

## Dysconscious Policing: A Critical Content Analysis of School Resource Officer Training Materials

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### Abstract

With more than 30,000 police stationed in U.S. schools, school resource officers (SROs) are a grossly understudied phenomenon. Advocates for police in schools highlight the ways they can improve safety for all students despite the racialized legacy of policing in the United States. Few scholars have studied the racialization of police in the field of education or the educational ramifications of SROs on students. This paper offers findings from a Critical Race Content Analysis of school resource officer training materials from one state in the U.S. southwest. The analyzed text is the training manual for any SRO who enters schools in the state. López's (2003) analysis of race-neutral discourses in education and King's (1991) notion of dysconscious racism guide the analysis of the training materials. Coding yielded 73 individual references to race or to racially coded content, which were categorized into five themes for analysis: (a) overt mentions of race and ethnicity (n=7), (b) universalizing student experiences (n=30), (c) operative Whiteness (n=16), (d) criminalizing students (n=15), and (e) opportunities for positive development (n=5). Themes are described and analyzed. Implications for further training are offered, and questions are raised about the role police ought to play in schools.

*Keywords:* school resource officers, critical race theory, policing, dysconscious racism, race neutrality, schools, racism

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Since the 1990s, the United States has seen an increase of school resource officers (SROs), police assigned to work in schools, based on the belief that officers will make schools safer (Weiler & Cray, 2011). In 2014, there were more than 30,000 police officers in U.S. schools with little evidence that this growth in police will abate in the near future (Gray, Lewis, & Ralph, 2015). If considered without a critical lens, police in schools seem like a positive development, as they can arguably provide a safer learning environment by reducing violence and crime.

To consider the role of police in schools, though, demands a critical consideration of the racialized nature of policing in the United States. There exists a deep, unbroken, and intimate connection between policing and systems of racial oppression dating back to the inception of state policing in the United States (Cashmore & McLaughlin, 1991; Muhammad, 2010). As a result, policing outcomes are notoriously racist and racialized, with People of Color (particularly Black, Latinx, and Native people) far more likely to live in heavily policed areas where they are disproportionately targeted for state sanction (Alexander, 2010). Notably, the racialization of policing has been widely studied by historians (Cashmore & McLaughlin, 1991; Muhammad, 2010), legal scholars (Alexander, 2010), and criminal justice scholars (Rice & White, 2010; Withrow, 2006). However, there is relatively little literature on the racialized impact of police in schools.

Research indicates that while police officers who are placed in schools are likely to carry racial bias into their work, training programs can impact the levels to which officers act on racial bias (Correll et al., 2007; Spencer, Charbonneau, & Glaser,

2016). Knowing this, there arises a need to examine the training of SROs to understand the following question: To what degree does training for school resource officers address race, racism, and racial oppression? The degree to which students of all racial identities are made to feel safer by the presence of police in their schools will depend considerably on whether officers are able to effectively address the racism and racial oppression that has historically been intimately tied to the policing of People of Color in the United States. To investigate whether training for SROs addresses issues of race, racism, and racial oppression, a Critical Content Analysis (CCA) was undertaken to analyze the materials used in the training of SROs in one U.S. state.

### Literature Review

If one looks to the methodological literature, there are relatively few studies that have employed any form of content analysis in questions of police and policing. For instance, Dixon, Schell, Giles, and Drogos (2008) used content analysis to consider the role of race in videos of police stops in one U.S. city, finding clear racial bias, but the training of officers was not considered. No examples of content analysis applied to police training—let alone police who work in schools—were located, which reflects that policing in schools is a grossly understudied phenomenon (Na & Gottfredson, 2013).

There is extensive documentation of the roles, duties, and training of police in schools. For instance, three National Institute of Justice–funded studies produced reports relating to the job duties and efficacy of police in schools, which highlight the training police in schools receive (Finn & McDevitt, 2005; Finn, Shively, McDevitt, Lassiter, & Rich, 2005; Travis & Coon,

2005). In considering the kind of training necessary, Finn et al. (2005) noted that training ought to relate to law enforcement, teaching, and mentoring—the three primary areas of work police are expected to take up in schools. Finn et al. (2005) found that few SRO programs provide much training before officers are placed in schools, and once they are in schools, the researchers found that little supervision of their work is offered to support their success. The researchers go on to suggest the types of training that officers need (such as basic teaching and counseling skills, the basics of child psychology, working with parents, and reapplying the skillsets they learned in the police academy to the specific needs of schools). Notably, though, Finn et al. (2005) do not mention diversity training, antioppression training, or other forms of training that would directly address the role of race in policing in the United States.

Finn and McDevitt (2005) found that when comparing SRO programs nationally, training varies. In some cases, training relied on new officers shadowing other SROs to learn from their experience. Others required both a 40-hour training and time shadowing an existing SRO. When considering the research question of this study, relying on peer-led, on-the-job training presents a problem, as there is no systematic way to know if race will be addressed constructively in such a model. Considering this history of policing, it seems unlikely that police are best equipped to be teaching their fellow officers how to mitigate bias or consider roles of racial difference in their work. A 40-hour training might hold more promise for addressing the role of race in policing, but Finn and McDevitt's report doesn't mention anything about how diversity or antioppression training could have been included.

Similar to these findings, Travis and Coon (2005) found that “many resource officers worked in schools for months before receiving training in how to perform as a SRO. A lack of adequate preparation of officers often contributed to role confusion and conflicts” (p. 205). The researchers saw a need for clearer guidelines for training and for wider implementation of training but did not mention the role of racial bias in training of police in schools.

Despite the apparent lack of attention to race in SRO training, there is pervasive racial bias among police officers generally, which affects the outcomes of their work (Correll et al., 2007; Spencer et al., 2016). Because of this bias, a simple content analysis of police training materials would not sufficiently address how race is operative in the role of SROs. It is possible to discuss race and the role of police in schools in ways that reinforce the racial hierarchies this study seeks to critique.

For instance, in Travis and Coon's (2005) comparison of SRO programs, race and ethnicity are only mentioned once, framing demographic changes in racially coded language. The report notes that racial changes in a school that went from predominantly White to more racially diverse created “a safety issue” where “a loss of simple social unity created a loss of security in some areas, while it introduced a threat of crime or violence in others” (p. 191). Such language establishes People of Color as a safety threat (as their presence is what introduced the “safety issue”) while also placing blame on “a loss of simple social unity” rather than on systemic discrimination and oppression experienced by low-wealth People of Color. The study then goes on to describe how police in schools were sought as one solution to the “safety issue.”

This example demonstrates how attention to police in schools needs a race-critical lens, for even studies that cast doubt on the effectiveness of police in schools can reify racist notions of safety and the subsequent racialization of policing in schools. As a result, this study applies the frame of Critical Race Theory to the content analysis of SRO training materials through CCA.

### Theoretical Frame

Critical Race Theory (CRT) offers a lens to examine the role of race and racism as endemic, enduring, and systemic in United States law and policy (Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993). Though CRT began as a movement in the field of law, scholars have called for a theoretical and empirical analysis of the role of race and racism in education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Despite the decades-long practice of police in schools and the racialized history of policing in the United States, there is a dearth of empirical research on the intersections of race, policing, and schooling. Since education policies like those that place police in schools often enact White supremacy (Gillborn, 2005), CRT informs this investigation of the role of race in the training of police who work in schools. The two theoretical tenets within the wider CRT framework that guide the analysis are (a) race consciousness in the face of race-neutral discourses, and (b) the dysconsciousness of much modern racism.

First, CRT in education calls for race consciousness in the face of race-neutral or racially essentialist discourses (Crenshaw, 1988). Recent popular narratives on race tend to remove notions of power from discussions of racism, reducing racism “to broad generalizations about another group based on the color of their skin” (López, 2003, p. 69) rather than understanding

racism as a system of racial power that benefits White people and institutions at the expense of People of Color. Scholars of CRT in education call for analysis and action against the ways that racism is continually “manifested in different forms” (López, 2003, p. 69) throughout educational systems rather than appealing to race-neutral discourses that erase the operative power of race, racism, and Whiteness. Thus, the following analysis considers the role of race and policing while weighing the role of race-neutral discourses (both in what is addressed within the training materials and what is not) in how officers are trained to work within schools that regularly reproduce racism and racial oppression.

Second, central to CRT is the argument that racism is normal and permanent in American society, though CRT scholars are clear that this should not be interpreted to mean that resistance to racism is without value (Bell, 1992). King (1991) builds on this central tenet of CRT in arguing that racism is not simply maintained through unconscious racial biases but through “dysconscious racism,” which she defines as “an uncritical habit of mind (including perceptions, attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs) that justifies inequity and exploitation by accepting the existing order of things as given” (p. 135). Too often, individuals (particularly White people) act upon “internalized ideologies that both justify the racial status quo and devalue cultural diversity” (King, 1991, p. 134). These ideologies do not function unconsciously but through active choices to set aside the truth of racial power and oppression in order to justify Whiteness as a system of oppression (Leonardo, 2009). This serves to reify the social and material benefits that all White people receive while living under systems of White supremacy (Lipsitz, 2006). King (1991) argues that

dysconsciousness is a state of “impaired consciousness” that accepts “certain culturally sanctioned assumptions, myths, and beliefs that justify the social and economic advantages White people have as a result of subordinating diverse others” (p. 135). In essence, dysconscious racism demands agency and choice to accept the racist status quo. Through the lens of dysconscious racism, discourses of race and racism can overtly and covertly function in the training of SROs and must be understood as reflective of the racialized nature of both policing and schooling in the United States.

In addition to the primary question of the degree to which training materials for SROs address race, racism, and racial oppression, this study investigates whether training of SROs in one U.S. state functions to reinforce dysconscious racism as part of the maintenance of a race-neutral ideology of policing in schools.

### Methods and Text Selection

Training materials are an important window into the experience of SROs, as they help those outside the field of policing understand how officers prepare to work in the unique environment of schools. Arizona was chosen for the analysis of SRO training materials because of my involvement in a large-scale study investigating the roles and effectiveness of SROs in that state. While there are state-specific nuances in SRO training, there are many similarities across states (FY2017 COPS Hiring Program, 2017) and a careful analysis of one state’s training materials will shed light on a little-studied aspect of policing in schools.

The following analyses reflect a Critical Content Analysis (CCA) (Short, 2016) of a manual used to train SROs in

Arizona, titled *New Officer Training: Connecting the Pieces with the School Safety Program* (New Officer Training, 2015), with the goal of understanding the role that race, racism, and racial oppression play in the training of officers. The *New Officer Training* manual is a notebook containing six subsections of training materials: (a) an introductory section, (b) a section titled “School Safety Program Pieces of Legal Issues,” (c) the School Safety Program Guidance Manual, (d) a section titled “Your Role in Education,” (e) a section titled “Law Related Education,” and (f) a section titled “Planning.” Additionally, the notebook of training materials includes two pockets with miscellaneous papers relevant to the training.

Studying the included text required two central units of analysis. First, any and all mentions of or references to race and ethnicity were analyzed through the critical lenses of dysconscious racism and race-neutral discourses. Notably, though, the possibility exists that there are too few overt mentions of race and ethnicity within the text to provide enough data for consideration with this first unit of analysis. Thus, the second unit of analysis is text or images that, when read through a Critical Race lens, function as racialized and racially coded language that does not overtly address race but carries messaging about race, racism, power, oppression, and privilege.

To investigate the text through these units of analysis, I first read through the training notebook in its entirety to familiarize myself with the content. Then I reread each section, marking the text and images that directly display or reference race and ethnicity. This process produced seven instances of text that overtly reference race or ethnicity. Then I conducted a close read of the text looking for language or imagery

that carries covert, discrete, or racially coded messages about race and policing, marking each for later analysis. This process produced an additional 66 racially covert, discrete, or coded references that, when considered through the lenses of race neutrality and dysconscious racism, can be understood to reinforce the racist status quo (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) and criminalizing nature of American schools (Nocella, Parmar, & Stovall, 2014). The total of 73 individual references were then categorized into the following five themes for analysis: (a) overt mentions of race and ethnicity (n=7), (b) universalizing experiences (n=30), (c) operative Whiteness (n=16), (d) criminalizing students (n=15), and (e) opportunities for positive development (n=5). Universalizing experiences emerged from recurring points in the text where differences in student identity were aggregated and where student racial differences were erased through universalizing narratives. Operative Whiteness as a theme emerged whenever a critical reading illuminated how the training materials might serve discourses where Whiteness is privileged and that reinforce Whiteness as oppressive (Leonardo, 2009). The theme of criminalizing students was more obvious than the two preceding discursive themes, as any reference in the text that would support the arrest and criminalization of students could easily be coded into this theme. And finally, opportunities for positive development reflected those points in the training materials where the author noted space for critical interrogation of race and policing in the training of officers.

### **Researcher Positionality**

With any scholarship grounded in Critical Race Theory, it is important that I address my own positionality in this research and in my wider scholarship as a

White scholar applying CRT and Critical Whiteness to education. CRT is a movement founded by and for People of Color working against systemic racial oppression in the United States, and as a result, needs to center the stories and truths of People of Color. Where, then, do I fit as a White man who strives to address systemic White supremacy in my work and scholarship? After all, People of Color are far better able than White people to identify, critique, and dismantle the ways that systems of oppression function to marginalize and oppress through systems of education (Matsuda, 1995). As a White person, Whiteness limits my perspective in analyzing race and racism (Yancy, 2012), as privilege constrains the ability of White people to understand the nature of racial oppression. At the same time, it is possible and important for White people to develop a racial consciousness that supports analysis of the oppression from which we benefit, even if that analysis is limited by our positionality (Tatum, 1997). As a result, White people have a moral responsibility to take up the work of ending racism because of the ways our racial identities are privileged at the expense of People of Color (Applebaum, 2010). It is from my positionality with its perspectives and limitations that I take up this study of the racialized messages offered during training to police who are working with diverse students in schools.

### **Findings**

Each of the themes identified through coding were described and simultaneously analyzed through a Critical Race lens in order to demonstrate a process of *thinking with theory* (Short, 2016), whereby the data ought to be understood through its theoretical underpinnings and implications rather than presented as separate from the theory that drove the

coding and analysis. However, the references coded as “opportunities for positive development” are reserved for discussion in the final section on implications for policy and practice because of how this finding moves the analysis beyond that of race and racism and into potential areas for improvement.

### *Overt Mentions of Race and Ethnicity*

In describing the findings of a study focusing on race and ethnicity, it makes sense to start with instances where race and ethnicity are overtly discussed in the text. There are few references to race and ethnicity, with only two of the seven references vaguely alluding to racism and racial oppression. Considering how race and systemic racism operate fundamentally in both schooling (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) and policing (Alexander, 2010), the lack of overt references to race and racism within the training of SROs stands as powerful evidence of race-neutral discourse in school policing, which functions to mask the truths of operative racial power (López, 2003).

Of the seven references to race, most are simple references to demographic data and notes that some policies may differ on American Indian reservations where tribal policies impact the implementation of SRO programs. Two references to race, though, are important when considered through a Critical Race lens. First, buried within a document titled “Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans” is the following statement: “Under a properly implemented threat assessment program, schools can respond to student behavior that raises safety concerns that are not based on assumptions, stereotypes, or myths about people with disabilities (including mental health-related disabilities) or people of a particular race, color,

ethnicity, national origin, religion, or sex” (*New Officer Training*, 2015, p. 45).

Nowhere in the training materials, though, is any attention given to how officers might respond to student behavior without “assumptions, stereotypes, or myths” based on race, ethnicity, or any of the other mentioned identity characteristics. Considering that police have been demonstrated to carry racial biases into their work, the lack of attention in the training to what this one mention makes clear is an important part of preparing police. This absence can be understood through dysconscious racism, whereby a largely race-neutral training actively avoids dealing with race and racism and reinforces “an uncritical habit of mind” (King, 1991, p. 135) on issues of race and racial oppression. Without overt training to help officers mitigate these biases, school resource officers risk reinforcing the racist outcomes of the criminal justice system through their work in schools.

The reflection of dysconscious racism in the training materials is further entrenched in a second reference that does not actually address race but likely alludes to a point in the training where race would be mentioned: one slide among 75 in the introductory section that simply reads “School to Prison Pipeline.” In some ways, it might be a stretch to consider this an overt mention of race. However, even though it is entirely possible to discuss what is commonly referred to as the school-to-prison pipeline without mentioning race, it is hard to imagine that race would not be mentioned at this point in the training, considering the racist and racialized way that criminalization in schools leads to disproportionate contact with the criminal justice system for Students of Color (Nocella et al., 2014). That this discussion is isolated to one vague slide rather than

woven throughout the materials, though, speaks to more than an unconscious race neutrality but an active dysconsciousness through avoidance on the part of the trainers and the officers.

### *Universalizing Experiences*

By far the most common racialized content in the training materials (n=30) never actually mentions race or ethnicity. Yet the text universalizes the experiences of students, reinforcing a race-neutral frame and erasing racial difference in how students are likely to experience police in schools. To understand why universalizing discourses about policing and student experiences are problematic, one must understand how police–community relations are profoundly affected by disparate police treatment of many Communities of Color. Morin and Stepler (2016) find that Black Americans are about half as likely as Whites to have a positive view of the work of police in their communities, and Hispanic Americans were also much less likely to have a positive view of police than Whites. In large part, this relates to the overpolicing of Communities of Color and the disproportionate violence many Communities of Color experience at the hands of police (Alexander, 2010; Goff, Lloyd, Geller, Raphael, & Glaser, 2016).

Zuberi (2001) notes how racial statistics lie through distortion of fact as well as through lies of omission. Thus, when the training materials for SROs call for “data driven decision making” in the introduction slides to the training, one must question what data is presented and whose interest the data serves. For instance, the 2003 and 2006 highlights of the School Safety Program evaluation state that “90.3% of students respect the officer at school” and “73% of the student respondents indicated that having an officer on campus made students feel safer.” Covarrubias and Vélez

(2013) argue for applying CRT to quantitative data because “numbers not only fail to speak for themselves but speak about the underlying views and biases of those who generated them” (p. 272). The use of numbers like those above and throughout the training materials demands questioning of the sampling methods, the racial demographics of students sampled, and how racially disaggregated data might paint a different portrait of the effectiveness of police in making students feel safer.

Further, the text regularly integrates language of safety and security into descriptions of officer roles and purpose. For instance, the “School Safety Program Guidance Manual” describes the first goal of the School Safety Program as contributing “to an orderly, purposeful atmosphere, which promotes the feeling of safety conducive to teaching and learning.” Leonardo and Porter (2010) note that a universal notion of safety acts to privilege the emotional safety of White students at the expense of Students of Color. Thus, when the “Guidance Manual” calls on its first numbered page for administrations to “integrate officers into the school community” (*New Officer Training*, 2015), educators must question what it would mean for an officer to be “integrated” into a school where Students of Color might experience police as violent and harassing in the wider community. Similarly, what does it mean for White students as opposed to Students of Color when an officer is expected to be a “positive role model” who demonstrates “how to handle stress, resolve conflicts, celebrate successes, and how to be a friend” (*New Officer Training*, 2015, Guidance Manual, p. 9, 11), particularly when Arizona police have been found to be significantly Whiter than the Communities of Color they police (Smouse, 2015)? And without specific training about racial bias and



racialized policing tactics, even well-meaning officers will have difficulty developing “on-going, positive, non-adversarial relationships with students” (*New Officer Training*, 2015, Guidance Manual, p. 26) who have experienced adversarial policing in their community.

To lump the experiences of all students together without considering racial nuance not only reifies race-neutral discourses but encourages officers to cultivate dysconscious racial attitudes that disregard the ways policing plays out in racist ways in the United States. The training of officers, as reflected in the universalizing of student experiences, encourages police to actively overlook racism in policing and treat all students the same without consideration for how different communities have different educational needs and have different relationships with policing. As a result, such universalizing can be understood to encourage the “cognitive distortions of dysconsciousness” (King, 1991, p. 140).

### *Operative Whiteness*

Statements from the text about “integrating” officers into the school community do more than universalize student experiences—they normalize and encourage Whiteness to further operate at structural levels of American schools. Whiteness in critical conceptions of race is about more than the skin color of White individuals; it is a discourse of power and privilege through which individuals and systems act to reinforce a racial order that privileges White people at the expense of People of Color (Harris, 1993; Leonardo, 2009). Historians and criminal justice scholars have demonstrated how police act as agents of the state (Alexander, 2010; Muhammad, 2010), which, by extension, means they function as agents of Whiteness in a society where systemic racism is

enduring and central to the project of the country (Crenshaw et al., 1995). In the context of schooling, Students of Color have to navigate systemic Whiteness constantly (Lee, 2004), a reality that is only further fraught when they must navigate the Whiteness of criminal justice in school buildings.

According to the “Guidance Manual,” the School Safety Program is meant to “provide an opportunity for [students] to develop bonds or attachment with representatives of ‘the system’” (*New Officer Training*, 2015, Guidance Manual, p. 26). When “the system” is fundamentally racially biased and when police disproportionately harass and brutalize young People of Color (Goff et al., 2016), who does it serve for students to develop such attachments? Such an expectation without critical attention to race “encourages students to respect rules, laws, and persons in authority” (*New Officer Training*, 2015, Guidance Manual, p. 25) in a way that is apolitical and erases the power and operative Whiteness in policing and schooling. For White students who are likely to have more positive views and experiences with police (Fingerhut, 2017), it serves to help them feel safe and connect further with their school environment when the goal of an SRO presence is to develop attachment with representatives of “the system.” However, for Students of Color whose views of and experiences with police are bound up with systematic racism and violence, such a statement serves only to ask such students to put themselves at risk of discursive or literal violence in their school environment. Thus, expecting that officers build “relationships with students, parents, and staff that promote a positive image of law enforcement” (*New Officer Training*, 2015, Guidance Manual, p. 8) without addressing the material conditions that produce less-than-positive

views of law enforcement in Communities of Color serves Whiteness as a power structure while acting as a form of dysconscious racism, furthering the oppression of the very communities it purports to protect.

While a minority of police in Arizona are People of Color (Smouse, 2015), the SRO training materials in the state communicate that policing is the work of White people, as every photo and cartoon of police in the entire manual depicts people easily read as White. When policing is portrayed as the work of White people and the materials offer no critical analysis of policing, education, and race, then one must question the School Safety Program's mission to "promote the integration of law-related education into the classrooms" (*New Officer Training*, 2015, Guidance Manual, p. 2). What interest does it serve to have officers enter classrooms of multiple subject areas to "increase students' knowledge of the law, making them better informed citizens and consumers" while discouraging "delinquent behavior" (*New Officer Training*, 2015, Guidance Manual, p. 25)? While the presence of officers in classrooms might have some benefits, the educational purpose of the Law Related Education component of the program runs the risk of reinforcing discourses of police that serve Whiteness in overt and dysconscious ways while also contributing to the criminalization of students.

### *Criminalizing Students*

Of all the racialized content in the training materials for school resource officers, that which is likely to most directly impact Students of Color is the content that opens the door to criminalization of students (Policing Students, 2015). Students of Color are disproportionately targeted for

criminalization within schools (Heitzeg, 2009; Reyes, 2006), even in situations where White students are extended leniency for the same indiscretions (Kim & Geronimo, 2009; Ramey, 2015). The race neutrality of the training materials in discussing issues of student criminal behavior has clear consequences for how students will experience the presence of police in schools and encourages a dysconsciousness among officers that supports the racialized status quo. After all, when officers are encouraged to see the arrest of students (which disproportionately affects Students of Color) as a dysconsciously normal part of one's job, it plays into the wider normalization of racism so central to the work of CRT (Bell, 1992).

Through their work in schools as both officers of the law and an instructor of law-related education, SROs are expected to promote "a safe, orderly environment, and good citizenship" (*New Officer Training*, 2015, Guidance Manual, "Goals and Objectives," 2015). The question, though, is "safe" and "orderly" for whom and toward what ends? Linguists and historians have noted, though, how "law and order" rhetoric like this acts as a racially coded "dog whistle" that appeals to White feelings of safety while encouraging criminalization of People of Color (Haney-López, 2014; Kazin, 1995). Safety simply is not a neutral concept, and to describe it as such reinforces dysconscious attitudes that serve White understandings of what it means to be safe. After all, research on the "discipline gap" finds that teachers (who are overwhelmingly White) perceive the (mis)behavior of Students of Color, particularly Black students, to be a greater threat to their safety and to school order than that of White students, leading to higher rates of discipline and arrest for Students of Color (Wright, 2015). Thus, it is important to consider the

material implications for Students of Color when police are in schools under such “law and order” pretenses, as notions of safety in school environments can and often do play out in racialized ways. In the racial and political climate of 2018, officers, trainers, and policymakers must be aware of the racialized differences in policing outcomes, yet the training materials make no obvious effort to mitigate racial disparities in policing, reflecting a level of dysconsciousness that puts students at risk for criminalization in school that can affect their life trajectories.

The “School Safety Program Guidance Manual” makes clear that school resource officers are, first and foremost, officers of the law placed in school environments, asserting that “[w]hen necessary, the SRO has the authority to intervene as a law-enforcement officer.... The SRO should be involved when a student’s conduct violates the law” (*New Officer Training*, 2015, p. 8). Prior to the inclusion of police in schools, administrators could deal with student behavior such as fights or drug possession pedagogically and/or through disciplinary action, ideally helping students learn from their mistakes without involving them in the criminal justice system. When police are placed in schools and given a mandate to act first as a law enforcement officer, minor legal infractions like fights between students or possession of drugs or alcohol can lead to criminalization of students rather than treating such infractions as disciplinary issues that are less likely to affect students for the rest of their lives. Further, when laws like Senate Bill 1070 in Arizona mandate immigration checks during law enforcement stops, officers have the authority to act as enforcers of immigration laws that have profoundly negative effects on the stress levels, school attachment, and grades of

Mexican American students (Orozco & López, 2015). In a political climate like the one created by Senate Bill 1070 and the presidency of Donald Trump, the very presence of police in schools puts undocumented students at risk for arrest and deportation. Importantly, if an administrator would prefer to handle problematic or illegal student behavior as a disciplinary rather than criminal matter, they would have no authority to overrule an officer’s decision to criminalize a student, as the description of the SRO service agreement in the “Guidance Manual” notes that “no district/charter/or site administrator shall interfere with the duties of the SRO/JPO (Juvenile Probation Officer) as a sworn law enforcement officer” (*New Officer Training*, 2015, p. 22).

In addition to the policies and procedures laid out in the “Guidance Manual” that open the door to criminalization of students, much of the “School Safety Program—Pieces of Legal Issues” section of the training focuses on the lines officers must draw between being an educator with widespread contact with students and a law enforcement officer. At multiple points, the training explores questions of “reasonable doubt” in search and seizure—for instance, using the 1985 case of *New Jersey v. TLO* to highlight the need for “reasonable grounds to suspect that the search will turn up evidence that the student has violated or is violating either the law or the rules of the school” (*New Officer Training*, 2015, Slide 16). Yet the editorial staff at the *Harvard Law Review* argues that “the reasonable suspicion standard interacts problematically with criminalized schools” (Policing Students, 2015, p. 1758). Thus, even though the training materials indicate that “police officers are required to have probable cause to search a suspect” (*New Officer Training*, 2015, Slide 26), police decisions to search individuals are highly

influenced by the race of the suspect (Durose, Smith, & Langan, 2005) and are likely to contribute to the disproportionate criminalization of Students of Color.

### **Implications: Thinking with Theory About Opportunities for Positive Development**

Though unorthodox, the following is an attempt to extend the process of thinking with theory to drawing implications from the text, as I ground the calls for more racially aware training in the materials themselves. There were five noted points in the text that open the door to training of officers that would be more characterized by racial awareness and critiques of power rather than by race-neutrality and dysconscious racism. The following implications, then, build from those points in the text where another approach to training SROs might be possible.

As mentioned, a section on emergency operation plans highlights the importance of police work in schools that avoids “assumptions, stereotypes, or myths about people” based on race, ethnicity, and other aspects of identity (*New Officer Training*, 2015, p. 45). Simply put: To even marginally mitigate the effects of racism and White supremacy on policing in schools, the training of school resource officers must include ongoing critical training on race, racism, power, privilege, and oppression—something that currently seems entirely absent from the training materials. The training reflected in the analyzed materials does not prepare officers to work responsibly and accountably with a diversity of students. When considering the SRO training and the potential impact officers can have on students from a Critical Race perspective, SROs should not likely have contact with students until they are more adequately trained to understand race, racial

oppression, and their own historical and present role in the maintenance of racial hierarchy in schools. Anything less reflects a conscious choice to advance the above-described race-neutrality and dysconscious racism that has the potential to directly harm students.

The “Guidance Manual” calls for utilization of “nationally recognized law-related education experts” in training officers (*New Officer Training*, Guidance Manual, p. 7), which opens the door to a similar commitment to expertise in the training of officers in addressing bias and systemic racism. An expert who brings a Critical Race lens to policing and pedagogy could break through the race neutrality and directly address dysconscious racism in policing and schools if given the opportunity to facilitate training.

The attention given in the text to the school-to-prison pipeline functions to reinforce dysconscious racism because of its marginality within the training, but weaving an analysis of the school-to-prison pipeline throughout the materials could help to lessen the effects of racism in school policing. For instance, the section on conflict resolution describes multiple “styles of conflict.” This presents an opportunity to engage officers in considering why there might be differences in how students of different races react to SROs in moments of tense conflict, opening the door to discussing historical trauma and the impact of overpolicing and police violence in some communities. Additionally, this can help officers consider what it would mean to de-escalate tense situations with students through a pedagogical approach rather than simply reverting to their law enforcement training. Another opportunity for incorporating a critical lens on race would be through the child development training for SROs, as it would provide an

opportunity to talk about how race and other environmental factors affect child development in the school environment.

The Guidance Manual describes multiple opportunities for centering the voices and experiences of marginalized students in considering the training and role of School Resource Officers. The School Safety Program mandates that each school with an SRO have a School Safety Assessment and Prevention Team (*New Officer Training*, Guidance Manual, p. 14), which according to the materials should include school administrators, the SRO, district administrators, parent representatives, and teacher representatives. However no students are included in this team's description. Having a diverse group of students who advise on the role and responsibilities of SROs could help to ensure that schools and police departments are responsive to the needs of students. Importantly, schools should be careful not to simply select students for such involvement in a way that would rubber stamp the continuation of the status quo, creating a faux approval that would further demonstrate dysconscious racism. This involvement could, however, place vulnerable Students of Color in a place to be further impacted by police presence in schools, and such a committee would demand unpaid intellectual and emotional labor from Students of Color. Yet for students to be completely left out of the decision-making process for having police in their schools can further disenfranchise those negatively impacted by the presence of police.

In paying critical attention to race in the training, it is important that changes to the program do not fall into the common pattern in schools of turning a racial lens on students without also turning that lens on the

adults in power. Training ought to include considerable time and attention to officers and other staff investigating their own racial identity and how it impacts their work. This is of particular importance for the majority of officers in schools who are White, as to leave their Whiteness uninterrogated would be a further enactment of racism (Utt & Tochluk, 2016; Yancy, 2012).

### Conclusion

There are clear implications that ought to be drawn from this study for the training of SROs so long as police are to be placed in schools, and both schools and SRO training programs ought to seriously consider the implications from this study. At the same time, it is important to note that when weighing the permanence of racism central to arguments in Critical Race Theory, one ought to think beyond these relatively constrained implications. When considered through the lens of CRT, training for officers is likely insufficient to overcome racism in school policing. The mission of the School Safety Program and this training regimen, at face value, is a positive one, and officers and administrators may have positive individual intent. Yet policymakers ought to question whether training itself would be enough to overcome the history of racialized policing and racial bias in police practice.

While this study's purpose is to address race neutrality and dysconscious racism in the training of School Resource Officers, a Critical Race Theory lens applied to policing raises questions for future research about whether police ought to be in schools in the first place considering what scholar and activist Angela Davis calls "the unbroken line of police violence in the U.S. that takes us all the way back to the days of slavery" (Jeffries, 2014). The pervasiveness

of dysconscious racism in the training materials described in this study should be enough to give pause to any policymaker who honestly claims to have the interest of Students of Color in Arizona's schools at heart, as it points to a problem of racism in policing demonstrated in past literature that ought to be taken up in future empirical analysis. After all, this problem of racism bound up in policing is significantly more pervasive and systemic than one set of training materials could ever hope to capture.

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