, my story evidences two distinctive processes: 1) my experiential learning as a person, and 2) my role within the dominant social structure of American society. These processes come to bear in every decision I make, because my choices derive from my intellect and my emotions: between what I know and what I have experienced.

The effect that critical knowledge has in my decisions, as a police officer and an instructor of police officers, is reflective of my grounding as an educational theorist for social change. My storyline establishes the foundations as to how I came to question the
function of institutional authority in determining basic educational philosophies currently
used in Northern California police officer training. In my life, there is a constant
interplay between the interests of institutional points of view and my individualism. The
discussion of my life frames my position as an agent for change within the current
structure of Northern California law enforcement. I choose to share who I am so that
others may recognize those processes in their lives that may facilitate the universal
development of critical knowledge that effects socio-cultural changes within the ethos of
American law enforcement.

The Beating of My Heart

My parents met in nursing school; never having been married, they decided to
bring me into this world. I was born July 18, 1974 in Kansas City, Missouri. I was six
weeks premature; my lungs were not completely developed and collapsed shortly after
birth. I spent my initial time on this planet in an incubator with chest tubes taped
securely into place. By the grace of God, the love and prayers of my family, I am here to
share my journey.

I was born of parents from two separate walks of life. In simple terms, my mother
is white and my father is black. Looking into the depths of my mind, I can still see my
mother sitting in the kitchen of my paternal grandmother’s house. My cousin and I were
running wild through the living room. The corner of a stone coffee table put an end to
that foot race and I still have the scar to prove it. My grandmother had told me several
times to stop, but there is no better lesson than the hard knocks of life. The earliest
recollections of my father’s family were the times I spent in my grandmother’s house,
experiencing the unconditional tough love “Sarge” had to give. This moniker was short
for Drill-Sergeant. My father decided, while he was in high school, that “Drill-Sergeant”
was better suited to describe her demeanor than “Mother.” I was her Dameo, her buddy,
and her pal. We share the same birth date; she cared for me with all her being. I still feel
her love today.

My mother would frequently bring me to Fort Scott, located on the Kansas side
about 100 miles south of Kansas City, to visit my maternal grandmother. She lived in a
mobile home park that our family owned. My uncle returned to manage the mobile home
park after my maternal grandfather passed away. Just two months before I was born, a
tractor he was riding had overturned and crushed him. From all accounts, I understand he
was a good man who was always willing to help others regardless of their need. I
enjoyed my visits to Fort Scott. I was “grandma’s special boy,” and being her only
grandchild meant I was the center of her attention.

From the earliest beginnings of my journey, these places were central to my
acculturation. My parent’s efforts to impart their experiences to me represented the
difference between being bi-racial and bi-cultural. I knew who my family was and never
questioned my identity. My father would frequently gather all of his children together for
visits. At the time, there were seven of us. My father eventually moved away from
Kansas City to California, and my youngest brother was born several years later.

I was my mother’s only child, and she made sacrifices to provide me with the best
life she thought possible. My mother soon moved to California and established residency
in Daly City. My recollections of this time are few. I do remember aspects of my pre-
school where we learned Spanish (“Juanito; Jaunito levantete”), and Chinese (Gung Hay
Fat Choy). In the early 1980s, my mother decided to travel to a nursing school in Texas.
She thought it best that I go to live with my maternal grandmother. I remember living and playing in the mobile home park. On occasion, I would help my uncle tend to the cows, bale the hay, or lend a hand to our neighbors. We would spend our Sundays in church. In the morning I attended Sunday school and practiced reading parables from the New Testament, coloring pictures of Biblical characters, or singing songs of Jesus’ love for the little children of the world; “be they yellow, black, or white, they are precious in his sight.” After Sunday school, we would return home for some lunch and to wash up. After a pot-roast supper, we went back to church for the evening service. Hellfire and brimstone, love and compassion, were general themes of the messages. We sang hymns during the collection of tithes. During the week, typically on Wednesdays, we would return for Bible study or prayer meetings. Church was the foundation of our humble country living.

The church administrated Fort Scott Christian Heights, a private school I attended. The school housed students from first grade through twelfth grade. Morning assembly usually consisted of an opening prayer and a few hymns. In the classroom, I learned to read, write, and do arithmetic. During arts and crafts, I spent time making keepsakes for holidays or other special events. Recess was my favorite time of the day, and coincidentally was one of the first words I learned how to spell. In the schoolyard, I played on the merry-go-round and climbed on the jungle gym. I would later suffer my first broken bone at the bars of that jungle gym. It was on the schoolyard playground that I first heard the word “nigger” from one of my classmates. I did not have a frame of reference to know the meanings of the word. I just knew it meant that I was different, and I felt in some unknown way that being different made me special.
After school, I went to spend the afternoon at a church member’s house. I would stay there until my grandmother could pick me up on her way home from work. There were three children in the house. The small farmhouse was home for two boys and a girl, all of whom were older than I was. Because the house was adjacent to the school, I spent most of the time playing on the jungle gym (hence the broken arm). Every so often, we would go fishing or run simple errands, but we mostly stayed close to the house. If the lady of the house needed to attend to personal matters, her eldest son was in charge. He was in his late teens and the reasonable choice to watch us younger children. It was during these times that I suffered cruelty. Most of the time, it was verbal abuse. I never fully understood why there was a great deal of anger, hatred, and violence projected towards my presence.

On one occasion, the younger son kicked me so hard in the groin that it caused a hernia that would require surgery to repair. The darkest moment came when the eldest son sexually molested me. It was in that moment that I called out to God; my spirit has been in his gracious mercies ever since. Before long, the younger brother would emulate the modeled behavior.

No sooner had I cut the Ronald McDonald birthday cake to celebrate my seventh birthday than my innocence was gone. The nature of my interactions with the world around me had changed forever; I became spatially aware. I began to observe people’s behavior and to scrutinize their mannerisms. I looked at the light in their eyes, searching the depths of their souls for glimmers of danger. I quickly learned to adapt to the hostilities of the environment and began to act in a self-preserving manner. Fear turned into anger and anger turned into rage. If threatened, I often lashed out furiously to
maintain my personal space. I tried to explain the transgressions to my family, but my attempts went unheeded. The absence of protection cemented a sense of injustice in my being. From that point forward, I realized I was responsible for defending myself from unfair treatment. When I was alone, I routinely internalized my thoughts and emotions of self-worth. Ultimately, my inability to effectively manage my frustrations began a cycle of self-destructive behavior that continued for many years.

That year spent in Fort Scott was not all bad. I still cherish the time I spent visiting maternal family in El Dorado Springs and Joplin, Missouri, and the rare opportunity to see my mother or father. Most of the time, I lived as an adventurer. Saturday mornings at the auction yard, shooting rifles, working on farm equipment, riding horses, wiring electrical outlets, dancing in thunderstorms and hiding from tornados were all a part of life. One of my earliest motivations to learn came when I attempted to ride a bike without training wheels. The gravel road provided me with more than enough encouragement to succeed quickly.

**A World of Wonder**

My mother had finished her nursing program and was now a registered nurse practitioner. We moved to an apartment on 44th Avenue in San Francisco, California. The apartment was within walking distance of her job at Fort Miley VA Medical Center. My mother guided me around the hospital grounds where she worked, and demonstrated how to locate her if there was an emergency. While my mother worked, I attended Lafayette Elementary School. Shortly before the school year began, my mother accompanied me to the city bus stop. We rode the MUNI bus together until I learned the route between our apartment and school.
The desks of my new classroom were in rows facing the blackboard. My second
grade teacher was short in stature, but a strong-willed lady who commanded respect; her
actions were rooted in kindness. She reminded me of Sarge, so I knew to mind my “P’s
and Q’s” in her presence. She spent most of the day with colored chalk on her fingers,
which matched her flower print smock. Music was her motivating reward for good
behavior. She kept the instruments locked in the equipment closet and always kept the
key tethered to her wrist. During our music sessions, I learned how to strum the autoharp
and tap the wooded panels of the xylophone. That year the school administered a grade
level placement test. According to my score on the aptitude test, the school
administration recommended that my mother have me placed into a third-grade
classroom. Not only was this suggestion a surprise to my fellow students, who routinely
poked fun at my midwestern drawl, but to me as well because I did not recognize my
worth as a learner. My mother decided it was better for my overall development to
maintain my social interactions with peers, and kept me at the current grade level.

Outside of school, I spent time developing my independence. Traversing about
the hospital grounds, observing the way people moved and talked and their manner of
dress. These observations helped me determine how to navigate through the hospital’s
social structure. People would often look at me with an inquisitive expression; some
would stop and ask me if I was lost. In response, I would rattle off my mother’s name,
rank, and her ward, and then politely thank them for asking as I carried on with my
business. I also traveled to the corner market to play video games, being careful not to
spend too much money on sweets. I had friends from multiple walks of life. They were
Asian, Jewish, Filipino, African American, Hispanic, and Caucasian. I spent time in their
homes learning their rituals, their communal interactions, and their concepts of family and life in America. I felt accepted, but knew there was a limit to the connectedness I could achieve. This was evident when I accompanied the mother of my friend to pick him up from school. I asked her why I could not attend the Lisa Kampner Hebrew Academy with her son. The gist of the answer amounted to, “because you aren’t Jewish.”

My first exposure to organized athletics was playing baseball for the San Francisco Police Athletic League. This was a truly memorable experience. Sometimes police cars lined the baseball diamond, and the mounted patrol units would bring their horses to our practices. Because my uniform was black and white with a badge imprinted on it, I remember having a sense of belonging; I identified with the officers who coached our team. I had never played baseball before, but often accompanied my mother to her softball games at places like Kimbell Park or Park Side Square. Although my skills were not very developed, my coaches told me I was a natural athlete. With all respect, I believe my natural abilities were probably due to the hours of physical labor on the family farm.

Before long, my mother found a roommate and together they decided to rent a house in San Rafael, California. My mother asked me what I thought of adding this new person to our home. I objected to the idea because I just wanted to have my mother close to me, but they had already made the decision. Several groups of my mother’s friends from the hospital gathered to help us all move into our new home. When the school year began, I attended Colman Elementary School. The third grade classroom had long horizontal tables that faced the front of the room. So that she could keep a watchful eye over the class, the teacher’s desk was strategically located towards the rear of the
classroom. She often used a slide projector to illustrate components of her lessons. Depending upon the scheduled activity, our teacher placed us into groups for reading and math assignments. Even though she used special names for the groups, it did not take me long for me to realize she selected the groups according to her perception of our level of ability. This was evident by the nature of her interactions with the various groups. There was an obvious demeanor change when it came to my group. She was cross most of the time and demonstrated little patience, as compared to her dealings with other groups.

She attempted to project her authority over me by acting tough. Having known the true authenticity of women with a strong will, her manufactured self was not a true representation of who she was. Ultimately, because I did not believe in her nor accept her attempts to exert power over me, a definite conflict arose. I found myself unfairly labeled as a behavioral problem, which triggered my internal defiance of unfair treatment. My rational reaction generated a pattern of negative interactions with her that brought out the worst in me. After a series of escalating events, I found myself in the principal’s office. He told me that my behavior was unacceptable and the consequences of my actions meant a paddling. I remember feeling an overwhelming sense of injustice as my blood began to boil. I was taking the punishment for her behavior towards me. I remember the principal retrieving the paddle from his desk, asking me to stand up, and taking hold of my arm. This is when the battle ensued. He attempted repeatedly to land the paddle with compelling impetus. I fought back relentlessly to thwart his efforts. We continued to thrash about his office, until he was out of breath. He dropped the paddle on his desk and told me my suspension from the school was indefinite. After my mother became aware of the situation, and voiced her disagreement regarding the circumstances,
they scheduled a day for me to return to the principal’s office with the understanding that I could not return to school until I received my punishment. When the day arrived, I wore every pair of ‘Underoos’ from the top drawer of my dresser. With my jeans fastened tightly, I took ten licks from the paddle.

Time passed and fourth grade began at Coleman Elementary. The sectioning of our class into separate rooms removed me from some of my friends. My new teacher was strict in her expectations of how I was to participate in her classroom. I was a visitor and needed to conduct myself accordingly. Although I had my own desk, she continuously directed me to move so I could pair up with a “learning buddy.” I worked on the projects she assigned, and watched movies she selected for the film projector. I took notes as she wrote on the overhead projector. Learning for me was dark and uncomfortable. In part, based on my previous experiences, I knew that the teacher and the principal had the final word; I felt it was in my own best interest to internalize my despondency. I truly felt disconnected from my environment and withdrew deeper inside myself. My mother, sensing I was disengaging from school and having difficulty in my social interactions with others, decided to sign me up for a variety of activities, including Cub Scouts, Little League, and even the Big Brothers of America program. In the end, the sessions with a child psychologist would cause the greatest impact to my journey. Those counseling sessions planted seeds in my mind that something was wrong with me, and invariably led the adults in my life to believe I was becoming a danger to myself due to my despondency.

At the end of the school year, my mother crowded my summer full of activities. I traveled to Hawaii, I went camping, and I visited my grandma in Fort Scott. My mother
even arranged for me to visit my father, who was now living in Detroit, Michigan. It was good to be around my father again. He had married a woman whose son was thirteen years old. We lived in a predominately African-American community. When I was not interacting with my father, I was learning the “ropes” from my stepbrother.

I soon realized that my stepbrother disliked his mother’s involvement with my father. During the day, he and I walked to the local YMCA for youth activities. He would seek opportunities to manifest his discontent towards me. Most of the time, I suffered disparaging remarks because I was white. He did not want to be seen walking through the neighborhood with “a white boy.” He provoked his friends to fight me because of my skin color. At the YMCA, I started taking a basic karate class, and a beginning bodybuilding class. The activities were neither structured nor informative. The only constant was the length of time I had to spend in the assigned activity room. I knew that being strong and skilled at fighting would enable me to protect myself physically. I learned later in life how to protect myself mentally and emotionally.

On our way to the YMCA, he and I would walk past, and sometimes through, a cemetery. I often found myself thinking about mortality, life, and my existence as a person of two separate cultures. I was no longer secure in my identity; I did not fit the expectations of any particular social demographic, nor did I embody their prevailing phenotypes. The abuses my stepbrother was subjecting me to eventually led to forms of sexual abuse. The core of my being was torn. I did not know how to verbalize my feelings of discontent. I often felt alone, and looked for opportunities to be alone. My value as a human being seemed to be dependent upon the virtues of the people who
surrounded me. I searched within myself, looking for the elements that caused others to
disvalue my existence.

The time I spent together with my father meant a lot to me, because I felt
connected to him. He welcomed me into his life and expressed his love for me. I still
remember standing in the kitchen lighting my birthday cake. I let the number nine atop
the cake burn for a while because I did not want the moment to pass.

**Out of the Darkness**

After returning home to my mother, my journey took an unexpected turn. I was at
a babysitter’s house, waiting inside the babysitter’s van while she went inside to retrieve
something. As I waited in the van with her other children, I began playing with the
automatic gearshift. I unexpectedly pulled the lever out of park, which caused the van to
roll backwards down a hill. The van crashed into a small retaining wall; thankfully, no
one was injured.

The event caused my mother to bring me to the local Kaiser hospital. Not fully
aware of the situation, I spent three days in the pediatric ward, eating Jell-O, watching
television, and speaking with a lady about how I was feeling. The nature of these
conversations was similar to the ones I had previously experienced with the child
psychologist. My mother explained to me that I would have to go to a different location
because sick children needed the hospital bed; this made sense to me because I was not
sick, nor had I been I hurt during the accident. My mother told me that I would be going
to a different hospital, which had more room. I got dressed and accompanied my mother
as we drove to this new hospital. I was not concerned about going to a different hospital,
because I knew how they worked and welcomed the adventure. Had I understood that
my mother was taking me to McCauley Behavioral Health Services located at San Francisco’s St. Mary’s Hospital and Medical Center, I probably would not have gone so eagerly. McCauley’s is a comprehensive mental health treatment facility that provides inpatient care for children and their families. McCauley’s specializes in individual therapy, family therapy, milieu therapy, psychological testing, medication evaluation, and psycho-education.

When we arrived at the hospital, a gentleman who escorted us inside the building met my mother and me at the main entrance. Once we were inside the elevator, he put a key into the service box, turned it, and pressed a button. When the doors opened, I was surprised to see kids running around, riding tricycles, and playing ping-pong. This did not look like any hospital ward I had seen before. After stepping off of the elevator, my mother went to a meeting and I waited with the other children. I felt uneasy about adult conversations that I was not a part of, because I never knew how their decisions were going to affect me. I passed the time patiently waiting to play a game of ping-pong. I was in the middle of my second game when my mother returned from her meeting. She was crying, and by the expression on her face, I knew it was time to go. She told me to give her a hug and squeezed me tightly, and then she walked onto the elevator. I followed behind her, but several staff members took hold of me. I immediately attempted to break free while calling for my mother. The door of the elevator closed and my mother was gone.

I cried for hours. I withdrew as far within myself as I could. I did not want to ever let other people know what I was actually thinking or what I was honestly feeling, because sharing those manifestations had obviously resulted in my current situation.
My hurt fueled anger, and my anger eventually turned into overwhelming sadness. I purposely would not allow others to become emotionally close to me. My experiences had taught me that people would leave me when I needed them the most. The emotions welling up inside me were inordinate. I began looking for reasons to lash out against the unfairness of my present condition. In time, I learned to repress my resentment by separating my thoughts from my emotions and I assimilated into my new surroundings.

I often wondered why this place would not allow me to be free. For all intents and purposes, I experienced incarceration. I had not hurt anyone, but I found myself subjected to forms of confinement suitable for criminals. I thought about every negative interaction I had ever experienced. I searched the depths of my soul for who I was. I sought the answer to the question: “Am I an evil person?” I concluded that I was not inherently evil, but I was capable of unthinkable acts of viciousness. The only bearing on life I had was the nature of my spirit’s connection to the loving presence of God. In time, I learned to use the voice within my heart to guide my journey.

I had to attend school on the ward, because we never went outside, so being in a regular school was not feasible. The classroom was small and the desks were crowded close together. The handouts were not interesting or mentally stimulating. The teacher had no enthusiasm, and it seemed as though we only went to class because it was a requirement. I did not care to be there and quickly took to finishing my tasks so I would not have to be bothered. I recall thinking that this was truly where the most dysfunctional children had come, and I was one of them. I knew, in my heart, I did not belong in this classroom.
I began looking for ways to separate myself from the dismay of this environment. The other patients were not interested in learning and spent most of the class time fighting with each other or arguing with the teacher. The arguments with the teacher had little to do with education and dealt primarily with issues concerning positions of authority. I soon realized there was an existing structure of power that governed everyone’s behavior on the ward, including that of the staff. Patients who felt mistreated, or wronged in some fashion, would throw temper tantrums. Regardless of their personal justification or reasons for acting out, patients who did not manage their behavior appropriately were “matted.”

Most times, when children “blew-up,” they would be pinned to the floor by three or four staff members. Their arms and legs would be held against their bodies while a folding mat, typically used for gymnastics, was wedged beneath them. The team rolled the mat tightly around the person, and to keep him or her from wiggling free, a staff member or two would sit atop of the mat. If the person continued to resist, then he or she was forced to take medications. Sometimes the patient would elect to drink the medicine, but most of the time, he or she simply received a shot. Once the medicine took effect, staff members dragged the person to his or her room and dead bolted the door from the outside. Children on the ward often talked openly about the experience as though it were a badge of honor. It all depended on how long they fought, or how many staff members it took to control them.

It became clear to me that the people housed on the ward had severe emotional and psychological issues. Their behavior did not make sense to me. I often contemplated what my issues were. I remember thinking, if I had only been a good boy
or done better in school, then I would not have to be in this place. As time moved along, I settled into the routine of the ward. I knew when it was time to take a shower, eat, go to bed, play, or rest. As I began to interact with other children on the ward, I became aware that I did not have the same background or personal issues. I did not have mental deficits, nor did I have sociopathic tendencies. The concerns expressed regarding my status as a patient focused on my self-destructive behavior. I often internalized my aggressions; my anger only outwardly manifested itself during times when I was physically threatened or voicing my opposition to wrongdoings. When I choose to manifest my anger physically, the level of rage I exhibited was concerning because I fought with every ounce of my being. As long as no one bothered me, I was okay. I remember feeling normal, most of the time, but the security screen covering the window reminded me that I was not.

After a month on the ward, I never had to be matted. I believed this had effectively demonstrated my normality to staff. I told a staff member that as long as I continued to behave according to the rules of the ward, then I would be able to go home. They said to me that if I did not let the doctors see what was wrong with me, then I would not get the help I needed. This meant to me that I would not be able to leave the hospital.

I was confused, because all I had ever seen on the ward were behavioral problems. I thought there must be something else I needed to demonstrate to the staff before I would be able to leave the ward. Since I knew there was an existing power structure that governed decisions, I needed to learn how to maneuver within it. I began to study the way staff talked to children, and the way they communicated among
themselves. I listened to the words they were using and watched their accompanying behavior. I observed that, depending upon the situation, there were different meanings for words and behaviors. I listened carefully to my doctors and therapists during counseling sessions and began to mimic their behaviors and expressions. It was during one of these counseling sessions when the therapist was speaking to me about my aversion to my mother’s roommate that I explained to him that the roommate had taken my mother’s attention away from me, and that I did not want her to live with us anymore. The therapist told me that my mother was a lesbian, and that the roommate would not be leaving the home. I did not know what the word meant, but based on the manner in which he used the term, anger welled inside me. I walked out of the counseling session, and waited for the staff to come drag me back to his office. They never came for me. I learned in that moment that I was able to disagree without immediate consequence. I struggled to find a context for understanding who or what a lesbian was. The word gained meaning for me during subsequent counseling sessions. Several years later, I would learn what the social implications of a homosexual relationship were.

As I continued to learn how to speak and interact among the various groups on the ward, I became aligned with Howard Giles’s concept of communication accommodation theory. I began to use their “language” to manipulate their responses towards me. Within months, I had developed an awareness of who I was becoming and what staff believed my issues to be. I effectively influenced the structure of power and was recommend for an alternative placement. I was now eligible for movement into a residential treatment home. From my point of view, this transition occurred because I
had altered people’s perceptions and gained proponents within the power structure. I had effectively shown them what they wanted to see, without changing the way I felt. I masked my feelings by demonstrating acceptable behavior.

The first trip outside the walls of the hospital was to Edgewood Children’s Center located in the Sunset District of San Francisco. Edgewood Children’s Center helps children and families in crisis move towards a positive future through a variety of programs designed to manage atrocities like abuse and neglect, and mental illness.

The oldest children’s charity in the western U.S., Edgewood has evolved to meet the community’s changing needs. What began as a refuge for Gold Rush orphans more than 150 years ago is now a nationally recognized, multifaceted agency. Edgewood serves more than 5,000 children and families in the Bay Area each year through community and residential programs. (Edgewood Center for Children and Families, 2010)

My first recollection of the facility was seeing the playground I had visited during my mother’s softball games at Park Side Square. The grounds of the facility had several cottages; my new home was Stowe cottage. When I walked into my room, there was a greeting card and a stuffed animal welcoming me to Edgewood. This was a vast change from the cold walls of the hospital ward. There were a few of my friends from McCauley’s who were at Edgewood before my arrival. They helped me adjust to this new environment. They explained the cottage rules and showed me how to earn participation stars for doing cottage chores. The more stars I earned, the more freedoms I received. I remember the excitement of being able to move about the cottage and to walk throughout the grounds without supervision. I quickly settled into daily life at the center.
In time, I became aware that all of the residents were there for various psycho-emotional reasons. Behavioral outbursts were less frequent than at McCauley’s, but they still occurred. When residents needed to be contained, we found ourselves forcefully placed in the “quiet room.” The quiet room was the size of a small bedroom. The covering on the floor was linoleum, and a barrier of plexiglass lined the walls. An especially thick layer of plexiglass covered the large window. The solid metal door had a rectangular view port with a large handle on the outside, which staff would hold closed until we calmed down.

When we were not causing trouble around the cottages, counselors would take us on outings to various locations throughout San Francisco. We would often go to Stern Grove, Sava Pool, or Ocean Beach. Sometimes our outings would include trips to the Palace of Fine Arts, Fisherman’s Warf, Park Presidio, or the San Francisco Zoo. Life at Edgewood moved along as normally as could be expected. My mother would come for visits and we would take short outings around the center. I was happy to spend time with my mother, and it was difficult to see her leave. The reality of being at Edgewood meant I was unable to exist in society as a normal child. At night, I would often wonder how I would ever be able to leave. The structure of this environment was different from the hospital ward, and I struggled to learn how to manipulate the power structure for my own benefit. It was as though time had slowed down. Some of the residents had been living at Edgewood for many years; to my knowledge, there were no specific rules for discharging children from the center. I knew there was a life outside Edgewood, but I did not know how to reach it.
There was a small schoolhouse on the facility that served the residents. When school began, we filtered into classrooms according to our age and cottage assignment. Staff members were always present as the teacher worked with us on our various assignments. There was even a quiet room located in the schoolhouse for the occasional disruptive outburst. Before long, I began counseling sessions with the resident psychologist. This is where things would take a turn for the worse. She was a deceptive person, and I recognized her negative traits to be similar to those of others who had caused me harm. The dialogue of our communication focused on my behavior and interpersonal relationships. She would routinely ask me questions regarding my feelings and my thoughts. She often disregarded my responses to her questions, and my explanations for my reactions to occurrences of resident life were frequently misconstrued.

Based on these interactions, I came to believe she was manipulative, opinionated, and generally untrustworthy. I observed her intentionally misrepresent discussions we had in her office to other members of the staff. She extrapolated her own conclusions regarding my behavior based on her personal interpretations of my feelings. During counseling sessions, when I raised my objections to her unfair treatment, she would refer to having me placed back into McCauley’s as a punishment. This frustrated me to the point of tears; I did not know what to do. If I acted out as I had done in the past, then I risked losing my freedoms. Her position of authority gave her the ability to determine my future.

I came to recognize that my limited freedoms were conditional, and returning to McCauley’s at a moment’s notice was a reality. I did not know where to turn for help.
Counselors in my cottage, who cared for me on a more personal level, had moved on to new professions and no longer worked at Edgewood. The new group of counselors who had been hired to take their place had not earned my trust. I again felt isolated and scared. I began searching for an advocate among the cottage staff, but I was unable to find anyone who I could rely upon to support me. To make matters worse, my relationship with my mother was deteriorating, based on the messages conveyed to her by the psychologist. I wanted desperately to release the animosity building up inside me. I found myself in a downward spiral. I became an emotional time bomb.

It was during the evening shift that the moment eventually came. A newer staff member who used cruelty and meanness to exercise social control over residents presented me with an opportunity to vent. I baited him into a situation where he chose to restrain me physically. The fight was on. Thirty minutes and seven staff members later, I had finally calmed down. That event was the first in a series of outbursts that stimulated conversations among staff regarding my placement. After one of my blow-ups, I was walking on the grounds outside the cottages. It was just before dusk. I remember looking at the sunset across the horizon of the ocean. I was in emotional crisis. It was in that moment that a voice from deep within my soul spoke to me. “Dam, you can control yourself, or they will control you for the rest of your life.” From that moment on, I assumed power over my actions and my emotions, and made the determination to take personal responsibility for my life.

It was in the classroom where a teacher saw something special within me and recommended that I attend a public school. This was a unique circumstance and I was the only resident at the time who had the opportunity to do so. After meeting with the
director of Edgewood, I reentered the public school system towards the end of fifth grade. My classmates at Commodore Sloat Elementary School did not know my journey to their classroom, and I was not prepared to share my story with them. As I entered the classroom, I remember overhearing the principal advise my teacher, “This is the one.” My teacher was a strong willed African-American woman; I respected her because she respected me. I wanted to succeed because she saw my potential and held me to a higher expectation. She did not accept any excuses from me, and demanded my academic best. I completed the remainder of that school year with a level of normalcy and a sense of value.

The summer months brought new changes to my routine at Edgewood. I earned the freedom to begin participating in activities outside the confines of the center. I started spending the weekends at home with my mother. My Big Brother, from the well-known youth organization, came to take me on special outings. A staff member, who had received a promotion to the resident director of my cottage, asked me if I would be interested in playing football. I told him several times that I was not interested. He was persistent in his efforts and convinced me that playing youth sports would demonstrate my readiness to leave Edgewood. I was surprised when he brought me to the first day of practice; I saw the softball fields of Kimbell Park where I had accompanied my mother many years earlier.

Our team was the San Francisco Seahawks. My coaches were tough and rugged individuals who saved a special allotment of physical conditioning just for me. I remember being so tired after my first day of practice that I fell asleep on the car ride back to Edgewood. As the season progressed, it became apparent that playing football
was a natural fit. I could do things on a football field that would land me in a heap of trouble anywhere else. I found appeasement for the fire that burned in my soul. I found peace in the chaos of battling on the gridiron. The more opponents tried to stop me, the harder I would fight against their efforts. I developed a sense of self-worth and self-respect; I had value and became aware of the potential of possibility.

I Am More Than Who You Say I Am

A few weeks into the season, I began the sixth grade at A.P. Giannini Middle School. My classroom was crowded with students, all of whom were trying to make sense of this new environment. As sixth graders, we spent only part of our day in transition. The seventh and eighth graders had a full rotating schedule. I had some difficulty fitting into the regimen of school, but the promise of football practice at the end of the day gave me motivation to succeed. I remember carrying my equipment to school with dignity. As my ability on the football field increased, so did the respect I received from my peers. They expressed tolerance towards my quiet demeanor, and defended me from the antagonistic behavior of upper-classmen. My teacher was stern, but fair. She took an understanding approach to my situation and realized the seriousness of my circumstances. She knew when I needed space, when I need encouragement, and if I stepped out of line, she would hold me accountable for my actions.

After practice, I would return to the cottage and begin studying my homework. It was often difficult to separate myself from the social context of my living environment, but I knew the consequences of reverting into a destructive behavior pattern. The season eventually ended, and I received an award for the Most Improved
Player. That recognition meant more to me than my growth as a player; it was representative of my growth as a person.

I was at the crossroads between two worlds. By day, I was an average kid learning to navigate through the world, and by night, I was another dysfunctional child in a residential treatment facility. I made friends outside of Edgewood, but we did not have play-dates or sleepovers. In January of 1986, I had demonstrated the ability to exist beyond the confines of the center and left the center. I transitioned back into my mother’s house in San Rafael, California. I commuted with her into San Francisco and used the Golden Gate Transit to get to school. The stability of my home environment provided me with enough security to begin achieving higher levels of academic success. I would soon find myself on the A.P. Giannini Honor Roll. When the school year ended, I said my goodbyes to my friends and my teacher because I would not be returning to school in the fall. My mother and her domestic partner had decided to buy a house in Petaluma, California.

The move signified a new beginning. I was in a new town and a new environment where nobody knew who I was or where I had come from. That summer, I helped my mother move into the new house, and anxiously counted down the days to the beginning of the Pop Warner football season. I needed to reconnect with the game that had given me so much. A couple of weeks before the school year started I was back on the gridiron. Once again, my ability on the field translated into social acceptance among my peers. These connections transmitted themselves into the first day of school.
Kenilworth Junior High School was composed of seventh and eighth grade, and although the students were new to the junior high environment, they had prior relationships that had carried over from their respective elementary schools. The relationships I had established moved me into the populace of jock. On the surface, this social group appeared to provide the predominant platform for collective acceptance among students. Even though the school was primarily composed of Caucasian students, my social group had the broadest range of cultural diversity.

As I began to navigate the hallways of the school, I found myself struggling to cope with the teachers’ expectations. The level of work I was accustomed to producing did not meet their standards. I soon realized that the merits of my work were dependent on the social perceptions of the teacher. I went from the honor roll to barely maintaining a ‘C’ average. I had difficulty communicating with my teachers. I observed through the nature of my interactions with them that their preconceptions of me offset my words. My ability to code-switch was ineffective, and I was unable to find a point of relation to their position. This inability to access the dominant power structure caused me to become frustrated. My midwestern drawl was gone and now street slang and an eclectic range of colorful superlatives characterized my words. I reverted to the level of expectations the teachers believed I was capable of achieving.

I began to act out my frustrations in the classroom, mainly through disobedience. Because of my previous social placements, I had a strong sense of self and knew that relinquishing my identity to appease others was a sign of weakness that would lead to being preyed upon. To this point in my life, my social conditioning, taught me to protect myself from authoritative abuses. I often found myself having to
serve detention for various reasons. I was not accustomed to this new form of punishment that carried a negative social connotation. I was astute enough to realize that any outward displays of anger would cause me to suffer placement in another treatment facility. My resolution was to refuse detention, especially if I felt the basis of the detention was due to a manifestation of the teacher’s opinion and not a result of my actions. This solution quickly led to suspensions and conferences with the assistant principal in charge of discipline. During these meetings, it became apparent that there was a level of institutionalized racism. I had experienced these behaviors before, and I knew what they meant. I remember asking my mother why this was happening, to which she replied, “There are people in this world who act out of ignorance.” In time, as a matter of self-preservation, I would learn to model my behavior and assimilate according to the imposition of that ignorance.

Kenilworth operated on a rotating schedule, which allowed us to move between different classrooms. In the classrooms where I was not free from prejudices, I withdrew from the learning process. Those classrooms that were tolerant of the minority perspective allowed me to be myself and encouraged me to participate in open forms of social interaction. My participation in athletics constituted my public identity. The balancing of these cultural experiences was difficult. It created a division between my public and private self. The reinforcement of my private identity came during visits to see my friends in San Rafael, and trips back to see my family in Kansas.

Entering high school at Casa Grande was a welcomed change. More students, more teachers, and a larger environment meant a greater ability to distance myself from people whose intentions were less than admirable. The nature of social acceptance
among students, and as an extension among the faculty, depended on the cliques to which people belonged. As an athlete, I received preferential treatment from some and condemnation from others. At various points along the way, I would find myself struggling with the demons of my past. There were occasional conflicts at home and patterns of behavior that plagued my ability to excel academically. I had no true sense of direction for my life.

As my ability on the football field grew stronger, so did my sense of belonging. I realized that playing football would present me with opportunities that I had never thought were possible. I had never valued my education beyond maintaining my academic eligibility to play sports. In order for me to attend college, I learned in the office of my guidance counselor, it was important to take the appropriate set of courses. My counselor took the time to explain what colleges looked for on my transcripts, and that I needed certain types of preparatory coursework. I realized it was equally important to become a student. From those discussions, and with his encouragement, I sought to achieve academically. I now had a direction for my life. Where I had once played sports as an emotional outlet, I now played for the purposes of going to college.

As time progressed, I would eventually learn to use my social status to become active in school affairs. I learned to use my social influence among my peers to create a positive culture on campus. I participated in various clubs and activities. I volunteered in community projects and became active in student government. One of the proudest moments came when I was a sixth-grade camp counselor for Cherry Valley Elementary School. I accompanied these young children on a weeklong excursion into the wilderness. I was able to participate in their academic activities and help them to
discover the world in which they lived. These children aided in helping me to realize
the positive impact I could have in the lives of others. They empowered me to
maximize my potential as an example for them to follow. I spent a considerable
amount of time reflecting on my life and the journey that I had undergone to arrive at
this position. I sought to achieve even greater levels of success, because of an
overwhelming sense of accomplishment. I looked forward to entering college and
welcomed the challenges that awaited me. Although I was not at the top of my class
academically, I graduated, and earned an athletic scholarship.

I Have Many Rivers to Cross

In the fall of 1992, I entered California State University, Sacramento (CSUS) to
begin my college career. My initial intention was to study coursework in preparation
for becoming an orthopedic surgeon. After spending several semesters in pursuit of this
goal, I realized I was not prepared to make the full academic commitment required to
fulfill this objective. I had become preoccupied with the allure of being a professional
athlete. I began looking for another academic course to follow. I remember thinking to
myself, since CSUS ranked among the top schools in the nation for criminal justice, I
might as well switch my major to suit. I justified this decision by figuring that we are
all part of the criminal justice system, in one form or another, and I might as well
learned how it worked.

My first class, “Introduction to Criminal Justice and Society,” set the tone for
my multidisciplinary journey into the American justice system. I remember hearing the
terms “Mala in se” (evil in itself), “Mala prohibita” (evil by virtue of statute), and the
code of Hammurabi (an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth). I soon realized that
studying criminal justice was about more than criminal behavior, and dealt with larger 
social constructs of perspective and class structure. As I studied the social aspects of 
deviant behavior, I soon found many comparisons to my own life experiences.

As a member of the Sac State athletic delegation, I would often become 
involved in various outreach programs in the community. We visited and spent time 
with people who were in need of positive interaction, due to the blight of their current 
situations. One of the more sobering experiences occurred during a mentoring trip to 
the Sacramento Children’s Home. We were in the gymnasium playing with the 
children. One of the counselors was trying to control behavior by bullying, threatening, 
and intimidation. It appeared as though he were trying to present a false image to our 
delegation, as though he needed to show us the value of his occupation. I recall 
watching the reaction of the children, and could feel their resentment permeate the 
room. One resident, who was probably ten or eleven years of age, began acting out his 
frustrations behaviorally. The staff took him away to suffer the consequences of his 
actions. I was saddened to witness his loss of self-control, which led to a loss of his 
social empowerment. Although many years had passed since my institutionalization, 
the behavioral and emotional remnants remained an accessible part of my functional 
knowledge. I wanted to defend the child, but I was afraid to suffer any consequences. 
Instead, I chose in that moment to refrain from using my position to repress other 
people. As we walked through the halls of that establishment, on our way home, I felt 
the pain of the residents’ current situation and empathized with their sense of 
abandonment. I realized I had opportunities to succeed that some of these children were 
unable to attain.
The campus of the university was alive with diversity. There were students from all walks of life represented in the daily mixture of activity. I distinctly remember walking through campus on my way to practice and seeing the many groups separated into different alcoves of the university. I thought college was a place where students were open to difference and celebrated the opportunity to share perspectives with each other. I was disappointed to discover that the groups I saw on campus mimicked the adult world I had seen as a child. In the same instance, I felt a fear of never locating my place within these varied groupings. I found myself asking questions of who I was: Where do I belong? Was I white? Was I black? Was I rich? Was I poor? Who was I? Who was I becoming? The reality of seemingly impenetrable racial boundaries confronted me, and I searched vehemently for my own identity in that complex system of multiculturalism. There were groups that I could not enter, because I did not possess the appropriate form of social capital. More often than not, I was an outsider and often felt diminished as a person.

In the search for truth, I sought the principles of manhood, scholarship, perseverance, and uplift. My only constant was the associations I had made through intercollegiate athletics. I ultimately traveled to CSUS because I believed in the men who represented those ideals I thought were of most value. As time changed the circumstances of my life, the loss of coaches whom I respected and looked to for guidance tormented me. New coaches came into the program, and discarded me as a remnant of a former system. Wandering, I was lost. I was in pain. I had no social frame of reference from which to anchor myself. The negative aspects of my personality began to overwhelm my interactions with others; I began to believe that I
did not possess the attributes to exist in the environment. Consumed by the emotional demons of my past, I reverted to old habits of self-destructive behavior. Instead of feeling the pain of rejection, I pushed people away by acting out of control. I engaged in all forms of deviant behavior. I experimented with drugs and alcohol to numb the torment. I routinely displayed anti-social behavior as a means to separate myself from the general lack of camaraderie. I was truly heading down a path towards ultimate self-destruction. By the grace of God, as an intercollegiate athlete, I had to pass my classes to maintain my eligibility. As long as I played football, my scholarship was secure. I refused to let them take it away from me.

The school recruited thirty football players as part of my freshman class. Five years later, there were only five of us still actively playing, and I was one of only three players that graduated on time from the program. After earning my baccalaureate degree in criminal justice with an emphasis in law enforcement from the School of Health and Human Services, I began looking for various employment opportunities. My first official job was serving as a classroom counselor during the summer school activities for South Pointe Academy in Sacramento. Most of these students ranged in ages from elementary school through junior high school. They all had suffered some level of atrocity in their lives. Drug addiction from birth, sexual molestation, poverty, and multiple forms of psychological and physical abuse were common among the students. This small school helped these students find empowerment despite their social conditioning. I spent a few months interacting with the children. I picked them up for school, monitored their outbursts during classroom activities, and chaperoned an occasional outing. I identified with these students; I knew the narrative of their stories
in relation to my own journey. Where other staff members were able to interact with them professionally, I was able to connect with them on a meaningful and personal level. The forming of relationships with the students was a natural evolution for me. I decided early in my time at the school to acknowledge them, respect them, and allow them to be who they were. I did not pass judgment, nor transpose my preconceptions on them. We mutually developed our social relation to each other. I can clearly remember one of the teachers encouraging me to consider a career path in education, but it was not my ambition, nor was it my time. I knew in my heart that if I did not leave the Sacramento area, I would succumb to the negative influences that were mounting in my life.

I returned home to Petaluma, California, and began coaching athletics at my former high school, while perusing a professional athletic career. I enjoyed coaching; it was a natural progression for me. The interactions with students helped me to regain a sense of myself. I was able to impart my knowledge and perspective to them and to utilize my experiences to enhance their development. I secretly hoped to give them an opportunity to succeed where I believed I had failed. In time, I realized that coaching gave me a platform from which to speak into the lives of children on a deeper interpersonal level. I never intended to mentor or direct them in their journeys; it was a byproduct of simply caring for their wellbeing. I felt drawn towards using my understanding of life to help them accomplish their goals. My superficial conversations with the student athletes concerned athletic achievement, but they were deeply rooted in developing their mental prowess, emotional health, and social perspective. I felt that by developing their ability to reflect on the processes of their athleticism in relation to the
many challenges they would face in life, they would create their own insightful connections to alternative forms of knowledge. For me, because they isolate those processes that mimic the situations we face in life, athletics are a mechanism for discovering the innate power contained within each and every individual who chooses to participate.

I continued coaching and training, because it was all I felt I knew how to do. Within months of being graduated from college and returning home, my life changed in a manner I never thought possible. I found myself blessed with the responsibility of becoming a father. I slowly turned away from my own preoccupations and began to focus on becoming a protector and provider of a new life. I took whatever jobs I could find. I remember working at a local grocery store stocking the freezer from four o’clock in the morning to two o’clock in the afternoon. This gave me the opportunity to continue training and coaching while fulfilling my obligations to my soon-to-be wife and child. Even though I was a college graduate, I was earning only six dollars an hour. I had no idea how to be a father, or a husband, but I knew it would require more effort than I had ever given to anyone or anything.

By the grace of God, I began working at the high school as a campus supervisor. The relationships I had previously fostered with the students and faculty while coaching had now developed into a more stable form of employment. My duties included simple tasks like collecting attendance and monitoring schoolyard behavior. For the first time, I entered into a position of responsibility where I had access to persons in positions of power within the learning environment and began to establish strong professional relationships. In time, an assistant principal approached me with the intention of
creating an in-house suspension hall. The goal of this study hall was to house the behavioral problems from throughout the school in a central location, where they could still receive educational instruction, without disturbing the learning opportunities of other students. He felt that my ability to relate to the students and maintain classroom order made me a logical choice for the position. In order to comply with regulations, the school administrator in charge of discipline encouraged me to seek a California Substitute Credential. With hesitancy, I took and passed the CBEST examination. Even though I had never intended to be a teacher, my desire to be able to provide for my budding family gave me the will to succeed.

Before the study hall officially began to function, I received a telephone call from a professional football team in Germany. They had come across some of my collegiate game film and wanted to contract my services to help their organization. After a great deal of contemplation, I chose to leave my wife and three-month-old daughter in pursuit of a professional athletic career. The experience greatly developed my sense of culture. I had only known what it was to be an American, and my false conception of Germans was a product of my history lessons. I had become the foreigner, and struggled to quickly learn how to exist according to German social constructs. I depended greatly on the hospitality and kindness of my hosts to survive. Simple tasks like going to the grocery store, eating in restaurants, and finding my way around the city of Bremen gave me a new perspective. For the first time, I gained an appreciation of what it is like not to know the language or be able to read. I even experienced new forms of discrimination. Although I was black, I was not African and the African nationals I came across looked down upon me. Because of my phenotype,
some of the German people thought I was a Turkish immigrant, and treated me according to those forms of social status and denigration reserved for members of that populace. I value those experiences because they allowed me to see the commonalities with life in America in a new light. I am grateful for the opportunity I had to interact with members of my team and their families and genuinely appreciate their generosity. The six months I spent away from my family taught me to humble myself and give thanks for the blessings in my life. In that time, I learned there was nothing more important to me than being in the presence of my family.

Who Am I to Say Different?

When I returned home to America, I was unsure of what the future held. A friend and classmate from high school had earned his tenure with the Petaluma City School District and was teaching at San Antonio High School. San Antonio is a continuation high school that operates under the umbrella of alternative education. Before his explanation, I had never fully understood what this learning environment entailed. He stated that it served students who had difficulty functioning in a comprehensive setting for various reasons mainly due to social, academic, or other learning deficiencies. Most of the students had fallen behind in credits needed for graduation and were placed at San Antonio. He told me the school uses whatever forms of education they can to engage the students in the learning process. Fortunately, they were in need of a classroom teacher, and because I had a college degree and had previously passed the California Basic Educational Skills Test (CBEST), I met the minimum requirements for employment. I told my friend that I didn’t know the first
thing about teaching, to which he replied, “Just be honest, if you don’t know the answer, tell them you’ll look it up.”

I interviewed with the principal, and he hired me the day before the school year officially began. My classroom was in a portable building, because the school was undergoing construction of a new campus. As the principal led me into the portable filled with boxes, I thought it looked more like a storage locker than a classroom. The walls were bare, the desks piled in a corner, and all of the teaching supplies were in their containers. I spent that afternoon and a major part of the night preparing for the arrival of students. I had a mental image of what I though a classroom should look like and proceeded to make it a reality. I finished setting up the classroom with just enough time to go home, take a shower, and return for the start of school.

As students entered into the classroom, they began to launch comments about what they customarily did to substitute teachers. They made sure I understood it was their school, and I was just a visitor. I replied it was a good thing I was their permanent teacher. Once the students were seated, I pulled out the attendance sheet and began to call roll; I made sure to make eye contact with each and every student as I bubbled-in the Scantron. I was making it up as I went along, but I had enough street smarts to not show my fear of being ill prepared. It was at this moment that I recognized I had no business teaching this class, because I had no proper training and no idea what I was doing. I reverted to what I knew best; I began coaching. Some of the students recognized me from working at the comprehensive high school campus, so there was a level of familiarity, but the nature of those previous interactions was disciplinary.
I spent much of that first week establishing a social climate that would govern our time together. I limited myself to a single set of objectives. I proceeded to treat them with respect, to talk to them as capable young men and women, and to engage them on a humanistic level. We learned how to trust each other and they felt safe in our classroom. We established a climate conducive to learning, because they knew through my actions that I was there for them and they reciprocated.

Although I taught physical science, American government, and economics, our interactions tended to deal with the students’ preexisting social constructs. I quickly understood their plight, and witnessed their marginalized, categorized, and underestimated status as learners. Their systematic conditioning, through imposed negative forms of thinking, permitted them to accept their position. They were not interested in the possibilities of education; they were preoccupied with the realities of their current circumstances. Other adults in their lives talked down to them and so many other teachers lectured these students that I had no choice but to discover a different way to captivate their attention. I began to engage them in conversations, so they could demonstrate their knowledge about a given subject. I would then ask questions to exposed their thought processes, and present alternative conceptions that required them to seek additional knowledge to defend their intellectual positions. The nature of these interactions challenged all of us to learn. As the school year progressed, they began to learn in ways they had never thought possible. Even the students who were not excelling academically were growing socially. The greatest compliment I ever received was when one of the students told me he had decided to name his first-born
child Damien. In that moment, I realized the influence we can have in the lives of others.

Due to the limitations of only possessing a substitute credential, I transferred to another campus for the last trimester of the school year. It was difficult informing my students I would be unable to finish the school year with them, because they had allowed me to become such an integral part of their lives and I felt their success was dependent upon my presence. Personally, I felt as though I had not met my objective. In reality, we had already accomplished more than I had thought possible and their success was a manifestation of who they were individually and collectively, and the environment we created evidenced their learning. On my final day, the students baked me a cake, and threw a party in our classroom. I initially fought back the tears, and then decided that there is nothing wrong with allowing them to see I was human. In such a short time period, we established deep personal connections to one another, and I was amazed.

As I stepped onto the comprehensive campus to finish the school year, I found myself placed into a situation where the teachers who had preceded me had abandoned the students. The students expressed outwardly negative responses to learning the subject matter. The classes had gone through several substitute teachers, and the level of student accountability for their own learning was nonexistent. Teachers in the science department were very supportive, offering ideas and suggestions on how to manage the classes. They also provided me with versions of lesson plans to help during the facilitation of curriculum. I was grateful to know there was such support, but I knew that these things had not helped the other teachers who had gone before me. I
replicated the processes I had learned in the continuation setting, and within a short
time, learning began to occur. By the end of the school year, several parents conveyed
their appreciation for helping their children to learn, but the gratitude expressed by the
students meant more to me. Before graduation, I went to the main office to meet with
the principal of the high school and the assistant superintendent of the school district. I
entered the office and no sooner had I taken a seat than I received my discharge papers.
They thanked me for my service and I returned to the classroom.

My first year of teaching gave way to the advent of No Child Left Behind. In
order to continue teaching I would have to acquire proper credentialing, so I began
looking at the requisites of various credential programs. After reviewing my transcripts
and speaking with advisors, it was determined that I did not have enough undergraduate
courses in any specific content area to enter a credential program. From my
perspective, I had wandered into teaching and had no other choice than to go back to
college to strengthen my content knowledge. I also had a responsibility to my students
to ask of myself what I had asked of them. As part of the certification process, I had to
undergo praxis examinations to demonstrate my subject matter proficiency; I eventually
passed the California Subject Examinations for Teachers (CSET) series, which provided
me the opportunity to apply for the teaching position at San Antonio High School that I
had previously vacated. With the birth of my second child, I desperately needed to find
secure employment. By the grace of God, the school district re-hired me and I began
teaching once again, as a participant in the Sonoma County Intern Program. This
program provided an exception to the teaching regulations, so I could teach while
working towards my official teaching certification.
Teaching during the day and attending college at night, I completed all of the pre-requisites and eventually gained acceptance into the Single Subject Credential program at Sonoma State University in Rohnert Park, California. According to their website, the Sonoma State Department of Curriculum Studies and Secondary Education (CSSE) “is dedicated to the advancement of excellence in education. CSSE offers an exemplary Single Subject teacher education preparation program based on sound educational practice, extensive research knowledge, and sensitivity to the needs of diverse populations” (Sonoma State University Department of Curriculum Studies and Secondary Education, 2010). The credential program provided an outstanding experience. I had never considered myself a good student, but I figured that through hard work and determination, I could become a successful student. I began to study practical and theoretical conceptions of educational processes. The resulting foundational knowledge allowed me to understand those things I was experiencing while teaching, and provided a framework from which to reflect on my personal experiences and teaching practices. The graduate courses of instruction built upon the conceptual framework, which sought to combine theory, research, and practice. The goals of the School of Education are to produce educators who, among other things, value social and emotional growth, believe that knowledge and learning are based on critical thinking, and believe that social justice and civic engagement are essential components of a democratic education (Sonoma State University Department of Curriculum Studies and Secondary Education, n.d.).

After completing my courses of study, I earned a single-subject California preliminary teaching credential in social studies. During the process of attaining this
distinction, my career path had taken a new direction, even though teaching felt natural and I enjoyed speaking into the lives of adolescents who needed to know they are valued. Unfortunately, due to California budget constraints, which adversely affected many public school employment opportunities, I grew tired of being “pink-slipped” at the end of every school year. I needed to find some level of financial security for my family. Many of my colleagues in the teaching profession told me I had the attributes of a police officer. They assured me that my physical presence and genuine concern for others, in their estimation, would make me a good cop. I began applying for entry-level positions with various police agencies. With the support of friends who were already in the profession, the City of Petaluma hired me as an entry-level police officer during my last year of teaching, and I entered a basic police academy in the summer of 2004.

**In the Face of Danger, Scorn, or Ridicule**

The decision to become a police officer was difficult. I had to face my own fears, and come to terms with who I was as a person. Was I good enough? Did I fit the mold? How would people see me? Would the self-destructive demons of my past surface? There existed in me a need to prove to myself, to confront the insecurities I had regarding my value as person, to know I was normal. Personally, I always seemed to exist on the fringes of acceptability. To become a police officer would in some way give me the internal peace I desired. I focused on the opportunity to face the social injustices I spent most of my life fighting; I thought in some small way, as a police officer, I could fight for those who were unable to protect themselves.

I once again said goodbye to my students and my colleagues, and left the classroom to begin a new profession as a police officer. As a condition of my
employment, I had to complete a Police Officer Standards in Training (POST) certified academy. Because of my employment with an agency at the beginning of the basic training, as opposed to many cadets who were paying their own way through the academy, the terms of my employment were dependent upon my successful completion of the academy. Being a sponsored recruit carried the privilege of employment, but maintained the expectation of properly representing my department. I attended the Santa Rosa Junior College’s Public Safety Training Center located in Windsor, California. The intensive program consisted of approximately 788 hours of instruction spanning twenty weeks. The curriculum was separated into forty-three learning domains ranging from leadership, professionalism, and ethics to unusual occurrences. The birth of my third child during my academy training added to the burden of accountability, and provided additional motivation to persevere. Through the love and support of many, I was able to fulfill the POST requirements and graduated as one of the top three in my academy class.

Because of my employment in the field of education before entering law enforcement, I often found myself evaluating pedagogical practices of the various instructors, trying to determine what constituted a good model of instruction. Most lessons facilitated POST standard curriculum with lecture-based formats that utilized some form of technological integration. Examinations consisted of multiple choice testing formats, or practical evaluations, which POST administered. If a cadet failed to meet the minimum standards for any given learning domain, he or she only had one opportunity to successfully remediate. If the cadet failed again, he or she had to withdraw from the program. Several of my classmates fell victim to this
standardization. Internally, I contemplated whether the student’s failure was a byproduct of the instructional style, the learning environment, or internal dispositions towards learning. Nonetheless, the ultimate determination of success for remaining recruits depended on their ability to assimilate into the paramilitary structure that governed all academic interactions. Insubordination, or the inability to follow the direction of persons in positions of stated authority, would preclude any hopes of obtaining or maintaining employment.

After graduating from the academy, I took my oath as a police officer on December 10, 2004, and entered the Field Training Program. This training program utilized a mentorship process during which Field Training Officers (FTO) selected by the department assumed responsibility for developing my skills as a rookie police officer. My FTO’s were also responsible for determining if I possessed any behavioral traits that might prove to be troublesome. The constant evaluation of my actions was stressful. I had to be mindful of what I said, how I presented myself, and how I interacted with other members in the department. I quickly learned to model my behavior according to the expectations of my FTO’s and ultimately of my department. At this stage in my career, my personal reservations about policing, or thoughts concerning the functions of police within communities, were irrelevant. As time passed, I developed the necessary capabilities and completed training ahead of schedule.

Once training was completed, I had to concern myself with maintaining a good professional image. The eighteen-month probationary period was a constant and ominous fixture in my mind. Without cause, termination from employment could come
at any given moment. I remember speaking with one officer who had had his probation period extended by six months. According to him, there were some initial concerns concerning his productivity, but he felt as though he had remedied them. As we spoke casually, the day before his probationary period was to conclude, he told me that he believed he was going to make it through probation. Unfortunately for his family, his termination occurred the next day. I realized that there were no certainties and it was best to keep focused on maintaining the task set before me.

Being an educator at heart and truly caring about the intellectual, emotional, and social development of others, I began looking for opportunities to contribute to the overall improvement of my department. One such opportunity arose with the opening of a position on the Defensive Tactics Team. Even with limited professional experience, I believed in my abilities to fulfill the requirements of the position. Thankfully, so did others who were in a position to provide input during the selection process. I quickly found myself plunged into the middle of developing a training program in an area that is considered one of the most essential platforms concerning the profession. At the onset of becoming a police officer, I had set two professional goals for myself. The first was to be a Defensive Tactics Instructor, and the second was to become a SWAT operator. Within months of accomplishing the first goal, I was able to test for the SWAT team. I had sustained a training injury that required the reconstruction of my anterior cruciate ligament and a partial removal of my lateral meniscus. Four months after undergoing the surgery, I was able to rehabilitate my knee and underwent the SWAT physical, shooting, and oral examinations. My appointment to the SWAT team was one of the most rewarding moments of my young career.
The conclusion of my probationary period marked the beginning of my personal struggle to fulfill the social expectations of some within my department. In part, due to my lateral assignments, superiors expected me to perform as a seasoned officer. Even though I received training and encouragement to face adversity on a regular basis, they expected me to make decisions according to their level of institutionalization that affected the life, liberty, and standard of living for others. People often ask me, “What is the most difficult part of being a police officer?” I have chosen to respond in this manner: The most difficult part of being a police officer is the way it will change who you are as a person. It is different for everyone, but it will change you at some level.

As an officer, there is an intoxication of having a great and powerful ability to direct the social actions of others. The insulation from those outside the profession helps to isolate the individual and often perpetuates a false sense of invincibility. My self-serving ideologies of success consumed me. I was unaware of how those interactions through the course of my employment were affecting me personally. I allowed myself to become overrun by the nature of police work and found myself becoming internally disillusioned. I ultimately lost my bearing.

Before entering law enforcement, I had had an idealistic vision of what I believed constituted a husband, a father, and a man. Through a twisted justification and a warped sense of rationalization, I made the decision to commit offenses against my family and the moral fiber of my being that I never imagined possible. At the time, I was full of over-confidence, Authoritativeness, and self-righteousness, and I suffered spiritually, emotionally, and professionally for those decisions to break the vows of my marriage. Subsequent reflection on myself as a person led me to question the nature of
my decisions, the decisions of others, and the manner through which various decisions occur on a daily basis in policing. I saw that a great many actions by officers were rooted in their social construction of a professional identity and their decisions directly resembled the social expectations of other officers: the ethos of law enforcement.

A reorientation of my personal journey allowed me to embark on a path of self-discovery, which developed an internal desire to return to school. I gathered my transcripts with a few letters of recommendation and once again applied to Sonoma State University. I gained accepted into the master of arts program in the School of Education. I entered the program with an idea to develop a better Defensive Tactics Program, which used computer-based instruction to assist learning. As I endeavored to study and contemplate the practicalities of interactive technologies, I soon found myself examining the underlying educational philosophies of police officer training in Northern California.

**So Long As I Am True in My Head and in My Heart**

This account of my life does not include the culminating point of my existence; it is only a description of where I have been. My experiences have evidenced the tensions between individual endeavors verses conforming to existing social structures, and the internal struggle to situate oneself appropriately. The reflection upon my life experiences, including those in policing, is explicative of my analysis towards developing a socially conscious curriculum aimed at addressing the institutional inequities found in American policing. Before entering law enforcement, it never occurred to me that my actions as an agent of the institution of American policing would cause destruction in the lives of others. I am not suggesting that police officers
refrain from apprehending and confining individuals who hurt others, but I am calling into question the systematic oppression and acts of supremacy exhibited by police officers.

Particularly in law enforcement, the existence of a historically based socio-cultural ethos has a fixed purpose of institutional oppression supported by the activities of police officers. This social reality becomes underscored in the exploration of why police officers will make decisions with limited contemplation regarding the balance between their authoritative actions and the underlying social outcomes of their decisions. This deep-seated reality of policing is a marred perception of discretionary power based on the institutionalized essence of law enforcement instruction. This awareness has led me to ponder the nature of our indoctrination into the profession, our acculturation, our training, and the educational philosophies that perpetuate the systematic abuses of police authority.

In the next chapter of my thesis, I present my textual analysis of institutional influences and police officer discretion through adaptation of instructional practices, curricula, and recognition of learners in the educational process. Through my restructuring of the learning environment, I advocate a flexible pedagogy that encourages and prepares police officers to function in a socially conscious manner. Considering that the long-established functions of American policing is a human construct, we individually and collectively have the responsibility in a postmodern society to adjust the policing apparatus for communal benefit.
Chapter IV

Why Are We Thinking Like Cops?

Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss several educational issues related to law enforcement. Throughout the chapter, I express possibilities as to how the basic instructional processes of police officer training can be adapted to produce postmodern police officers. The issue with law enforcement preparatory practices is their singular approach to learning. In essence, police officers are teaching police officers how to think and act like cops. Most often, the curriculum is fraught with war stories and some misguided experiential anomalies that are outdated. My discussion speaks to the training apparatus for police officers and the thought processes employed when developing conscientious and comprehensive forms of curricula. I briefly expand upon curricular ideologies of computer-assisted instruction (CAI), which may prove to be useful for teaching basic policing processes in the twenty-first century. This chapter concludes with an exploration of socially transformative considerations that question contemporary practices of the policing profession and police officer discretion.

A direct account of the relationship that exists between police officer discretion and the institutional aspects of American policing is necessary. This relationship is part of the individual’s prior knowledge that is essential to his or her decision-making and the basis of his or her discretionary action. In contrast to my personal journey evidenced in the last chapter, are other stories. Some stories are filled with experiences and understanding that are reaffirmed by the historical structure of American policing. Just as
my personal journey is essential to the development of my decision-making, so are the stories of other police officers.

Individual discretion is central to police officers negotiating a balance between performing the institutional function of American policing, as represented by their training, and their induction into the paramilitary mindset. The limitations of individual discretion to change the institution will require further study to determine, because those considerations are bigger than any one individual discretionary act. For the purposes of my current inquiry, teaching police officers critical thought needs to consider and question their prior knowledge in association with exercising their discretionary power for social transformation or for maintaining the institution of American policing.

Fundamentally, I am advocating the acquisition of critical knowledge. For police officers, this is the knowledge necessary to distinguish between superficial and deeper forms of understanding. For example, the language of learning among police officers is training. For the purposes of my inquiry, I separate the language of training from the concept of learning. Training is the superficial acquisition of knowledge, and it includes the limitations of only knowing the process. Learning is the depth and breadth that allows police officers to understand the process of policing and the ensuing social outcomes. The difference is as simple as knowing how something is done versus knowing why we choose to do it. This, in turn, may become an ongoing reflective practice within the individual police officer and affect the institutional inequities of policing. The question becomes how to educationally develop problem-solving police officers who think critically, and who affect both social and cultural shifts in the practices of law enforcement.
The following discussion concentrates on the principal relationships found within the learning environment of American policing, and addresses instructional practices, curricula, and educational philosophies as they relate to learners within the paramilitary structure that governs current law enforcement training. Specifically, I am concerned with examining the educational methodologies and philosophies being used during basic academy and in-service training contexts of American policing. I have chosen to investigate the relationships between these aspects for the purposes of determining functional alternatives to the existing educational perspective and practices supporting contemporary law enforcement training.

By ascertaining those practices through which police officers can amass critical knowledge and social understanding, it is my position that training environments will produce police officers who come to rely upon the critical development of their intellectual prowess and the socio-cultural dynamics historically found in American policing to address the imbalances of sociopolitical power for the purposes of communal benefit. In this vein, creating a change in law enforcement training permits police officers to think differently about their purposes, their practices, and their profession.

The method for investigating current instructional practices compares California Police Officer Standards in Training (POST) pedagogy with more educationally diverse models of curriculum theory. The similarities and differences are described to provide the most meaningful context for evaluating learning opportunities as they relate to the teaching of police officers. It is important to recognize that any restructuring of the paramilitary learning environment has to contend with the cultural reality that learning will either be reinforced or deconstructed by the ethos of American policing. In other
words, police officer discretionary practices will have to account for institutional
influences of American policing.

I suggest that preparing police officers to meet the demands of a postmodern
America will begin with transforming the educational practices and underlying
philosophies historically found in paramilitary police organizations. The bureaucracy of
these agencies is difficult to reduce; the need to encourage a leadership structure that
creates a culture of ethical behavior is paramount and must equally emphasize an ethical
form of education (Reese, 2003). A rebirth of thinking about the function of police
officers in American society and the social costs of American policing practices is needed
to bring forth a cultural evolution and to incite social parity. Police are a critical element
in strengthening those informal mechanisms of social participation weakened by the
decline of community life, and the public’s safety is equally dependent on police to stop
the cycle of social decay, thereby making neighborhoods safer (Lyons, 1999).

The reality of twenty-first century policing in America has to contend with
multiple social, ethical, and historical issues. At the forefront of a police officer’s
communal obligation to protect the Constitutional rights of citizenry, a collaborative
approach that empowers the communities’ police officers serve is also necessary. Lyons
(1999) foresees the advent of these transformative policing relations and concludes:

The conceptual foundations of community policing range from nostalgic
images, to management strategies, to visions of communities strong
enough to police themselves. Prevailing stories construct each of these to
support a state-centered vision of policing: professional beat cops with the
coaching and support of reform-minded police administrators can
effectively partner with communities to combine order maintenance and
law enforcement, leading us all from anomie back to the safety and
prosperity of transitional community life. (p. 40)
Let us visualize for a moment that an officer has been employed with his or her respective department for approximately fifteen years. The officer has attended multiple developmental trainings regarding arrest and control procedures and has received countless hours of legal updates. The officer has initiated numerous suspect contacts and investigated a great number of cases. The officer is scheduled to participate in an upcoming departmental training. How will the police instructor provide this officer with an appropriate and relevant educational experience? How will the officer incorporate newly acquired information into his or her prior knowledge? How will the trainer and the officer meet the newly evolving ideology of law enforcement? Better yet, how will the curriculum practices include and develop the discretionary practices of the academy graduate who is attending his or her first departmental training?

A Discussion of CAI Curriculum

As an educator in the law enforcement paradigm, I believe the ultimate goal for any police officer is to become a lifelong learner. When a police officer has internalized the educational process and can facilitate his or her own manner of truth seeking, actualization of content knowledge is within his or her grasp. Beyond the scope of academic institutions, one’s ability to understand and adapt to the working standards of a chosen profession is paramount. This is especially true within the law enforcement profession where problem solving is a daily occurrence and making an untrained or uneducated decision can have catastrophic consequences.

As policing moves into the twenty-first century, information technology is on the horizon and is due to become an integrated component of the policing environment. The contemporary instructional environment of CAI, designed to educate personnel about any
subject, is largely comprised of self-directed learning (SDL), and through enhanced training activities is being emphasized by professional development (curricula) (Dynan, Cate, & Rhee, 2008).

Because of the financial outlays associated with any type of professional development, departmental training needs must be satisfied in the most effective way possible (Schmeeckle, 2003). The versatility CAI provides as an educational implement offers a wide variety of teaching formats that can be adjusted to accommodate different learning styles, and allows learners access to explore multiple interests and abilities (Ng, 2008). To facilitate police officer learning, adoption of alternative methods of instruction has to be considered as a viable option that perpetuates change within the individual police officer.

In general, CAI utilizes less communication between student and instructor; usually, CAI is an interactive self-study process that educates and trains through automated programs or tutorials (Schmeeckle, 2003). CAI encourages the learner to exhibit self-control over the educational sequence, because individualized pacing is an inherent component of this learning modality. As a leading curriculum writer for the Florence Melton Adult Mini-School Institute (FMAMSI), Schwartz (2006) discusses the work of Slattery (1995) in regard to the value of allowing learners control over their curricular development:

New ideas and models for curriculum writing begin to take shape when we consider a different approach to defining curriculum: *Currere* is derived from the Latin infinitive verb that means “to run the race-course.” Curriculum is a verb, an activity, or an inward journey. The modern curriculum development rationale has truncated the etymological meaning and reduced curriculum to a noun, the racecourse itself. Thus, generations of educators have been schooled to believe that the curriculum is a...
tangible object, the lesson plans we implement, or the course guides we follow, rather than the process of running the racecourse (p. 450).

As we begin to apply curricular theories to law enforcement training, several practical considerations need reviewing. One such consideration, especially in the context of police officer learning, is efficiency. Another consideration, equally important, is effectiveness. Striking a balance between these concepts is fiercely debated in education and law enforcement. When compared to traditional curricular strategies, CAI participants demonstrated almost two-thirds less time devoted towards instruction (Schmeeckle, 2003). This finding might raise some questions as to the instructional quality, but Schmeeckle (2003) indicates, “A study of college students (Skinner, 1990) on the effectiveness of CAI as determined by the students’ achievement level and between two different CAI presentations indicated low achieving students increased learning performance more than the high achieving students” (p. 209). When considering that police officers are functioning in a dynamic problem-oriented environment, their learning process becomes initiated before they participate in any curricular experiences. During in-service and academy training, as is true for all learners, their prior knowledge is all-important for effective problem-based learning (PBL). In recognition of the officer’s necessity for rapid acquisition of functional knowledge, a curriculum designed around PBL concepts should be constructed from an extensive and flexible knowledge base, facilitate effectual relationships, improve problem-solving skills, foster intrinsic motivation to learn, and assist in acquiring SDL skills (Loyens, Magda, & Rikers, 2008).

One approach towards addressing new curricular perspectives is development of a “rehearsal curriculum,” which allows the curriculum designer to engage in a learning process (during curriculum formation) that will resemble the student’s experience
This approach to curriculum design will enable the police educator to develop a deeper understanding of the curriculum’s projected outcomes.

Due to the amount of curricular design required for CAI, a few potential drawbacks exist, for example, updating the program and making sure police officers understand how to use the computer software. However, CAI can be designed so that developmental approaches to primary learning components become prerequisite objectives before introducing increasingly complex tasks (Schmeeckle, 2003). When dealing with an adult learning population, such as police officers, motivation also becomes a central issue. Therefore, the willingness of individuals to learn and their ability to learn can be influenced through an engaging instructional design (Schmeeckle, 2003). Even though curricular design may encounter problems, facilitators who use CAI will have the flexibility to consider multiple approaches when conceptualizing and presenting subject matter (Schwartz, 2006). Although the curriculum may be predisposed by the police educator, it has been argued that, given the theoretical nature of SDL, curricula of this nature expresses existentialist perspectives, which postulate individual freedom, responsibility, and personal viewpoints of the learner as an individual (Loyens et al., 2008). More importantly, police officers that participate in CAI will have been afforded the opportunity to understand their personal relationship with the subject matter.

A curricular approach towards generating transformative outcomes begins with the understanding of where current policing methodologies exist and identifying those areas where learning outcomes can be enhanced. When determining curricular components related to American policing, Reese (2003) acknowledges:
Imperative are considerations and discussions of fairness, of inordinate force, and of the differences (and similarities) between a fast gun and a wise, just, courageous gun. Lectures, readings, writings, stories, testimonies of senior officers, explanations of departmental policies and the reasons for them, discussions of examples from the history of the department, careful criticism by teacher, and conscientious field training are all necessary to enable an officer to grasp the reasons for behaving in particular ways that make the judicious and wise use of force fully second nature—and that enable the officer to behave as quickly as the circumstances require without being precipitous. (p. 94)

On the other hand, when curricular approaches are applied in contrast to philosophies of social empowerment like social theory, critical pedagogy, or critical theory, learning outcomes become negative factors and preclude social transformation. For example, “the Louisiana State Police Department’s training film explicitly exhorts officers to use traffic stops to conduct narcotics searches of ‘males of foreign nationalities, mainly Cubans, Colombians, Puerto Ricans, or other swarthy outlanders’” (Cole, 1999, p. 41).

One manner of a more socialized development through CAI can address the internal reflection required to sustain police officer’s operational effectiveness. As a function of their occupation, police officers need to constantly evaluate their interactional behavior with citizens. McElhinny (1994) expresses the value of examining interactional behavior through Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of “habitus”:

Habitus is ‘a system of lasting transposable dispositions which, interrogating past experiences, functions in every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions.’ It is history turned nature, interactional experiences incorporated into memory, to form the common sense with which people’s expectations about, and reactions to subsequent incidents are shaped. (p. 165)

The overall goal of transformative forms of curricula is to generate lifelong learners for social change; the immediate goals are: 1) participants who will be able to self-direct
their learning, 2) participants who will exhibited patterns of self-regulated learning, 3) participants who will acquire basic content knowledge, and, 4) participants who will discover areas for further inquiry based upon their specific needs. Similarly, institutional expectations would presume a reduction in associated training costs, shortened training sessions, and increased officer proficiency in occupational implementation of acquired knowledge. Through her observations of CAI curriculums, Schmeekle (2003) writes, “The use of online training with law enforcement personnel [indicated] trainees learned as much as they did in the classroom in considerably less time and at a substantial financial savings” (p. 240). The research did not indicate if behavioral changes translated into the field, and additional study of policing practices is warranted in this area. However, the general indications of CAI effectiveness can be expected to materialize even a minimal change in the practice of police officers and their respective agencies. These possibilities of CAI effectiveness are supported by Dynan et al. (2008), who note:

The ability to engage in SDL is a skill that is necessary for lifelong learning. With this skill, on the basis of Bloom’s (1956) taxonomy, we propose that students will be able to do the following: (a) ask appropriate question to guide their inquiry; (b) identify the appropriate resources and tools necessary; (c) use the tools and resources, with appropriate adjustments and modifications based on their specific needs, to satisfactorily answer the initial question; and (d) question the assumptions and ideas that created the question in step (a). (p. 97)

Throughout this assertion, I have expressed various educational implications concerning law enforcement training, and have attempted to explain theoretical concepts of CAI that support the basic acquisition of critical knowledge and the advent of a more enriched learning experience for police officers. Similarly, Loyens et al. (2008) convey that “deep-level processing is aimed at seeking meaning in the subject matter, while in surface learning the reproduction of the content is the first matter of importance” (p. 415).
As we have considered, the mastery of information has little educational value, because police officer learning is the result of an ongoing engagement in the act of reflecting, reconsidering, and revising one’s own understanding (Schwartz, 2006). Through the use of CAI, various curricular approaches can develop police officers who have literacy in the use of technology and who will employ those skills to seek, manage, analyze, evaluate, and integrate information for the purposes of problem solving and synthesizing of new information (Ng, 2008).

The efficiency of CAI will undoubtedly lead it to become a favorite instructional method for most professional institutions because of its effectiveness in increasing and upgrading skills of the workforce (Schmeeckle, 2003). Due to the nature of the police officers’ personal interactions within the curriculum, during CAI learning, they also become one of the most important inputs for future curriculum design. As stated, SDL requires equipping police officers with the skills and competencies to continue their own self-education beyond the end of formalized training environments (Loyens et al., 2008). Regardless of institutional pedagogy, Schmeeckle (2003) reiterates, “The importance of training should not be devalued, especially in law enforcement, where the lack of proper training can be a matter of life or death” (p. 240).

One catalyst for enabling fundamental changes in police officer learning will be implementing a critical pedagogy that adopts adult learning methodologies that are collaborative in nature, and that represent the collective experiences of police officers. This approach requires law enforcement instructors to engage police officers as a principal part of the curriculum, more so than has been true in their traditional role of organizing trainings and developmental programs, or simply facilitating a teaching
process (Yorks, 2005). Police officers that are currently working in the law enforcement profession have a tremendous amount of operational experience. Drawing upon their professional knowledge can enhance the overall learning experience throughout the paradigm. Transformative educational enrichment, combined with the benefit of skill set acquisition, will begin to transmogrify the acculturation process of American policing and enrich the general cultural experience of being a police officer. Therefore, a carefully designed blend of technology-based and traditional teaching methods would be most beneficial (Ng, 2008). Practitioner-based collaborative action requires SDL and SRL concepts to methodically create this kind of generative space, where the present is “bracketed” for the purposes of police officer learning, with the intention of creating actionable knowledge and new meaning (Yorks, 2005).

These concepts, not central to current police officer training, are generally aimed toward increasing learning of content knowledge and development of learning proficiencies that will serve the police officer in all of their endeavors (Dynan et al., 2008). There is a considerable amount of fieldwork, research, and study that must be conducted to bring these changes to fruition, even though there is growing literature that attests to the need for establishing these types of learning structures by which new patterns of interaction can emerge (Yorks, 2005).

Walking the Beat

Without question, the profession of law enforcement is changing because society is changing. Police officers are tasked with maintaining social order on a local level in a democratic society that is rapidly shifting through technology innovation into a global community. The current standardized performance testing for today’s officer is ill suited
for addressing the preparedness of police officers to undergo this change, and more importantly police officers are not, at a fundamental level, being equipped with the necessary schema for developing archetypes of change; the basic curriculum model and pedagogical practices being employed do not encourage socio-cultural developments in the profession. For example, police officers are guided by academy instructors to develop processes for making arrests in conjunction with the letter of the law, but are not necessarily afforded the opportunity to examine the implications of those processes as they relate to the spirit of the law. More importantly, there is limited discussion of, or inquiry into, sociological implications surrounding the unlawful acts police officers will encounter and some will even engage in. To illustrate this point, let us look at a police officer that encounters a man sitting on the sidewalk next to a park bench. The man’s eyes are bloodshot and watery, his speech is slurred, and there is the presence of an alcoholic beverage on his breath.

California Penal Code section 647 states:

Every person who commits any of the following acts is guilty of disorderly conduct, a misdemeanor:
(f) Who is found in any public place under the influence of intoxicating liquor, any drug, controlled substance, toluene, or any combination of any intoxicating liquor, drug, controlled substance, or toluene, in a condition that he or she is unable to exercise care for his or her own safety or the safety of others, or by reason of his or her being under the influence of intoxicating liquor, any drug, controlled substance, toluene, or any combination of any intoxicating liquor, drug, or toluene, interferes with or obstructs or prevents the free use of any street, sidewalk, or other public way. (Deering’s California Desktop Code Series, 2007, pp. 484-485)

As the police officer begins to investigate the man’s current situation in accordance with lawful conduct, it becomes apparent that the man is unable to articulate the date, time, or his present location. Without provocation, the man begins crying and states that he just
lost his job. After looking at the man’s driver license, the police officer discovers the man lives one block from the park. Should the officer take this man to jail, or escort the man home? Police officers encounter these types of situations on a daily basis, and are often placed in a position to use their discretion in determining the appropriate action to take. Moreover, how does the social construction of the officer’s professional knowledge in relation to the presence of gender, ethnicity, age, religious, or sexual orientation change the officer’s actions in this scenario? To believe these factors do not influence the decisions police officers make is nonsensical. Police officers deal with the dark aspects of American society, and continued crime fighting gives them a distorted view of the world (Reese, 2003). Appropriate education could help police officers find a balance between the letter and spirit of the law to support serving the greater good and perhaps restore some balance to the distorted view that often develops in the minds of police officers.

With this understanding, we begin to see the relevance of constructing an educational process in law enforcement training that encourages critical thinking based on sociopolitical structures of power and a transformative development of an institutionalized critical pedagogy.

Police officers are street-level bureaucrats. According to Michael Lipky (1980), street-level bureaucrats make policy in two ways. They exercise wide discretion in decisions about citizens with whom they interact. Then, when taken in context, their individual actions add up to agency behavior. (Reese, 2003, p. 92)

For example, “Using minor, generally under-enforced, traffic violations as a pretext, officers target and stop black and Hispanic motorists” (Maclin, 1998, p. 336). The summative effects reinforce institutionalized antagonistic relationships between law
enforcement agencies and minority communities. Whether on a professional or individual level, police officers have to confront the reality that “racial decision-making by officers often rests on solid empirical data and indicates much more than the subjective bias of a few rogue officers” (Maclin, 1998, p. 344).

From an educational perspective, undergraduate courses are designed to build within each student the ability to critically assess new situations, undertake new learning as needed, and even to question the “facts” and underlying assumptions of existing canons of knowledge (Buerger, 2004). From a law enforcement perspective, this is a dangerous proposition for paramilitary command structures that view educational debate as insubordinate to institutional positions of authority, and the larger societal influences that rely upon police officer obedience to separatism among the policed.

Increasing critical knowledge provides avenues of discretionary empowerment by enhancing the breadth and depth of the individual police officer’s perspectives. Such development is often associated with principles of self-directed learning, self-regulated learning, and life-long learning. In contrast, basic academy training systematically builds particular skills in police officers to achieve certain ends or the repeated achievement of a desired action and result, regardless of the social context (Buerger, 2004). For example, the basic steps of a criminal investigation (who, what, when, where, etc.) can be applied to any number of circumstances. However, what a powerful resource emerges when these processes are grounded in socially transformative curricular models that are converged for the holistic development of the police officer’s discretion.

Presently, law enforcement practitioners who are able to integrate macro-level social science knowledge with street-level experiential learning remain a scarce
commodity (Buerger, 2004). This professional actuality will continue to be an institutional reality within the law enforcement paradigm until Commissions on Police Officer Standards in Training (POST) realize there has to be an evolution in socio-cultural understanding among police officers. Because neither formal study nor secondhand experience alone is an adequate preparation for the demanding tasks of police work, learning objectives and instructional practices have to combine both forms of curricula (Buerger, 2004).

**I Know How To Do My Job?**

The true matter asserted in police officer training has to do with police officer activities among members of the community. For example, the practice of conducting a traffic stop has two implications. One is process (stated) and the other is purpose (hidden). The process of conducting traffic enforcement stops deals primarily with the “how to” and is accomplished through instructional practices that are based on essentialist methodologies found in education. Without intellectual consideration of associated social implications, police officers, as a matter of professional practice, are precisely taught through systematic instructional practices the steps of stopping a vehicle. In contrast, instructional practices that examine the relation between processes and the purposes for utilizing those processes are more pragmatic in approach, and are better suited towards addressing the discretionary powers of police officers. The deeper knowledge of a police officer’s reason(s) for selecting a particular vehicle to stop is embedded in institutionally based phenomena. Instructional practices that address these relationships tend to be based on constructivist methodologies found in education.

According to this viewpoint, police officers’ attitudes and beliefs are an innermost part of
their existing knowledge and consequent acquisition of new knowledge will become part of their behavioral patterns. In other words, if a police officer has preconceived notions of what a criminal is, then he or she will conduct traffic stops of motorists who fit their stereotype of a criminal.

When addressing the training needs of police officers, social edification has to be accounted for when determining two of the most fundamental questions regarding police officer learning: What knowledge is of most worth, and who decides? To help us discover the answers to these questions, Reese (2003) provides some contextualization regarding the nature of police work and the expectation of police officers as he explains:

It is estimated that a police officer must react to 300 to 500 unique types of incidents. In no other profession is an individual called to respond to so many types of incidents and play so many different roles. Police officers must make split second decisions in life or death situations. They must make judgment calls on how to respond to criminal behavior in the heat of the moment. Because of the nature of the police officer’s job, it is very difficult to reduce discretion. Because police specialize in, among other things, managing the most serious and dangerous breaches of social behavior, we provide them with the authority to use force, weapons, and other tools not available to the average citizen. The power we delegate to police, as well as the prestige that accompanies the special trust we place in them, enables them to fulfill their responsibilities, but it also makes it easier for corrupt officers to take advantage of people who possess less power and prestige. Thus, if providing formal social control is a fundamental problem of living in large social groups, so too is controlling police. (p. 92)

The institution of American policing, as a mechanism of social control, must address discretionary practices of police officers as socially generated phenomena. This reasoning accounts for the substantial discretion police officers posses in deciding which vehicle to stop for the myriad of traffic offenses they observe (Maclin, 1998, p. 376). This educational approach towards addressing police officer discretion may also transform the context of police officer interrogation of citizenry.
With the understanding that Constitutional rights are triggered by custody and questioning, some proponents of modern police interrogation tactics can argue,

> It may in fact have more to do with a suspect’s state of mind than with the location of the questioning. By informing the suspect he is free to leave at any time, and by having him acknowledge that he is voluntarily answering their questions, police will transform what would otherwise be considered interrogation into an interview. (Leo, 1998, p. 67)

This argument does not call into question the socio-cultural nor historical context that governs the cultural interaction or exchange of social capital during the interrogation. Educating police officers to recognize the social elements contained within the interaction can give them a level of understanding and equip them with the ability to discern between liberation and oppressive thoughts, actions, and tactics.

**That’s Just Good Police Work?**

The basis of any educational evaluation of the paramilitary environment of law enforcement must reflect on the social effects of how police officers are acculturated into professional police services. Reese (2003) begins this discussion by recognizing the following:

> High-ranking police administrators, police commissions, and oversight committees are usually responsible for developing the standard operating procedures of the department . . . police officers work in situations that are too complicated to reduce to programmatic formats. . . . Perhaps this means the objective of police reform should not involve trying to assert more control over officers, but exposing officers to enough humanistic training that they will be empowered to make the right decisions when they exercise their discretion (p. 92).

This summation reinforces the need for socio-cultural change within the institution of American policing and the fact that such change will originate from the individual police officer. With every instance of police officer subjectivity, there exists the historical aspects of American society that have created the socialized processes that
accompany their discretionary power. The current curricular objectives regarding discretionary power given to law enforcement personnel have not dealt with the hidden aspects that precede the formulation of those ideologies that target minority communities. When viewed as an aspect of American policing culture, those arbitrary and indeterminate policing practices have been justified through loose organizational interpretation and have become representative of the hidden curriculum found within police agencies. To further illustrate this point, let’s consider that nearly one-third of a Florida sheriff department’s police officers targeted minority drivers without any formal policy ordering the practice, but an internal investigation revealed that the department accepted the practice of pretext traffic stop of minority drivers (Maclin, 1998). The critical objective then becomes transforming the hidden social subjectivity of traffic enforcement that has been perpetuated and accomplished through outmoded training curricula and the acculturated identification of criminal behavior.

Instances where police officers have exhibited racially motivated decision making as a function of their discretionary authority have also been evidenced during judicial review. For example, Maclin (1998), explains:

These cases acknowledge two things: (1) disparate racial impact of police search and seizure methods is a proper consideration for Fourth Amendment analysis; and (2) where government officials submit that racial factors promote law enforcement interests, the court has allowed police to utilize racial and ethnic factors when deciding who will be seized and searched in certain investigatory contexts. (pp. 343-342)

The contemporary methodologies regarding police officer interrogation tactics have gradually shifted away from physical forms of coercion. “With this change, police power in the context of interrogation has acquired new meaning: it has become more subtle, more invasive, and more total, effectuated through psychological manipulation rather
than physical violence” (Leo, 1998, pp. 65-66). This subtle change requires great awareness of institutional considerations that affect police officer discretion, and some contemplation has to be given to the historical power police officers represent within those interactions by their association with social authority. “Although one occasionally reads or hears about abuses during custodial questioning, police critics agree that use of the third degree during interrogation is now relatively infrequent” (Leo, 1998, p. 66).

Even though this has been evidenced by a professional awakening, we need to stimulate an intellectual awakening of social consciousness concerning those pre-existing social traits that can be considered remnants of more institutionalized forms of social intolerance, for example, examining the language, actions, and attitudes of police officers that exhibit racialized preconceptions towards citizens during criminal investigations.

**I Was Just Doing My Job**

Speaking from a historical context, “Since the late 1960s and the early 1970s, following what many perceive to be police mismanagement of urban unrest, a series of studies criticizing professional policing practices created disruptive space and resources for the revival of alternative stories about policing” (Lyons, 1999, pp. 46-47). Regardless of the catalyst that seeks or sought to render an alteration to the institutions of American policing models, addressing socio-cultural aspects within the consciousness of police officers has been limited. More recently, American policing has progressed in terms of applied practices, but the underlying relations to power, influence, and oppression continue to exist.

For example, a modern police interrogator “relies on psychological techniques and appeals involving manipulation, persuasion and deception. The goal of the
interrogation is to create a psychological atmosphere that will facilitate the act of confessing” (Leo, 1998, p. 66). The justification and relative rationalization for these activities is the pursuit of justice. Critically speaking, the process of interrogation, either physical or psychological, has to examine the institutional relationship between the police officer and the subject of the law enforcement interrogation. Reese (2003) gives some level of insight into the nature of police interrogators:

Because of the enormous power they wield, police officers also have an exaggerated sense of self-worth. Theorists of police culture often refer to the sense of “mission” as a central feature. Love of action and cynicism are also held to be typical of police officers’ psychic makeup. In such a culture a sense of “mission” may empower, excuse, alibi, or justify police in resorting to dirty means to achieve good ends. (pp. 91-92)

Expectations concerning the recruitment, selection, and education of police officers must critically address the institutional processes and social processes that are both stated and hidden within the professional curriculum of American policing.

When we consider that “the Supreme Court has yet to lay down any clear rules about interrogatory deception, effectively allowing police to define the outer limits of permissible trickery and deceit” (Leo, 1998, p. 70), we are once again faced with the realization that discretion is an individual choice. At the exact moment when a police officer chooses to utilize discretionary power, the only true regulatory authority is contained within the individual officer. Only he or she can decide how to act. The ramification of those decisions is where institutional forces may come into effect.

Without an internalized and personalized process of reflection, discretionary outcomes are predetermined by institutional orientation. Ultimately, there is no right or wrong under these circumstances; there is only the continuation of the status quo. Let us examine the following scenario presented by Cole (1999):
The police obtained consent to search an eighteen-year-old woman at 3:40 a.m. outside a bus station. An expert witness testified that the woman had an IQ only six points above mild retardation had been in special education classes before she dropped out of school in the ninth grade and was suffering from borderline personality disorder. Yet, the court found her consent voluntary, stressing the absence of threatening behavior by the police officers. (p. 32)

Under contemporary assumptions, the conduct of the police officers would be considered an example of good police work based primarily on the acquisition of consent, and subsequent development of probable cause to effect an arrest. The danger of institutionalized reinforcement of these practices produces habitual and autonomic responses that prevent discretionary authority to occur on a socially conscious level. Police officers then respond according to their manner of acculturation instead of acting in accordance with their understanding of socially oppressive behavior. Establishing reflective processes that empower police officers to examine their professional practices is warranted if changing the institution of American policing is desired.

Standardized law enforcement training teaches police officers how to apply their legal and social authority, but rarely addresses the internal motivations of police officers to express their authority. We have to acknowledge the historically brutal means police officers have used to acquire and maintain their authority. This history is evidenced by institutional biases and ulterior motives that have maintained a social fear of blackness. The fear of blackness is equally sustained by the fear of institutionalized whiteness, and the role police play in that negative relationship. We see examples of this interplay in the subversive context of modern police interrogations. To contextualize this perspective, consider Skolnick’s (1998) discussion of former Chief Justice Rehnquist’s position concerning Miranda admonitions:
A free and voluntary confession is deserving of the highest credit, because it is presumed to flow from the strongest sense of guilt . . . but a confession forced from the mind by the flattery of hope or the torture of fear, comes in so questionable a shape . . . that no credit ought to be given to it, and therefore it is rejected. (p. 112)

“Miranda” protects citizens in the judicial process by excluding confessions obtained under duress. The conscious attempt by police officers to use institutional dialogue to solicit admissions of guilt prior to Miranda admonitions, especially from persons who have been systematically acculturated to fear police authority, further calls into question the volition of any subsequent statements made by subjects.

At present, police officers are being trained, acculturated, and encouraged to use these coercive alternatives to outright violence to acquire statements from suspected criminals. This is evidenced by Skolnick’s (1998) account:

Officer Hanarahn testified that he was trained by his department, as well as one he had worked for previously, “to withhold Miranda warnings hoping to get an admission of guilt.” Contemporary police interrogation manuals, we learn from this case, teach that the first admission, no matter how small, is the “breakthrough” or “the beachhead,” leading to a full confession. This case, featuring deception and an assault on Miranda rights—but not pressures of the “third degree” —typifies much of contemporary American police interrogation practice. (p. 123)

Addressing the historical and underlying social context of police officer interaction with citizenry has to account for the institutional separation of police officers from the general populace. I have often found myself, through no involvement other than the mere presence of my uniform, become a mechanism for social control. Parents of young children routinely acculturate their children to fear police officers. As an example, I was buying lunch at a local restaurant and there was a toddler-aged child playing between the tables as his parents ate. I watched as the mother half-heartedly attempted to maintain control of her child. No sooner had I turned to leave, when the mother told her child that
if he did not listen, then the police officer was going to “get him.” Bewildered by my motion towards the door, the child stopped playing, took hold of his mother’s arm, and gripped it tightly. After a lifetime of this manner of social codification being imposed upon the juvenile’s psyche, how could I hope to have a positive social exchange with that person without addressing the institutional presence of fear and separation?

During his discussion of police officer corruption, Reese (2003) discusses the creation of an early warning system for identifying problem officers and suggests, “Officers who have been identified as “problems” [should be] given necessary supervision, psychiatric help, education, or the discipline they need” (p. 94). Even in the discussion of treating problematic police officer behaviors, education is a key component. As a preventative, precautionary, or even regulatory practice, educational efforts should be implemented at the onset of police officer training to address the formative processes that precede such corrupt behavior. For example, the subjective intentions that characterize police officers’ motives, based on racial stereotypes, and discriminatory application of institutional authority resulting in racialized enforcement of laws is an area where education can address intentionality of police officer actions.

The organizational practices that have been developed from within the law enforcement paradigm have further separated and isolated police officers from communities. Research has indicated that random patrol activities within communities may appear to be administratively beneficial, but those practices insulate police officer’s ability to develop networks of local relationships where essential information is located and reduces agency access to community support (Lyons, 1999). The educational discussion, in all forms and aspects of police officer activities, has to contain a
transformative dialogue that questions the nature of American policing authority and for whose purposes those practices are supported.

**What Have I Become?**

Creation of police officer identity in the cultural context of American policing has to account for the individual’s prior identity when addressing the professional persona of police officers. Accounting for the various social constructs that precipitate social identity allows us to understand the nature of human interaction between one’s cultural ideals and a desired professional ideology that generates transformative interaction for social harmony. Lyons (1999) discusses:

> Considering the meaning of community this way means seeing community as a democratic aspiration to forms of association unlike bureaucratic client-patron relations, which is consistent with the notion of community appealed to by the advocates of community policing; a form of association with specific capacities to subject unaccountable power in their neighborhoods to critical public scrutiny. (p. 25)

My examination of learning objectives within American policing has revealed several competing socio-historical paradigms that contextualize the educational discussion of police officers, and the transformative foundations of institutional change that can benefit from democratic participation.

From my perspective as a police officer and law enforcement instructor, any educational approach intended to transform the institution of American policing has to account for the police officer’s creation of self in relation to the dominant social experience. Symbiotic institutional and socio-cultural identities within the police officer are constructs of individual self-perception and the collective social influences that have reinforced intrapersonal relationships within the dominant perspective. That is, police officers will interact differently with people of various backgrounds relative to the
institutional experiences of the police officer. Transformative education has to develop an institutional awareness surrounding the police officer’s actions comparative to the factors that have influenced the police officers’ internal predispositions. Subsequent theoretical approaches toward a more critical pedagogy throughout the law enforcement paradigm must confront and interrogate the institution of American policing, and question the beliefs and practices that influence police officer actions; the objective is to acquire a critical consciousness of institutional inequity. Police officers need to have a critical understanding of American society and policing actions with the intent to transform institutionalized socio-cultural oppression.

**The Face in the Mirror**

A major component in assuming a critical approach towards police officer learning is developing the self-reflective processes of the individual. Especially within the law enforcement paradigm where a police officer’s interaction with citizenry is a fundamental element for establishing or eroding trust, police officers need to recount their role in social conflict. All too often, the actions of police officers manipulate the public’s trust for personal or professional gain. Appealing to the public’s conscience becomes a powerful means of persuasion when the officer exploits the trust inherent in those relationships (Leo, 1998). The nature of human interaction is dependent upon the perception of the participants. Any form of social conflict or mistrust can be misinterpreted as deceit or deception that 1) increases the desire of police officers to “investigate” further or 2) increases the desire of the public to “resist” police officer action.
When self-reflection on the part of the police officer is present, then identification of suppressive practices becomes possible. Without this reflection into to the nature of police officer behavior, or the reasoning behind discretionary patrol activities, policing actions manifest an organizational behavior that simply reinforces institutionalized disparity. For example, when police officers and police supervisors deny that race influences their decisions, they are unable to explain why minorities are six-fold more likely to be searched than whites (Maclin, 1998). It is important for police officers to recognize that “just as our situations constrain our life options, so do the choices we make regarding life projects contribute to our collective understanding of the good, to our definition of self and community” (Lyons, 1999, p. 20).

Police officers have to address themselves in relation to the people with whom they will interact. There needs to be a balancing between the interests of the individual police officer and the interests of the community in which they serve. “Understanding the competing stories and power relations that intersect in community policing are (sic) essential parts of evaluating the extent to which it maps a path toward freedom or servitude, to a more democratic or more disciplinary society” (Lyons, 1999, p. 38). Judicial review has attempted to regulate the outcomes of these actions carried forth by police officers as armed extensions of government within the community, but has not found a suitable answer for addressing police officer discretion. Maclin (1998) argues, “Indeed, in light of past and present tensions between the police and minority groups, it is startling that the court would ignore racial concerns when formulating Constitutional rules that control police discretion to search and seize persons on the street” (p. 340). What this assertion by Maclin (1998) fails to recognize is that the regulation of discretion
cannot be established through legal precedence, because the only true regulation of
discretion comes from within the individual police officer and is a manifestation of his or
her free will.

During moments of professional reflection, we police officers often replay
scenarios or visualize interactions of instances where we have done a good job or may
have done a better job. For example, one interview or interrogation technique is to “offer
suspect[s] psychological excuses or moral justifications for their actions in order to
psychologically facilitate the act of confession” (Leo, 1998, p. 68). Professionally,
organizationally, or individually, a police officer may consider the methods, reasons, or
manner used to obtain information; more often, we measure the value of the information
obtained. We isolate the process and seek to reproduce it. Police officers may feel that
the bottom line is getting the job done and making the suspect admit to wrongdoing; this
type of mental reinforcement is limiting. This style of reflective thinking mainly about
processes places the justification on the outcome rather than on the means used to obtain
it. All too often, police officers miss the opportunity to evaluate the human interaction,
and lose sight that “just because you can, doesn’t always mean you should.” Be that as it
may, the expenditure of emotion on people, especially sympathy or empathy for others, is
to feel too much and risk being torn apart; police officers have to carefully isolate
themselves from the people they have to see as clients. Being impartial and suppressing
one’s own reaction is part of being professional, as doctors, lawyers, and coroners are
with their clients (McElhinny, 1994).
What Does It All Mean?

This chapter has expressed several concerns I have regarding the education of police officers, American policing as a profession, and American society in the twenty-first century. I view the educational process of police officers as a cyclic phenomenon. Police officers enter the profession with preconceived notions of what it means to be a police officer. We learn through acculturation how to become agents of the institution. We make decisions that influence the lives of others, and ultimately influence the next generation of police officers. We are all captive to the social, political, and economic structure of American society, yet we can exert influences on the structure. As a police officer, there are basic processes I must learn and engage in to safely carry out the functions of my profession. As an educator, there are basic questions I must ask of my profession. As a human being, there are basic decisions I must make regarding my interactions with others. I must reflect on my life and the role I play in the lives of others. I can either choose to maintain the status quo, or I can choose to effect change for the benefit of those around me. I have expressed those elements of police officer training and learning where I believe we can make positive changes for the benefit of future generations.
Chapter V

School Is in Session

From the onset of writing my thesis, I sought to bring forth an engaging discussion concerning the institutional aspects of American policing and the education of police officers. Throughout the writing process, I have evidence how I came to question the nature of policing, and what becoming a police officer means to me. My philosophical statement of purpose to change the functions of American policing, by changing the discretionary practices of police officers, is contained in my discussion of theoretical approaches towards police officer learning. In this chapter, I speak candidly about my role in bringing theses various considerations forward into my profession.

Through my research into the history of American policing, I have acquired an understanding of how past practices support the present functions of law enforcement. Even though it is important for me to recognize the relevance of sequential changes in American policing, I must acknowledge that the institutional supremacy remains unaffected. As I look forward to the future of my profession, I am obligated to focus on those things that I envision will constitute progress and work towards those ideals. As a police officer and educator, it is essential for me to embody those things I am calling for from other members of my profession. As I have stated, the transformation must begin within me, because the greatest authority for change is contained within the decisions I make as a police officer; the choice is mine. Collectively, the conscientiousness of our choices will determine the future of American policing.

Every time I venture into society, I see recurring procedures of authoritative crime control stratagems enacted by police officers within my community. In pursuit of
legitimate law enforcement objectives, sanctioned professional trickery and deceit

promote the morally troubling manipulation and exploitation of human relationships that
encourages police officers to function in a manner that undermines public confidence and
social trust, which have psychological and moral consequences for everyone involved
(Leo, 1998). I frequently question the damaging effects these law enforcement actions
have on my ability to protect and serve the people who need my assistance. This evokes
a level of confliction within me between my duties as a police officer and my
responsibility to humanity.

While conducting research into the reasons for these institutionalized practices, I
came across a psychology study that used the Minnesota Multiphase Personality
Inventory (MMPI) to evaluate people entering law enforcement. The MMPI is an
evaluation used to determine aspects of one’s personality. The researchers presented
findings regarding predispositions that affect socio-cultural decisions. The study
conducted by Bernstein et al. (1982) of police academy recruits identified a correlation
between learning and socialization. The research indicated that MMPI affected by racial
differences was limited to the less intelligent and poorly educated (Bernstein et al., 1982).
This led me to believe that educating police officers through a more socially conscious
approach would reduce discriminatory practices in my profession.

Knowing people come into the profession of law enforcement from all varieties of
backgrounds and for an equally great number of personal reasons, I also began to
question the unobserved manifestation of professional identities. A tragic case of
maladjustment researched by O’Hara (2005) acknowledged:

Police Departments should expect to have personnel who are abusive to
spouses, dependent on alcohol, or wrestling in some way with demons
they cannot shake. These are not conditions specific to police agencies, but can occur more frequently in policing than in most other professions. (p. 102)

Unfortunately, the existence of socially deviant individuals in law enforcement is indicative of attitudes and beliefs prevalent throughout society. Accordingly, the attitudes reflected in the decisions police officers make lead to a greater concern, when we consider that aspects of the police culture extend beyond the walls of police departments and the “us versus them” philosophy is not just limited to police officers (Reese, 2003). From my perspective, this narrow-minded culture is an intertwined component of policing, and supports an institutionalized and historically biased point of view.

As an agent for social change, I believe in the promise of a different tomorrow. I find comfort in the fact that during the last half of the twentieth century, defining features of American policing have undergone a profound transformation regarding law enforcement methods and strategies (Leo, 1998). I am a product of this continual growth and expansion in the law enforcement paradigm, yet I recognize that archaic practices still exist within my profession. In the traditions of law enforcement, the past carries with it a temporal index, by which there is an agreement between previous and present generations ( Cuevas, 2008). I have seen the advancement to positions of authority of people who carry a professional mindset developed by their time on the streets, and who have minimal consideration for perspectives other than their own. As long as this generational transfer of power continues to exist, our growth as a profession will continue to suffer.
Every so often, during my conversations with fellow police officers, we talk about our backgrounds before entering law enforcement. From these exchanges, we come to know that we all have differing levels of education, and we all have attained certain amounts of life experience. I have noticed a difference in attitudes towards being a police officer between those who possess a college-level education and those who are without college experience. This is important because an emphasis on the bureaucratic and social aspects of police work, which has constituted a change in the profession, underscores the necessity for post-secondary education (McElhinny, 1994). Those police officers that have undergone learning in a post-secondary setting seem to be more receptive to alternative policing strategies and are more reflective regarding their interactions within the community. They also have an appreciation or sensitivity towards the impact their actions have on others, and are more apt to question the institutional structure of policing.

On many occasions, my job requires me to settle civil disputes between people. In essence, I am a peacemaker seeking to help them come to a social agreement through consideration of other points of view. Even though law enforcement expresses the stated goal of fighting crime, professional era police spends upwards of seventy percent of their time maintaining civil order (Lyons, 1999).

When I patrol certain neighborhoods within my community, citizens will wave, smile, and express gratitude for my presence. Nevertheless, in other neighborhoods citizens will avoid any form of contact with me. Although these differences existed long before I ever entered policing, I still feel a sense of professional responsibility for those conflicting attitudes exhibited by citizens within my community. It is certain that police agencies must also be mindful of their political alliances with resource-rich communities,
ensuring that patrol activities do not marginalize weaker communities and inevitably promote distrust (Lyons, 1999). To ensure the trust my community has in me, I have to constantly reflect upon my actions, as a matter of democratic responsibility, and evaluate my practices for inclusion of social equality. The collective actions of my fellow officers and I, in our community, are a matter of an established organizational ethos; my ongoing conversation with them about policing in a more democratic fashion encourage us to evaluate the trade-offs associated with our discretionary power while in the performance of our duties.

Be that as it may, external influences still exist that politically sway some police officers to engage in activities that fuel social conflict. “This bureaucratic bias inflates the police officer’s role as a state agent and deflates the officer’s role as a local insider empowered and constrained by the complex social relationships that constitute the communities that they work (and live) within” (Lyons, 1999, p. 47). I have pondered from a purely educational standpoint, the idea that police officers would benefit from an inoculation against structural biases through professional training geared to withstand the negative social influences inherent in law enforcement. As American policing moves further into the twenty-first century, I trust police officers will benefit from these types of continual innovations towards learning within the professional model of law enforcement.

As a proponent for effecting transformation to the institutional constraints of policing, I see the organizational structure of law enforcement agencies as a primary obstacle that needs addressing if greater educational advancements for members of my
profession are to occur. Reese (2003) echoes this opinion regarding structural change in his writings about police officer training when he expresses:

> The traditional paramilitary marine-style philosophy of policing should be jettisoned for a humanistic approach. Officers should be trained in areas of abnormal human behavior, contemporary social issues, and the democratic process. Training in these areas would enable officers to use human relations skills to better serve their community. Such concepts as “sensitivity, understanding, creativity, and warmth” should all become included in human relations training model for police officers. The goal would be to train officers to help their clients and the people in their community to develop the positive “chemistry” necessary to create and to maintain a healthy environment. (p. 95)

From this perspective, even minimal reduction of this bureaucratic barrier will allow police officers to build more empathetic relationships with the citizens of our community. At the very least, shifting the structural initiatives of existing policing organizations to become more inclusive may support police officers in developing ongoing relationships with citizens and co-create a collective knowledge necessary for effective problem solving within the community (Lyons, 1999).

As a law enforcement instructor and developer of police officers, I need to appreciate that the nature of policing is inherently predisposed to social conflict and acknowledge that there is no absolute method for eradicating disparity within the profession. Similarly, I have to accept that police officers will demonstrate a wide variety of characteristics and personalities unique to the profession, which enable them to interact effectively with the general populace. I must take into account the complexities of police officers as an adult learning population. A difficulty exists because adults often re-learn, and relearning requires revision (or un-learning), so much of what we remember learning is actually a distortion of the truth, and needs to be unlearned, before we can go on to relearn content (Schwartz, 2006). Therefore, deconstructing the acculturated
knowledge that police officers possess is inherent to the overall learning process. Any educational approach used to address these complexities will require active consideration of the police officer throughout the entire learning process. Schwartz (2006) further explains this progression as he discusses:

The solution to this challenge lies in rethinking the target group for the curriculum writing and revising the classic conception of a written curriculum guide. Thus, Bobbitt (1918), for example, the pioneer of the US understanding of curriculum work, understood the curriculum to represent those things [learners] must do and experience in order to adequately perform. (p. 450)

I expect, for police officers, that a range of collaborative, interactive, and problem-based models of instruction will effectively support their learning during law enforcement training.

In addition to creating flexible instructional approaches that engage the police officer in the learning process, the dynamic working environment of law enforcement requires police officers to demonstrate learning in a way that supports adept conflict resolution. Considering the need for rapid acquisition of acquired knowledge, learning outcomes need to concentrate on a police officer’s cognative processes. As a result of effective problem-based learning, as Dynan et al. (2008) articulate, police officers will exhibit several intellectual processes:

These higher order reasoning skills are: (a) application, the ability to apply the basic concepts to real world problems or situations; (b) analysis, the ability to recognize and explain major underlying assumptions; (c) synthesis, the ability to build simple models based on principles; (d) evaluation, the ability to compare and contrast the cost and benefits of simple models and explain why one is better than another. (p. 97)

Given the complexity of educational issues facing law enforcement, I believe it is imperative for future advancements in police officer training to support the police officer
throughout the educational strategy, and give particular attention towards fostering a positive learning experience. “The important component in producing an effective learning experience is in the quality of the instructional design and not in the [content] itself” (Schmeeckle, 2003, p. 216).

Having investigated the historical foundations of American policing throughout the statement of my thesis, I believe the most effective approach to transforming American policing is reorienting the educational directives of the law enforcement profession. My critical examination of the socio-cultural ethos of modern law enforcement has revealed some possible advancements to the educational methodologies used to prepare police officers that may add up to more democratic forms of decision making. My conclusions suggest social education of police officers must be the primary objective of policing curricula. Reorienting the educational philosophies of law enforcement to address many of the historical shortcomings of American policing cannot eradicate all of the problems located within the profession.

Given the social nature of American policing, the course of study for police officers has to become manifestted in their self-directed actions, particularly when determining how to utilize their descretionary power. With regard for social progress, the decisions police officers make and the approaches they take to address socially occurring issues will determine the future of law enforcement. This level of critical inquiry exhibited from within the police officer will fundamentally change the ethos of my profession and will constitute a reconceptualization of American policing. It is my hope that developing the intellectual processes of police officers in this respect will empower them to make decisions that benefit all members of our society. “The cornerstone of a
civil society is respect for the heterogeneous. The role of government and all of its agents is to carry out duties in ways that exemplify fairness, justice, and equity” (Reese, 2003, p. 95).

Let me leave you with this thought: Transformative discretionary action (TDA) by police officers can effect an interactional change that influences the institutional function of American policing. For example, I investigated a public disturbance where a citizen took an immediate stance of resistance and an overly animated posture towards my presence as a police officer. His confrontational behavior prompted me to request additional cover units. Eventually, seven police officers were on scene working to resolve the situation this man created. In those moments, everything he believed about police officers and all we accepted as true about fulfilling the purposes of our duties were coming to bear on the outcome of this situation. The citizen used every opportunity to call into question issues of race, harassment, and the visual threats of force our command presence exhibited. Consciously and without jeopardizing the safety of all involved, I chose in that moment to unbalance the nature of this interaction. By the end of my investigation, all that remained was his interaction with me. In the presence of his family, witnesses to the event, and my cover officer, I asked him a simple question: “What can I do to help you?” I continued, “Do you want me to pray for you, listen to you, or do you need a hug?” He replied, “Man, I need all of them!” I told him I was willing to put aside the disparity between us and give him a hug, man to man, to evidence my heartfelt intent to support him in sorting through the issues in his life. I raised my arms and the citizen relinquished his stance of resistance, walked towards me, and I gave him a hug. I walked away from him and took no further policing action. In that moment,
his interaction with law enforcement changed forever. My transformative discretionary action struck at the institutional foundation of American policing he had previously experienced. This was a new interaction with law enforcement, evident to all who observed: an alternative approach towards American policing.
References


