POLICING IN TORONTO SCHOOLS: 
RACE-ING THE CONVERSATION

by

Gita Rao Madan

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements 
for the degree of Master of Arts 
Graduate Department of Social Justice Education 
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education 
University of Toronto

© Copyright by Gita Rao Madan 2016
POLICING IN TORONTO SCHOOLS: 
RACE-ING THE CONVERSATION 
Master of Arts 2016 
Gita Rao Madan 
Department of Social Justice Education 
University of Toronto 

Abstract 

In 2008, fully armed and uniformed police officers were deployed to thirty public high schools in Toronto to patrol the hallways on a full-time basis. The permanent assignment of police to the city’s schools represents an unprecedented turn toward a disciplinary strategy rooted in a paradigm of security and surveillance. This institutional ethnography traces the chronology of the program, exploring how race-absent official discourses of safety and relationship building are used not only to legitimize the program but also to conceal how it works to produce and sustain social inequalities in schools. I argue that racial power is constitutive of the SRO program itself—that it is not simply an effect or consequence of the program’s existence but the very instrument through which it operates. As such, a framework for school discipline that is rooted in equity and justice would require the complete removal of police officers from school spaces.
Acknowledgements

My deepest gratitude is extended to my supervisor, Dr. Sherene Razack, for her immeasurable guidance and mentorship throughout this process. I also wish to thank my second committee member, Dr. Abigail Bakan, for her invaluable insights and encouragement.

This thesis was also made possible through the unconditional love and support of my mother Sheila, my father Ashok, my brother Rahul, my dear Karl, and my family of brilliant and kind friends.

Finally, thank you to my students and all of the other young people who are a grounding force in my life and a daily source of inspiration for imagining a better future.
# Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Race-ing Police in Schools ................................................................. 1

  Contextualizing SRO Programs ................................................................. 3
  Existing Scholarship ............................................................................... 6
  Race-Absent Scholarship .................................................................. 8
  Race and My Project ........................................................................... 8
  Theoretical Framework: Race, Space, and Modernity .................. 11
  Methodology ......................................................................................... 16
  Chapter Organization ........................................................................... 20

Chapter 2: The Introduction of Police into Toronto’s Public School Systems .......... 21

  A Chronology of Disciplinary Policy and Violence in Toronto Schools ..... 22
  The Introduction of School Resource Officers .................................. 27
  Schooling in the Context of Modernity ............................................ 31
  Zones of Illegality ............................................................................. 33
  Carcerality ......................................................................................... 37
  Comprehension and Closure ............................................................. 39
  Racelessness ....................................................................................... 41
  SRO Governance ............................................................................... 46
  Conclusion ........................................................................................... 49

Chapter 3: Building Relationships through SRO Policing: Cooking with Cops .......... 51

  Building Relationships ....................................................................... 53
  What Is Concealed by the Relationship Building Discourse? ........... 57
  Who Benefits? .................................................................................... 60
  Student Surveillance ......................................................................... 66
  SRO Disciplinary Practices .............................................................. 68
  Voices of Dissent ............................................................................... 72
  SRO Program Evaluations ............................................................... 77
  Racism Born Again .......................................................................... 80
  Conclusion ........................................................................................... 81

Chapter 4: Conclusion ................................................................................. 82

  Moving Forward .................................................................................. 83

References ............................................................................................... 89
Chapter One:

Race-ing Police in Schools

In early September 2008, on the first day of a new school year in Toronto, fully armed and uniformed police officers called School Resource Officers, or SROs, were deployed to thirty public high schools to patrol the hallways on a full-time basis (CBC, 2008b). This policing program was implemented overnight, without any public consultation, and very few details about its parameters were made available by either the Toronto Police Service (TPS) or the two school boards serving the Toronto area, the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) and the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB) (TPAC, 2008b). The permanent assignment of police to our city’s schools represents an unprecedented turn toward a disciplinary strategy rooted in a paradigm of security and surveillance. The SRO program was first introduced following the murder of fifteen-year-old Jordan Manners on school property in 2007; at that time, state representatives justified a need for the policing of school spaces by appealing to widespread public concerns over safety. Over time, the primary emphasis of the program has shifted toward building relationships between police and marginalized youth, an approach rooted in the model of community policing. Now, a few short years and two high school cohorts later, the practice of SRO policing has become normalized as a natural part of the Toronto high school experience, leaving many educational stakeholders, including teachers, administrators, parents, and students, to uncritically accept the presence of dedicated school-based police officers rather than to question the need for them in the first place.
The objectives of this thesis project are twofold: first, to document the history and development of the SRO program as it exists in Toronto; and second, to contribute to the wider debate regarding the role of race in the securitization of school spaces. This research is important because thorough documentation of the SRO program in Toronto has not yet been completed, and I argue that a lack of attention to the productive function of this program has enabled its continued existence by naturalizing the racialized constructs used to uphold it.

My own interest and investment in this project was sparked by a brief conversation that took place while I was studying to become a teacher. During an orientation session at a Toronto high school, one of my peers asked the principal a simple question: whether or not a police officer was stationed at the school. Following a moment of silent tension, my colleague was sharply corrected: “It’s not a police officer; it’s a School Resource Officer.” This was my first introduction to the discursive gameplay commonly used to minimize the stark reality that students are now being policed in the hallways of our schools. The SRO program was implemented several years after I graduated from high school in Scarborough, a largely racialized suburb of Toronto. I imagine that my own schooling experience and that of my peers may have been considerably different had the police been patrolling the hallways of our school. Now, as an educator, I have seen members of my community, including family, friends, and students, face the lived daily reality of police violence that is so often a product of racism and other interlocking oppressions. I take my responsibility to my students very seriously and am deeply concerned by the recent turn toward heightened security and surveillance as new forms of disciplinary power and social control within school spaces. I am, instead,
invested in striving toward the collective creation of classroom, school, and community spaces in which all young people feel safe and supported and are treated with dignity, equity, and respect. Whether this goal can be accomplished when police officers are stationed in schools is the impetus behind this thesis project.

**Contextualizing SRO Programs**

The presence of law enforcement in high schools across North America has expanded drastically over the past twenty years. Although the first reported use of SROs was in Flint, Michigan, in the 1950s, formal partnerships between police departments and school boards really proliferated only in the 1990s as part of a broader “zero tolerance” approach to misconduct (Petteruti, 2011). This model was first implemented in federal drug legislation in the United States, mandating automatic, strict, and uniform punishments for even minor and first-time transgressions of the law. Based on the theory of deterrence, the assumption was that the threat of severe legal consequences would deter a wide range of behaviours that were deemed undesirable. The zero tolerance model quickly spread to other social arenas, including schools. In the United States, the passing of the Gun Free Schools Act in 1994 formally nationalized zero tolerance educational policy, as concerns about school violence gained prominence on the public and policy agendas following several highly publicized school shootings. In the post-9/11 neoliberal context, this has predominantly taken the form of sweeping securitization and surveillance in many public schools, including the installation of metal detectors and surveillance cameras as well as the permanent stationing of security guards and police officers (Nolan, 2011). Within this transformed educational regime, the enforcement of school discipline has become highly punitive, involving serious consequences for even
minor violations of school rules, including acts with little potential for harm, and permitting little room for consideration of mitigating circumstances or alternative disciplinary approaches.

Although the United States has taken the lead on policing in schools, this trend has begun to infiltrate Canadian schooling practices as well: in addition to Toronto, SRO programs have been initiated in other Canadian cities, including Vancouver, Calgary, Ottawa, and Winnipeg (TPS, 2009). Although there is a widening base of scholarship examining the contemporary approach to school governance through strategies of crime control—often referred to as the criminalization of school discipline—there is less research focusing specifically on school policing programs. This gap is especially apparent in the Canadian context. As such, the first of my two primary research questions is: What were the conditions of possibility for the introduction of police officers into Toronto’s public school system, as well as the subsequent expansion of the program?

In Toronto, the stationing of police officers in many public high schools cannot be taken lightly. It occurs within a historical and ongoing daily reality of police violence and brutality toward communities of colour in Toronto, especially young Black and Brown men. Since the 1970s, the Black Action Defense Committee (BADC) and other community members and advocates have been organizing against police violence and the systematic murder of Black men, in particular, at the hands of the Toronto police (Wasun, 2008). In 1992, BADC organized a historic demonstration that saw over a thousand people take to the streets to protest police racism in Toronto and the acquittal of the white police officers involved in the infamous Rodney King beating in Los Angeles. Today, issues of racial profiling, especially in the context of community policing and
contact carding, are major concerns that, thanks to the work of Black Lives Matter Toronto and other advocates for racial justice, have even permeated contemporary mainstream media conversations about the subjection of racialized youth to routinized police suspicion, aggression, and use of force in certain areas of the city (Cole, 2015). Black youth in Toronto are already familiar with the racially coded safety discourses and relationship-building strategies of the TPS. Many Black and Brown youth who I encounter as a community-based educator and public school teacher in Toronto are painfully aware that putting police in the schools is not in fact different from other routine police practices in the city.

In this context, the approval of the SRO program by the school boards, whose mandates emphasize equity and inclusivity, is especially puzzling (TDSB, 1999). How did we arrive at the decision that the best way to make schools safer is through all-encompassing securitization? What does the active presence of law enforcement in schools mean in a broader socio-historical context of police violence toward racialized, particularly Black, communities? Why have officers largely been placed in schools in racialized and low-income neighbourhoods, and how does the systematic school-based criminalization of particular students facilitate their movement into the expanding prison system?

The extent to which matters of race are completely erased in the discourses surrounding SRO programs is shocking. As I will show, in Toronto, race is absent from all of the official communications related to the program, an omission that is also echoed in public discourse. It is key to my project to explore how the absence of an explicit or implicit invocation of race in dominant explanations for the existence of Toronto’s SRO
program actually works to obscure its most insidious functions. As such, my second major research question is: How do the institutional discourses used to legitimize the SRO program conceal its reality as a racial project?

**Existing Scholarship**

Critical scholars have demonstrated that SRO policing and other zero tolerance-based policies not only produce negligible effects as a strategy for improving school safety in general but have also exacted a severe and often disastrous toll on certain youth—specifically racialized (Black and Brown) students (Petteruti, 2011).

The Advancement Project (2013) has collected a wealth of data demonstrating the disproportionality of these consequences:

In Delaware in 2010–2011, Black students were three and a half times more likely to be arrested in school than White students. In 2007–2008 in Philadelphia, a Black student was three and a half times more likely, and a Latino student one and a half times more likely, to be taken into custody from school than a White student. Black students make up only 21% of the youth in Florida, but were the subject of 46% of all 2011 school-related referrals to law enforcement. In East Hartford, Connecticut in the 2006–2007 school year, Black and Latino students were 69% of the population, but experienced 85% of school based arrests. In West Hartford, Connecticut, Black and Latino students made up 24% of the population, but experienced 63% of the arrests. (Advancement Project, 2013)

Studies have found that the disciplinary approach that emerges from a crime control paradigm of security and surveillance disproportionately impacts racialized students in multiple ways, creating a web of intertwined, punitive threads that further
entrench the historical and systemic linkages between schools and jails—a phenomenon referred to as the school-to-prison pipeline or school-to-prison nexus (Meiners, 2007). School-based arrests surely pave the most direct route for funneling students into this institutional track. However, the path between schools and jails is not always linear; for example, the Justice Policy Institute (2011) writes that SROs can create a sense of fear and violence in schools, interfering with learning opportunities and causing students to miss school or become otherwise disengaged, which then increases their chances of becoming involved with the justice system.

In *Police in the Hallways*, Kathleen Nolan (2011) conducted an ethnography in an urban public high school in New York where aggressive policing practices and police surveillance prevail over other ways of responding to misbehaviour. She found that the school, attended predominantly by low-income Black and Latino students who are already subjected to heavy policing in various domains of their lives, is seized by a “culture of control” in which order maintenance—style zero tolerance policing is accompanied by a heavy security apparatus, including metal detectors, surveillance cameras, and scanners, and where criminal justice-based disciplinary practices (e.g., hallway stops and sweeps) and their supporting discourses are widespread. She found that, on the ground level, the emphasis on these practices consistently diverted attention away from educational concerns. Further, as regular school incidents came to be “defined by the actions and language of the police,” the disciplinary strategies of school administrators were overshadowed, and more constructive responses were precluded (p. 15). Importantly, Nolan demonstrates that while this culture of control creates a disproportionate flow of poor and racialized students into criminal court, it is also
powerfully concretized in other ways. Specifically, her work encourages us to look beyond arrest statistics to understand how student-SRO confrontations represent novel forms of racialized penal management within school spaces.

**Race-Absent Scholarship**

Given the amount of evidence connecting SRO policing to racialized outcomes, it is striking that the majority of research on SROs fails to even name race, never mind take it up in any meaningful way. I am critical of work that treats policing in schools as an isolated phenomenon, decontextualizing it from the deeply racialized histories of both the policing and the educational institutions. The failure to name entrenched systems of racism and white supremacy as central to this discussion represents a fundamental lack of understanding of the contemporary and historical realities of the subjugation of people of colour by a society that recognizes only whiteness as fully human. Whether intentional or accidental, academics who use race-neutral language and the rhetoric of multiculturalism to avoid naming race serve to render invisible people of colour and reproduce systems of racial subordination through their research and scholarship. This lack of critical insight has serious material consequences. Race-absent scholarship produces work that is drawn upon by policymakers and other stakeholders to legitimize the continued existence of programs like SRO policing (OHRC, 2003a; OHRC, 2003b). As I will show, the dominant conceptualization of the securitization of schools as unrelated to matters of race directly influences how the violence that accompanies SRO programs comes to be seen as logical and just.

**Race and My Project**

It is imperative that researchers at the intersection of education and criminal
justice actively work to acknowledge and dismantle the racisms produced at this juncture rather than simply mentioning the disproportionate impact on minority students in passing or ignoring them altogether. Scholars including Nolan (2011), Noguera (1995; 2003), Kupchik (2010), and Bracy (2011), whose work I draw upon in this thesis, have taken up race as an analytical framework in ways that have invaluably mapped the groundwork for demonstrating how school-based policing targets racialized students. Each also illuminates the socio-historical and political economic conditions that enabled the introduction of police officers into schools, carefully contextualizing SRO programs within the punitive turn in education and its relationship to societal institutions more broadly. Collectively, these scholars challenge the legitimacy of SRO programs and interrogate the claim that schools and communities can be made safe through strategies of policing.

For me, however, there are lingering questions that remain unanswered even in critical scholarship, conditions of possibility that beg explanation but have yet to be fully captured. Several authors have previously pointed towards theoretical gaps in the SRO literature. Hirschfield (2008), for example, contends that there is something missing from the “moral panic” narrative so often cited as the impetus for the securitization of schools. He argues that while this explanation is important for understanding why police are often introduced into school spaces following a highly sensationalized act of school violence (e.g., the massacre of students at Columbine), it fails to capture why these programs persist and are even expanded when the panic subsides. Another common explanatory narrative he identifies is “due process,” which contends that the shift of front-line disciplinary responsibilities from teachers onto law enforcement constitutes an attempt by
schools and teachers to reduce their vulnerability to litigation. However, concerns about liability fail to account for the fact that, across North America, SRO programs are never concentrated in more affluent neighbourhoods, where students and their families would have greater financial access to be able to pursue legal remedies. These critiques indicate that there is a pervasive, more elusive story to be told about SRO programs, one that has consistently defied explanation but, as I will show, simultaneously ensures their endurance.


My understanding of racial violence in this context extends beyond sensational acts of police brutality. Specifically, there is a more insidious form of injustice inherent in the fact that material and symbolic support for SRO programs has continued to persist in spite of thorough and ongoing documentation demonstrating their manifold devastating consequences for racialized students. In this thesis, I seek to uncover this violence through an interrogation of what SRO programs do—specifically, how they work to produce and reproduce social inequalities within school spaces. Central to this
examination are questions of how: How does violence against racialized student bodies become institutionally authorized? How is this specific form of racial violence obscured by always-evolving but consistently race-absent justificatory discourses? How are these programs and their consequences for particular students widely rendered explicable, logical, and even necessary?

I approach these critical questions with the hypothesis that racial power is constitutive of the SRO program itself—that is, that racial power is not simply an effect or consequence of the program’s existence but the very instrument through which it operates. Accordingly, the only theoretical framework capable of fully illuminating the mechanism of racial power that operates through this program is one that situates policing in schools within the larger field of the production of meanings—specifically, the meaning of the black body in modernity.

**Theoretical Framework: Race, Space, and Modernity**

Denise Ferreira da Silva (2010) refers to police violence as the “most perverse and elusive form of race injustice” (p. 441), arguing that the effects of racial power that manifest themselves in forms such as police brutality go far beyond easily documented instances of racial discrimination. Accordingly, in order to fully grasp these more slippery or insidious forms of race injustice, she challenges the logic that race only becomes significant when it is invoked (either explicitly or implicitly) to justify practices of discrimination. We therefore need to expand the predominant sociological conceptualization of race as a mechanism of exclusion, in order to “address the very conditions of production of the symbolic mechanisms deployed in the constitution of people of colour as modern subaltern social subjects” (p. 427).
In order to do this, Ferreira da Silva offers an archaeological examination for what she calls the analytics of raciality, through which she traces various important moments in the evolution of the racial as a concept over time. She argues that although the idea of “race difference,” or the racial as a signifier of difference, was used in the classification of human groups preceding modernity, it transformed into a strategy of knowledge/power only with the project of modernity. From modernity emerged man: the perfect being, the transcendental consciousness, the sovereign (self-present and self-transparent), and the fundamental agent of human history. It was a raced consciousness: the hegemonic narrative of modernity appropriated and re-signified the “racial” as a strategy of power by articulating it as a scientific construct that fundamentally connected body, place of origin, and forms of consciousness in order to indicate which types of humans exhibited the most advanced form of the human mind. Specifically, those originating from Europe (whites) were produced as the fully modern consciousness, the only form “able to fulfill the material and moral projects of modernity” (p. 431). From there, “race difference” emerged as a concept used to identify and hierarchize qualitatively distinct forms of consciousness and to reveal the “truth” about human conditions.

The sociological field’s epistemological transformation of race from a modern scientific construct to an object of investigation represents a further critical moment in the analytics of raciality. Importantly, Ferreira da Silva argues that sociology re-signified the racial as constituting a strategy of power only when the mechanism of race difference is invoked to justify race prejudice—a framework she calls the logic of exclusion. This is problematic because instead of challenging the construct of race difference itself,
sociology builds upon earlier scientific conceptions of the racial and upholds race
difference as the mechanism through which the racial is manifested. In other words, the
segregation or exclusion of people of colour is understood as a negative byproduct of
race difference in an otherwise egalitarian modern social space. This erases the very
conditions of the moment of the production of the racial as a strategy of power, delinking
it from the earlier articulations of race difference as a specific connection between mind,
body, and place. Critically, it fails to capture the primary social and political effect of the
racial: to produce the realm of universality itself.

From its first articulation in modernity, and throughout its subsequent
transformations, the racial has been used as the category “distinguishing modern
technological and cultural conditions from those which are spatially adjacent but
temporally distant from modernity” (Ferreira da Silva, 2010, p. 435). It has been used to
map which regions of the modern global and social space and which human beings lie
within the territory of universal justice. This domain indicates all that is just, legal, and
good, and organizes structures and institutions according to the principle that only
whiteness signifies universality. Outside of this region is the zone of violence, the
boundary of which is demarcated by race; here, the racial is no longer attributed to all
humans but to bodies and minds that have failed to achieve the proper degree of
development of modern consciousness. These bodies are constructed to immediately
signify an “original outsidedness,” evicted from the domain of the universal principles
ruling modernity (p. 426); they are pathologically fixed by the racial in pre-historical and
pre-conceptual conditions. In modern thought, black consciousness thrives in the domain
of the illegal.
Goldberg (2009) writes that although race has become the foundational code for modern society (whereas prior to the fifteenth century, religion was the dominant public frame), it has assumed a sense of naturalness. In other words, the immense amount of conceptual, material, social, political, and legal work it took to create a modernity constituted by the racial becomes taken for granted, as if there is some sort of inevitability or givenness in the fact that modern social arrangements ascribe worthlessness to those who fall on the other side of universality. Importantly, modernity is an ongoing project that requires continuous investment to produce and reproduce the hierarchy of racial arrangements. The labour of race, as Goldberg calls it, continues to be accomplished by modern institutions, including science, literature, law, and education, which “effect and rationalize social arrangements of power and exploitation, violence and expropriation” (p. 4) by naturalizing the boundary between the domain of justice and the zone of violence.

The analytics of raciality framework allows us to move beyond the liberal race perspective, which assumes a modern social space organized by inherently universal principles and positions race prejudice as a moral problem that can be overcome by eliminating exclusionary practices that are seen as contradictory to the universalism of this space. Further, it challenges the critical race theory perspective, which does challenge the law’s claim of universality through a historical and structural perspective, but retains the earlier construct of racial power as operating primarily through ideas and practices of discrimination and exclusion by focusing on whether and how racism is operative in particular processes and structures. According to Ferreira da Silva, both perspectives are limited by “the view that if one’s race difference is not explicitly found
to determine unfavourable social thoughts or actions, exclusionary ideas and behaviour, it
cannot be proven to be the ultimate cause of the ensuing harm to that person’s rights” (p. 426). Instead, we must understand the racial as a strategy of power that has produced
modernity itself, and, in doing so, written the boundaries of the universal territory of
justice and legality.

The framework I have outlined is critical for several key reasons: first, for its
ability to illustrate and explain mechanisms of racial power and subjugation that are not
captured by the concept of race difference, upon which liberal and critical race theories
rely (i.e., race difference is what produces discrimination and prejudice). The hegemonic
construction of race presumes that race must be invoked in order to justify practices that
produce exclusion. Until we move beyond this view, racism may still be challenged, but
the operation of the racial as a mechanism of power will inevitably be incompletely
grasped. Race difference becomes a strategy of engulfment because, according to
Ferreira da Silva, there are forms of race injustice—specifically, police terror—that can
exist without the invocation of race. Through this framework, it is possible to capture the
more slippery forms of power that produce subalternity without invoking race. In doing
so, it allows for the articulation of claims of race injustice that are otherwise rendered
unheard or irrelevant on the grounds that they fail to explicitly invoke race.

Moreover, close attention to the modern construction of the black body enables a
more complete understanding of why certain actions that would otherwise be considered
violent and unjust consistently escape serious scrutiny. This conceptualization of racial
power is critical to an analysis of SRO policing, which I argue is rooted in racial injustice
but operates through discourses that allow it to persist while eliding the criterion of racial
invocation. If we are to achieve a truly just and equitable education system, we must contextualize the securitization of schools in this understanding of how the racial has constituted the project of modernity, with particular attention to how it has shaped schooling practices.

**Methodology**

In order to pursue my research questions, I employ the methodology of institutional ethnography, which is powerful in its ability to elucidate what institutional discourses do and what they suppress. Smith (2005) writes that the purpose of institutional ethnography is to make visible the complex power relations—what she refers to as the “ruling relations” (p. 4)—that connect us across time and space and coordinate our everyday lives but which remain largely unseen from within the everyday world because they extend beyond the perspective of personal experience. In other words, institutional ethnography “recognizes the real interpenetration of the present and immediate with the unknown elsewhere and elsewhen and the strange forms of power that are at once present and absent in the everyday” (p. 35). Smith offers an illustrative example: a situation in which a person reads a bus number while waiting at a bus stop. While the number itself may indicate information about the route of that particular bus, it does not offer insight into how bus routes in the city are organized and coordinated, passenger flows and peak usage times, the myriad of people involved in ensuring that the buses continue to run and arrive on time, or the structural organization of the bus company itself. In other words, there is information beyond that available from this particular bus stop that could affect how a person perceives and engages with the experience of taking the bus. What institutional ethnography does is to enlarge the scope
of what is visible from the vantage point of any particular site so that the larger organization of social relations that connect one local setting to others, as well as how people participate in and are shaped by these relations, can also come into view. Smith likens the institutional ethnographer to a cartographer, who maps the power relations in which institutions are embedded, illuminating how people’s doings are connected to those of others across space and time.

Institutions are complexes of relations that organize distinct functions in local settings, while at the same time being standardized across particular localities. Institutions are constituted externally to particular people, but people produce and are produced by them in the course of their everyday lives. Smith argues that institutional power is mediated by texts. Texts work to standardize, to transform local particularities into generalized categories and frames of coordination in a highly politicized way. Language is central to the coordination of institutions across time and space; it plays a powerful role in creating frameworks that shape how accounts of personal experiences are understood. As such, institutional ethnography brings the textual into ethnographic focus, seeking to understand what texts do—that is, how they coordinate series of actions; how they produce and regulate the discourses they employ; how they disappear race, class, and gender; and how they insist on abstract individuals without histories, subsuming lived experiences and personal accounts by reconstructing violence “to fit an institutional procedure” (p. 110). For example, Smith writes that institutional narratives often transform police abuse into sanitized instances of properly mandated police behaviour, displacing the victim’s lived experience.

While the focus of institutional ethnography is not the actualities of everyday
existence within a local site, it certainly starts from the reality of people’s lives (as opposed to the abstract theoretical formulation of a problem). People are taken as experts of their own worlds, and the methodological intent is to build upon and extend rather than to displace the knowledge that they already have. Accordingly, my thesis project is rooted in real concerns from various local sites that the SRO program in Toronto has a disproportionate effect on youth of colour. These concerns have come to my attention in several ways: through media interviews of those affected by the program, through community-based resistance including calls for more research (see: OPIRG, 2015), and in many conversations I have had with students and colleagues. From this starting point, I moved outward into an ethnographic exploration of how the institutional processes governing the SRO program organize people’s lives within hierarchical systems of power. Through this method of inquiry, it is possible to move beyond demonstrating evidence of differential outcomes to interrogating how difference itself is established and how it constitutes subjects.

In this project, I bring together spatially and temporally dispersed pieces of information about the Toronto SRO program in order to map the way it has been institutionally maneuvered into our city’s schools. My sources of data include (1) institutional documents, including the Falconer Report (2008), the Police-School Board Protocol (TPS, 2011a), two SRO Program Evaluations (TPS, 2009; TPS, 2011b), the 2011 TPS Year-End Review (TPS, 2012), and several other TPS-generated media releases and social media accounts; and (2) mainstream and alternative media coverage of the SRO program in Toronto, including coverage of its introduction, its expansion, arrests made by SROs, and community-based resistance to the program.
A further reason that I have chosen to employ this methodology is to turn the gaze of scrutiny upward from communities who are often over-studied toward the systems that structure the conditions of their oppression. I believe that it is vital to conduct research that foregrounds the voices of youth who are directly impacted by SRO programs, amplifying their stories, experiences, and demands; this is especially true within a system that actively works to contain and silence them. However, being conscious of how regimes of surveillance persist across institutions, including academia, I am wary of reproducing the very mechanisms that I aim to critique through my work. Fine (cited in Meiners, 2007) echoes this tension: “My work has moved towards institutional analysis because I worry that those interested in qualitative inquiry and critical ‘race’ theory have focused fetishistically on those that endure discrimination” (p. 14). My focus on institutional practices is an intentional decision to explore elite racism—namely, the primarily text- and talk-based reproduction of racism by those whose power and influence relies on “preferential access to and control over public discourse and its consequences for the manufacture of consensus” (Van Dijk, 1993, p. ix).

Smith (2005) argues that the product of institutional ethnography should be accessible and useful, just as a map is to those who live on the terrain it covers. It should serve as a resource for those people and communities whose standpoint it has taken as a starting point, as an extension of already-existing knowledge rather than a substitution with the knowledge of an “expert.” This can have practical implications: an understanding of the categories that operate to coordinate institutional processes may be drawn upon in efforts to change them.
Chapter Organization

In the following chapter, I trace the historical and sociopolitical events leading up to the implementation of the SRO program in 2008, mapping the conditions of possibility for its emergence in Toronto schools. Through an examination of the racially coded discourses of safety and risk used to legitimize the program, I examine how the racial hierarchies that have historically been produced in school spaces continue to be reproduced in the contemporary moment through the work of SRO policing.

In chapter three, I outline the critical developments that have taken place in the years since SROs were first stationed in Toronto schools, arguing that the shift toward a relationship-building approach has effectively and insidiously advanced many of the institutional interests of the police while powerfully decontextualizing the program from the ongoing historical violence that racialized communities experience at their hands.

Finally, in chapter four, I share some concluding remarks about the possibility of a paradigmatic shift away from a punitive and criminal justice-based approach to school discipline in Toronto toward a more constructive approach rooted in equity and justice.
Chapter Two

The Introduction of Police into Toronto’s Public School System

When the SRO program was introduced in Toronto in 2008, state representatives justified a need for the policing of schools by appealing to concerns over school safety. “Our goal is to make our schools safe,” remarked former Toronto Chief of Police Bill Blair. “SROs are an additional program resource that will support a school environment that is safe and caring. We said we would make a difference and we are,” said former TDSB Director of Education Gerry Connelly (CBC, 2008b). It is true that the issue of school safety in Toronto had recently come to the public forefront with the media-driven panic that followed the death of Jordan Manners, who, in 2007, was the first student to be killed on TDSB property. However, the active policing of school spaces is only one of many possible approaches for addressing the (real or perceived) issue of school safety. Research and experience point to the success of many other programs and policies that have been implemented in other jurisdictions to improve school safety in concrete and meaningful ways. These include conflict resolution programs, peer mentoring and mediation, and other evidence-based approaches based on principles of restorative and transformative justice (Noguera, 2003). Why, then, was the SRO program the foremost policy response to this issue?

In this chapter, I argue that we must not take for granted that police should be part of the educational experience of young people in this city. Through a tracing of the historical and sociopolitical events leading up to the implementation of the SRO program in 2008, I map the conditions of possibility for its emergence in Toronto schools. I begin
with some historical context in the form of a chronology of school disciplinary policy changes in Ontario and school-based violence in Toronto, demonstrating that police have been introduced into Toronto schools in the face of overwhelmingly contradictory facts and evidence. My primary question is not one of intent; instead, I aim to critically interrogate the productive function of the discourses used to legitimize the SRO program—that is, to ask what these discourses do. I argue that this question can be answered only by contextualizing them within the meaning of blackness in modernity. Here, Ferreira da Silva’s work offers insight into how the racial hierarchies that have historically been produced in school spaces continue to be reproduced in the contemporary moment through the work of SRO policing. Ferreira da Silva also shows how it could become perfectly understandable and acceptable to the modern mind to turn to policing as a method of disciplining, controlling, and containing young racialized students: because the spaces and bodies associated with blackness always already signify violence and criminality, falling outside the realm of justice and universality. Therefore, any violence enacted towards these bodies is legitimized by the need to maintain order in schools and keep them “safe”—a rhetoric that powerfully obscures the material consequences of the decision to police young Black and Brown students in their school spaces.

**A Chronology of Disciplinary Policy and Violence in Toronto Schools**

I begin here by providing some context—specifically, an examination of provincial and municipal disciplinary policy changes in the educational arena leading up to the implementation of the SRO program. Over the past twenty years, education policy in Ontario has moved into, and subsequently out of, a period of zero tolerance–based
school disciplinary policy (OHRC, 2003). A zero tolerance approach to school disciplinary matters was first introduced by the Scarborough Board of Education in 1993 under its Safe Schools Policy on Violence and Weapons (OHRC, 2003). In 2001, following the introduction of a provincial school Code of Conduct, the Harris Progressive Conservative government enacted the Safe Schools Act, which formally introduced this disciplinary model on a province-wide basis. Before the Safe Schools Act, the Education Act regulated formal student discipline by limiting the powers of suspension and expulsion to principals and school boards, respectively, and by authorizing the exercise of these powers on a discretionary basis (Ecker, 2000). The most significant changes brought about by the Safe Schools Act were to expand the authority for suspensions and expulsions to teachers and principals, respectively, and to create provisions for mandatory suspension and expulsion as well as mandatory police involvement for various infractions.

This shift toward a zero tolerance–based disciplinary regime profoundly altered the educational landscape in Ontario. In the 2002–3 school year, the number of students suspended in Ontario spiked from two years prior by almost 50,000, to 157,436; expulsions increased from 106 to 1,786 (Rankin, 2009). Soon after the Safe Schools Act came into effect, students, parents, and community members from racialized communities alleged that, in practice, the policy systematically discriminated against students of colour, particularly Black students (OHRC, 2003). They pointed out, for example, that the disciplinary power of school staff was being unequally exercised when it came to more discretionary or subjective offenses, resulting in much higher numbers of racialized students being punished for behaviours such as “disrespect” and “questioning
“authority” than their white counterparts. These claims are corroborated by the TDSB’s race-disaggregated suspension data for 2006 (released only in 2013), which indicate that at the time, suspension rates were disproportionately high for Aboriginal students, followed by Black and mixed-race students (Rankin, 2013). In response to these concerns, voiced primarily by Black parents, the Ontario Human Rights Commission launched a formal investigation into the application of zero tolerance policies in Ontario (OHRC, 2003). The investigation concluded that the Safe Schools Act was indeed having a disproportionate impact both on students of colour, particularly Black, Aboriginal, Tamil, and Latino students, as well as students with disabilities in Ontario. Based on these conclusions, the OHRC filed human rights complaints against the TDSB and the Ministry of Education, and settlements were reached in 2005 and 2007, respectively, in which parties were counseled to examine and implement alternative measures for achieving school safety that do not discriminate against racialized students and students with disabilities (OHRC, 2007).

In response to the OHRC investigation, the Ministry of Education passed Bill 212, the Ontario Education Amendment Act (Progressive Discipline and School Safety), on June 4, 2007, and the law came into effect on February 1, 2008 (Wynne, 2007). The amendment marked a drastic change in approach from the Safe Schools Act, requiring that all school boards in Ontario revise their policies, guidelines, and procedures with respect to discipline: instead of mandating strict and punitive one-size-fits-all consequences, it called for a graduated disciplinary model following a progressive continuum of supportive interventions. Further, it removed the suspension and expulsion powers granted by the Safe Schools Act and gave school boards $44 million to hire
psychologists and social workers and to set up alternative programs for students who are suspended or expelled (Rankin, 2009). Although Bill 212 was itself a progressive and commendable policy move by the Ministry of Education, it remained to be seen how, at the ground level and in conjunction with other policies, it would ensure the protection of students from the institutionalized racism characterizing the preceding disciplinary regime.

Amid this province-wide transformation of school disciplinary policy, the city of Toronto was deeply shaken by the shooting death of fifteen-year-old Jordan Manners in a stairwell of his high school, C.W. Jefferys Collegiate Institute, in May 2007. It was a tragic loss of a young life, and marked the first murder of a student in the halls of a Toronto public school. Following this incident, the TDSB found itself facing severe scrutiny and urgent demands for accountability and action by a public experiencing a moral panic regarding the state of school safety and security in Toronto (Falconer, 2008).

It is important to note Toronto criminologist Scot Wortley’s (2008) caution that a sensationalized focus on individual cases can create fears of crime, contributing to the belief that crime is worsening when in fact statistics tell otherwise. Toronto’s violent crime rate has in fact decreased over the past twenty years and currently falls far below both the national average and rates for most jurisdictions in the United States. However, studies show a widespread public perception than violent crime is on the rise: 70 percent of Toronto residents believe that crime increased significantly between 1997 and 2007, and 50 percent believe that Toronto has more crime than other major cities in Canada. This unsubstantiated fear has also been documented in the American educational context: an analysis of U.S. newspaper articles conducted between 2000 and 2006 revealed that
school violence is consistently portrayed as bad and getting worse, despite drops in national rates of both school-specific and general crime over the past twenty years (rates of school violence decreased 69 percent in this time period) (Justice Policy Institute, 2012; Kupchik and Bracy, 2010). In Ontario, although overall crime rates are stable, disaggregated data does point toward an increasing concentration of violence among “socially disadvantaged minority youth” (Wortley, 2008). However, Wortley asserts that it is the fear of crime and violence that is a growing problem in this province. There is a tendency for fears of youth violence to concentrate on school spaces when, in fact, the percentage of youth homicides occurring at school is a small fraction of the total number of youth homicides (less than 2 percent in the United States in 2011) (Justice Policy Institute, 2012).

In the face of the public fears following the Manners tragedy, the TDSB commissioned a three-member School Community Safety Advisory Panel, led by lawyer Julian Falconer, to conduct a thorough investigation into safety in Toronto schools. The resulting report, released in January 2008, is deserving of serious critique (which is beyond the scope of this thesis). However, the panel did find that the effects of the punitive approach characterizing the zero tolerance era are lasting and ongoing, resulting in an urgent and systemic “crisis of confidence” caused by the TDSB’s failure to address the needs of marginalized youth (Falconer, 2008). The report strongly recommended a total dismantling of the “Safe Schools” culture, including the removal of “Safe Schools” language from all TDSB policies, to be replaced by a “different and inclusive concept of safety—an approach which includes discipline but is capable of operating beyond straight enforcement” (p. 5). The recommendations included campaigns to address sexual
assault and gender-based violence; revision of a code of conduct to address cyber-violence; teams of school-based support workers to support the mental health needs of students; thorough curriculum reform pursuant to the TDSB’s Equity Foundation Statement, including the incorporation of African-centered perspectives; and the hiring of additional social workers, child and youth counselors, attendance counselors, and community outreach workers. The constructive nature of many of these recommendations reflected Falconer’s position that the TDSB must “send [a] clear message to affected communities that the vestiges of the past, in the form of safe school/zero tolerance initiatives have been truly abandoned” (p. 52).

Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty also commissioned a provincial investigation into youth violence in response to the Manners shooting. Written by Roy McMurtry and Alvin Curling (2008), the resulting report declared that although the Ministry of Education has taken some positive steps, the new provisions fall short of what is required to deal with the devastating reality of systemic racism and poverty that continues to permeate Ontario schools in a multitude of interlocking ways. They argue that racism in Canadian society is not only a notorious and indisputable fact, but it is becoming an ever more entrenched problem here because “Ontario is not dealing with it.” Because these long-identified barriers are not being addressed, new investments in education are not reaching many of the young people marginalized by the education system. Given this policy context of institutionalized racism, how would the school board prioritize recommendations to move forward at this important historical juncture?

**The Introduction of School Resource Officers**

In August of 2008, local media announced to the public that armed and uniformed
police officers (SROs) would be permanently stationed in thirty Toronto high schools at the beginning of the upcoming 2008–9 school year. According to the CBC, the SRO initiative was the result of a new partnership between the TPS, the TDSB, and the TCDSB, formed as a direct response to the Falconer report on school violence (CBC, 2008b). The primary goal of the initiative was “to improve safety (real and perceived) in and around public schools” (Public Safety Canada, 2013), and the SROs’ mandate was to work “in partnership with students, teachers, school administrators, School Board officials, parents, other police officers and the community, to work to establish and maintain a healthy and safe school community” (Connelly, 2008). To this end, funding was made possible through a one-time provincial grant of $2.1 million aimed at “addressing the increased gun violence in the City of Toronto” (Public Safety Canada, 2013). This program would mark a significant change in the relationship between police and students; until this time, police visited local schools only occasionally as called in by school administration or as part of special events or presentations, but their active and visible presence had never before been a permanent part of Toronto’s schooling fabric.

Of the 126 recommendations made in the Falconer report, not one called for the placement of armed officers in schools. In fact, Falconer cautioned that “quick fix” surveillance-based solutions (e.g., metal detectors) might be a tempting response but would ultimately undermine the creation of healthy and safe learning environments. Other prominent researchers and community advocates had also previously denounced the idea of policing as a way of addressing safety in schools. The McMurtry-Curling report argued that the tactic of deploying even more law enforcement to address the roots of youth violence actually exacerbates the problem. This is due to the already-
deteriorating relationship between police and racialized youth, the proven harmful nature of punitive strategies, and the increased criminalization of youth caused by zero tolerance policies, which “have led many schools to call in the police for activities that would have been addressed by the schools alone in earlier times,” often for minor matters that do not involve violence. Many other organizations, including Jane and Finch Action Against Poverty, the Neighbourhood Organized Coalition Opposing Police in Schools, and the Toronto Police Accountability Coalition, as well as community residents, students, and parents, also asserted their strong opposition to the SRO program around the time of its inception (Gopaul, 2009; TPAC, 2008a; TPAC, 2008b). For example, on the very same day the program was announced, students and staff at an alternative school called the Student School voted unanimously to reject the assignment of an SRO to their school (Worrell, 2008).

The relationship between the police and racialized communities was particularly tense leading up to the introduction of the SRO program. On October 31, 2007, unarmed Alwy Al-Nadhir, an eighteen-year-old student at Central Technical School in Toronto, was shot dead by a police officer in Riverdale Park (Cash, 2008). The ensuing Justice for Alwy Campaign mobilized the community to demand that the officer responsible for Alwy’s death be charged; instead, the officer was cleared by the Special Investigations Unit, the “arm’s-length” body that investigates police misconduct, in June 2008 (CBC, 2008a). Instances of police profiling, suspicion, aggression, and force have always been routine experiences for many racialized youth in Toronto. For example, one study of Toronto high school students shows that Black students not involved in delinquent behaviour are much more likely to be stopped and treated as suspects by the police than
white youth who actually admit involvement in illegal activity (Fine et al., 2003). Issues related to the relationship between police and Toronto schools had also arisen prior to the implementation of the SRO program. The OHRC (2003) investigation into the Safe Schools Act cited its mandatory involvement of police in schools for certain infractions as a major concern, due to the “increased power given to police to supervise Black students, particularly given the evidence that Blacks are already subject to disproportionate racial profiling by the police.” For years, Black parents and some school board trustees have condemned the increasing reliance on police by Toronto schools, citing many incidents of police harassment, as well as arrests taking place within schools prior to the launch of proper investigations. There is little evidence to support the premise that policing in schools actually makes schools safer. A report by the International Center for Crime Prevention suggests that SRO programs have no long-term measurable benefit for either student engagement or school safety, and U.S. statistics show that since the expansion of SRO programs, levels of student-reported incidents of theft and violence have been at their lowest when the fewest number of SROs were assigned per student (Campbell, 2009; Justice Policy Institute, 2012).

The TDSB is committed to a mandate of fairness, equity, and inclusion (TDSB, 1999). Given a history of inequitable disciplinary practice in Ontario, a backdrop of racial profiling and violence by police officers in Toronto, steadily decreasing municipal crime rates, little evidence supporting the effectiveness of SRO programs, and evidence from other jurisdictions that policing in schools produces starkly racialized consequences, how are we to understand the implementation of armed officers into our city’s schools? What logic is revealed by what we “remember to forget and forget to
remember” (Goldberg, 2009, p. 28) in making these decisions? Here, I argue something that many people of colour already “know”: that a project like the SRO policing initiative is, at its essence, a strategy of racial power, premised on ideas about which bodies need to be surveilled, disciplined, and controlled and which bodies deserve safety and protection.

**Schooling in the Context of Modernity**

As artifacts of modernity themselves, schools have always been important sites through which the power of the racial is inscribed on the bodies of Black and Brown youth. The foremost mechanisms through which this is accomplished are discipline, control, and containment. Noguera (1995) traces how the organization and operation of public schools have been influenced by a preoccupation with social control since their early development at the start of the nineteenth century. Early American schools were influenced by the asylum, an institution that used rigid discipline not to prepare prisoners for eventual readmission into society but to mitigate the threat they posed to others. At this time, the educational agenda was dominated by the need to control student behaviour, especially those from poor and immigrant families who were deemed in need of saving through assimilation. Guided by this ideology, as school systems developed, a focus on maintaining efficiency, routine, and order through discipline of the body overtook concerns about academic achievement.

In Canada, the civilizing role of the educational mission is no more apparent than in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Indian Residential Schools, through which many successive generations of Aboriginal children were forced (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). Under the force of colonial law, children were removed from their
families to live under a system of foreign language, religion, and culture operated by a state committed to their physical and cultural obliteration. Under the guise of education, these children were made to live in deplorable living conditions, enduring inadequate nutrition and starvation, forced labour in unsafe working conditions, cruel discipline often involving physical and sexual abuse, and inadequate medical services causing more than 6,000 deaths. This school-based violence escapes the hegemonic historical narrative of the Canadian education system, though it was critical to the formation of this settler colonial state.

Within the modern educational setting, discipline serves as a central mechanism of racial power. In schools, the exercise of punishment has served as the primary means for both producing and securing the boundaries of the territory of universality. The criminalization of school discipline involves new and sophisticated regimes of heightened security and surveillance; under this prevailing paradigm, the majority of actions taken (including the installation of metal detectors, security cameras, and SROs) are pre-emptive. In other words, in the absence of any actual evidence, the implementation of these measures is based on the assumption that criminality (or the possibility of future criminality) is ever present (Pinnow, 2013). In this way, issues of safety are framed as issues of security and control: the very idea of safety as it is mobilized here becomes predicated on an implicit notion that some students must be kept safe from others.

In Ontario, although school disciplinary policy has officially moved away from institutionalized zero tolerance, the practice of policing in schools is in fact continuous with, not divergent from, this punitive approach. This claim is supported by the majority
of research on the school-to-prison pipeline, which consistently refers to policing as a
direct manifestation of zero tolerance, not as some sort of constructive alternative. I argue
that school-based policing is the most recent technology for continuing decades-old
practices of subjugating and controlling the racialized body through schooling.

**Zones of Illegality**

Referring to the poor and racialized favelas of Rio de Janeiro, Ferreira da Silva
(2010) argues that neighbourhoods inhabited by bodies of colour are written off as zones
of pathology and illegality, the boundaries of which are constituted by the universal
spaces of legality and justice in which white middle-class Cariocas (residents of Rio)
live. Blackness is produced to signify this domain: markers of blackness indicate the
embodiment of excess, the overflow of danger, and social and moral degeneracy, and
violence itself is understood as indigenous not only to these areas but to the very bodies
of their inhabitants. In Toronto, Ferreira da Silva’s spatial anchoring of the racial is
evident in the geographic distribution of the SRO program across the city (Vivanco,
2009). Officers have been concentrated in schools under the city’s “priority area”
framework (which has since been renamed as “neighbourhood improvement areas”), for
which one of the key criteria for identifying target areas was a disproportionately large
concentration of immigrant and racialized residents (Chapman-Nyaho, James, & Kwan-
Lafond, 2012). In other words, the moral panics that catalyze security interventions in
schools are more accurately *racialized* moral panics, premised on the construction of
communities of colour as a threat to safety that must be controlled and contained (James,
2011). These are the same communities whose streets have already been occupied by an
aggressive and threatening specialized street policing unit called TAVIS (Toronto Anti-
Violence Intervention Strategy), a program that has been heavily criticized for its racial profiling of young men of colour, particularly Black men (Joshi-Vijayan, 2008). This racialized spatial distribution follows similar patterns in other cities: for example, the percentage of U.S. schools with full-time SROs varies from 5 percent in rural elementary schools to 68 percent in urban high schools (Na & Gottfredson, 2011). The likelihood of having other crime-control technologies such as metal detectors, gates, walls, and barricades is also positively correlated to the prevalence of minority students (Hirschfield, 2008).

In a study of Black high school students in Toronto, participants reported being routinely stereotyped by adults as troublemakers and poor students based on their skin colour and neighbourhood: “Once they [police] see wha colour skin you have, you are bad news. . . . They don’t look at you as a person; they look at you as where you’re from” (James, 2011, p. 481). The discursive association of lawlessness and other “problem” behaviours with residence in stigmatized urban neighbourhoods in Toronto is discussed by James (2011), who argues that police intervention into the lives of youth is recurrently justified by pervasive discourses of at-riskness. “Risk,” which serves as a euphemism for race/place and other interlocking constructs including class, gender, and immigration status, is not an abstract concept; it is a category used to identify racialized youth, to label them as in need of saving, and to justify mechanisms of social control. The “at-risk” designation is powerful in its ability to mask institutionally structured relations in ways that pin responsibility for circumstances and life opportunities back onto youth, their families, and their communities. The institutions that then mobilize this designation are absolved from responsibility, understood only as well intentioned in their provision of
additional community “supports” such as extra police. Gebhard (2013) also points to how the construction of Aboriginal peoples as inferior and in need of help is not only used to justify intervention but is fundamental to the perpetuation of mythologies celebrating the ongoing benevolence of the Canadian nation state.

These spatialized discourses of criminality and risk are evident in the explanatory framework used by the media to organize the story of Jordan Manners’s death in 2007. O’Grady et al. (2010) show that although Manners’s shooting was first contextualized by the media as the latest tragedy in a string of school shootings in North America, this interpretation quickly gave way to one that constructed his death as a product of his community’s troubled socioeconomic and cultural conditions—that is, as rooted in the crime-ridden and gang-infested environment of Toronto’s black urban “underclass.” This discursive shift toward criminalization took place almost immediately following Manners’s murder, and in the absence of almost any information about the event. For the media, Manners’s death quickly became a product of his culture, of the crime-ridden community where he came from, despite the fact that levels of crime and victimization at Manners’s high school at the time were comparable to random samples from other high schools across the city. However, when blackness and black spaces are understood as spaces of illegality and criminality, evidence that reflects actual levels of violence becomes irrelevant. Crime and criminality simply become understood as inherent problems only of black and brown spaces and, by extension, of the youth who move through them. The individuality of particular people—even a fifteen-year old child—is always already eclipsed in order for these discourses to circulate as truth.

The Falconer report warned that the targeted use of securitization and surveillance
technologies (specifically metal detectors) in only some of Toronto’s schools would result in even further stigmatization and marginalization. While Falconer is correct, the consequences are even more dire: the targeted deployment of SROs means that students at schools with the SRO program experience a qualitatively different form of discipline than do students at schools without SROs. This means that, in Toronto, there is a significant probability that two students who exhibit the same behaviour in schools in different parts of the city will face radically different consequences. The New York Civil Liberties Union has documented evidence of discriminatory and abusive comments and conduct by SROs, intrusive searches and confiscation of personal items, and intrusions on instructional time (Mukherjee, 2007). Research shows that schools with SROs are responsible for higher rates of suspensions, removals, and transfers than schools without SROs (Na & Gottfredson, 2011). Further, the rate of arrests for “disorderly conduct,” a circumstantial charge that can serve as a catch-all for a range of behaviours judged to be disruptive, is more than five times greater in schools with an SRO than those without one (Petteruti, 2011; Theriot, 2009).

Hundreds of stories of unlawful school-based arrests have been documented, many of which reveal a shocking abuse of police authority. For example, the Advancement Project (2003; 2013) reported that in Palm Beach County, Florida, a six-year-old student was arrested for trespassing on school property while walking home through the schoolyard after hours; in Houston, Texas, an honours student spent the night in jail after missing class to support her family; in Indianola, Mississippi, elementary school students have been arrested for talking during an assembly; in New York, a thirteen-year-old student was handcuffed and removed from school for writing on her
desk. Arrests in the Toronto context have yet to be methodically documented; one such event in a Toronto high school was captured on video and will be analyzed in the following chapter.

**Carcerality**

Noguera (2003) writes, “Those most frequently targeted for punishment in school often look—in terms of race, gender, and socioeconomic status—a lot like smaller versions of the adults who are most likely to be targeted for incarceration in society” (p. 343). As the presence of law enforcement has increased in American schools, arrests and referrals to the juvenile justice systems have also increased, and a greater proportion of referrals to juvenile courts are now coming from schools (Justice Policy Institute, 2012; Na and Gottfredson, 2011). For example, in Clayton County, Georgia, the number of referrals to the juvenile justice system increased from an average of 89 per year in the 1990s to 1,400 per year in 2004, when the SRO program was initiated in that district. Gebhard (2013) points to the existence of a school-to-prison nexus for Aboriginal youth in Canada, who make up 3 percent of the total population but a staggering 17 percent of the country’s expanding prison population. She argues that ongoing systemic inequalities and schooling practices rooted in Canada’s colonial history ensure the continuity between residential schools and contemporary schools and blur the line between schooling and incarceration: “The prison has become for many young native people the contemporary equivalent of what the Indian residential school represented for their parents” (Jackson & Canadian Bar Association, cited in Gebhard, 2013).

The racial inequity associated with the criminalization of school discipline must be theorized within a political economic analysis focused on the rise of the prison
industrial complex, a phenomenon that fundamentally depends on the criminalization of Indigenous, black and brown bodies. Despite the national crime rate being at its lowest since 1973, Canada is currently undergoing its largest prison expansion since the 1930s. Between 2008 and 2011, the federal government invested upward of $150 million to build twenty-two new facilities and to expand seventeen existing ones (CBC, 2010). This expansion has, once again, been justified through discourses of safety: “Our government is proud to be on the right side of this issue—the side of law-abiding citizens, the side of victims who want justice, and the side that understands the cost of a safe and secure society is an investment worth making,” said Vic Toews, former Minister of Public Safety. Toews flatly denied statistics about falling crime rates in order to push this carceral agenda. “The crime isn’t going down,” he insisted; “It is still unacceptably high. Canadians should not be subjected to that kind of crime rate” (CBC, 2010). When so many new prison cells are created, incentives for criminalization become even stronger in order to fill them. Fine and Ruglis (2009) argue that we are witnessing a “soft coercive migration of youth of colour, especially poor youth of colour, out of sites of public education and into militarized and circular corners of the public sphere” (p. 20). Public educational policies are not confined to the educational arena but are cross-sectoral, operating in conjunction with criminal justice, health, and neoliberal economic policy. Contrary to dominant beliefs, the neoliberal educational agenda has not withdrawn public investment from poor and racialized schools; it actually involves a steady and massive infusion of public funds into these schools in the form of criminal justice security and surveillance. The cost of a Toronto police officer, including pay, pension, supervision, and equipment, was about $100,000 a year in 2008, meaning that the SRO program
represented a $3 million investment in Toronto schools in the first year of its existence (TPAC, 2009). This was funding that had been allocated to increase safety in Toronto schools, and that could have been used to implement many of the constructive policies recommended for precisely that purpose in the reports commissioned by both the TDSB and the province. However, of the many ways that money could be spent to resource schools, the SRO program is one of the few investments able to provide a firm guarantee that it will eventually loop back around to benefit private and carceral interests.

**Comprehension and Closure**

Ferreira da Silva’s (2010) work on constructions of blackness in modernity allows us to understand why the concentration of SRO policing on particular bodies has so easily escaped serious scrutiny: dominant discourses that construct poor and racialized areas and bodies as zones of violence work to legitimize their containment. When violence is understood as a routine phenomenon for black and brown bodies, violence towards them is nothing new; in fact, their very presence marks a need for intervention. As the boundaries of universality are drawn, whiteness is produced as innocence, security, and merit. For those who exist in the domain of justice, black bodies become the rightful targets of policing simply by virtue of their residence in the domain of the illegal.

In Toronto, if school-based violence is understood as an extension of community-based violence, as was seen in Manners’s case, then it is only logical that the street policing model of TAVIS has infiltrated schools. Indeed, if racialized students are the very embodiment of danger and criminality, then who better to control this threat than the police? In this way, the fact that SRO programs exist in only certain areas of the city is not only rendered explicable but becomes necessary and justifiable: these school
communities *deserve* to be policed because something intrinsic and unique to their students put them in this predicament in the first place.

Fears of black violence, mapped onto the bodies of youth, fuel support for SROs. In Toronto, Thompson and Wallner (2011) argue that the Manners tragedy, which dominated the Canadian media for weeks, served as a focusing event that catalyzed policy changes which had garnered little political support in the pre-Manners policy climate. For example, in January 2008, the TDSB approved the establishment of an Afrocentric school in Toronto, a proposal that had been repeatedly shelved for a decade prior. The aftermath of the event opened up a similar window of opportunity in which the SRO program also became a viable policy response to an issue that constructed school safety as an issue of black and brown criminality. The SRO initiative certainly would have faced greater public scrutiny had it been tabled during the OHRC human rights investigations. However, in the wake of Manners’s murder, the formation of a strategic partnership between the TDSB and the TPS reassured the public that serious action was being taken. Policing as a strategic intervention is tangible and immediate, far more visible than the majority of potential alternatives. For many people, the routine work of the police is to ensure public order and to protect rather than harm the population—a view that precludes serious public scrutiny and lends to the belief that SROs are simply a product of a well-intentioned desire to protect young people. This is certainly an obstacle I have faced in my attempts to discuss the issues of SRO policing with my colleagues: the absence of race invocation in the production of this form of injustice “renders the majority of . . . whites either ignorant, insensitive, or unable to mount effective political resistance” (Ferreira da Silva, 2010, p. 441). It is true that, even for many progressive
educators, the dominant framework for conceptualizing race injustice as a process of exclusion impedes resistance to a program that legitimizes itself based on a principle that is easy to adhere to: the desire for safe schools.

Finally, when police officers are permanently installed in black and brown areas of the city, this further legitimizes and reinscribes the constructions of inherent criminality that were used to explain their presence in the first place. It suggests that if the police are there, the violence must actually be dangerously out of control, and so they must need to be there. Resistance to police presence then becomes effectively managed in a way that diverts attention and absolves state institutions by placing the blame back on communities and individuals. The line separating police terror from routine police operations becomes blurred, but this is completely understandable because it is for the protection of the students.

**Racelessness**

For Ferreira da Silva (2010), police terror is the most elusive instance of race injustice because it operates fully and effectively without the invocation of race. Instead, “this kind of race injustice is hidden by a perverse logic. It assumes that since they’ve been written outside the domain of legality, residents are also placed there and therefore rightful victims of police terror” (p. 441). Policymakers and officials who make decisions about containing and controlling the constructed threat tend to be far removed from the lived daily consequences of those decisions. These are people whose children do not typically face routinized police violence, for whom policing projects can be conveniently removed from their historical and structural contexts in order to declare that they have nothing to do with race.
In her consideration of dominant responses to social exclusion, Ferreira da Silva critiques the liberal attack on official segregation, which reinstated race in the domain of law through the punishment of exclusionary practices but “left un-addressed how the structures, institutions and principles organising the US social space have been constituted out of the assumption that whiteness and only whiteness signifies universality” (p. 447). Further, although critical race theory challenged the law for its inherent bias after segregation was legally abolished, this recognition alone does not render judicial processes just. Many scholars still retain the view that racial power manifests primarily as discrimination, limiting considerations to whether and how racism plays a role in social encounters, processes, and structures. As a result, the most pervasive form of race injustice is obscured: “that which usually does not make it to the courts; even when it does, it always already ensures that the black or Latino perpetrator will receive a guilty verdict because the blackness and brownness of the accused or victim and the place where s/he lives is read as the indigenous locus of violence” (p. 448).

In *The New Jim Crow*, Alexander (2010) argues that mass incarceration has become the new face of this racial logic that organizes modern society. Echoing Ferreira da Silva, she writes that the end of the civil rights era did not bring about the end of this logic but instead called for a redesign of its mechanisms. As a result, what has changed most is the language used to justify policies that are racially subjugating. Post–civil rights, it is no longer socially permissible to explicitly invoke race as justification. Rather than doing this, the criminal justice system is mobilized to label people of colour, particularly Black men, as criminals so that we can continue to engage in all of the
practices that we claim to have left behind since we entered this so-called post-racial era.

Goldberg (2009) also argues that in the modern imagination, race is assumed to be an obsolete notion, a vestige of the premodern past. Contemporary forces of racial order insist on formal equality under the law, producing state-mandated race neutrality that has effectively “saved” racism through the categorical abandonment of race. Goldberg refers to this redirection of the racial as born again racism: “Racism without race, racism gone private, racism without the categories to name it as such. It is racism shorn of the charge, a racism that cannot be named because nothing abounds with which to name it. It is a racism purged of historical roots, of its groundedness, a racism whose history is lost” (p. 23). Born again racism is transparent and faceless, always operating in denial. A regime of racelessness, while appearing to extend openness and accessibility, ensures the covert and totalizing extension of the racial—a logic that now rests on discourses of security maintenance, crime control, and the like.

Settler colonialism is also imagined as a relic of a distant past. Razack (2015) offers detailed evidence of the unspeakability of racism in matters of colonial violence on the part of the Canadian state. Specifically, she tracks the story told by white settler society about Indigenous deaths in police custody in official inquests and inquiries into these deaths. In every case, iterations of the same colonial story are told—that of the disappearing Indian. The proceedings of inquests and inquiries inevitably become focused on details of alcoholism and other pathologies understood as intrinsic to Indigenous people and communities, installing the idea that Indigenous people lack a capacity for modern life and are therefore always already dying anyway.

The race-absent official story told by inquests and inquiries serves an important
function in contemporary colonial governance. Settlers have much at stake in the active maintenance of this narrative, as their very legitimacy as rightful owners of the land requires the disappearance of Indians. Razack writes, “The activity of clearing settler spaces of Indigenous bodies becomes morally defensible if Indigenous people can in fact be turned into debris, a transformation that is accomplished by viewing the Indigenous body as sick, dysfunctional, and self-destructive” (p. 17). In the context of inquests and inquiries, when a framework of addiction and dysfunction takes over, discussion is limited to how improved systems of care can be implemented in the future to better deal with the inherent vulnerabilities of this population. This framework blames individual Indigenous people for their own deaths; if understood as victims, it is only of their own pathology. It renders a historicized interrogation of the dispossession and violence that continue to be produced by ongoing processes of settler colonialism as peripheral to any investigation of Indigenous death in custody. Far from holding the state accountable, it obscures the violence enacted on the bodies of Indigenous people by the state. If anything, settler society comes to be seen as benevolent for trying to help such a difficult and vulnerable population.

With respect to school-based policing in Toronto, the very existence of the SRO program depends on the active maintenance of an official narrative that warns of perpetual threats to school safety. As I have shown, this story is predicated on racialized constructs of criminality and risk. Because these characteristics are understood as inherent to particular bodies, police response becomes framed as a logical, neutral, and just intervention. In Toronto, the implementation of the program has been accomplished in a policy context that makes no mention of race or the historical relationship between
police and racialized communities. Menter’s (1987) discursive analysis of the literature on police-school relationships in England identifies this erasure, revealing that police in schools are often framed by institutions in ways that obscure the central role of the police in the broader machinery of security and surveillance. He identifies in institutional documents a common pattern of carefully crafted and race-neutral language, including words such as “cooperation,” “respect,” “responsibility,” and “cultural diversity.” These policies are “carved very precisely, and with a very sharp edge, around the contours of race, ethnicity, and class; ironically in the name of public safety, educational accountability, and personal responsibility” (Fine and Ruglis, 2009, p. 22). The glaring omission of race is not merely an effect of power; it is the very mechanism through which it operates. Two opposing discourses become apparent: one represented by institutional documents, and the other by lived realities, which are rooted in collective memories that powerfully disrupt dehistoricized and raceless accounts of both education and policing. Pinnow (2013) refers to this disjunction as a “contradictory surveillance terrain,” in order to highlight the tension between the application of law enforcement to ensure “safety” and the reality that safety is only ensured for some:

The “contradictory” aspect of the school surveillance terrain can be located in the tension between the principles guiding the use of law enforcement which has been instituted under the auspices of promoting school and student safety, and the reality that the manner in which these resources are used against particular youth, constructing them as criminals to be disciplined and punished and contributing significantly to lengthening the school-to-prison pipeline. (p. 253)
**SRO Governance**

Issues of racism are so inextricably linked to the existence and operation of the SRO program that it is not only race that disappears from the conversation; in some cases, all traces of the program disappear as well. SROs in Toronto are governed by a document called the “Police-School Board Protocol,” the purpose of which is to establish an agreement between the TPS, the TDSB, and the TCDSB confirming the “working relationship and appropriate responses to incidents where police involvement or intervention is requested or required in school related incidents” (TPS, 2011a, p. 4). The most recent version, ratified in 2011, seeks to expand the 2006 version, which governed the relationship between police and students prior to the introduction of SROs.

Considering that the SRO program was implemented in 2008, well before the document was updated, it is curious that the current document bears so little mention of SROs. In fact, the only reference to SRO policing in the entire protocol appears in section 18, “School/Police Role in Violence Prevention”: “Where assigned, School Resource Officers (SRO) will work in partnership with students, teachers, school administrators, school board officials, parents, other police officers, and the community to establish and maintain a healthy and safe school community” (p. 20). This omission is extremely problematic because it leaves a gaping hole in the governance and oversight of a program that represents an unprecedented involvement of police officers in some Toronto schools as well as new forms of interaction between police and youth in Toronto that are unique to SRO policing.

The guidelines in the existing protocol pertain to the roles and responsibilities of police officers that visit schools to conduct criminal investigations; as mentioned, there
are none pertaining to the working relationship between schools and SRO police in particular. Several contradictions between the protocol and the roles and responsibilities of SROs become apparent. For example, there is a lack of clarity regarding whose authority—that of the school administration or that of the police—prevails in a conflict over discipline. The protocol states that in cases of exigent (urgent, pressing, or emergency) circumstances, police assume primary responsibility as may be necessary to ensure school safety, whereas the principal continues to be responsible for the health and welfare of students and to maintain proper order and discipline in the school. As I show throughout this thesis, the on-paper distinction between ensuring safety and enacting discipline is not so neatly delineated when it comes to the work of the SRO, specifically when SROs perform disciplinary functions in the name of “safety.” Research shows that in similar situations, school authority is routinely relinquished to police power as constructive disciplinary strategies become overshadowed by the militarization framework (Nolan, 2011). Kupchik (2010) suggests that for educators, the division engendered by the securitization regime is related to how many now see their roles “in more limited terms than in years past, where teachers now deal exclusively with students’ minds and security forces with students’ bodies” (p. 98).

The protocol also makes a clear distinction between school-based incidents that require mandatory notification of the police by school officials and those for which notification is discretionary. Mandatory notification is required, for example, in all cases of death, sexual assault, and criminal harassment. Incidents that are left to the principal’s discretion upon consideration of other mitigating factors include vandalism, trespassing, threats of serious physical injury, and all other school-related occurrences not specified in
the protocol. In SRO-policed schools, procedures for the discretionary notification of the police become irrelevant, as officers, who roam the hallways and are in constant communication with students, are always on the front lines of response. Further, in schools without SROs, when police are called in to a school in response to an incident, they are to follow a set of steps before making contact with a student: “report to the principal, providing proper identification; explain the purpose of the visit, and plan with the principal on how to proceed; consider alternatives that limit the disruption to the school day; obtain information from the principal about the student before making contact with the student; and contact, or make arrangements with the principal to contact, parents of students under the age of 18” (p. 10). These guidelines, which are ultimately meant to ensure the protection of the student, are also irrelevant in the context of SRO policing, where officers have easy and routinized access to and contact with students.

Finally, the protocol presents clear procedures that are required for interviews of students by police (including the need to make efforts to contact parents before the interview and the need for an adult to be present throughout the interview). However, the procedures outlined are specifically for interviews related to criminal investigations. There are no parameters for interviews falling outside this scenario, including informal stops and unregulated attempts at interaction by SROs in the hallways of the school. Further, the protocol states, “If the incident is not related to the school and will have no impact on school safety, police should not conduct interviews at the school” (p. 16). Again, there is a lack of clarity and consensus regarding what qualifies as an interview.

Bracy’s (2010) investigation into SRO policing in two American public high schools paints an alarming depiction of how SRO officers and school administration
work in collusion to find ways to circumvent some of the legal protections offered to students. She found, for example, that in order to negotiate delicate legal rules around school searches, arrangements were made that involved school administrators conducting searches in the presence of SROs even when no crime had taken place. This procedure subjected students to the same consequences as a police search but managed to evade the legal requirement for the SRO to find probable cause before searching a student. Examples like this illustrate the extent to which youth can have little recourse even when it comes to administrative support or legal action.

The lack of transparency around the Toronto SRO program makes it unclear whether any other special powers are granted to SROs. Although I do not argue that it would effectively address my concerns, it is worth noting that the protocol lacks any mechanism of accountability for overseeing SRO (mis)conduct. The erasure of the SRO program from institutional policy documents including the Police-School Board Protocol is a direct manifestation of the racial logic that produced it: the violence that accompanies SRO policing is rendered so natural and so explicable that it can be enacted without needing any governance or accountability at all—in effect, with impunity.

Conclusion

It is critical to understand how interventions like the SRO program are continuous with a modern episteme that is produced by the racial, and, as it follows, with a history of Canadian schools as a site of subjugation of young black and brown bodies. When discourses of safety are used to justify police intervention in our school spaces, we must ask: Safe for whom? Same from whom? Policing in schools does not create safety; it creates only an appearance of safety, and it does so at the expense of the bodies of
racialized students. As Fine and Ruglis (2009, p. 31) write,

Today most middle-class and wealthy youth, who are overwhelmingly White, have at their disposal a public sphere that enables their development, offers protection, and provides supports. With their cultural ideals proliferated in the mainstream culture and media, an invisible public sector of support is supplemented by substantial private scaffolding by family and community. Elite, White youthful bodies un-self-consciously come to represent merit and a worthy investment. At the same time, and on the other side of the same public policies, many African American, Latino, immigrant, poor, and increasingly Muslim and queer/trans youth are being read as disposable, embodying danger, worthy of dispossession, or in need of containment—in order to protect “us.” This story is no news to our nation: we were founded on this narrative.
Chapter Three
Building Relationships through SRO Policing: Cooking with Cops

Toronto police have a vision. One day—and one day soon—teens will no longer consider police officers as the natural enemy but rather as an ally in the community. Instead of protecting their friends from the law, Toronto’s youth will turn to the neighbourhood cop with any troubling information. Teens from across the city, from the marginalized neighbourhood to the uppity ones, will respect and appreciate the badge and the uniform instead of running away from it the way they do now. (Benitah, 2009)

Some of the boys who were most hostile at first were drawn to him most. One of the school’s toughest kids became a star of the team. He had a rap sheet for robbery, assault and car theft. With a 6-foot-2, 240-pound frame and don’t-mess-with-me-manner, the 18-year-old had made it clear he despised “Officer Ron,” as Constable Chhinzer was soon being called. But when the constable made him a team captain, “he looked at me and his eyes lit up. For him it was the first time in his life that somebody, specifically a male, told him they really believed in him.” He started confiding in Constable Chhinzer about his life: his mother left the home when he was 8 and his father when he was 12, leaving him to be shuffled among foster homes. By the time he hit high school he was living alone in a one-bedroom apartment, working odd jobs to survive. With the advice of Constable Chhinzer and others, he is now finishing his schooling as an adult student and hoping to become a chef. This is the promise of police in the schools. Troubled kids learn that cops aren’t always out only to hassle or arrest them. Cops learn that there is sometimes more
than simple malignancy behind the tough kids in hoodies and ball caps they see on the street. (Gee, 2009)

Following its inaugural year in 2008–9, the Toronto SRO program was expanded from thirty to fifty schools across the city (CBC, 2009). In this chapter, I continue to trace the institutional chronology of the SRO program since its introduction in Toronto schools. I outline the critical developments that have taken place in the years since the program was initiated, arguing that the official objectives of the SRO program belie its material reality on the ground. A close examination of the institutional discourses used to justify the program reveals that soon after its implementation, the Toronto Police Service would shift away from appealing to public concerns over safety and reframe the program largely as a relationship-building initiative between racialized youth and the police. This strategy, rooted in the community policing model of TAVIS, has seen police officers attempt to integrate themselves into school communities in a variety of ways, including coaching sports teams and running homework clubs, delivering anti-bullying and anti-violence presentations, and participating in staff and school management meetings. I examine the implications of such intimate police involvement as well as the pedagogy of the SRO program—that is, how the visible presence and disciplinary actions of police officers teaches students about who they are by producing and reinforcing racial hierarchies in schools. The relationship-building discourse is self-serving for the TPS in various ways: it boosts public relations by framing the program as an innocent and mutually beneficial community partnership, and it also allows for the humanization of individual officers, a process that detracts from systemic analyses of policing as an institution. Further, it positions policing as an attractive career option for young people
who are constructed as in need of guidance and attention, allowing the police to advance their institutional interests by recruiting youth of colour from their school spaces. I close this chapter with an analysis of the two major evaluations of the SRO program to date, both of which were conducted by the TPS themselves and, despite survey results indicating otherwise, declared the program to be a resounding success.

**Building Relationships**

In the previous chapter, I examined how the introduction of full-time police officers into Toronto’s public school system was legitimized through powerful discourses of safety and security following the murder of Jordan Manners in 2007. As the SRO program developed, the prominence of safety discourses began to give way to a softer and friendlier rhetoric of “relationship building”: “Officers don’t just patrol the halls, they also develop a relationship with students,” said police spokesperson Mark Pugash (Aulakh & Dobbs, 2009). At first, building better relationships between police and “at-risk” youth became the strategy through which safety in schools was to be achieved. Over time, this emphasis seems to have become the primary goal of the program in and of itself.

If the primary objective was indeed to make schools safe, recommendations from the Falconer and McMurtry-Curling reports, as well as other evidence-based recommendations from other jurisdictions, would have been prioritized over the SRO program. A shift away from the rhetoric of safety was necessary when it became evident that Toronto schools do not actually experience the kinds of imminent and ongoing threats that would call for such intensive securitization measures as the SRO program. In 2009, upon being asked whether schools had become any safer in the year after the
Falconer report was released, Toronto District School Board Chair John Campbell said, “There’s nothing I can point to. . . . I think that basically our schools were safe” (Marlow, 2009). If this was indeed the case, safety discourses could no longer be mobilized to justify the ongoing existence and subsequent expansion of the program. A 2009 TPS press release about the program manages to reframe the primary objective of the program as if it had always been about relationship building: “The main goal of the [SRO] Program has always been to build relationships, provide mentoring, leadership, and develop extracurricular opportunities for the students” (TPAC, 2009b). The official goals of the program also reflect this revisionist history: in 2011, the TPS stated, “The overall goals of the SRO program remain unchanged.” However, at this time, a new goal appeared on the list: “Improve the relationship between students and police” (TPS, 2009; TPS, 2011).

What does the relationship-building approach actually look like in Toronto schools? Because there are so few actual (as opposed to perceived) safety concerns in schools, officers in schools are almost full-time relationship builders. SROs have actively integrated themselves into all aspects of school life, taking on roles such as coaching sports teams, running homework clubs, participating in talent shows, attending graduation, delivering anti-bullying presentations, attending field trips, running charity fundraising events, speaking to law or civics classes, DJing at pep rallies, and attending student council meetings (Gee, 2009; Kauri, 2012; Rushowy, 2009). They also actively foster relationships with other members of the school community by attending staff meetings, attending parent council meetings and parent information sessions, and making efforts to integrate themselves into school management teams. SROs report that the most
successful strategies they have used to establish and strengthen relationships within schools include showing students respect and considering their needs, being approachable and non-authoritarian, being friendly and positive, fostering informal conversation, offering prize incentives (especially food), identifying popular students to promote and lead events, coaching or participating in sports, and being visible in the halls and at lunch (TPS, 2009; TPS, 2011).

It is clear that many SROs have a lot of time on their hands; quite a few have developed elaborate programs that many teachers could only dream of having the time, energy, and funding to resource. One such initiative is the Cooking with Cops program, started by the SRO at a high school in Toronto’s west end several years ago in partnership with ProAction Cops and Kids Toronto chapter (Chu, 2014). ProAction is an organization that was formed on the premise that everyone in the City of Toronto would benefit from better relationships between youth and police officers (ProAction Cops and Kids; 2015). To this end, it encourages officers to share their passions with youth through programming that spans a range of areas, including sports and camping, arts, leadership, life skills, and safety. The organization frames its work through discourses of relationship building and providing opportunities for a better future for at-risk youth. The SRO that started the Cooking with Cops program, who has also been involved with other TPS community policing initiatives, said she was tired of seeing fast food takeout containers in the hallways of the school (Chu, 2014). “Eager to make a change,” she started a program that would allow youth to learn recipes, cook food together for school events, serve meals at a seniors’ centre in the area, and visit local restaurants for kitchen tours and cooking classes (Rainford, 2014). For example, the students in the program made
chocolate-dipped strawberries for Mother’s Day, beautifully presented on the trunk of a police car for the photo that would be posted to the SRO’s Twitter account (Graham, 2014). The SRO has also brought family and friends into the school as guest chefs to expand the range of recipes she was able to offer. Of the program, the SRO says, “I like the experience it gives the students, plus it teaches them about teamwork, hard work, dedication and commitment. I truly love it. . . . They don’t see me as a police officer half the time, I’m just a friend now” (Chu, 2014). Other initiatives she has been involved in at the school include the hockey team, student/teacher/TPS lunches, running a warm winter fundraiser, the Halloween costume parade, and running a basketball team for at-risk male youth (Graham, 2014). Many students and staff at the school were clearly very fond of her, offering a nice farewell when she left the school and tweeting about how much they would miss her.

Of all the activities in which SROs are engaged, few are concerned with what might traditionally be considered to be the work of the police. Both curricular and extracurricular programming and pedagogy are arguably better fulfilled by professionals who have spent many years developing specific skills, training, knowledge, and experience in fields related to education, schooling, and youth engagement. In fact, some SROs report that having other staff-led activities and programs in the school competes for student participation, which has sometimes made it challenging for them to perform their duties (TPS, 2011). What is accomplished by the fact that police officers are fulfilling these roles? How does the seemingly benign relationship-building approach obscure the more insidious policing functions of the SRO?
What Is Concealed by the Relationship Building Discourse?

“You remember me? You arrested me in the summertime.”

—A Toronto student, upon meeting the SRO who was assigned to his high school (Rushowy, 2009)

The narrative of relationship building not only masks the naturalization of police presence but also enables and occludes the violence that accompanies it. Though the SRO program may at first seem innocuous, well intentioned, and mutually beneficial, it has emerged from a broader community policing model that has been applied in a targeted way to racialized and low-income areas of the city through the TPS’s Toronto Anti-Violence Intervention Strategy (TAVIS). The SRO program is part of the integrated TAVIS model that sees a convergence of policing services on the bodies of youth from these areas who have been deemed to be “at risk” (see previous chapter) (Public Safety Canada, 2015). Under the guise of relationship building and becoming familiar faces in the community, TAVIS officers have aggressively assaulted and drawn guns on young people on the streets of their neighbourhoods, performed strip searches in broad daylight, and arbitrarily stopped hundreds of racialized people without cause in public areas to question them and gather intelligence—a practice known as carding, which has been targeted primarily at Toronto’s Black community (Winsa, 2013). There is clearly more to the community policing approach than meets the eye. What is obfuscated by the relationship-building approach when it comes to the SRO program in Toronto’s schools, the majority of which are in the same communities in which TAVIS operates?
Chapman-Nyaho, James, and Kwan-Lafond (2012) have investigated another TPS program rooted in similar objectives and discourses as the SRO Program: the Youth in Policing Initiative (YIPI). Every summer since 2006, YIPI has offered 150 predominantly racialized (over 93 percent, with over half identifying as Black) youth from Toronto’s designated priority neighbourhoods full-time employment in various policing divisions for six weeks. The purpose of the program is to provide work experience for youth who are deemed “at risk” and to improve the historically tense relationship between these youth and their communities, on the one hand, and the police, on the other. Both YIPI and the SRO program fall under the TPS’s community mobilization strategy, and both are listed under the City of Toronto’s broader strategy for addressing “youth who are at the greatest risk of marginalization” in Toronto (Brillinger, 2013, p. 1). Strikingly similar justifications were used to create the two programs: concerns about safety (YIPI was initially conceived as a response to Toronto’s 2005 “summer of the gun”), concerns about escalating youth violence concentrated in priority areas, the positioning of youth from these areas as at risk, and the TPS’s self-perceived ability to intervene and improve their lives by creating opportunities and guidance that they might otherwise lack.

The racialized spatial nature of the at-risk designation is evident in the selection criteria for the YIPI program (Chapman-Nyaho et al., 2012). All youth accepted into the program must reside in priority neighbourhoods. However, youth cannot have a criminal record to participate in the program, and very few who are selected have a history of encounters with law enforcement or trouble at school. Regardless of their individual circumstances and histories, all youth from priority areas are labeled at risk and in need
of guidance and attention solely based on geographic location. When faced with the reality of the irrelevance of this designation that is applied to all the young people they work with, YIPI officers frame the intervention as pre-emptive: while the youth may not seem “bad,” considering their environment and lack of opportunity, you “never know what would happen” without programs like this (p. 88).

James (2012) argues that initiatives such as YIPI and the SRO program—those that involve educational support, guidance, mentorship, and relationship building—are frequently the precise outcome of the mobilization of at-risk discourses. Specifically, when it comes to policing, this rhetoric is routinely used to justify interventions that extend beyond the law enforcement capacity of the police; this is the very premise on which the model of community policing is based. However, it is critical to understand how these programs also produce and sustain racial subordination. Chapman-Nyaho et al. (2012) argue that they are actually “premised on a need to guide, govern, and surveil young people from priority areas, and, in the process, protect and advance the material, moral, and psychological interests of the police” (p. 84). The creation of the at-risk designation allows the police to declare racialized and low-income youth as in need of special intervention to fill the void of positive influence in their lives. When the police swoop in to help, they establish their moral authority through efforts to reach out to marginalized youth, a redemptive gesture that reflects positively on their public image.

The mentorship of the police is said to provide valuable opportunities and experience that youth from these communities would otherwise be lost without, and only the guidance of the police can transform them into responsible adults and good citizens. The YIPI program as well as the Police-School Board Protocol certainly position police
officers as role models from whom the qualities of good citizenship can be learned (Chapman-Nyaho et al., 2012; TPS, 2011a). The framing of these initiatives through a language of opportunity has garnered enthusiastic support from policymakers; authority figures in young people’s lives, including teachers and school administration; and many from the wider community. Member of Provincial Parliament Glen Murray praised the YIPI program for connecting police officers, who “express the highest calling of citizenship,” with “young people who, in many instances, have life experiences that would have given them reasons not to have hope, not to have faith, and not to see a brighter future” (Chapman-Nyaho et al., 2012, p. 82). This framing of policing as benevolent effectively resolves any public anxieties that may have been induced by the idea that students are now being policed in their schools. The portrayal of YIPI and SRO officers as saviour-like has been successful in pacifying criticism even from some of those who are critical of the harsh and aggressive tactics employed by Toronto police elsewhere.

**Who Benefits?**

To be clear, some students in schools with SROs do gain some material and social benefits as a result of the program. The SRO represents an additional adult in the school who provides access to extracurricular programs that are desirable for students as part of their high school experience. When it comes to choosing between having an extracurricular activity or team run by an officer or not having one at all, for many students, the choice is clear. For example, I recently asked one of my former students how he felt about his junior boys’ baseball team being scheduled to play several games against a team of police officers. He said, “I’d rather just play against another school. I
don’t wanna shake their hands because they’re the ones who are constantly looking at me every time I’m walking down the street.” For him, being forced to interact with police officers in this way was the personal cost of being able to play sports at school. In addition to having the luxury of time, SROs are also able to financially resource their activities in ways that teachers often cannot. For example, at one school, the SRO who coaches the football team lamented that some students had to wear street clothes to practice because they could not afford gym clothes (Rushowy, 2009). In response, he printed T-shirts for the entire team that read “NAC [North Albion Collegiate] Football,” with his badge number on the front and “23 Division” on the back. Participation in other SRO-led initiatives is incentivized with prizes for students such as free bicycles and even trips to Disneyland (Park, 2015). These material benefits offered by the SRO program likely contribute to why some youth do see it as a valuable experience overall. There are two questions left unanswered here, one of which I have asked before: Why are police providing opportunities that should fall under the jurisdiction of schools? And, why are the police so invested in providing these opportunities?

The discourse of relationship building rests on an assumption that bringing at-risk youth and police together in a “get-to-know-you” setting will foster mutual understanding and respect, thereby improving the historically problematic relationship between them. The TPS argues: “Young people get to see police officers in a different light, and police officers get to see young people in a different light—when the program works well, both sides can take away something positive” (TPS, 2011). However, the claim that this is a mutually beneficial exchange where understandings flow freely and equally between youth and the police is utterly false, serving to obscure the gross power
differential between the two parties. Instead, the way that the YIPI and SRO programs are structured works primarily to advance the institutional interests of the police—they do so by using relationship building to bring the beliefs and practices of racialized youth in line with those of the policing institution. Chapman-Nyaho et al. (2012) noted that over the course of the six-week YIPI program, there was a profound change in the way the youth conceptualized policing. Youth reported feeling highly influenced by the interpersonal relationships they developed with officers in the program, describing officers as being very relatable, having a great sense of humour, and going out of their way to make the youth comfortable. Regardless of their previous attitudes toward the police, by the end of the program almost every youth came to the conclusion that the police are good people: “Now I see how they are; they’re human just like us. They’re doing a job just like everybody else” (p. 90). This enthusiastic admiration for individual officers quickly translated, however, into an increased belief that the institution of policing as a whole is friendly, helpful, and just. The effect of this form of governance was thus a drastic shift in the beliefs and attitudes of youth into alignment with the interests and objectives of the police. This paradigmatic shift on the part of young people resulted in switched allegiances, with youth taking on an ambassadorial role for policing in their communities and defending police practices that are often criticized by others: “Now, when I see a cop car, I don’t look to see who’s in it, I look to see who’s driving it” (p. 91). In this way, the interests of the institution are not only protected but entrenched through programs such as these.

A similarly profound attitudinal realignment has been accomplished with respect to SRO police:
When he came to NACI as a school resource officer—one of 50 now in Toronto schools to maintain security and reach out to troubled kids—many saw him as the enemy. They turned away when he came down the hall, muttering among themselves or sucking their teeth in disdain. “No one would talk to me,” recalls Constable Chhinzer, an athletic 27-year-old with a shaved head and an open manner. One day he saw some boys playing football in the gym. He put up a notice calling a football practice and, to his astonishment, 70 kids came out. As he put them through their paces in after-school drills that lasted three hours and more, they gradually learned to trust him and see the man behind the blue uniform and flak jacket. (Gee, 2009)

“If anything, I’d rather have him inside the school than outside,” said Lovejeet, a Grade 12 student. “It changed the perception of police officers,” she said. “My cousins don’t like the cops and now they talk to him and stuff.” (Rushowy, 2009)

The teens said they didn’t always have this positive attitude towards police. “Honestly, I thought they were assholes,” said Farooq. “I’d be chillin’ with my friends and they’d harass me for no reason.” “The cop in our school is normal, he’s the complete opposite of that,” he added. (Benitah, 2009)

The students no longer care that Chhinzer wears a uniform and carries a gun. To them, he’s part counselor, mentor, ego-booster and founder and coach of a football team with no uniforms or equipment but enough enthusiasm that 60 boys
come out on a regular basis—rain, shine, even hail—just to scrimmage. . . . He jokes with the students, and they with him; on the rare occasion he brings his patrol car to school, students put their hands on the hood as if under arrest.

(Rushowy, 2009)

These improved perceptions of police among youth are considered one of the greatest successes of the SRO program (TPS, 2009; TPS, 2011). Though framed largely as an opportunity for youth—an opportunity to attend a school that is “safe,” an opportunity to build closer relationships with the police, an opportunity to access sports and other extracurriculars that may otherwise not be offered at the school—the opportunities provided to the TPS by the SRO program far outweigh any benefits proffered to students. According to the TPS, “The school environment provides an excellent opportunity for positive interaction with young people outside of traditional enforcement activities” (TPS, 2009). Through the relationship-building initiatives of the program, the exposure of police to youth in a non-conflictual setting has enabled them to divorce the personalities of individual SROs from their fundamental role as representatives of the police. Instead, the humanization of individual officers allows them to be seen as regular people who can relate to the struggles of youth. Importantly, this occurs while the police are able to carry on as usual without sacrificing any of their practices or assumptions, and without having to examine or confront the ongoing historical violence that racialized communities experience at the hands of the police. The relationship-building approach is powerfully effective at decontextualizing the SRO program from its social and historical reality, ignoring the ongoing struggles for justice
by racialized communities in the city, for whom police violence is a daily reality. It precludes a systemic analysis of policing that would first and foremost ask, why is the relationship between police and racialized youth in need of improvement in the first place? Instead of looking toward structural conditions or the epistemological conditions of modernity, it individualizes both blame and responsibility by locating inadequacy and disadvantage in the bodies of racialized youth. Further, it encourages liberal understandings of policing in which harmful police practices are ascribed to individual officers who strayed from protocol, instead of viewing modern institutions as fundamentally produced by the racial.

The programs in Toronto’s community policing strategy also facilitate the recruitment of racialized youth into the ranks of the police. Cowen and Siciliano (2011) theorize the relationship between criminalization and militarization in the context of education, and the cycling of racialized surplus subjects between the two. They write that in the United States, soon after the import of zero tolerance into the education system, the military began to aggressively target schools in low-income communities of colour for enlistment. For young men of colour constructed as criminals through racist zero tolerance policies, the military offers an increasingly rare route to deserving citizenship and valorization, and one of the only possibilities for avoiding a life of criminalization and incarceration. In the United States, there are currently more Black men in prison and the military than in postsecondary education; schools play a large role in organizing the futures of these youth, who are stratified by the education system and increasingly streamed into a choice between the two. One military recruiter justified the intensive targeting of particular schools by arguing that “enlisting is a way to improve the lives of
young people with few options” (Cowen & Siciliano, 2011, p. 116). Once again, discourses of risk and opportunity are used to justify state intervention into the lives of racialized youth that is ultimately not for the benefit of the youth. In Toronto, both the SRO and YIPI programs have been successful in promoting the TPS as a potential career path for the youth who participate in the program (Chapman-Nyaho et al., 2012). The SRO program enables targeted recruitment by offering the police unprecedented access to the lives of young people through their schools. Benitah (2009) writes that the Toronto program “has worked magic on teens like 17-year-old Usher Farooq, who says he now wants to become a cop after getting to know his school resource officer. ‘I’m not kidding, I really do want to become a cop,’ he said. ‘The officer talks to us, he’s friendly.’ ‘He’s a proper guy, trustworthy,’ chimes in his friend Surkhail Kamal, who is also in Grade 12.”

The steering of students towards policing as an option for redemption from their at-risk status is highly beneficial for the police, who are able to gain allies in racialized youth who will eventually engage in the policing of their own communities.

**Student Surveillance**

The SRO program is a critical tool for increased government surveillance of the youth population at large (Ali, 2009). The community policing project of TAVIS is intelligence led; information collected about individuals from racially targeted contact carding street stops is retained in a burgeoning database that can be accessed by any security force in Canada, as well as the FBI and U.S. Homeland Security (Saczkowski, 2015). If it was not already taking place informally, in 2011, the responsibilities of Toronto SROs were officially expanded to explicitly include intelligence gathering (TPS, 2012). According to the TPS, every SRO is now a member of a police Tactical
Intelligence Strategy team that meets weekly to share information specifically about youth. Other members of this team include front-line enforcement, intelligence, TAVIS street policing teams, and Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA), or immigration, officials. SROs play a critical role on this team because they are uniquely positioned to collect sensitive information about young people, and they actively encourage students to disclose information to them and to see them as confidants and allies (Benitah, 2009). “If you are going through something, talk to me,” says one Toronto SRO to a student in his school (Rushowy, 2009). This “get-to-know-you” approach serves to conceal the intelligence-gathering mandate of SROs, allowing them to develop intimate and familiar relationships with students, who may share personal information with officers while remaining wholly unaware of the potentially grave consequences of doing so.

The SRO’s intelligence mandate is particularly threatening for the thousands of students (and their families) in Toronto who have precarious immigration status. In May 2007, under pressure from school groups and community organizers, the TDSB adopted a “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy (P.061 SCH) stating that all children are welcome at school regardless of status and that status-related information would not be shared with immigration officials (No One Is Illegal, 2010; TDSB, 2007). Under this policy, schools are instructed not to require information about immigration status for student enrollment and, if it becomes known, not to provide this information to immigration authorities. Further, the policy is supported by a directive that denies immigration authorities access to TDSB property. However, through the SRO program, CBSA is effectively able to access personal information about students and their families that could lead to apprehension, detention, and deportation. The collusion between SROs and CBSA
clearly negates the board’s commitment to the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy. Even if the policy were enforced for SROs, it would conflict not only with the SRO mandate but also with current policing practices under subsection 5 of Ontario Regulation 265/98 (Government of Ontario, 2005). While it is legally within the discretion of police to report any personal information gathered in their investigations to federal agencies for “bona fide” reasons, it has been found that reporting and disclosure to CBSA takes place on a regular basis (Moffette & Gardner, 2015). In other words, the routinized flow of information from the police to CBSA presents a danger to undocumented students that only the removal of SROs from schools would address.

**SRO Disciplinary Practices**

The relationship-building discourse of the Toronto SRO program is extremely effective at detracting attention from the disciplinary and enforcement functions of SROs. The Toronto SRO program is not notorious for the harsh and aggressive tactics characterizing SRO programs in schools in many American cities; SROs in Toronto prefer to see themselves as relationship builders rather than enforcers (Rushowy, 2009; TPS, 2009; TPS, 2011). However, the Toronto-based organization Educators for Peace and Justice confirms reports of police intimidation, harassment, arrests, and assault of students by Toronto SRO officers (Jennie, 2009). It claims that SROs create a climate of fear and repression in schools, and that while the media prefers to focus on students who may benefit from the presence of police officers, many marginalized students feel further alienated by this program. Incidents of inappropriate disciplinary enforcement by police in Toronto schools were an issue well before the SRO program existed, as documented by the OHRC investigation on zero tolerance: “I saw a Black male student . . . who was
handcuffed and being taken out by White officers. He was taken out in front of his peers like that. He had stolen some money, but it wasn’t a life and death issue, or use of a weapon, where he had to be handcuffed and taken out of the school like that” (OHRC, 2003).

It is important to understand how the performance of disciplinary enforcement by SROs has escalated in other jurisdictions. The very idea of deploying police officers to schools was borrowed from the United States, and the securitization and surveillance paradigm that has become so integral to the contemporary American education system continues to influence Canadian policy. For example, a recent TDSB school safety community consultation explored the idea of installing metal detectors in Toronto schools. Nolan (2011) describes the series of events typical of most school-based arrests she observed in high schools in New York City: these confrontations begin with the violation of a school rule that has little or no impact on school safety, such as the dress code or taking too long to get to class. Students are criminalized for these behaviours, and in responding to the provocation they often end up getting arrested for insubordination or disorderly conduct. The presence of police in the school creates an excessive reliance on law enforcement, meaning that minor incidents previously dealt with by the school administration escalate into criminal justice matters. For example, the Advancement Project (2013) found that the Los Angeles Police Department and the Los Angeles School Police Department issued 47,000 tickets for truancy alone between 2004 and 2009. As the distinction between violations of school rules and transgressions of the law becomes blurred, the involvement of officers in these minor incidents is more of a formality than a necessity (Kupchik, 2010). Research shows that the officers often act as
instigators, seeking to redefine misbehaviour as criminal in order to justify their presence in the school, since most of the time their policing skills are unnecessary (TPAC, 2009). There are hundreds of stories and many shocking Internet videos of violence towards young racialized men and women by SROs in their school spaces in which it is clear that the SROs are provoking the student and using excessive force that is highly disproportional to any perceived or real threat.

One such video of an incident in a Toronto school went viral after it was posted to YouTube: the arrest of a sixteen-year-old Black male in the stairway of his high school in October 2009. The video, called “Student Arrested at Northern Secondary School for No Reason,” begins following a confrontation that was reportedly initiated when the SRO asked the student for identification (even though he was wearing an ID lanyard around his neck) and the student responded using the word “bacon” (Friesen & Appleby, 2009; MajorKraze, 2009). As the situation escalates, the officer repeatedly demands that the student put his hands behind his back. The student responds with, “I’ve done nothing wrong to get arrested,” and, “Don’t you have to let me know what I’ve done first?” The student’s friends also demand that the officer let the student go. With no justification given, the officer handcuffs the student and proceeds to violently push him through a packed hallway of the school, making a public spectacle of the incident for all the other students to see. They enter an office, and when his friends try to follow, the white women in the office deny them entry from the hallway and stand guard at the door. The student was subsequently charged for assaulting an officer and resisting arrest, and then suspended (TPAC, 2009).

This is an all-too-familiar story that just happened to be captured on video. What
message is sent to students who are under tight and constant scrutiny, repeatedly being asked to identify themselves in their own schools, the very places where they are supposed to be? Discipline is powerfully pedagogical. Noguera (1995) asserts that the disciplining event itself functions to reactivate power, both by demonstrating where it lies and also by perpetuating its authority; quoting Foucault, he writes that the “ceremony of punishment . . . is to make everyone aware, through the body of the criminal, of the unrestrained presence of the sovereign” (p. 49). In this sort of altercation between students and SROs, there is a reactivation of power that takes place that is imprinted on the bodies of students. Racial hierarchies in the school are reinscribed through the encounter: the targeted youth is produced as a criminalized subject, as a threat that must be contained and removed from the school, while the groups of white students (and staff) bearing witness to this performance in the hallway are able to affirm that they are not him, that they exist in the domain of justice and are therefore deserving of protection from him at any cost. In other words, it is an act through which white subjects come into their personhood through the eviction of the co-constitutive Other. Lipman (2011) writes that repeated police encounters serve as a “powerful signifier that youth of colour are dangerous and need to be locked up or removed from public space” (p. 85). Spectacles of this sort serve to confirm the perception that there is indeed a need for the SRO in the school. The rest of the school community can be assured that although the vast majority of the time the presence of an SRO is unnecessary, rare incidents do arise that only the police can handle.

This racial boundary is enforced even when SROs are not engaged in disciplinary action. Throughout all SRO activities, there has been a strong emphasis on the visibility
of officers. Former Police Chief Bill Blair insisted that officers be in uniform at all times and that they maintain an active and visible presence in the school (Blatchford, 2009). The Cooking with Cops officer, for example, sees this expectation as a challenge: “I’m in my uniform and I’m cooking near a hot stove with the kids. It’s a lot of fun” (Chu, 2014). When SROs are engaged in other activities or even just standing around, their uniformed presence still ensures a constant visual reminder not only of the power they wield as police officers but also of the constant threat of criminality that lurks in school spaces. The result is a culture of control that constantly codes the bodies of racialized students in particular ways, teaching students about themselves and their place within the hierarchy of the school. It also sends a clear message to the broader school community about the students who attend the school. For example, at one school located on a major street, the SRO often insists on parking his police car directly in front of the school instead of in his assigned spot in the parking lot behind the building. This move has resulted in passersby frequently asking what just happened at the school. In the few instances when SROs perform their duties in civilian clothes, this decision is made very strategically. In the one example I could find, an SRO who visited a school to make a special presentation explained, “I do the same job as Candy [the school’s SRO]. I purposely didn’t dress up like a cop today because I wanted you to see Candy as a cop in a uniform and me as a cop not in a uniform. We’re both just people. And we’re both here to help” (Mills, 2012).

**Voices of Dissent**

Several weeks after the Toronto SRO arrest was captured and broadcast on YouTube, some two hundred students at Northern Secondary School staged a walkout in protest (Ali, 2009). Their demands included the immediate removal of the officer from
their school and an open, public community consultation about the SRO program at Northern. One student representative voiced his concerns: “This is very much a grassroots movement; students are outraged and our questions are not being answered. The main issue is that students feel uncomfortable with an armed officer in the school. It makes us feel like the school belongs not to students but to the police.” Students from other schools have also voiced strong opposition to the SRO program. At Weston Collegiate Institute, students organized a protest at the beginning of the 2009–10 school year calling for the removal of the SRO from their school (Peat, 2009). Their resistance was supported by parents and community members through the creation of a petition with over 500 signatures. Members of this community were particularly angry because a consultation had been conducted by local School Board Trustee Stephanie Payne several months prior in which students and community members overwhelmingly opposed the program, voting against the placement of an SRO at their school; Prior decided to approve the program anyway, stationing officers in all the high schools in her ward (Campbell, 2009). “You don't bring them together and then totally disregard what they say, that’s wrong,” said the co-chair of the school’s parent council in response. “If you consult them, then you need to listen and you need to pay attention to what they’re saying.” For this school, the fact that such a decision could be made so quickly in the face of so much opposition was especially frustrating considering that parents and students had been asking for a crosswalk at the school for almost a decade, to no avail (Blatchford, 2009).

Many of these issues have also been raised by other political representatives and community organizations. For example, the organization Jane and Finch Action Against
Poverty published a video interviewing residents in their heavily policed neighbourhood about the program; the response was a resounding “no” to police in schools (Gopaul, 2009). Another grassroots organization called the Neighbourhood Organized Coalition Opposing Police in Schools, or NOCOPS, was active in the first two years of the program, supporting student organizing, writing articles in community media, and presenting concerns to the TDSB in May 2009 in conjunction with the Toronto Police Accountability Coalition (Campbell, 2009). Educators for Peace and Justice (EPJ) have also presented the school board with documentation of a variety of concerns, including reports of assault and harassment by SROs, evidence that SRO programs do not make schools safer, and concerns about the ways in which the program criminalizes students. EPJ writes that the nature of the debate about the SRO program at the school board level indicates that the police are clearly guiding the direction of the program and that “few people in the board can clearly articulate the goals of the program or detail what benefits the TDSB and students get for the amount of money being spent.” Only one school board trustee, Sheila Cary-Meagher, has publicly opposed the placement of officers at schools in her area: “It isn’t the only answer, and I really resent that people think because there is a cop it will be hunky dory,” she said (CBC, 2009).

In January 2009, Julian Falconer, of the School Community Safety Advisory Panel struck by the TDSB, publicly criticized the province for failing to provide adequate funding to the TDSB to implement his report’s recommendations (Benitah, 2009; Marlow, 2009). He refers to the SRO program as a “one size fits all” approach that disregards the oppression of particular students: “The reality is that there are some schools for whom the uniform and a gun represent a source of security. And there are
other schools, and other youth with different life experiences, for whom the uniform and the gun are a source of fear.” He calls the program an absurd allocation of resources when, for example, in the northwest family of schools there are only two social workers servicing thirteen high schools and all of their elementary feeder schools. He reiterates a dire need for the school board and the province to revisit his panel’s recommendations.

The reason that students and community members oppose the SRO program is most eloquently put by Rayon, a high school student who wrote an article about the program for a local community newspaper:

The feelings among most of the students at Weston C.I. is that they do not want a cop in their school and they feel threatened by the presence of an armed police officer in the school for numerous reasons. The students cannot identify with an individual who wears a massive bullet proof vest and carries a loaded gun and taser, which is quite intimidating particularly for people coming from T.O.’s “priority neighbourhoods”—let’s be honest, ghettoes—who witness and experience police activity in a whole different light than youth from more affluent areas. On a day-to-day basis, the police harass, bully, and brutalize people from our communities and get away without being held to account for their actions. How can we accept having police in our schools to “build relations” with us if they are getting away with daily brutality and sometimes murder in our communities? . . . We have already experienced police (SRO) harassment at Weston C.I. There was a conflict with two young women and the SRO used unnecessary and excessive force on the two young women. (Rayon, 2009) Although community mobilization and direct organizing are the most visible
forms of dissent, student resistance to the presence of police officers in schools necessarily takes different forms. Meiners (2007) argues that while anger is a legitimate response to injustice and oppression, not everyone has the political power to express their anger or to control how it is taken up. In the schooling context, the translation of anger and dissent from systemic critiques into individual pathologies is a powerful tool used to invisibilize those who are marginalized. She writes, “A failure to control oneself, to keep that anger in check, to act and learn appropriately, in particular for those in any way marginalized, might mean school expulsion, criminalization, or pathologization. If you do not have the right to be hostile, anger can be read as violence, disruption, disrespect, or as evidence of inherent deviancy, or cognitive and behavioral impairment” (p. 30). The criminalization of anger further serves to reinforce embedded representations of racialized youth as disobedient and unlawful: it is fodder used by decision makers to justify the need for SROs in the first place. The pathologization of anger is evident in the high volume of racialized students who are labeled with anger or behavioural issues, emotional disturbance, or learning disabilities, and as a result are disproportionately streamed into special education programs (Watts & Erevelles, 2004). Uncovering this connection helps to illuminate why research has shown that special education students, in addition to students of colour, are also disproportionately affected by zero tolerance policies: it is likely that in many cases, these apparatuses converge on the bodies of the same students.

In this context, students draw their own boundaries and find ways to negotiate and resist the presence of SROs in their schools. Although further research would be necessary to understand the nuanced ways in which this happens in Toronto, some of the
forms it has taken are a refusal to engage with the relationship-building efforts of officers (“It’s all [B.S.] that they’re trying to get to know me. They’re here to do their job.”), as well as finding ways to work around them (“He doesn't reach out to me and I don’t reach out to him. He’s just an obstacle, people work around him. [Having him there] doesn’t reduce fights, it just doesn’t happen in front of him”) (Benitah, 2009).

Although there was significant public resistance to the SRO program in the first two years of its existence, the normalization of police presence in Toronto schools has occurred rapidly. “It can be kind of intimidating at first,” said one Toronto student in anticipation of the SRO placement at his school, “but if we see him every day we can accept him” (CBC, 2009). The program is now almost eight years old, and for cohorts of current high school students, police are largely understood as an ordinary part of the social fabric of schools. One Toronto principal referred to the SRO program as a component of “wraparound care” for every child; if by this she means the naturalization of police presence and activities in the majority of everyday spaces of racialized youth, then it most certainly is (Rushowy, 2009). Initiatives like the SRO program produce a continuity across institutional boundaries that extends the violence of policing to wherever they are. It ensures that they are denied the possibility of escape even in their school spaces, where it is mandatory for them to spend so many of their waking hours.

Indeed, one of the explicit goals of the TAVIS model is “normalized policing” (TPS, 2015). This aim of omnipresence is reflected in the way the program was quietly slipped into the everyday practices of Toronto schools, almost as if it had always been there.

**School Resource Officer Program Evaluations**

Since the introduction of the SRO program in 2008, two official evaluations have
been conducted: the first in 2009 and a follow-up evaluation in 2011 (TPS, 2009; TPS, 2011). For both reports, the entire evaluation process, including survey design, data collection, analysis, conclusions, and recommendations, was carried out entirely by the TPS itself. In other words, no independent evaluation of the SRO program has ever been conducted.

Both the 2009 and 2011 evaluations focus on student, teacher, administrator, parent, and SRO perceptions of school safety. The TPS found that most students felt safe at school both before and after the SRO program, most administrators and teachers felt safe at school both before and after the SRO program, most parents felt their child was safe in school both before and after the SRO program, overall perceptions of school safety did not improve, and there was no difference in perceptions of school safety between those students who had approached an SRO to talk about a problem they were having at school and those students who had not approached an officer. These results confirm that, in addition to a lack of evidence for real safety issues in schools, there is also a lack of evidence for the existence of perceptions of low school safety. Had this survey been conducted prior to the introduction of the SRO program, there would have been no grounds upon which to justify its implementation based on discourses of safety.

Interestingly, the only group of survey participants who felt that safety in and around schools has improved as a result of the SRO program was SROs themselves. SROs also saw their relationships with students, staff, and administration more positively than students and staff saw their relationships with the SROs. On the other hand, only 10 percent of students who witnessed a crime reported what they had seen to their SRO, the main reasons for doing so being that they are not comfortable talking to a police officer
and that “the police always think people have done something wrong, even if they haven’t” (2009, p. 19). Nevertheless, most officers consider the greatest accomplishment of the SRO program to be developing positive relationships with students and earning their trust.

The evaluations suffer from serious methodological flaws. For example, care was not taken to ensure that the student survey participants formed a representative sample; response categories are conflated when doing so favours the police (e.g., most students reportedly believed it was a “very good/okay” idea for SROs to coach sports teams); benchmarks for success are never established; and data are manipulated in such a way that small changes are presented as “somewhat different” when they do not support the SRO program but “significantly different” when they do. Further, there is no evidence to support a causal link between any of these changes and the presence of SROs. Upon reviewing the 2009 evaluation, one teacher from EPJ wrote that the report would most certainly receive a failing grade were it written by one of his high school students (Premjee & Ceja, 2009).

Despite this lack of research integrity, in both the 2009 and 2011 evaluations the TPS ignores its own findings in order to declare that the SRO program is a resounding success that has unequivocally met its key objectives (Premjee & Ceja, 2009; Public Safety Canada, 2013). The ongoing existence and recent expansion of the Toronto SRO program is premised largely upon these conclusions, and it has even been touted as a model program in other jurisdictions (Raymond, 2010).

However, these evaluations are grossly insufficient in capturing even the most obvious effects of the SRO program, never mind the more elusive ones. The TPS found
that students who supported the placement of an SRO in their school were more likely to feel safe at school, while students who thought it was a bad idea were more likely to say that they feel unsafe. The report makes no efforts to further investigate which students think SROs are a bad idea and why; according to community advocates, there is reason to believe that some students feel unsafe not in spite of SRO presence but because of it. The failure to provide data disaggregated by categories such as race, class, gender, and ability makes it impossible to understand how the SRO program affects different groups of students in different ways. Further assessment is also required that moves beyond perceptions and includes, for example, data on SRO disciplinary functions and disaggregated rates of arrest.

**Racism Born Again**

If the particular form of racism inherent in the SRO program was first born again through discourses of safety, it has effectively been reborn through the approach of relationship building. The characteristically neoliberal purging of race from the public sphere in the name of racelessness does not make it disappear; instead, it unhinges race from the domain of state delimitation, allowing it to circulate freely under discourses of individual merit, effort, ability, and choice. Because the relationship building strategy relies on these discourses, it is a particularly insidious example of how racism continues to operate without race invocation—in this case, under a veneer of opportunity and mutual benefit. Goldberg (2009) writes, “As race evaporates from the socio-conceptual landscape, racisms (in their plurality) are pushed further and further out of sight, out of “existence,” unmentionable because the terms by which to recognize and reference them recede, fade from view and memory” (p. 360). Racial power assumes new strategies and
modes of management in order to ensure its continuity; this is evident in the discursive evolution of the SRO program from safety to relationship building, each subsequent strategy more thoroughly raceless and thus farther away from the explanatory grasp of dominant conceptions of racism.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have continued to elucidate the racial mechanisms of power through which the Toronto SRO program operates. The TPS has invested large sums of time, money, and energy into the program, creating and mobilizing discourses of safety, at-riskness, and opportunity in order to frame the project as beneficial for the youth targeted by SRO policing. However, a close examination of this discursive framing reveals that it works to produce and reproduce the racial boundaries of modernity by naturalizing police presence in the school spaces of racialized youth; by entrenching the institutional interests of the police through the realignment of interests and objectives of these youth, their recruitment as police ambassadors in their communities and into the ranks of the police, and their intensive surveillance; and by masking the role of SRO police in racialized school disciplinary enforcement. In this context, one of the greatest accomplishments of this approach has been its relative success at engulfing critique and suppressing resistance; since the first two years of its existence, it has managed to fly under the radar in conversations about both education and policing in the city. Here, I have aimed to articulate what is suppressed by official discourses in order to more fully grasp what is at stake in the continued existence and expansion of the program.
Chapter 4:

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have examined the history of the SRO program in Toronto schools through a lens that challenges the view that race is only significant when explicitly or implicitly invoked for the purposes of exclusion or discrimination. In the absence of this critical understanding, one could be convinced that the SRO program is in fact highly inclusionary, as it funnels a relatively large amount of resources and attention onto young black and brown bodies. However, if we consider the human body as a “surface of inscription of modern meanings”—specifically, blackness as a signifier of departure from modernity—it becomes clear that racism is constitutive of the program and, as such, the invocation of race is unnecessary for its operation as a racial project (Ferreira da Silva, 2010, p. 429). In fact, racial power is manifestly secured in the absence of this invocation, as the central organizing logic of race becomes hidden by race-absent institutional discourses of safety, risk, opportunity, and relationship building. As concerns about safety and security are mapped onto the bodies of racialized youth in the city, these students are now subject to unprecedented technologies of control, containment, and surveillance in their school spaces. The multiple dimensions of racial violence that accompany this policing strategy are powerfully obscured by the official narrative produced by the TPS. In this way, the racial is not only an effect of power but its very instrument. As Goldberg (2009) writes, “The population seen as threatening is the one actually threatened: with alienation, intimidation, incarceration, marginalization and externalization of one kind or another, ultimately even with extinction” (p. 29).
Through tracing an institutional chronology of the SRO program in Toronto, it has been my goal to articulate the particular form of race injustice inherent in this program, one that stubbornly escapes the logic of exclusion and has therefore been consistently successful at engulfing critique and rendering claims for justice unheard.

**Moving Forward**

On September 23, 2014, nineteen-year-old Hamid Aminzada became the second student to be killed on Toronto District School Board property (CBC, 2014). It was a devastating tragedy: Aminzada was trying to break up a fight between two other students when he was fatally stabbed in the hallway of North Albion Collegiate, a school that was part of the SRO program. Immediately after the incident took place, local media reignited with concerns over school safety in Toronto. Once again, the school board struck a panel to investigate the incident and to develop recommendations for further changes to school disciplinary and safety policies. The composition of the panel is telling: it was led by a private company called Executek International, a “Canadian based initiative of seasoned security, law enforcement, and specialized service personnel committed to providing risk management solutions designed to meet the individual project needs of a diverse client base” (Executek, 2012). This company also happens to be owned by Kim Derry, Toronto’s former Deputy Chief of Police and past president of an organization related to the FBI. The fact that recommendations from policing and security specialists were prioritized over those of any other experts for creating safe, supportive, and humane learning environments for youth is reflective of a paradigm of securitization and surveillance that is so all-encompassing that it limits us from even imagining any alternatives. At the community consultation conducted by the panel, I listened to parents
voice concerns that were predominantly about their children’s experiences with bullying at school. Several community members said that criminalizing young people is not an adequate response to the real issues that students face on the ground, and that schools don’t need metal detectors or police but rather more qualified support staff to address these issues. The panel’s response to these concerns was baffling: one member proceeded to highlight the massive deficit currently being faced by the school board, asking the community for any recommendations to bridge the $3 billion gap. I also voiced some of the concerns that I have presented in this thesis; the response I received from the officer on the panel was, “It’s not about putting police officers in schools; it’s about putting police officers in an environment where children are.”

The process undertaken by the investigative panel struck by the TDSB indicates that Toronto is on the brink of moving toward even more intensive securitization and surveillance as a way of addressing safety concerns in our public school system. There is a body of existing research that condemns SRO programs, calling for reforms such as better training and more monitoring. For example, Kim and Geronimo (2010) published a policy paper arguing that if SROs must be deployed in schools, they should be provided with a formal governance document and other necessary tools and support to ensure that there are shared understandings of SRO program goals and that student rights are protected while school safety is ensured. Another report by the New York Civil Liberties Union (2007) illustrates the many problems associated with policing in schools, concluding with recommendations such as better officer training and supervision and the implementation of a complaints process (Kupchik & Bracy, 2010). Stinson and Watkins (2014) found that when SROs themselves are arrested, it is most often for sex-related...
offenses involving female students who are enrolled at the schools they patrol; even still, they suggest that SROs be provided with training on relational boundaries in the school environment. Hirschfield (2008) theorizes the relationship between school criminalization and the prison industrial complex, highlighting many of the detrimental consequences for youth of colour; he goes on to suggest that because individual police officers are “prone to accept but capable of resisting the imperatives of criminalization,” American SROs should adopt a model of building mentoring relationships with students (p. 94). He qualifies this recommendation, stating that “whether some progressive schools are capable of co-opting criminal justice tools and agents to the extent that they no longer qualify as agents of criminalization is an open theoretical and empirical question.”

I reject all of these reformist strategies. Ferreira da Silva’s analytics of raciality provides a conceptual framework for understanding the racial logic of modernity that renders any of these solutions acceptable. She warns us of the dangers of advocating for mechanisms of improvement and inclusion based on a false assumption that racist ideas are a deviation from a neutral, universal, and just modernity. Those who restrict possibilities for change to the functioning of the police as an institution, reducing issues to isolated instances of “bad apple” cops and individual officers who used poor judgment, fail to produce solutions that adequately respond to the scale and nature of the problem. They operate from an assumption that the injustice produced by the program can be addressed through proper identification, punishment, or training of bad cops—at the extreme, the banishment of individuals officers to the zone of violence. These solutions do, however, accomplish several other important feats: they reassure the public that any
issues that may have accompanied the policing of youth bodies in their schools have been resolved and their desired peace of mind is achieved once again; they allow the state to disentangle itself from responsibility for the problem; and they sustain the racial logic that writes the boundaries of modernity on the bodies of youth, only to be reinscribed again. This all occurs while the most important question—why we continue to insist on keeping police officers in schools in the first place—is successfully evaded.

Goldberg (2009) writes of the “relation between racial evaporation and erasure as explicit conception of state governmentality under globalizing neoliberal conditions . . . and the increasing difficulty as a consequence of considering racisms critically, of resisting them” (p. 30). In consideration of solutions to the problems posed by SRO policing, it is helpful to consider his conceptual distinction between antiracialism and antiracism. Antiracialism takes a stand against a categorizing—namely, the view that groups of people who are marked by certain visible traits are also inextricably connected by cultural, psychological, and behavioural traits. Antiracism, on the other hand, involves an explicit refusal of imposed conditions of being or living. Goldberg argues that there have been many critical moments in the history of social movements where antiracism has collapsed into the dominant trend of antiracialism. What is buried by this reduction is the racial arrangement that draws and polices boundaries between groups of people, determines the inferiority of people of colour, and always already determines their social, economic, legal, and political subordination. While antiracialism may scratch the surface, it attempts to erase the category of race before addressing ongoing legacies of racism, and is therefore wholly inadequate as a response to these histories. He writes, “If antiracist commitment requires remembering and recalling, antiracialism suggests
forgetting, getting over, moving on, wiping away the terms of reference, at best (or worst) a commercial memorializing rather than a recounting and redressing of the terms of humiliation and devaluation” (p. 21). Antiracialist calls for reform work to further entrench SRO programs by legitimizing their ongoing existence and reaffirming that those who live on the other side of universality require policing in the first place. These demands actually reflect a need by the racially dominant group to continue the ongoing work of producing and securing racial boundaries, even as they may challenge the program on the basis of race. Accordingly, Goldberg refers to the antiracialist position as “whiteness by another name, by other means.” In the context of this project, antiracism involves naming and explicating the set of conditions that constitute the SRO program and seeks to transform the very structure of those conditions itself. This involves demanding nothing less than the complete removal of police officers from schools.

In the context of new school safety recommendations, Donna Quan, the director of the TDSB, insisted, “I recognize clearly that there are concerns, but metal detectors are not the answer. We don’t want to create fortresses” (Doucette, 2014). This is a hopeful and promising indication that the school board indeed recognizes that implementing technologies of security and surveillance in schools is not conducive to fostering healthy and positive school communities. I have shown in this thesis that the SRO program is the most severe manifestation of a punitive and criminal justice–based approach that is, in many ways, seeing the transformation of schools into fortresses. Further, it contradicts provincial legislation that has rescinded zero tolerance approaches to discipline, as well as the school board’s strong commitment to operating from principles of equity. Accordingly, the same sense of justice applied to the board’s rejection of metal detectors
must also be applied to a consideration of policing in school spaces.

Here, I raise questions about the possibility of a paradigmatic shift to school discipline in Toronto toward a more constructive approach, one that recognizes what it means to truly create safety for all students. Steven Teske, a juvenile court judge in Clayton County, Georgia, who noted that SRO presence in schools correlated with a drastic increase in the number of youth channeled into the courts, said, “If anything, we need to develop a zero tolerance attitude toward policies that harm youth” (Petteruti, 2011, p. 30). Many schools and school districts across North America have begun to shift toward alternative disciplinary practices in recognition of the dangers of SRO policing for students of colour, and there is ample evidence to indicate the far-reaching success of more constructive and thoughtful approaches. Toronto must follow suit by immediately removing police officers from schools altogether and considering a framework for school discipline that is rooted in equity and justice.
References


Advancement Project. (2013). *Police in Schools are Not the Answer to the Newtown Shooting*. Retrieved from http://b.3cdn.net/advancement/a24bfe0e82e0a37d66_lzm6bkclv.pdf


CBC. (2009, June 29). 50 Toronto high schools to have police presence. Retrieved from 

CBC. (2010, October 6). Tories announce $155.5M prison expansion. Retrieved from 


http://www2.tdsb.on.ca/boardroom/bd_agenda/uploads/generalinfo/080623%20POLICE%20RESOURCE.PDF


Rankin, J. (2009, June 6). Suspended Sentences: Forging a School-to-Prison Pipeline? The


