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NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND

SOCIETY'S AUTOMATON: AN EXISTENTIAL PERSPECTIVE ON POLICE TRAINING  
AND STRESS MANAGEMENT EDUCATION

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF HUMANITIES

PAUL E. SYLVESTRE

2015

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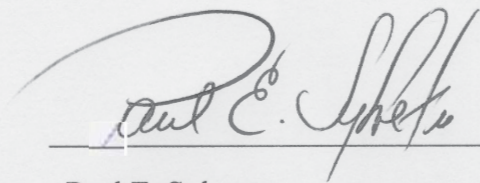
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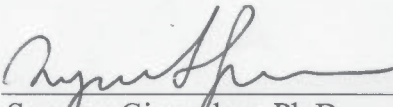
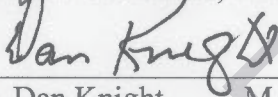

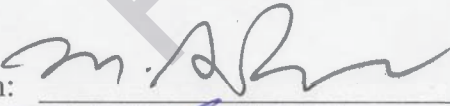
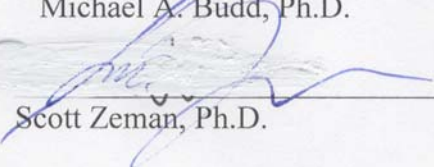
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## SALVE REGINA UNIVERSITY

### GRADUATE STUDIES

This dissertation of Paul E. Sylvestre entitled "Society's Automaton: An Existential Perspective on Police Training and Stress Management Education" submitted to the Ph.D. Program in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Salve Regina University has been read and approved by the following individuals:

Reader:	 Symeon Giannakos, Ph.D.	<u>5/15/2015</u> Date
Reader:	 Mr. Dan Knight MA	<u>5/15/2015</u> Date
Mentor:	 Daniel Cowdin, Ph.D.	<u>5/15/2015</u> Date
Director, Ph.D. Program:	 Michael A. Budd, Ph.D.	<u>5/15/2015</u> Date
Provost:	 Scott Zeman, Ph.D.	<u>5/15/2015</u> Date

I HAVE BEEN WHERE YOU FEAR TO GO . . . I HAVE SEEN WHAT YOU FEAR TO SEE  
. . . I HAVE DONE WHAT YOU FEAR TO DO . . . ALL THESE THINGS I'VE DONE FOR  
YOU. I AM THE ONE YOU LEAN UPON . . . THE ONE YOU CAST YOUR SCORN UPON  
. . . THE ONE YOU BRING YOUR TROUBLES TO . . . ALL THESE PEOPLE I'VE BEEN  
FOR YOU . . . THE ONE YOU ASK TO STAND APART . . . THE ONE YOU FEEL  
SHOULD HAVE NO HEART . . . THE ONE YOU CALL THE MAN IN BLUE . . . BUT I AM  
HUMAN JUST LIKE YOU. AND THROUGH THE YEARS I'VE COME TO SEE . . . THAT  
I'M NOT WHAT YOU ASK OF ME . . . SO TAKE THIS BADGE AND TAKE THIS GUN . . .  
WILL YOU TAKE IT? WILL ANYONE? AND WHEN YOU WATCH A PERSON DIE . . .  
AND HEAR A BATTERED BABY CRY . . . THEN SO YOU THINK THAT YOU CAN BE  
ALL THOSE THINGS YOU ASK OF ME . . . ?

— AUTHOR UNKNOWN

## Table of Contents

<b>Acknowledgements .....</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>List of Appendices.....</b>	<b>viii</b>
<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>ix</b>
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter One: The Public's Influence on the Evolution of Policing in Contemporary Society .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Chapter Two: Concerns for Contemporary Policing .....</b>	<b>41</b>
Introduction.....	41
Realities Indicative of "Bad Faith" .....	48
Impact of Cumulative Stress .....	55
Disservice of Mass Media to Policing and Society .....	57
Consequences of Unrealistic Expectations .....	66
Existential Absurdity of Police Training Methodology.....	70
Professionalism of the Police.....	72
Disconnection between Professional Needs and Training.....	75
Masculine Image of Policing .....	79
Consequences of Social Milieu of Police Profession .....	90
Paradox Confronting Individuals in Law Enforcement.....	94
Conclusion .....	99
<b>Chapter Three: Connecticut Police Academy .....</b>	<b>103</b>
Introduction.....	103
Academy Curriculum and Training .....	106
Demographic Influence on Training toward Professional Development .....	117
Aggregate Connecticut Responses to Vital Survey Questions .....	121
Cumulative Stress .....	122
Training Methodology .....	126
Acceptance of Counseling .....	133
Perception of Weakness.....	140
Conclusion .....	151
<b>Chapter Four: Demographic Influences on Connecticut Officers' Perceptions of Training and Cumulative Stress in Policing.....</b>	<b>158</b>
Introduction.....	158
Part One: Male Officers in Connecticut.....	163
Cumulative Stress .....	163
Training Techniques and Methodology .....	165
Acceptance of Counseling .....	170

Perception of Weakness.....	176
Influence of the Mass Media.....	182
Part Two: Tenure .....	188
Significance of Maturity of an Individual.....	206
Age at Time of Employment.....	206
Military Experience .....	217
College Experience .....	226
Shift Assignment.....	241
Connecticut Female Officers .....	253
Conclusion .....	262

**Chapter Five: Massachusetts Training Academy Methodology and Officers’ Perceptions Regarding its Adequacy in Addressing Cumulative Stress within Policing.....**

Introduction.....	274
Academy Curriculum and Training .....	282
Demographic Influences on Training .....	290
Aggregate Massachusetts Responses to Vital Survey Questions .....	292
Cumulative Stress .....	293
Training Methodology and Ideology .....	296
Acceptance of Counseling .....	303
Perception of Weakness.....	313
Male Officers in Massachusetts.....	320
Cumulative Stress .....	322
Training Techniques and Methodology .....	324
Acceptance of Counseling .....	327
Perception of Weakness.....	331
Influence of Mass Media .....	332
Tenure of Male Officers.....	336
Maturity of Male Officers.....	344
Age at Time of Employment.....	344
Military Experience .....	352
College Experience .....	358
College Graduate .....	366
Shift Assignment.....	371
Massachusetts Female Officers.....	379
Conclusion .....	387

**Chapter Six: The Deconstruction of Police Academy Training within Rhode Island and Officer Perceptions on Cumulative Stress within Law Enforcement.....**

Introduction.....	396
Academy Curriculum and Training .....	401
Demographic Influences on Training .....	415
Aggregate Rhode Island Responses to Vital Survey Questions .....	419
Cumulative Stress .....	420
Training Methodology and Ideology .....	424
Acceptance of Counseling .....	431

Perception of Weakness.....	441
Male Officers in Rhode Island.....	448
Tenure of Male Officers in Rhode Island .....	452
Maturity of Male Officers.....	470
Age at the Time of Employment.....	470
Military Experience .....	476
College Experience .....	483
College Graduate .....	493
Shift Assignment.....	503
Female Officers from Rhode Island.....	509
Conclusion .....	516
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>527</b>
Overview.....	527
Academy Analysis .....	534
Repercussions .....	544
Recommendations.....	548
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>600</b>

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## List of Appendices

Appendix A....Letter of Introduction to Police Chief.....	553
Appendix B ....2009 Connecticut Municipal Academy Curriculum .....	554
Appendix C ....Current Connecticut Municipal Academy Curriculum.....	558
Appendix D....Survey Participation Consent Form .....	562
Appendix E ....Likert Scale Survey Questionnaire .....	564
Appendix F.....Tentative Start Dates Connecticut Training Academy .....	568
Appendix G   Graphs Depicting Responses of Male Officers from Connecticut.....	569
Figure One .....Officers can suffer from stress .....	569
Figure Two.....Cumulative effects of stress recognized by officers .....	570
Figure Three.....Training provided proper preparation to work in policing ....	571
Figure Four.....Academy curriculum emphasizes crime fighting .....	572
Figure Five.....In-service training emphasizes crime fighting.....	573
Figure Six.....Academy curriculum not accurately reflect reality.....	574
Figure Seven .....Seek independent therapist .....	575
Figure Eight .....Avoid counseling due to fear of isolation .....	576
Figure Nine .....Acceptance more important than treatment .....	577
Figure Ten.....Admin. & Dept. personnel not recognize cumulative stress..	578
Figure Eleven.....Officers weak if counseling for cumulative stress.....	579
Figure Twelve .....Willingness to seek counseling is sign weakness .....	580
Figure Thirteen.....Academy teaches suppression of emotions.....	581
Figure Fourteen....In-service training re-enforces suppression of emotions .....	582
Figure Fifteen.....Television & Movies accurately depicts policing.....	583
Figure Sixteen .....Perceptions of policing influenced by mass media.....	584
Figure Seventeen..Preconceived perceptions were accurate .....	585
Appendix H....MPTC Operated and Authorized Academies .....	586
Appendix I .....MPTC Basic Recruit Training Curriculum.....	587
Appendix J .....2010 Rhode Island Municipal Training Academy Course Outline .....	590
Appendix K....2011 Rhode Island Municipal Training Academy Course Outline .....	593
Appendix L ....Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval.....	599

## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study was to examine the issue of police training techniques and the perceived antiquated ideology within the profession of law enforcement. This ideology which endorses the masculine image of physical and psychological toughness and the suppression of natural human emotions despite its considerable impact on an individual's psyche and the perceptions of weakness associated with someone in policing who may succumb to the detrimental consequences of cumulative stress. This study attempted to determine if the current construct of basic recruit training, as well as supplemental departmental in-service instruction, within the states of Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island focus their attention and resources toward the crime fighting and physical fitness component of policing at the expense of adequate attention being placed upon the predominant community service obligations, thus insufficiently preparing an individual to assume the duties of a police officer in contemporary society. A questionnaire was designed by the researcher based upon a Likert scale which was made available only to the uniform patrol officers, excluding supervisors, from qualifying municipal departments within the three participating states provided they attended the same academy. The data revealed an influence of the informal social norms of a police organization and willingness to conform on the part of an individual in order to gain acceptance. The data also revealed that regardless of the construct of the training academies within the three participating states the focus and attention is predominately on the crime fighting aspects of policing, which is perceived by the officers participating in this study to have not properly prepared them to assume the duties of a police officer. Overall officers' recognized cumulative stress as real, but it is not adequately anticipated

in the training academies nor adequately addressed later on by in-service programs or the informal police sub-culture.

PREVIEW

## INTRODUCTION

The police profession requires a physical and emotional commitment from those individuals who desire to serve their respective communities in such an admirable capacity. The total physiological and psychological immersion of a candidate into the police culture is achieved through the transformation of the recruit's psyche.

Unfortunately some naïve and impressionable individuals may, as a measure of self-preservation suppress their natural human emotions and reactions to the myriad of incidents encountered during a career in law enforcement creating a catalyst for the detrimental consequences of cumulative stress. "You may even experience a loss of your own humanity. It may become extremely difficult to be gently, caring, tender, and nurturing. These feelings create vulnerability, forcing you to feel the pain of those you work with. So you devise various shields to protect yourself" (Conroy & Hess, 91). The training techniques employed at the police academy may proficiently prepare the recruit for the crime-fighting aspects of a career in law enforcement, but not as strongly for the community-service functions. The majority of an officer's day is spent in the community-service aspect of law enforcement. This raises a question of whether the academy and individual police departments fail to recognize and adequately address the impact of cumulative stress on an officer. "The price that the public pays for uncontrolled police work stress is an undisciplined impulsive, or dysfunctional police response that plants a seed for possible tragedy" (Blum "Stoning Keepers at the Gate", 177).

In the course of this dissertation the researcher will address the consequences to police officers when the day-to-day cumulative effects of stress are ignored. Cumulative stress, according to Clinical Psychologist Dr. Ellen Kirschman entails the prolonged and

unrelieved wear and tear resulting from having more demands imposed than one is capable of fulfilling (Kirschman, 89). The day-to-day cumulative stress referenced in this dissertation refers to the totality of circumstances and instances encompassing the role of a police officer. The spectrum of such incidents range from responding to accident fatalities, death notifications, suicides, various motor vehicle stops, issuing motor vehicle violations, and moving groups of unruly juveniles, to name just a few. They are all perceived to be “routine” functions of the role of police officers in contemporary society. Police Administrations and department personnel identify and understand the willingness and desire for an individual officer, who has been exposed to a specific and isolated traumatic incident, such as a fatal shooting or the death of a partner, to seek counseling, but do they equally recognize and empathize with the officer suffering from the detrimental effects of cumulative stress? The daily exposures to horrific crime scenes, as well as the uninterrupted anxiety of being on constant alert are inherent facets of the police profession that are catalysts for the fragile emotional psyche of a police officer.

In order to undertake a manageable and feasible study the researcher has imposed certain restrictions in establishing the specific parameters concerning the participant pool for this dissertation. This particular dissertation will only focus on the training of uniformed police officers, in nonsupervisory positions, from the states of Connecticut, Massachusetts and Rhode Island who attended the same academy, in the hopes of determining the significance of each individual municipality’s curriculum concentrations and how that may influence, positively or negatively, the respective recruit’s perceptions concerning the adequacy of the instruction they received, as well as provide some insight into areas of apprehension with current instructional formats and regimens. Do current

training techniques in Rhode Island, Connecticut and Massachusetts fail to protect officers from the cumulative psychological effects of day to day job related stress? “Recruits are screamed at, and degraded. Even today, trainers at some academies assert, in the face of the huge body of contradictory evidence, that ‘it’s the only way to train police officers’” (Ellison, 64). Such a boot camp style ideology may not adequately address inoculating individuals against the detrimental effects of cumulative stress, but could rather be considered a stimulus for distress in the recruit. “Many scholars also argue that the behavioral and militaristic environment in most police training academies hinders the learning experience. Birzer notes the paradox for police who, work in a democratic society, but are trained and learn their jobs in a very paramilitary, punitive, and authoritarian environment” (White & Escobar, 124). In many instances such a methodology may impede the ability of a recruit to learn the appropriate skills required of a law enforcement officer in contemporary society, while accelerating the exposure to stressors that may culminate in the individual succumbing to cumulative stress and the corresponding physical and emotional ailments. “In order to cope with stress on an individual level, the officer needs to be made aware of the problems he is facing, i.e. the type of job stressors he will encounter and the impact of these stressors on him physically and emotionally” (Kroes, 108).

The current composition and structure of most police organizations, as well as the various training academies, are designed to perpetuate the masculine ideology and instill within the impressionable young recruit the fictionalized version of a police officer which is routinely depicted in the myriad of mass media representations that permeate contemporary culture. “Law enforcement agencies are structured in a semi-paramilitary

management style. Supervision is often authoritarian. Middle and top level managers have sometimes risen through the ranks having strict disciplinarian role models. They in turn, are accustomed to the rigid, disciplined supervision style. The “macho”, tough cop image is perpetuated” (Trautman, 157). A training academy is traditionally structured in a fashion similar to the paramilitary organizational ideology of most law enforcement agencies, as well as including the additional responsibility of initially instilling within the young impressionable recruit the fictional macho image of a police officer. “Officers have been indoctrinated to keep a lid on their feelings. They are warned repeatedly that losing control can jeopardize their safety *and* their career” (Kirschman, 31). Any open display of emotion by an individual in law enforcement may be viewed as exhibiting characteristics and traits which are contradictory to the public’s innate image of a police officer, as well as the individual being considered weak and a liability by other members of the department.

In order to comport to the “macho” image of a police officer an individual may suppress his/her natural human emotions and suffer in isolation in order to conform to occupational expectations. Do training academy administrations recognize the impact of cumulative stress on contemporary law enforcement personnel? And if not, should they incorporate curriculum designed to eradicate the “mythology of invincibility” inherent in the police profession? The training programs in the police academy must include an acknowledgement concerning the acceptability of counseling in contemporary law enforcement. Professor Hans Toch of the Social Psychology Department at the School of Criminal Justice in New York believes that the process to reorient the mantra of invincibility should begin in the academy. “We could in fact start by treating the recruits

as adults in the training academy, instead of self-consciously deploying demeaning regimentation and calling this a desirable stress training model” (Ellison, 64). Such a transition at the academy would eventually lead through attrition, to department wide acceptance of counseling as a necessary and a viable alternative to isolation due to the cumulative effects of stress.

Integrated within the fundamental researchable question, Does police academy training and the various departmental in-service instructional programs adequately prepare an individual for the practical role and responsibility of a police officer in contemporary society?, are supplemental inquiries that are also pertinent to the hypothesis of the dissertation. Such sub-questions include concerns such as: What is the training culture in the police academy as it relates to day to day stress? What do current training techniques focus on? Do the images of police work provided by the mass media impact the curriculum and/or the expectations of recruits as they enter the force?

The primary role of the police in contemporary society concerns their community-service role, rather than crime-fighting. The majority of training academy and departmental in-service programs emphasize the crime-fighting aspect of law enforcement. The training academy curriculum incorporates instruction in cultural awareness due to the demographic diversity of various municipalities, while failing to recognize the realities of the role of police in contemporary society.

The curriculum of the training academy emulates society’s mythological perception of the police profession prejudiced by the mass media. “The entertainment industry has done little to improve our images of police and policing. Based upon their portrayals, it seems reasonable to conclude that crime-related chases, fights, and use of

weapons are frequent activities for patrol officers” (Lundman, 2). The curriculum of a training academy, and the instruction police officers receive through various in-service education programs conducted by their respective departments, emulates the fictional role of police in contemporary society demonstrated through the genre of the mass media, and does not prepare recruits for the realities of the law enforcement profession. The mass media presents the recruit as well as members of society with unrealistic perceptions of the role of police in contemporary society.

Of concern, then, is the possibility that the curriculum and training programs at the police academy address the fictional role of police in contemporary society as crime fighters, established by the mass media, at the expense of the community-service role. Some police recruits have preconceived notions of the role and function of police in contemporary society. The emphasis of the training academy and police departments on the physical aspects of crime-fighting raises questions about their detachment from the actual function and recognition of the role of police in contemporary society. The anthem of physical prowess instituted in the training academy is perpetuated by the respective departments through in-service instructional programs. The recruit and patrol officer are being consistently prepared for the deleterious crime-fighting aspects of the police profession at the expense of any recognition to the caustic effects of cumulative stress from the principal community-service role. In some instances an individual may have preconceived impression of the role of a police officer in society which has been ingrained due to the continuous exposure to the plethora of police docudramas that monopolize television and the movie industry.

The police academy reinforces these misconceptions by perpetuating the misnomer that the predominate aspect of policing entails crime fighting. The individual is then blindsided by the fact that policing is in actuality more involved in community service type obligations than the advertised crime fighting function. The individual may feel that the community service responsibilities are preventing him/her from engaging crime fighting, which is the standard of how one is as being a good police officer. The officer may develop some anger issues, as well as hostility and resentment toward the public, who are inhibiting his/her ability to fight crime which may be a catalyst for creating a wound for stress to fester and eventually cause physiological and psychological ailments with the individual. "Stress thus occurs when the demands placed on us exceed our capacity to deal with them. More specifically, this means that stress develops when we are not able to *avoid*, *alter*, or *control* those demands" (Stinchcomb, 261).

The police profession and specifically the method and techniques employed in the training of impressionable and vulnerable young recruits will be the primary focus of this dissertation. The cumulative effects of stress, absent the exposure to traumatic life and death encounters such as a fatal shooting, are currently not sufficiently recognized as having a detrimental impact on the health and psyche of an individual officer. In the course of this dissertation, stress is to be defined according to Canadian Endocrinologist Hans Selye as the nonspecific response of the body to any demand made upon it. Selye understood and identified that stress could be both positive, "*eustress*" which would encompass positive situations such as an individual receiving a promotion at work, and negative, "*distress*," incorporating those situations that are damaging, unpleasant, and

detrimental to an individual's psyche and physical health (Selye,14-8). In the course of this dissertation the negative aspects of stress or distress will be the focus of the research.

The academy strips the young recruits of their humanity and indoctrinates them into the police culture. The recruit may not be properly prepared for the actuality of life as a police officer and as a result suppresses the inherent daily stress associated with the profession. The training and job expectations have isolated the young recruit to rationalize his/her existence as inevitable. In order to conform to the "macho image" of a police officer an individual suffering from the detrimental consequences of cumulative stress must suppress his/her emotions and suffer in isolation so as not to be construed as being weak and a liability. The recruit is surgically segregated and isolated from his/her past. Individuals who are not part of the police culture cannot understand the emotions experienced. The young recruit is reluctant to seek outside counseling for fear of disclosure and being recognized as weak. "The isolation is further strengthened by an inability to display any weakness or vulnerability" (45). The recruit must construct a wall of invincibility and project an aura of confidence in order to conceal the emotional internal strife. The police academy, through the selection of training techniques, assists the young recruit with developing his/her stoic automaton appearance to the community.

The emphasis on one particular training technique at the expense of the other may serve as a catalyst for the internalization of police distress. In order for a recruit to be properly prepared to assume the role of a police officer in contemporary society they must receive the appropriate training. The traditional stress oriented "boot camp" type training technique does not guarantee a recruit's capacity to be properly prepared for the practical experiences they will encounter while serving as a police officer. The premise of

this dissertation is that a symbiotic curriculum of stress-related and service-oriented training will be more beneficial to not only the individual recruit, but also the police department and the city. In order for society's perception of law enforcement to be credible, it must first be formulated from reality with some recognition of the cultural milieu of the police profession.

The young impressionable recruit is taught early in the academy that a display of emotion is a recognized sign of weakness. The police department and veteran officers perpetuate the indoctrination received in the academy. Young officers strive to seek the approval of veteran officers, so they are reluctant to seek counseling for fear of being identified as "weak" and becoming isolated from the police cultural milieu. The desire to be accepted as a member of the department and the internal community inherent in law enforcement deters an individual from seeking outside help on stress related issues. It is accepted and recommended to seek counseling as a result of becoming involved in a traumatic incident, such as fatal shooting. Yet the cumulative effects of stress as a result of everyday "routine" occurrences are not recognized as instances where an officer would or should seek counseling. The structure and curriculum of a police academy is designed to inoculate an impressionable recruit to the sensory stimulus overload inherent in the police profession. An individual who has been trained to react without emotion is more likely to be able to cope and deal with the sensory assault intrinsic in contemporary law enforcement. The training a young recruit receives in the academy imposes a sense of invincibility on the individual. The paramilitary structure of a training academy facilitates the mechanization of the recruit, stripping away any sense of humanity that would detract from the desired emotionally repressed police graduate. "Police agencies have adopted a

professional model of police officers as logical, rational, and reasoned decision makers and mediators who fight crime and maintain order. Emotions are regarded as unwanted influences that deflect police officers from the path of objectivity and professionalism, as forces to be controlled and hidden by police officers, if not eliminated through training, socialization, and supervisory practices” (Copes, 166).

“Often, precisely in order to be able to treat other people inhumanely or to prevent our own lives from being disturbed by the suffering of others, we shut ourselves off emotionally from perceiving the suffering of other people as suffering” (Hinman, 287). We could assume that the mandate to be stoic is a defense mechanism incorporated into the training academy’s curriculum, in order to protect officers from the strain of internalizing the pain of others, and subsequently having an adverse impact on their personal life. I might agree with that premise, if not for the basic contradictory dichotomy of the training and psyche within the police academy and individual departments. The display of emotion is an indication of weakness and an affront to society’s stereotypical perceptions of a police officer. “The stereotypical masculine value system of the police culture emphasizes a preference for cold rationality, which is cultivated through a norm of emotional suppression and self-management” (Copes, 166-7). We expect our officers to suppress their emotions without considering the detrimental impact on the psyche.

The researcher will be utilizing a mixed quantitative and qualitative methodology in this dissertation in order to combine the structure and precision of a correlation design with the insight of scholarly discourse, as well as his own professional experience. “In the most common variation, the quantitative and qualitative approaches are used to

supplement one another in the same study, with each method seeking to confirm or validate the findings from the other and strengthen the outcomes of the study because the advantages of one approach may compensate for the weaknesses of the other” (Rudestam & Newton, 52). The researcher intends to concentrate on the representatives of the uniform patrol division from police agencies within the states of Connecticut, Massachusetts and Rhode Island. I am concentrating on the representatives of the uniform patrol division of these agencies due to their direct interaction with the community and exposure to society’s suspected skewed perception of law enforcement being influenced by the mass media. The patrol divisions of every department are the initial responders to every call for assistance, and consequently are held to the mythological standards of a police officer personified by the mass media. The departments to be included in this dissertation will be those agencies that attend the same municipal training academies within their respective states.

The rationale for including such a vast array of agencies in the research pool is to account for those departments in which officers will simply refuse to participate in the study. The large research pool will also allow for an analysis and comparison of urban and suburban departments, as well as ensuring the inclusion of agencies with diverse demographic populations. The focus of the dissertation research will be concerned with whether individual officers from the patrol division of the included departments believe that they have received the proper training at the academy in order to prepare them for employment as a police officer. The research will analyze and examine the disparity between the traditional stress oriented boot camp style training technique and the college

oriented training technique which emphasizes communication and concentrates on the community service aspects of policing.

Another issue to be examined is whether applicants for positions as police officers had preconceived notions and perceptions of the job that were acquired through the mass media. The police docudrama, in a myriad of depictions, saturates the television airwaves and various cinematic productions in modern society. In many instances the public and specifically individuals aspiring to enter the police profession, may often obtain their skewed perceptions concerning the role and image of a police officer from these various mass media fictional depictions of law enforcement. The public may expect officers from their respective municipal police departments to exhibit the same characteristics and traits as the hero exhibits in the various police docudramas that permeate the big and small screen. “A staple assertion of introductory texts and lectures is that societal perceptions of crime are formed through exposure to various forms of media, including television, film, video, and internet services” (Dowler, Fleming & Muzzatti, 837). The training academy may also perpetuate the fictional image of a police officer by emphasizing the crime fighting aspects of the profession at the expense of the principal community service obligations. Some naïve mass media fictional depictions on the role and responsibilities of a police officer conflate the realities confronting a member of a municipal law enforcement agency. The individual officer’s inability to measure up the standards established by society and to engage in the crime fighting aspects of policing on a consistent basis can be a catalyst for succumbing to the detrimental effects of cumulative stress.