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Safety Department Officers' Perceptions: Concealed Carry and the Imposed Risk on Campus

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SAFETY DEPARTMENT OFFICERS' PERCEPTIONS: CONCEALED CARRY AND THE IMPOSED RISK ON CAMPUS

by

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Brightest Blessings.

Hebrews 11:1

Faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.

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ABSTRACT

A small number of studies have explored community college safety officers' perceptions regarding concealed carry on campuses. This understudied topic demands attention as the number of concealed handgun permits increased nationally for the third year in a row (Crime Prevention Research Center, 2021). Data suggests that within the 34 states that require a concealed carry permit, the number of Americans carrying stands at 18.66 million, a 304% increase since 2007 (Crime Prevention Research Center, 2021). As a result of recent state legislation and court decisions, ten states have provisions allowing for concealed carry on public campuses of higher education: Arkansas, Colorado, Georgia, Idaho, Kansas, Mississippi, Oregon, Texas, Utah, and Wisconsin. Using the Routine Activities Theory alongside Theory of Mind and qualitative methods, the purpose of this study was to gather information about how safety department officers at one community college perceived concealed carry and the imposed risk on campus.

Chapter 1: Safety Department Officers' Perceptions: Concealed Carry and the Imposed Risk on Campus

Getting shot on a university campus accounts for a small number of gun deaths in America (Berkowitz & Alcantara, 2020). However, it is the images of past shootings that have spurred on the multi-faceted battle for the right to conceal carry, not only because the Second Amendment affords that right, but also because some believe that carrying a handgun provides a sense of protection. Hsiao (2018) argued the right to campus carry "is simply an extension of our natural right of self-defense" (p. 466). This belief may stem from the Supreme Court's decision in *District of Columbia v. Heller*, 2008. The majority of Justices agreed that the Second Amendment protects the individual's right to possess a handgun outside of active duty in the military as a means of self-defense in the home (Dieterle & Koolage, 2014). In 2010, the Supreme Court ruled that the rights of individuals to bear arms, as afforded under the Second Amendment, was made applicable to the states by the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. With this decision, "policies were overturned that had theretofore banned guns in sensitive places" (Somers & Valentine, 2020, p. 20) including schools and college campuses.

Critics of concealed carry on campuses of higher education have collectively voiced their concerns regarding how concealed carry could impact the learning environment by creating additional safety issues (Dahl et al., 2016; De Angelis et al., 2017; Jones & Horan, 2019; Shepperd et al., 2018). These issues include, but are not limited to, an increased risk of violence for faculty and students, whether armed students deter violence, and shooter misidentification during emergencies (Birnbaum, 2013; Price et al., 2014; Proffitt & White, 2017; Schildkraut et al., 2018). These concerns were reported during research conducted at four-year institutions of higher education. However, research on community colleges and the risk of concealed carry have

yet to receive the same amount of attention. This lack of attention becomes problematic when considering that “open campuses are as susceptible to violence as any other public place” (Hoover, 2008, p. 1). Community colleges tend to have an open-door policy in which the fluidity of students creates a sense of anonymity and where fewer opportunities exist for students and faculty to build meaningful relationships (Dahl et al., 2016). Further, there is inadequate research on how concealed carry at community colleges impacts the men and women who protect and carry out administrative policy. The following pages outline this qualitative study used to understand safety department officers’ perceptions of concealed carry on the community college campus within the lower contiguous 48 states.

Problem Statement

There is insufficient research on community colleges and concealed carry from the perspective of campus safety officers. Most research has examined the faculty or student perception (Drew, 2017; Flaherty, 2017; Jones & Horan, 2019; Shepperd et al., 2018; Somers & Phelps, 2018). In their 2016 study, Dahl et al. examined community college faculty attitudes towards concealed carry on campus. Their research looked at community college campus safety, security issues on campus, the advisability of allowing concealed carry onto campus, and a history of gun ownership and faculty use. The results of their study indicated that the majority of faculty at community colleges felt safe and did not support students or faculty carrying while on campus. One difference in the Dahl et al. (2016) study when compared with the research done on four-year universities from Thompson et al. (2013) was the difference in weapon socialization faculty had with handguns. Forty-six percent of community college faculty owned a handgun (Dahl et al., 2016) while only and 21% of four-year university faculty owned a handgun (Thompson et al., 2013). Additionally, still using the data from the comparison of the Dahl et al.

(2016) and Thompson et al. (2013) studies, 18% of community college faculty were members of a handgun organization where only 2% of faculty at four-year universities were members of a handgun organization.

When the research does focus on the perceptions of law enforcement, safety officers have not been considered. In their 2009 study, Thompson et al. examined university police chiefs' roles in reducing firearm-related violence. Thompson et al. (2009) found that "1 in 4 campus police chiefs reported having experienced some form of firearm event on campus" (p. 252). These same officers admitted that allowing concealed carry on their campus would not prevent firearm-related violence. The campus police chiefs advocated for education on firearm-related issues for higher-level administrative teams all way down to incoming freshmen (Thompson et al., 2009). In an extensive review, I found no empirical research, other than the aforementioned literature, where actual safety officers were asked their perspectives about the imposed risks of concealed carry on campus.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gather information about how safety department officers perceived the imposed risks of concealed carry on one community college campus. While this topic remains under-researched, the debate over expanding the right to carry a concealed handgun on the university campus is not. In 2004, Utah passed a new law prohibiting public institutions of higher education from banning licensed concealed carry on campus. This was the first permissive campus carry bill, and the model other states used to forge ahead with their own legislation (Somers & Valentine, 2020). Since then, a proliferation of lobbyist groups and politicians have tried to maximize their agendas and sway the debate over concealed carry onto campuses of post-secondary education. Nine years after Utah passed their

concealed carry law, 19 other states have tried to follow suit by introducing legislation that would allow concealed carry onto these campuses. Fourteen states in 2014, and six states in 2018, drafted state policy that sought the legalization of concealed carry on campuses of post-secondary education (Krisberg, 2018). In 2015, the state of Texas, successfully legalized its concealed carry law with State Bill 11 (S.B. 11). The Texas bill reads that a licensed holder may have a concealed handgun on campuses of higher education. S.B. 11 applies to most academic settings, including the classroom (Shepperd et al., 2018; Somers & Phelps, 2018). The Kansas State Senate, in 2017, rejected House Bill 2578, a bill that would have prohibited concealed carry in public universities. The Kansas State Senate rejected the bill because senators believed that all public institutions of higher education in Kansas would be vulnerable to attack (Drew, 2017; Lewis, 2017). Concealed carry lends itself to further debate as states continue to wrestle with policy drafted from both sides of the political aisle.

In the past, some studies have examined the relationship between concealed carry and student and/or faculty perceptions regarding guns on campus (Bennett et al., 2012; Cavanaugh et al., 2012; Price et al., 2014; Thompson et al., 2013a; Thompson et al., 2013; Verrecchia & Hendrix, 2018). However, few researchers have used an exploratory study to describe safety officers' perspectives on the imposed risks of concealed carry on the community college campus.

Research Questions

Qualitative research questions explore a central phenomenon in a study, and researchers draft those questions according to the methodology used so that the needed data can be acquired (Creswell & Creswell, 2018a). In a qualitative study, "how" or "why" questions create an open-ended language that encourages the participants to provide more detail (Mills et al., 2010). In this study, the questions centered around concealed carry and the perceptions of the officers working

in a community college safety department (See Appendix A). The central question in this research study was:

RQ. How do the members of a community college safety department perceive the imposed risks of concealed carry on the community college campus?

Because this study focuses on the perspectives of officers concerning concealed carry, the following sub-question helped narrow the scope of the responses given:

SQ1. How do these perceptions inform safety decisions as they relate to concealed carry on their campus?

Definition of Terms

In this qualitative study, I explored campus safety officers' perceptions concerning concealed carry on the community college campus. In doing so, it was necessary to define some terms and attributes:

Campus Carry. A term often referenced when describing the action of carrying a handgun on a school campus. The two terms, campus carry, and concealed carry, will be used interchangeably throughout this dissertation.

Concealed Carry. In the state where the study took place, concealed carry permits are given to those 21 years of age and older. The concealed handgun license allows an individual to carry a loaded or unloaded handgun concealed upon the individual or concealed within their control in their vehicle.

Guardianship. A person or object whose proximity or absence makes it more difficult or easier to carry out a crime (Cohen & Felson, 1979).

Perception. "The subjective process of acquiring, interpreting, and organizing sensory information" (Lavrakas, 2008, p. 2).

Routine Activities Theory. A criminological theory developed by Cohen and Felson (1979) explaining victimization in relation to opportunity and guardianship.

Theory of Mind. The cognitive process of understanding the mental states of oneself and others (Karoğlu, 2021).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework guiding this research will be Tewksbury and Mustaine's 2003 adaptation of the Routine Activities Theory, first developed by Cohen and Felson (1979). The original theory measured predatory crime and its relationship with daily routines and lifestyles simultaneously influenced by suitable targets, potential offenders, and lack of capable guardianship (Cohen & Felson, 1979). The term guardianship can either be a person or an object that can deter crime or victimization from occurring. Routine Activities Theory suggests informal social control along with target hardening affects victimization. Formal guardianship, like law enforcement, often prevents or deters crime by protecting/guarding targets (Cohen & Felson, 1979).

Tewksbury and Mustaine (2003) used the theory to explore who uses self-protective strategies by assessing the individual's lifestyle related to the proximity of a motivated offender and suitable targets. Their research indicated that the most effective guardianship for their participants was on the individual level. The specific guardianship method used varied across the participants' "social status, age, gender, ethnicity, marital status, education, and objective assessments of victimization risks" (Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2003, p. 305).

Organization of This Study

Chapter One provided a brief overview of the topic and the literature, by introducing the motivation for concealed carry that guides this qualitative research and identified the knowledge

gaps in the current body of literature. The purpose of this research was to gain an understanding of how safety officers perceived the imposed risks of concealed carry on a community college campus. The Routine Activities Theory provided the theoretical framework to understand concealed motivation as a self-protective behavior. Chapter Two relays information on the historical background of the literature along with the three themes that appeared throughout the literature review. Chapter Three includes an overview of the research design, methodology, setting, data source, a brief introduction of the participants, data gathering, and data analysis. Chapter Four includes the emergent categories and themes from this qualitative study along with an analysis of the findings. Chapter Five concludes this research study by discussing the connections of past research with the findings of this study. Chapter Five also provides implications for practice and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Understanding the debate surrounding concealed carry on campuses of higher education requires an in-depth look into the dynamics of the controversy. Active shooter events, both recent and in the past, have elevated the level of attention given to concealed carry and when this is coupled with a political environment advocating for self-protection and the Second Amendment, the issue of concealed carry takes on a life of its own. This chapter presents pertinent literature associated with the issues surrounding concealed carry on campuses of higher education. Additionally, this chapter examined the work done in Routine Activities Theory and Theory of Mind to help explain deviant behavior towards others. Chapter Two concludes with a literature review that includes an examination of the thematic concepts of (a) trust in the government and police, (b) faculty perceptions on concealed carry, and (c) student perceptions on concealed carry.

Historical Background of the Literature

A brief synopsis of active shooters on campus provides the platform from which the movement for carrying a handgun on campus gained a foothold:

- April 16, 2007, thirty-three individuals died at Virginia Tech University (Hayter et al., 2014);
- February 14, 2008, a graduate student used a shotgun and pistols to kill five individuals while wounding an additional twenty-one at Northern Illinois University (Post, 2016);
- April 2, 2012, ten individuals were shot while attending Oikes University in Oakland, California. Seven of the ten died (Kaminski et al., 2010);

- June 7, 2013, a former student brought an AR-15 semi-automatic rifle onto the Santa Monica College campus and killed six people while injuring an additional four (Post, 2016);
- June 5, 2014, a gunman shot and killed one student, and injured two more at Seattle Pacific University (Mallahan, 2016);
- October 1, 2015, an active shooter on campus shot nineteen people, ten of whom died after a shooting at Umpqua Community College in Roseburg, Oregon (Kaminski et al., 2010) and;
- April 30, 2019, two were killed at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. The shooting ended when a student tackled the gunman; however, that student died at the scene (Marusak et al., 2019).

Those shootings were but a handful that have occurred across the country.

With such tragic outcomes of so many active shooter on-campus incidents, a sense of outrage, fear, and urgency propelled the argument that students and faculty should have the right to carry a concealed handgun with them for protection. Gun-rights advocates have stood firm in their constitutionally held belief that their right to bear arms outside of their homes was affirmed by *District of Columbia v. Heller, 2008*. In the landmark case, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled that American citizens had the right to possess handguns and use them in self-defense. The Supreme Court opinion said that while there are unique places, like institutions of education where guns could remain prohibited without violating the Second Amendment, the Court did not preclude weapons on campus in their entirety. The Supreme Court left it up to the individual states to decide whether to prohibit or allow handguns on campuses of post-secondary education.

Gun-rights advocates also hold that their right to carry on campus stems from a natural extension of the Second Amendment's right to self-defense and personal protection (Birnbaum, 2013; Hsiao, 2018; Satterfield & Wallace, 2018). After the Virginia Tech tragedy and the ensuing shootings, gun advocates maintained that students and faculty remain better off defending themselves (Lewis, 2017). Potter (2007) argued that a policy allowing for concealed carry on campus addressed the misguided argument that schools with "more security cameras, more police…and electronic checkpoints" (p. 2), could protect students and faculty from an active shooter on campus. Students for Concealed Carry on Campus (SCCC), a grassroots gun advocacy group, along with the National Rifle Association (NRA), lobbied under the banner that guns provide safety to those who carry on campus (Harnisch, 2008; Proffitt & White, 2017). SCCC argued that if an active shooter on campus knew other students were armed and prepared to defend themselves, the shooter would not commit violence (Birnbaum, 2013; Proffitt & White, 2017).

The need to protect oneself and remain safe while on campus provided additional argumentation for prohibiting handguns by those favoring gun-control laws. Students for Gun-Free Schools (n.d.) claimed that those who advocated for concealed handguns on campus had faulty argumentation. They reasoned that concealed carry would not take away from academic freedom; however, it would put students at an increased risk of harm. Students for Gun-Free Schools (n.d.) also maintained that concealed carry would not deter shooters; concealed carry permits did not mean the weapons permit holder was a law-abiding person, and that concealed carry permits did not require weapons training. In some states, laws require a background check, an application fee, in-class handgun training, or live shooting at a firing range to obtain a

concealed carry permit (Lott & Wang, 2020). Other states, like South Dakota, sell a yearly permit for $10 with no training required (Lott & Wang, 2020).

A significant concern in the argument against concealed carry centers around the safety of students and faculty. Many gun-control advocates have argued that college life has historically correlated with risky behaviors such a binge drinking, drug use, accidental shootings, and suicide (Cavanaugh et al., 2012; Jang et al., 2014; Price et al., 2014; Schildkraut et al., 2018; Thompson et al., 2013; Wallace, 2019). Ninety-five percent of violent crimes on college campuses involved alcohol use, and gun control advocates held that adding the availability of concealed carry on campus seemed "antithetical to such an environment" (Price et al., 2014, p. 461). Thompson et al. (2013) reported that an estimated 24,000 college students per year attempted suicide. Adding the availability of weapons on campus could increase the likelihood of higher suicide rates. The Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence (2010), an anti-gun lobbyist group, advocated that there is no evidence indicating students with weapons saved lives. Instead, the Brady Campaign (2010) held that more guns on campus lead to future victimization, along with increased chaos for campus police in identifying the correct shooter in an active shooter incident.

Summary and Discussion of the Related Literature

In 2019, the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) shared information on the culmination of state requirements for concealed carry on higher education campuses. NCSL reported sixteen states currently ban concealed carry on college campuses: California, Florida, Illinois, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, Nebraska, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, South Carolina, and Wyoming. In twenty-three states, each campus makes its own concealed carry policy: Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Minnesota,

Montana, New Hampshire, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, and West Virginia. Ten states have provisions allowing concealed carry onto higher education campuses: Arizona, Colorado, Georgia, Idaho, Kansas, Mississippi, Oregon, Texas, Utah, and Wisconsin. Utah and Arkansas must allow any individual with an appropriate permit to carry concealed on campus (Hutchens & Melear, 2017). In Tennessee, full-time employees, but not students, may carry concealed weapons and in Kansas individuals can conceal carry unless a building can prove adequate security measures already exist.

Much of the literature on concealed carry was published in the early to mid-2000s and focused on what would happen if the university under-study allowed concealed handguns. A great deal of the research located came by way of scholarly journals. I created a research matrix to itemize all of the data used for this study. However, the inclusion of secondary source articles became necessary because many of the journals simply examined previous research on concealed carry and did not include any additional insight. Additionally, the research located did not provide sufficient information on community college safety officers' perceptions. The journals reviewed for this study produced three significant themes: trust in the government and police, faculty perceptions on concealed carry, and student perceptions on concealed carry.

Trust in the Government and the Police

One of the prevalent themes woven through the reviewed literature was the lack of trust students and faculty have in the government or the police to keep them safe while on campus. This lack of trust in the campus police to maintain safety significantly correlated with the support of carrying a concealed firearm onto a university campus (De Angelis et al., 2017). Interestingly, the distrust of campus police correlated with a lack of confidence in the federal government to

keep higher education campuses safe (De Angelis et al., 2017). In their 2017 research, Jang et al. had college students assess police department performance so that the researchers could establish the level of confidence the student body had in the police. The results indicated that only 10.09% of the 451 students who completed the survey had confidence in the police to keep them or the campus safe. Lewis et al. (2016) had unfavorable responses from the participants in the study they led. Only 44% of the college students surveyed believed that the U.S. government did enough to address gun violence. Further, in the research by Thompson et al. (2013a), of the 1,649 college students surveyed, 49% were not very confident and 7% were not at all confident that the police could prevent violent crime on campus.

Another pressing issue derived from the literature analysis was whether the climate on campuses of higher education could foster an unbiased view of carrying a concealed handgun. Often, the answer lies in the subjective view of personal safety and the concept of collective security. Collective security posits that once students and faculty perceive they cannot rely on the police for campus security, they begin to explore alternative self-protection methods (De Angelis et al., 2017). In their 2017 survey, De Angelis et al. examined the predictors of 1,170 faculty and staff attitudes towards concealed carry at a university in the western United States. Their findings suggested a correlation between supporting concealed carry on campus with a lack of trust for both police and the federal government. Their research also supported the belief that individuals might adopt self-protection strategies such as purchasing a firearm, along with favoring concealed carry on campus (De Angelis et al., 2017). De Angelis's survey instrument's limitation suggested that it was sent out too soon after the legislative session; thus, the researchers heeded caution not to infer false assumptions.

In another study related to students' beliefs regarding gun violence, Lewis et al. (2016) found that 56% of college students at a Midwestern university did not believe the U.S. government was doing enough to address the issue of gun violence. Further, their results revealed that 57% of the students surveyed agreed that professors should carry registered handguns on campus. However, there was no clear indication if this support correlated with the lack of trust in the U.S. government to address gun violence.

Thompson et al. (2013) found slightly different results in their study. A pool of 791 faculty members from randomly selected universities in Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Wisconsin received a survey regarding concealed carry on campus. Most of the faculty responded they felt safe on campus (97%). When the construct of campus police was mentioned on the survey, the researchers found that 50% of the faculty who perceived there were disadvantages in carrying a concealed handgun remained confident that the police could prevent violent crime on campus. However, 51% of surveyed faculty admitted concern about being a victim of crime on campus.

Price et al. (2014) had similar results in their study. Researchers looked at university presidents' perceptions and practices of carrying a concealed handgun onto campus. Of the 401 responses received, 98% of the presidents thought students and faculty felt safe on campus. Of the university presidents surveyed, 73% perceived there to be disadvantages to carrying a concealed handgun and remained confident in the police to prevent campus crime. However, 41% of the university presidents perceived there were advantages to carrying a concealed handgun on campus and were not confident in the police.

Faculty Perceptions of Concealed Carry on Campus

In the literature reviewed, independent variables such as race, gender, political affiliation, weapon socialization, and victimization at times had a correlational relationship in determining support for concealed carry on campuses of higher education. Overall, however, the faculty surveyed in the literature reviewed adamantly resisted the idea of concealed carry on campus (Bennett et al., 2012; Thompson et al., 2013). In their 2013 study, Thompson et al. found that the faculty surveyed mimicked that of the students previously surveyed. Fifty-one percent of the male faculty surveyed perceived there to be an advantage to carrying a concealed handgun, compared to their female counterparts. Forty-one percent of the faculty identified as white and 67% identified as Republican. Other consistent variables that aligned with the support of carrying a concealed handgun included gun ownership. Seventy-six percent of the faculty who responded that there were advantages of carrying, owned two or more guns. Forty-six percent of faculty grew up with weapons in their homes, while 42% of the faculty surveyed indicated that they had experienced victimization on or off-campus.

In other studies, many faculty indicated they already felt safe on campus, and adding guns, in that sense, did not add to the value of the safety argument expressed by others (Dahl et al., 2016; Patten et al., 2013; Thompson et al., 2013). When asked if qualified faculty or students should carry concealed handguns on campus, faculty resoundingly replied, no (Patten et al., 2013; Thompson et al., 2013). In their 2013 study, Thompson et al. also revealed 93% of the faculty surveyed would feel unsafe if the university made it legal for faculty, students, and visitors to carry a concealed handgun on campus. In Beggan's 2019 study, he focused his attention on the state of Texas that recently passed a concealed carry bill. His study indicated that there were perceptions of increased fear and anxiety among faculty throughout campuses of post-

secondary education in Texas. A professor from the University of Houston put together a slide that advised faculty to alter their teaching habits to avoid possible conflicts with students who may be carrying. (Beggan, 2019)

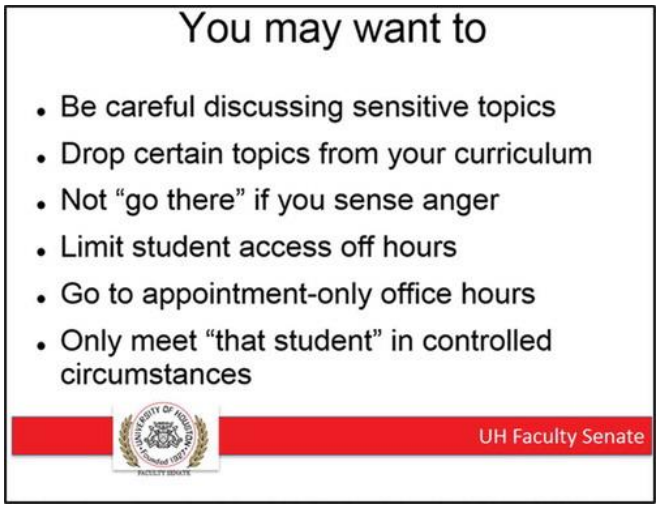

Figure 1. A PowerPoint slide advised professors to alter teaching to pacify armed students at a University of Houston faculty senate meeting.
(*Beggan*, 2019)

Bennett et al. (2012) examined the attitudes of southeastern Georgia university faculty regarding House Bill 89 (HB 89) and concealed carry on higher education campuses. The researchers found that most of the participants did not favor HB 89. However, the research failed to show significant predictors of faculty attitudes through a multivariate analysis. Bennett et al. (2012) used a survey instrument with questions in a multiple-choice format followed by eleven demographic questions. The response categories were structured in a Likert-type fashion utilizing responses such as "strongly oppose" or "strongly favor" (Bennett et al., 2012, p. 340).

Price et al. (2014) studied university presidents' perceptions and practices of carrying concealed while on campus. The researchers designed their confirmatory research around close-ended questions regarding safety and the occurrence rate of campus shootings. Price et al. (2014) used a forty-nine-item questionnaire utilizing a three-wave mailing procedure and received a

46% return rate. Compared to other studies, the number of questions on the researcher's questionnaire may have been too burdensome for a higher return rate. Price et al. (2014) acknowledged that their questionnaire might have been "too monothematic" (p. 467), thus hindering the participation desired. The compilated results from those who responded found while campus shootings are episodic and rare, the damage they leave behind is extensive. For those reasons, campus administrators do not believe handguns belong on college or university campuses.

Student Perceptions of Concealed Carry on Campus

When the students' perceptions were sought in the research, the results revealed that students were relatively uncomfortable with the concept of concealed handguns on campus (Cavanaugh et al., 2012). In their 2012 study, Cavanaugh et al. surveyed students from two universities, one in southeastern Texas and the other in eastern Washington. Researchers asked how comfortable students would feel if their school legalized carrying a concealed handgun on campus. The results indicated that the Washington sample was "3 times as likely to report that they were not at all comfortable with concealed handguns on campus as they were to report that they were very comfortable" (Cavanaugh et al., 2012, p. 2246). Comparatively, the Texas sample was greater than 2:1. When asked if the students were concerned over campus violence, 55% of Washington students said they were, and 64% of Texas students said they were concerned. Cavanaugh et al. (2012) added that changing concealed carry policy for university campuses is not limited to just the constructs of crime and violence. "The campus community's emotional and behavioral reactions are also relevant" (Cavanaugh, 2012, p. 2246) and these concerns did not appear to have been considered in policy discussions.

In another study, Thompson et al. (2013a) assessed the perceptions of college students from fifteen public midwestern universities. They found that most students were not supportive of carrying a concealed handgun on campus. Their research also indicated that even if concealed carry on campus became legal, most participants would not obtain a permit to carry a gun legally. Thompson et al. (2013a) used a survey instrument to gather their data. However, surveys tend to "rely on self-reported perceptions and behaviors" (p. 252), limiting the validity of the responses. Furthermore, Thompson et al. (2013a) found themselves in a position where the professors handed out the university questionnaires. This occurrence eliminated the uniqueness of a random sample and allowed bias to seep into the results.

In other studies, predictors may have helped form the reasons behind the support of carrying a concealed handgun. The predictors reflected race, gender, political affiliation, weapon socialization, and victimization. The constant predictors supporting concealed carry included race, political affiliation, and weapon socialization in both student and faculty participants. In the research provided by Thompson et al. (2013a), the student participants who believed in the advantage of carrying a concealed handgun generally identified as males, Republicans, and gun owners, 71%, 59%, and 86%, respectively. The predictor of fear of victimization also correlated with the belief in the advantage of carrying a concealed handgun.

Jang et al. (2014) studied college students' perceptions regarding carrying a concealed handgun on college campuses. In their study, researchers used predictors such as socio-demographics, deviant lifestyle, political party, weapon socialization, victimization experience, fear of crime, the likelihood of shooting, and confidence in the police to determine support for concealed carry. Of the 451 completed surveys, only 27% strongly disagreed with allowing concealed carry on a college campus. Gender played a significant role in the responses received.

Males were three times more likely not to choose the “strongly disagree” response to the question about legalizing concealed handguns on college campuses. Weapon socialization, often associated with political party affiliation, also played an essential role in Jang et al., (2014) research. Students whose parents owned handguns, and friends who owned handguns, were more likely to support carrying a concealed handgun on college campuses. Sixty-two percent of parents had handguns in the house while the survey participant lived at home. Thirteen percent of participants had friends with handguns.

Routine Activity Theory

Lawrence Cohen and Marcus Felson published a paper on Routine Activity Theory (RAT) in 1979 that examined the circumstances around predatory crime without the emphasis being on the offender. In their paper from the *American Sociological Review*, the researchers found that the more individuals engage in routine activities away from home, the more likely that opportunities for crime exist. Cohen and Felson (1979) defined routine activities as “recurrent and prevalent activities which provide for basic population and individual needs, whatever their biological or cultural origins” (p. 593). Within the routine activities pattern of an individual, Cohen and Felson (1979) wrote that three minimal elements were needed for crime rates to be affected. The three elements included motivated offenders, suitable targets, and the absence of capable guardians. The researchers also found that if any one of these three elements was missing, that missing element was sufficient to prevent the successful completion of the crime.

Cohen and Felson (1979) argued that routine activities in jobs away from home or in other activities away from home increased the risk of victimization because they enhance “the convergence of space and time with suitable targets in the absence of capable guardians” (p. 593). In Cohen and Felson’s (1979) research, suitable targets were defined as things with value,

visibility, accessibility, and passivity. The researchers defined guardianship as a person or object whose proximity or absence makes it more difficult or easier to carry out a crime (Cohen & Felson, 1979).

Richard Tewksbury and Elizabeth Ehrhardt Mustaine (2003) examined how the role of guardianship could plausibly reduce the chances of victimization in college students. The researchers looked at how college students used self-protective strategies, considering lifestyles and the student's proximity to motivated offenders, the student's suitability as a target, and how these elements converge to influence the use of self-protective devices. Self-protective strategies include mace, clubs, knives, body alarms, or guns.

In their study, Tewksbury and Mustain (2003) used self-administered surveys in the fall of 1996 at nine postsecondary institutions of education. They received surveys back from 1,513 students. Their study found that college students base their use of self-protective measures on their objective measure of proximity and exposure to offenders and their vulnerability as a target. Their vulnerability as a target is dependent on their "employment status, transportation activities, frequency of associating with strangers, living in disordered neighborhoods, drug use, and perceptions about the safety of their homes" (Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2003, p. 321).

Theory of Mind

Theory of Mind is associated with poor social functioning in autism, schizophrenia, Asperger's, depression, and anxiety (Karoğlu et al., 2021; Ruhl, 2020; Winter et al., 2017). Theory of Mind (ToM) is also a term often operationalized in terms of cognitive and affective representations. Cognitive representation is the ability to understand the mental states of others, where affective representation is the ability to infer the emotions of others (Karoğlu et al., 2021). Cognitive representation breaks down into two orders. The first-order is "determining whether

someone can infer another person's thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and intentions accurately" (Karoğlu et al., 2021, p. 3). The second-order cognitive representation in ToM determines whether a person "can accurately understand a person's mental state about another person's mental state "(what X thinks about Y's thoughts, feelings, intentions, or beliefs)" (Karoğlu et al., 2021, p. 4).

In their 2021 study, Karoğlu et al. examined 28 previously published studies on ToM impairment and offending behavior spanning 16 years (2004-2019). Their review of the studies indicated that offenders and non-offenders do not differ in their first-order Theory of Mind. When looking at second-order ToM, Karoğlu et al. (2021) found that the link between Theory of Mind impairment and offending behavior was mixed. The reason why the link was found to be inconclusive was related to the lack of previous studies on offenders and Theory of Mind, and ToM uses a "range of different Theory of Mind tasks to measure the same domain" (Karoğlu et al., 2021, p. 12). The researchers concluded that the previous research did not consider other constructs such as cognitive abilities, history of offending, socialization history, levels of neuroticism, and the closeness of the offender to their victim (Karoğlu et al., 2021) that could have influenced the results.

Researchers Winter et al. (2017) also examined cognitive representations (Theory of Mind) and affective representations (empathy) as a way to help understand aggressive behavior. Winter et al. (2017) defined aggressive behavior as "any behavior directed toward another individual that is carried out with the proximate (immediate) intent to cause harm" (p. 1). Aggressive behavior towards another individual can be associated with mental disorders, including antisocial personality disorder, but healthy individuals can also carry out aggressive behavior. Both the acts of empathy and aggression have been linked to alexithymia, "a

personality trait describing difficulties in identifying and expressing one's emotional states" (Winter et al., 2017, p. 2).

In their study, Winter et al. (2017) showed a social video task to 29 men with a history of aggressive behavior and 32 control participants. Their study revealed that the participants with a history of aggressive behavior "had a decreased sharing of negative affect with others, indicating diminished empathy, and reduced compassion after emotionally negative videos" (Winter et al., 2017, p. 6). In this same group of participants, no ToM deficit occurred, which told the researchers that intact cognitive perspective-taking occurred in the participants with a history of aggressive behavior. Their study also revealed that lack of empathy in individuals with a history of aggressive behavior relates to increased alexithymia.

Charlotte Ruhl (2020) wrote about Theory of Mind and provided additional background information on what the theory allows the scientific community to understand. Theory of Mind is the ability to attribute mental states like beliefs, intents, and emotions to ourselves and others (Ruhl, 2020). ToM occurs in succinct stages after several developmental skills in infants take place. The three developmental skills include the ability to understand the concept of attention, the ability to understand the intentions of others, and the ability to imitate others. The skill of paying attention to others is based on Baron-Cohen's (1991) research that giving attention to something is more than just looking; it involves selectively giving our direct attention to specific objects and people. The second skill needed to advance towards ToM is intentionality. Philosopher Daniel Dennett (1983) wrote that the ability to understand the intentions of others arises out of an understanding that people act out of their desires and wants and that these can differ from our own. The ability to imitate others, the third skill infants learn before developing

ToM, allows an individual to recognize that another person has their own beliefs and desires and may direct their attention to that object or scene as well (Ruhl, 2020).

Conclusion of the Literature Review

The reviewed literature presented a decade worth of studies that examined faculty and/or students' perceptions concerning concealed carry on campus. Undoubtedly, many of these studies may have come to fruition due to the horrific shooter on-campus events at several American higher education institutions. However, the results of some of these studies indicated a somewhat mixed message as to whether students and faculty would support a policy that allowed campus carry. Self-protection came up, as did a sense of lack of safety due to the perceived inadequacies of the government and the police. What was not discussed in enough of the literature was how a policy that allows concealed carry would affect the officers on community college campuses. This study does just that; this study looked at how safety officers perceived concealed carry at the community college level.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

In this qualitative study, I examined the perceptions of safety officers and the construct of concealed carry on community college campuses. The study shed light on this underdeveloped research topic while simultaneously provided information useful in promoting future research and crafting formal school policy. The central question that guided the research was,

- How do the members of a community college safety department perceive the imposed risks of concealed carry on the community college campus?

The following sub-question furthered understanding in this qualitative study.

- How do these perceptions inform safety decisions as it relates to concealed carry on their campus?

Design/Research Approach

A qualitative research design, drawing on constructivism, guided this study. Constructivism assumes individuals want to understand the world in which they live and work (Yazan, 2015). For this to happen, constructivism theorizes that individuals construct or develop subjective meanings of their lived experiences. This meaning-making of their experiences comes by way of the individual's historical and social perspectives (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yazan, 2015). Through close collaboration between myself and the participants, capturing the participants' contextual backgrounds came to fruition.

I used a qualitative research design to develop the researcher-subject interaction, which is compatible with the constructivist epistemology (Yazan, 2015). When pairing these two constructs, an understanding of the phenomenon developed as its "boundaries are fenced in" (Merriam, 1998, p. 27). An example of boundaries being fenced in was found in Drew's 2017 research, where she used a qualitative research design to share the professors' reactions to the

concealed carry law at Pittsburg State University (PSU) in Kansas. Using a qualitative research design allowed Drew to bound the study and provided an in-depth understanding of how the law threatened academic freedom, identity, and a climate of safety at PSU due to Kansas State House Bill 2578 (HB2578). HB2578 allows concealed carry on campuses of higher education throughout the state if no other adequate safety measures exist at the campus.

In the past, researchers who wanted to accomplish similar goals also used qualitative research (Merriam, 2002). While surveys could be disseminated and analyzed for data that answered the research question, qualitative research allows the researcher the opportunity to account for the rich and detailed descriptions of a unique present-day condition rather than a simple rationalization (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). This study's research design did not presume a causal link as explanatory case studies often try to accomplish, nor did this study use a descriptive approach showcasing the phenomenon's chronology. Concealed carry on community college campuses remains a relatively new phenomenon that has yet to establish an extensive history. This research helped narrow the knowledge gap concerning concealed carry and campus safety officers' perceptions on the community college campus.

The Researcher

The subject matter of concealed carry on school property has impacted me since Sandy Hook Elementary's devastating events in December of 2012. As both a parent and a graduate student, I began to ponder the legitimacy of arming teachers or employing armed security at K-12 schools along with campuses of post-secondary education across the nation. Over the years, as shootings continued to occur and the concealed carry argument gained traction, I began to see my interest in the law and our schools' safety merge into a usable career path once I completed

my education. I knew that I could use my passions to affect school policy while keeping future research on concealed carry in schools up to date.

My own experience as a daughter of a law enforcement officer and as an avid learner has shown me that my passion for the law and protecting students can have a harmonious relationship. Developing and implementing policy takes the ability to look at a scenario, like concealed carry on campus, and appreciate both sides with a willingness to have an open heart and an open mind. Concealed carry is not an issue that will go away. The amendments, unless rewritten, affords Americans the right to carry. When applied to school settings, the issue of concealed carry is relevant because of today's turbulent times and because we must protect our ability for healthy discourse and learning. My study, looking at the safety officers' perceptions of concealed carry, furthered this discussion.

Bracketing of Potential Bias

In qualitative research, bracketing allows the researcher to mitigate the potential inimical effects of presuppositions, biases, assumptions, or personal experiences (Dempsey et al., 2016; Given, 2008) to see the officers' viewpoints and opinions. The goal of using bracketing in this study allowed information-rich participants the opportunity to provide insight and an in-depth understanding of campus carry without decreasing the study's rigor (Gentles et al., 2015). The inclusion of bracketing provided an indispensable tool that helped set aside my posteriori knowledge and the possibility of bias given my family's history in law enforcement.

The goal of bracketing allowed me to listen and converse with an open-heart and an open-mind to the statements provided by the research participants. Further, the extent of my willingness to bracket, open up, and harness my own lived experiences directly correlated with capturing the transmission of assumptions, opinions, and emotions throughout the research

project (Tufford & Newman, 2010). As the study's primary investigator, I recorded all the interviews, and noted reactions and expressions of the participants while I maintained a high neutrality level. Further, I used memos during the data collection and analysis process to record and reflect upon my engagement with the data (Tufford & Newman, 2010).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations of the Study

Qualitative research is context-based, occurs in a single setting or a small population. Qualitative research also rarely makes claims about the generalizability of the research findings. Qualitative researchers also acknowledge that different circumstances can produce different outcomes, therefore, the theories and the processes used in the research could be transferable (Erickson, 1986; Maxwell, 2013). In this qualitative research study, the focus is on a single community college that uses its legal authority to set concealed carry policies. The school's policy currently allows for students to conceal carry on campus, thus limiting the study to perceptions of an existing policy. The study's limitations may also include officers who fear retaliation and may not be forthcoming in providing open and reflective responses. An additional limitation in this study may include my exposure to firearms growing up. This personal experience may create a bias that could limit the data analysis process; however, bracketing should reduce said biases.

The study's delimitations are the boundary choices I set while in this study's planning phase. The choice to have a sample made up of community college safety officers and not sworn police officers resulted from my opinion that there has not been enough exploration of campus safety officers' viewpoints on the topic of concealed carry. Further rationale for this decision rests in the belief that community college campuses tend to have fewer opportunities for students and faculty to build meaningful relationships (Dahl et al., 2016). A single community college

campus will bound this study. The college setting could also be a delimitation because the college's classification stands as a rural public school.

The choice to use the interview as part of the instrumentation process in the study derived from the belief that qualitative research allowed me to explore officer opinions and viewpoints. The other research design considered was a phenomenological study. However, a phenomenological study would seek the essence of the meaning behind the phenomenon of campus carry. Creswell and Poth (2018) described the purpose of phenomenology as to "reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence" (p. 75). I explored the officer's viewpoints in this study; therefore, a phenomenological study was not advantageous.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

The concept of validation attempts to assess the research findings' accuracy through the researcher, participants, and readers (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Franklin et al. (2010) saw that validity in qualitative research answers whether "the researcher sees what he or she thinks he or she sees" (p. 9). Strategies to increase validity include prolonged engagement, which allows the researcher enough time to reflect on the participants' perceptions and the researcher's biases and perceptions (Franklin et al., 2010). Other strategies used to increase research validity include the triangulation of multiple sources, peer reviews, member checking, external audits, and bracketing (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, I used triangulation, member checking, and bracketing.

Qualitative research strives for credibility and confidence that the data collected during the study is accurate and trustworthy. In this research study, the process of triangulation helped establish credibility. Data collection from multiple officers with extensive experience occurred;

and, as a result, increased the study's trustworthiness. Member checking also helped to establish credibility. Member checking encompasses the solicitation of the research participants' opinions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Lincoln and Guba (1985) argued that member checking might be the "most critical technique for establishing credibility" (p. 314) by ensuring that what the researcher is portraying aligns with what the participants conveyed during the interview process. In this study, the participants received an email containing the transcript of their answers to check for accuracy and authenticity. The use of bracketing also limited the research's biases from influencing the participants' answers.

Setting/Context/Discussion

With the help of a fellow Doctor of Education cohort member, the campus safety director at a community college agreed to participate in this qualitative study. The community college that agreed to this study currently allows for students to conceal carry, and since the study focused on perceptions surrounding the imposed risks of concealed carry, the study's participants included campus safety officers who work on campus. The community college does not allow campus safety officers or faculty to conceal carry.

Qualitative researchers select participants or locations for a study to glean a better understanding of the phenomenon. The participants needed for this study consisted of campus safety officers in their natural setting. The natural setting, where the participants work and an existing site for concealed carry, could impact the safety of those on campus, thus allowing an understanding of the phenomenon's situational context because the officers' perceptions occur without external constraints or control (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The size of the sample for this study was limited by the number of members in the department. The goal of the sample size in the proposed research study was four to six participants.

Selection Process

A qualitative study's value lies in the quality of the stories, not the quantity (Patton, 2015). This belief guided the interest in detailing perceptions of campus safety officers who work at a community college. Yin (2014) wrote that convenience sampling means intentionally selecting a group of participants based on its member's traits. Although convenience sampling is less labor-intensive than using a random or representative sample (Urdan, 2017), I believe that the community college sample differed from the population of interest in ways that could influence the study's results (Urdan, 2017). These differences are in connection with not being a sample that is comprised of sworn law enforcement officers who receive countless hours of training and state funding. This, alongside the fact that the community college does not arm their safety department officers and the unique rural area of the community college, could influence the study's results. The participants did not receive incentives or compensation for their time.

Participant Profiles

To keep the anonymity of all participants and information confidential, I randomly assigned the alphabetic label of CSD (Campus Safety Department) and a numeric character (1-9) to each of the participants. Each of the five participants currently works in the same safety department at a community college within the United States and collectively possesses a total of 81 years of law enforcement and/or security experience. The participants' experience ranges between 10 months and 30 years, with a mean of 16.2 years. Men made up most of the sample, with four of the participants being male and one female. The gender composition of the sample may be due in part to the number of women in the law enforcement field in the United States. Just under 13% of full-time law enforcement officers are female (Statista, Inc., 2020).

Participant CSD 1

CSD 1 is a female security officer who currently works in the safety department at the community college. She has no formal law enforcement experience; however, CSD 1 worked in the security field in a busy metropolitan area within the United States. She interacted daily with the homeless and those experiencing mental health issues.

Participant CSD 3

CSD 3 is a male security officer currently working in the safety department at the community college and has diverse security experience. CSD 3 has never worked on a higher education campus before his current job but has the experience in the security field and as a reserve police officer.

Participant CSD 4

CSD 4 is a male security officer who currently works in the safety department at the community college. He has approximately five years of security-related experience.

Participant CSD 6

CSD 6 is a male security officer who currently works in the safety department at the community college. He has over two decades of law enforcement experience both municipally and at the federal level.

Participant CSD 9

CSD 9 is a male security officer who currently works in the safety department and holds multi-faceted roles at the community college. He has several decades of experience as a police officer and as a police chief within the United States. He also has experience in threat assessment along with emergency preparedness.

Data Sources and Data Gathering Procedures

Creswell and Poth (2018) stated that the researcher is a key instrument in a qualitative study. As the primary researcher in this study, it was critical that I reflected on my predispositions. Through the process of reflexivity, a "process of critical self-reflection on ones' biases, theoretical predispositions, preferences" (Schwandt, 2007, p. 260), the lens through which I viewed the research remained transparent. Merriam (2002) touched on this transparency by ascribing to the belief that all researchers must explain their biases, dispositions, and assumptions regarding the research under study.

The standard open-ended interview guided this qualitative study with the goal of changing the relationship between the participant and the researcher into that of a narrator and listener (Chase, 2011). This approach let the participants share as much detailed information as they wanted to contribute while allowing me to ask further probing questions that explained the finer points of the participants' responses (Turner, 2010). Each participant received identical questions geared toward eliciting the freedom to fully express their thoughts and feelings "in order to gain maximum data from the interviews" (Turner, 2010, p. 757). During the interview, I asked for clarification while also verifying the interviewee's answers. Lincoln and Guba (1985) called this approach conversations with a purpose. My interactive approach meets their criteria.

In-depth data collection consisted of myself remaining as the primary instrument that administered the interviews. After receiving approval from my university's dissertation committee, I asked for the campus safety director's help at the community college under study. I asked for help in sending an email to all campus safety officers who work on the community college campus requesting volunteers for the study. Once the officers agreed to participate, I emailed an informed consent letter (See Appendix B) advising the participants of the purpose of

the study; that their participation was voluntary, and their identities protected; the format of the interview; how to get in touch with me after the study's completion; and asked the participants if they had any questions before the interview took place. I assigned each participant an alphabetic label and numeric character before starting the interviews to ensure anonymity in addition to providing each participant an opportunity to review their interview transcript for accuracy.

The interview process utilized Calendly to schedule confidential private appointment meetings with the participants. The interviews occurred through Zoom or as written responses and lasted approximately 30-45 minutes. Once the participants chose an appointment time, I emailed them an appointment reminder and the Zoom link for the meeting. If they chose to write out their answers to the interview questions, I emailed them the questions on a Word document. All Zoom calls were recorded, and during the interview, I wrote everything down instead of relying on memory (McNamara, 2009). Because I am responsible for safeguarding the participants' identities, the study's location will not be disclosed. I informed the participants that they could withdraw from the study at any time, and that all data would remain confidential. The audio, video, transcripts, and field notes from the interviews were stored electronically in password-protected folders. All video was destroyed after the initial verification of the answers to the interview questions. All other data and files were destroyed upon completion of the study.

The primary purpose of qualitative research interviews looks to examine the opinions and experiences of research participants. When the study consists of sensitive topics, researchers can take steps to minimize powerful emotional responses. One of these steps includes responding in a nonjudgmental and empathetic way through active listening, not interrupting, nor offering advice. Just as importantly, researchers should recognize signs of distress and respond accordingly (Muraglia et al., 2020). Additionally, researchers can create a safe environment by

asking open-ended questions that empower the participant through the Tell, Explain, and Describe (TED) System (Muraglia et al., 2020).

Rubin and Rubin (2005) added to this knowledge base of qualitative research interviews by suggesting researchers ask probing questions. They categorized the probes as a continuation probe, elaboration probe, attention probe, clarification probe, sequence probe, steering probe, and a slant probe. Rubin and Rubin (2005) also cautioned about using the right kind of probe depending on the level of distress or sensitivity the participant may exhibit. Potential distress indicators include both verbal cues, such as sarcasm and curt responses, along with nonverbal cues, like body language and silence (Muraglia et al., 2020). "Such cues may indicate that it is time to pause and/or check-in with a participant as to whether they want to continue or to stop the interview" (Muraglia et al., 2020, p. 4). My interview questions aligned with the theoretical framework and literature review from Chapter One and Chapter Two. I sought to understand how concealed carry imposes a risk on community college campuses, but I also wanted to know how concealed carry affects the perceptions from the point of view of unarmed campus security officers.

Data Analysis Procedures

Creswell and Poth (2018) characterized the process of data analysis akin to the structure of a spiral. Within each spiral, the researcher will imagine and organize data, read, write down developing ideas, describe and classify codes into themes, and develop and access interpretations. All the compiled data stemmed from the detailed and rich field notes and transcripts that followed the officer's interviews. The data collected helped answer the question, how do members of a community college safety department perceive the imposed risks of concealed carry on the community college campus?

After each interview, the audio recordings were transcribed, including all field and margin notes, and were arranged in individual electronic folders. Follow-up occurred with each participant verifying the subject content of their interview. I reviewed the Zoom calls again to ensure that no statements were inadvertently left out. Saldaña (2016) recommended that data analysis occur immediately after the first interview to capture all the data's themes. Themes will begin to emerge as the researcher begins the process of coding. Coding occurs as the researcher divides the interview data into detailed descriptions that describe what the author believes they see in the information (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I used these detailed descriptions to build broad categories that were refined into themes as patterns emerged in the data. Identifying themes occurred by focusing on the proposed research study's purpose and research questions and using the theoretical framework and literature review to guide the data interpretation. All data and files were destroyed upon completion of the study.

Chapter 4: Findings

This study explored how the community college safety department officers perceived the imposed risks of concealed carry on the community college campus. At the time of this writing, students at the community college could legally carry a concealed handgun with the required permit. The safety officers, staff, and faculty are not allowed to carry. In this study, the safety department officers were once commissioned by local law enforcement to carry a handgun on their person. That special designation was revoked several years ago as high-ranking officials from the local sheriff's office deemed the liability to the county too great to continue. The decommissioning led to the current agreement with local law enforcement that provides an armed school resource officer (SRO) to the college.

The participants interviewed for this study consisted of five unarmed officers with varying law enforcement or security experience. The data collected from these officers were used to answers the research questions gathered either through Zoom calls or by answering the interview questions on a Word document. Each Zoom call lasted roughly 40 minutes and was followed with member-checking by the participants. I emailed all the participants a Calendly link and asked that they select a day and time that fit within their schedule to meet via Zoom. I also emailed the interview questions to the participants who chose this option. Once the participants scheduled a time and date on Calendly, a Zoom link was created and forwarded to the individual participants. Each Zoom call and Word document provided insight into the following research questions:

RQ. How do the members of a community college safety department perceive the imposed risks of concealed carry on the community college campus?

SQ. How do these perceptions inform safety decisions as it relates to concealed carry on their campus?

Chapter 4 covers the thematic analysis of the interview data. Four categories emerged along with three themes that were found to carry throughout the categories. Interview questions (see Appendix A) one, three, and six were connected to the sub-research question (SQ) and gained insight into how the perceptions of the safety officers inform safety decisions on the campus. The remaining six questions were connected to the primary research question (RQ) and focused on how the safety officers perceived the imposed risks of concealed carry on campus.

Thematic Analysis

After I completed all interviews consistent with the university's dissertation committee, I began a systematic analysis of the interview data. The interviews resulted in nearly 45 transcribed pages. I read through the transcripts for accuracy, paying close attention to detail and overarching concepts that helped identify emerging categories and subsequent themes. After I checked the transcripts, I emailed each participant their copy and asked that they verify that their words came across as intended. After the participants acknowledged that the content of the transcriptions accurately represented their words, I started the first round of coding by highlighting critical statements, sentences, or quotes that illustrated the participants' perceptions (Creswell, 2007). Once key components were identified, I put all of the information into a spreadsheet to assist in the process of thematic coding. This process resulted in four overarching categories. Within the categories, three themes developed. Each theme was found to carry throughout the categories and remained a critical element in helping to explain the perceptions of the safety department officers.

Categories

- Perspectives on the ability to serve
- Perspectives on concealed carry on campus
- Perspectives on gun-control
- Perspectives on local law enforcement

Themes

- Deterrent
- Relationship
- Challenge of who's who

Perspectives on the Ability to Serve

Each of the three themes identified cut across the participants' perspectives that they are well equipped to serve alongside a policy that allows students to conceal carry on the community college campus. In the discussions that ensued between myself and the participants, a predominant sense of "I've got this" mentality prevailed. This confidence level was not laden with machismo, but rather confidence in their past and present job experience, in addition to being part of a well-led team. The themes that emerged are discussed below, with interview quotes from the participants when appropriate.

Deterrent

When examining their ability to serve, the term deterrent used by the participants in this study emerged as questions regarding job experience were answered by the five participants. Each participant's previous job experience provided the foundation from which the safety officer's physical presence on campus could be a deterrent to criminal behavior. One participant indicated that their personal experience spanned approximately 30-years which aptly provided

the experience to understand the dynamics surrounding a policy that allows concealed carry. These dynamics include the campus's location and an understanding of the state's history, gun familiarity, and situational awareness.

Another participant expressed that their ability to serve resulted from the experience as a sworn law enforcement officer when the safety department allowed the safety officers to carry a handgun. The deterrent theme emerged as the participant expressed that an armed safety department created a natural deterrent, and this perception of deterrence is once again extended to how the department is viewed today with the addition of the SRO.

> We were armed, and we had police authority under the sheriff's office, a special commission. Once that was taken away, we could definitely tell there was a jump in crime. But as soon as the SRO was added, things improved again on campus (CSD 3).

Other participants offered similar statements and added that the safety department answered most calls for help at the college. Back when they were an armed safety department, they only involved the local police as needed.

Relationship

Another theme that emerged centered around the relationships built during on-the-job training. The safety department officers learned situational awareness; the art of gathering correct information and making plans based on the analysis of the information, which built confidence within the team of safety department officers. One participant provided an example that if the officers did not know how to assess a threat properly, something that could have been an easy fix could essentially turn into a law enforcement response, much like it is portrayed on television. This theme of relationship extended out to the staff and faculty as well. The

importance of the staff and faculty trusting in the relationship with the safety department emerged as relevant alongside a policy allowing students to conceal carry.

> One of the other big things we did when we had this big discussion on our campuses was provide training to staff and faculty because we also wanted them to be very careful if they saw somebody with a handgun. If the staff and faculty understand that we don't want them calling 911 and saying, Hey! We have somebody on our campus with a gun. Because what's going to happen? You're going to have every police department in the area responding with all their guns out. So, we want them to be very careful if the student isn't doing anything. If they want to call us or call the police, staff and faculty need to be very careful with what they say. Like, Hey! I'm a faculty member, and I see this student carrying a gun. He hasn't threatened anybody. He hasn't pulled it out, but I would really like to have it checked. That's going to elicit a much different response from us, or the police, than saying, I got somebody with a gun in the classroom (CSD 9).

This same participant pointed out that the school has a multidisciplinary group that meets once a week to discuss and report on students who are exhibiting either violent behaviors, have made some kind of threat, or just seem to be struggling in some way. "The college tries to provide a kind of wraparound service to students and help them. The school tries to keep the students from getting to a point where we really have a problem" (CSD 9). Again, this relationship-building throughout the multidisciplinary group could help provide the buy-in needed from the faculty and staff on the ability of the safety officers to serve.

Perspectives on Concealed Carry on Campus

Previous research indicated that concerns about concealed carry on campus centered around the weapon falling into the wrong hands (Bartula & Bowen, 2015), an increase in student

suicide, student-to-student, and student-to-faculty homicide (De Angelis et al., 2017). From the five participants in this research study, numerous concerns were mentioned that surrounded the community college's policy allowing students to conceal carry. One participant mentioned a concern about an accidental discharge or the misplaced handgun. All five participants mentioned the calls to their department about students leaving their handguns in the restrooms. CSD 1 explained that many times the students unholster their guns, put it on the restroom counter, leave it in the stall, and then walk away.

A couple of participants expressed concern about the lack of training that goes into receiving a permit to carry. These concerns around the permit process seemed to coincide with the number of years of experience the officer had. CSD 9, who has over 30 years of law enforcement experience, said that the permit process would be a lot more difficult if the decisions were up to that participant.

> I am all for gun control. There're just too many guns out there, and the permit process is too easy. A lot of people will get a permit to carry, and maybe they'll go to their range once or twice and fire their weapon, but they don't do continual training with it. They don't do extensive training in situational awareness of when you should use that handgun. Some people don't know how to take apart their handguns. They don't know how to clean it properly. It's just something they bought. A lot of people are not properly trained and do not train continually. I think it causes a real problem (CSD 9).

Challenge of Who's Who

The significant issue that raised the participant's concern was determining who has a valid concealed carry permit versus who does not. This quandary was identified as the challenge of knowing who's who and refers to not knowing who the suspect is in a room or campus if other

handgun owners have drawn their weapon or even accidentally exposed their weapon. This challenge emerged when, with no way of knowing who was carrying or who was allowed to do so, chaos erupted as a student accidentally displayed a part of their handgun in class. The same reaction occurred when another student was viewed with a handgun imprinted on the back of a t-shirt. CSD 9 stated,

> Another student saw at least one of the people with the handgun on campus, and it caused quite a commotion. The student that saw the person with it kind of freaked out, called college safety, got the instructor involved, and it started a real big kind of ruckus on our campus (CSD 9).

The challenge of who's who that all five of the participants spoke of is heightened by the perspective that just because a permit holder went through the process to get licensed does not mean that the permit holder has good intentions.

> The biggest challenge is, how do you know the difference between somebody with a handgun that plans to start killing people indiscriminately versus somebody that's just carrying a handgun because they happen to have a valid permit and is just doing it for their protection? Sometimes it's kind of difficult (CSD 9).

CSD 4 added,

> Just because a student has the legal ability to possess and conceal a handgun on campus doesn't mean that they should be doing that. If we respond to a hostile or confrontational situation, sometimes we have to respond without prior knowledge of which students carry or don't carry. From a risk assessment standpoint, it puts more pressure on us to be hyper-aware in a situation in case a handgun is introduced.

A question was posed during the interview process by CSD 1. The participant asked, "I'm at school. Do I really need to conceal carry? What is going to be my level of threat? Especially given that we now have a school resource officer on campus" (CSD 1). This perspective ties back into the SRO as plausibly being seen as a natural deterrent. However, the participant went on to add,

> The challenge is if something were to happen or someone came onto campus with a gun with bad intentions, and the student would be carrying for whatever reason, then we would have a situation of who's who (CSD 1).

Relationship

The theme of relationship, and the perception that there is low risk with students carrying on the community college campus, was reflected in how the officers respond to a student carrying concealed. The safety officer's low-key approach is seen as more educational than disciplinary, and it invites the students to see the safety officers as trustworthy and take responsibility for how they carry their concealed handguns. When referencing the incident of a student who accidentally displayed his gun in class,

> The student went to sit down in a chair, and it hiked up his shirt on his back. That's what another student observed. The student who was carrying had a valid permit. He was doing nothing wrong. He wasn't exhibiting any kind of violent behavior or any kind of threat. He didn't have the gun out, and he didn't intend to shoot anyone (CSD 9).

CSD 3 corroborated the general response made by permit holders when questioned about carrying a concealed handgun.

> Generally, those carrying are very responsive. If someone, during hunting season, leaves a rifle exposed in their truck, we just make casual contact and let them know that they need to put it away or conceal it. We get good responses just by doing that.

Even though CSD 3 and CSD 6 had similar responses when contacting students with exposed rifles in their trucks, CSD 6 provided a glimpse into the mindset that even though things tend to be low-risk at the college, the safety department's officers think about the what-if scenarios.

> I would like to think, and I'd like to know, whoever chooses to exercise their right to carry concealed, that they have received some form of training. I would definitely also like to know that they're not some gun-toting cowboy and would keep a level head if carrying concealed. I would hope that if we went into a lockdown procedure, that I wouldn't have one, two, five, or ten people that may be carrying concealed that start to charge after the guy or whomever the threat would be (CSD 6).

Deterrent

Gun rights advocates have contended that the possession of handguns by law-abiding persons is a potential deterrent to campus violence (Harnisch, 2008). The five participants interviewed varied in their responses as it relates to the opinions of gun rights advocates. CSD 9 did not share this opinion and was more concerned that people do not train regularly, are not proficient with a handgun, and do not understand that when you pull out a handgun, it is not to intimidate someone. "You pull out your weapon because you are going to use it. You are going to stop the threat" (CSD 9). However, CSD 1 did not believe that concealed carry acts as a deterrent.

> When you are in a classroom, the teacher doesn't even know who is concealed carrying. I don't think the criminal would know that someone has a gun. I mean, what are the odds that someone is in the area that carries concealed? (CSD 1)

In line with CSD 1, participant CSD 6 expressed that concealed carry does not deter criminals. However, CSD 4 saw concealed carry as a deterrent from both sides of the coin. On one side, concealed carry does not have the effect that most people would think. "Primarily from the fact that it is concealed, and no one knows who is carrying and who isn't. On the flip side, I understand the aspect of surprise and wanting to keep a handgun concealed" (CSD 4). An outlier response came from CSD 3. The participant expressed that, "If there's more ownership of guns or handguns among the law-abiding citizens, it just acts as a natural deterrent. A concealed carry permit, and the law allowing it, I think it benefits that" (CSD 3). As the theme of deterrent developed, none of the five participants stated their concerns were enough to increase the risk level than what was previously expressed.

Perspectives on Gun Control

The prevailing research indicates that guns should not be allowed on campus (Bennett et al., 2012; Dahl et al., 2016; Price et al., 2014; Thompson et al., 2009; Thompson et al., 2013). In this research study, that belief was not so clear-cut. During the Zoom calls, there were plenty of references made related to the Second Amendment, and not all of them were in agreement. CSD 9 expressed that too many people latch onto their Second Amendment and that many believe it "gives them the right just to have an arsenal of weapons and carry whatever they want to. I just don't happen to buy into that." (CSD 9) Comparatively, CSD 6 and CSD 3 expressed that people should have the right to carry, a Constitutional right. "It seems like law-abiding citizens should

have the right to do that since the unlawful people seem to always acquire weapons or guns anyway" (CSD 3).

Deterrent

The perspective of CSD 6 and CSD 3 could reasonably tie into the theme of guns being seen as a deterrent. Under their similar perspectives, students who stand firm in the Second Amendment and the right to carry could potentially deter others from criminal activity on the community college campus. While this common perspective has not been scientifically supported, both sides of the political spectrum are often used to garner support for political purposes. Gun lobbyists state that shooters target gun-free zones such as colleges, and gun-control advocates claim that shootings at American colleges remain rare evets (Students for Gun Free Schools, n.d.).

Perspectives of Local Law Enforcement

Overwhelmingly, the five participants expressed not only a respect for the relationship they have with the local police department but almost an appreciation for how the police interact with the college community daily. When the safety department at the community college lost their commission to carry concealed, the sheriff's office put a uniformed police officer on campus, and that police officer worked alongside the safety department in their office. It was a team effort, and overwhelmingly that relationship became the precedent to confidence as described by the safety officers.

Relationship

Each participant said they had a close working relationship with the local law enforcement, or a good relationship, as a result of training together. At times, law enforcement agencies even provided the much-needed training equipment to the community college safety

department. CSD 6 stated that “I like knowing, being a former law enforcement officer, what the SRO’s training and background are and how hard each officer has to annually keep up to maintain that level of skill and response.”

This appreciation and confidence in the local law enforcement training were reiterated by CSD 9, who came to the community college after working as a sworn police officer. Participant CSD 9 added that the agency he came from trained their police officers for several months and mandated that their officers continually train with their weapons and scenarios involving threat assessment. Participant CSD 9 expressed that knowing that this is the level of training their sworn SRO has while on the community college campus provided confidence that if there was an incident involving concealed carry on campus, and the safety department needed help, their law enforcement colleagues would arrive to support them. CSD 9 said that arming the safety officers at the college would not be a good idea because they had not received the level of training as typically seen of a sworn officer. “Firearms training involves a lot more than just knowing how to shoot. There’s a lot to it. It’s not just hiring the right folks. It’s the money for training, the continual training, and the right equipment” (CSD 9). The local law enforcement can provide that to their sworn officers, thus providing the safety department’s help and creating a good working relationship.

Summary of Findings

Research Question

How do the members of a community college safety department perceive the imposed risks of concealed carry on the community college campus? Participants described a variety of contributing factors to the perceived risk at their community college. These included the challenge of not knowing the difference between someone with a handgun seeking harm to

someone carrying a concealed handgun because they have a concealed permit. Others admitted that being an open-campus could become a problem, but that response circled back to the concern of not knowing why a student is in possession of a handgun. The location of the community college was mentioned in somewhat of the same breath as being a challenge. However, the location never stood out as a major concern.

After the thematic coding occurred, several categories emerged to answer the research question. The first category, perspectives on the ability to serve, answered the research question by illustrating that the safety department office served as a natural deterrent to concealed carry when in tandem with criminal activity on campus. The officers also linked their relationship and trust based on their previous job experience and on-the-job training from their current employer. Participants expressed that their years as law enforcement officers or working in the security field provided them a sense of "I've got this" mentality. It is plausible to perceive that this mentality stems from a close relationship between the officers under the leadership of their managing officer.

The second category, perspectives on concealed carry on campus, revealed that the community college had relatively few concealed carry incidents involving students. The officers collectively suggested that the number of incidents did not warrant an increase in the level of risk. This shared perspective is despite the concern surrounding who is carrying a handgun because they can and who is carrying because they seek to do harm. Alongside this theme of who's who is the perception that officers perceive a lack of aggressive behavior in students and a high rate of compliance from the students when stopped on campus for concealed carry policy violations. This theme of the relationship between safety officer and the student could reasonably explain the perceived risk as low for students carrying concealed handguns.

The third category, perspectives on gun control, had the most diverse perspectives of all the categories. The participants recognized the Second Amendment as a right that applies to all law-abiding U.S. citizens. That fact was undisputed amongst the participants. However, only one officer came out and said that it was the student's Second Amendment right to carry their handgun on campus, and it was the officer's job to protect that Constitutional right. This perspective of the right to bear arms could lend to the theme of deterrence on campus under the explanation that concealed carry could deter others from acting out egregiously and using their gun as a weapon instead of an extension of oneself. However, some believed that the Second Amendment did not provide the protection to carry around an armory of weapons on your person or vehicle, citing that too many weapons are in the hands of those that do not receive adequate and continuous training.

The fourth category, perspectives on local law enforcement, conveyed a close working relationship with the local law enforcement agencies. The participants understood the rigorous training sworn law enforcement officers receive in weaponry and threat assessment. This understanding seemed to forge trust between the two parties and a level of confidence in handling high-risk scenarios if they should occur. There was also an appreciation of the shared training and shared knowledge that local law enforcement seemed to provide to the less experienced officers in the safety department.

Sub-Question

How do these perceptions inform the safety decisions as it relates to concealed carry on their campus? All of the themes supported this answer. When the safety department received support in the form of training and education, alongside sworn police officers, relationships were created where the safety officers relied on one another and demonstrated confidence in how they

approached a call concerning concealed carry on campus. Their training and education helped lend to the deterrent theme and the perception that "I've got this!" The safety department officers perceived that the best way to address concealed incidents is to casually make contact, appease the persons involved, and ensure that the student carrying the handgun understands the school's policy. The participants acknowledged that their decision not to handle situations with a heavy hand reduced the likelihood of different scenarios unfolding and unfortunate endings occurring. This relationship set the foundation between the safety officers and the student carrier and the plausible buy-in to be a responsible concealed carrier. The safety officers also acknowledged that working alongside an agency with sworn police officers provided the necessary force on campus that helps create a safe atmosphere for students, staff, and faculty.

Summary

This chapter provided information about the categories and themes that resulted from the coding of the qualitative interview data. These categories and themes also respond to the appropriate research questions. Given the low number of incidents of student-involved concealed carry violations on the community college campus, the safety department officers did not feel like the perceived risk of students carrying concealed handguns was noteworthy. Moreover, the safety department perceived their strategy of handling concealed carry concerns with a somewhat firm but yet low-key response was a suitable way to diffuse the situation. The safety departments' tactics allowed the stakeholders involved the opportunity to continue learning and instructing.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

I designed this study to help determine how the community college safety department officers perceived the imposed risks of concealed carry on the community college campus. During the process of thematic analysis, four categories emerged that best summed up the overarching perceptions of the participants: 1- the ability to serve; 2- concealed carry on campus; 3- gun control; and 4- local law enforcement. The data analysis from the study and its subsequent compilation into the themes of deterrent, relationship, and the challenge of who's who added to the discussion of findings outlined in this chapter. Additionally, after the findings of this study were laid out, the theoretical framework of the Routine Activities Theory was determined to be an ill-fitted theory for the data. The Theory of Mind was determined to be a more suitable framework for this study. The two research questions guiding this study helped answer how the participants' responses connected to previous research on concealed carry. Lastly, this chapter outlines suggestions for possible future research on the much-needed perspectives of campus security officers.

Discussions of Findings

The perspectives of the officers from the community college safety department in this study connected with the perspectives shared by law enforcement from previous research that related to students carrying concealed handguns on campus. This study, and studies already published, suggested that security officers and campus police shared the perspective that creating a safe campus must involve minimizing acts of violence. In research presented by Price et al. (2014), campus police chiefs decisively decided that the best way to limit handgun violence on campuses is to keep handguns from being used on campus. This sentiment backed up previous statements made in Thompson et al.'s (2009) research where 96% of their sampled law

enforcement agreed or strongly agreed that they should be involved with school administrators to create concealed carry ban policies. While the participants did not indicate a desire to create policy alongside administrators in this study, 50% of the participants questioned the need for allowing students to conceal carry at the college outside of their Second Amendment right.

Another connection between this study and previous research was the concern regarding recognizing who is carrying a concealed handgun with the intent to do harm and who is not. Harnisch (2008) indicated that campus police were concerned with a policy that allows concealed carry because officers could easily mistake a possible threat for an armed student. Further, officers have expressed concern about having to stop as they enter a scenario involving a probable gunman, where every second matters, just to assess whether there could be a good guy with a gun or not. “Their failure to make a quick and discernable judgment can be extraordinarily costly for all parties involved” (Harnisch, 2008, p. 5). This concern of determining who the good guy with the gun is, was reiterated by the Chief of Campus Police at the University of Arizona (U of A) in a research study published by Smith (2012). The Chief of Campus Police at U of A stated that the “presence of guns on campus during a shooting would make the situation even more chaotic” (p. 240). In my study, 80% of the participants agreed that one of the unique challenges concealed carry poses on their campus could be determining who is carrying a concealed handgun and who the shooter is during a possible shooter on campus. It is a situation officers do not want to have to walk into. CSD 9 asked, “What do you do when you enter a room with multiple people with pulled-out guns? Who’s the bad guy?”

In Chapter One, I introduced the theoretical framework of Routine Activities Theory (RAT) as a guide to possibly explain how safety officers perceived the risk of concealed carry on campus alongside a policy that does not allow officers to carry a handgun. My initial thinking

that the Routine Activities Theory could explain how shootings could occur on a community college campus within the context of a suitable target (the school and safety officers), potential offenders, and the lack of capable guardianship (safety officers not carrying a handgun). With RAT claiming that when offenders, along with suitable targets and the absence of guardianship, come together, criminal activity can occur (Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2003), my initial assumption was that the safety officers would collectively perceive to be at risk. However, as the data from the interviews went through the analysis process, I began to question how the safety officers would determine who a potential offender was given the school's policy of allowing students to conceal carry? RAT does not mention how the officers would infer the potential behavior of an offender. Additionally, how would the Routine Activities Theory explain how the safety officers perceived the intent of students carrying on the campus? After much thought and research, a conclusion was reached that the data did not fit the Routine Activities Theory. Theory of Mind could more accurately guide this study on the safety officers' perceptions of the imposed risk of concealed carry on campus.

"Theory of Mind is the ability to attribute mental states- beliefs, intents, desires, emotions, and knowledge- to ourselves and others" (Ruhl, 2020, para.1). Theory of Mind (ToM) further holds that these states help individuals to anticipate and predict the behavior of others and ourselves, regulate behavior, and interacting socially (Karoğlu et al., 2021). Applied to this study, ToM seems to suggest that safety officers need a strong sense of their ability to understand and read the intentions and behaviors of others for the best outcomes on campus to occur. The best outcomes include protecting the freedoms and rights of students to carry a handgun afforded under the Second Amendment, protecting the teacher's ability to teach, and the continuation of

relationship building between the officers in the safety department, along with the students, faculty, and surrounding law enforcement agencies.

When second-order ToM is applied to this study, several data points indicate that while it is a challenge to understand the intent of someone carrying a concealed handgun, the safety officers have the training to approach the situation, and they do so carefully, assessing the circumstances surrounding a potential concealed carry occurrence. One of the five participants cited specific training received as it related to the concept of mental health. This participant referenced familiarity with understanding how to communicate with those experiencing mental health issues and using the art of de-escalation. “You have to get into their headspace, and you have to be patient. Patience can take you a long way. At any point, I could have gotten frustrated and aggressive, but I knew I wouldn’t get anywhere with that person” (CSD 1).

Implications for Policy

Institutions of post-secondary education should provide a safe and secure campus so that visitors feel welcomed, the staff and faculty feel safe, and students can continue to thrive. While it is the unique responsibility of the campus police or the campus safety department to provide that safety, administrators of post-secondary education should find ways to support their officers. One of these support methods includes appealing the decision that allows students to carry concealed handguns on campus. At the time of this writing, the Montana University Board of Regents won an “injunction temporarily staying the implementation of a new state law allowing for the open and concealed carry of guns on public college campuses” (Redden, 2021, para. 1). The Board of Regents cited that students, parents, and faculty are concerned about the policy and how it will affect the safety of college students. In this study, while the safety department

expressed confidence in their abilities to keep the community college safe, the perspectives shared on mental health could support an appeal.

Appealing the right for students to carry on the grounds related to students' mental health is an approach that administrators could use. One of the participants in this study mentioned that a team of stakeholders meet once a week to discuss the threat assessment of the college, which includes looking at students that may be exhibiting signs of struggling. When these discussions are alongside a policy that allows students to carry a concealed handgun, college administrators should consider whether or not detecting students who may need help is feasible on a community college campus. Given that most students on a community college campus are only there for a small portion of time over the week, it may be easier for students exhibiting disturbing behavior to go undetected. Previous research overwhelmingly showed that the inherent challenges faced by a college or university student include, but are not limited to, alcohol abuse, stress related to academics, and even interpersonal relationships (Dahl, 2016; Harnisch, 2208; Lewis, 2017; Price et al., 2014; Satterfield & Wallace, 2018; Thompson et al., 2009). When overlapped with a policy allowing for concealed carry, there are potentially deadly consequences for everyone on campus.

Administrators of post-secondary education could also appeal to the policy that allows students to carry concealed handguns based on the current research that disputes the argument that concealed carry acts as a deterrent. In this study, even though one of the participants indicated that the policy acts as a deterrent and probably even encourages enrollment, that perception is not found throughout most previous research. "Statistical evidence that concealed carry laws have reduced crime is limited, sporadic, and extraordinarily fragile" (Ayres & Donohue III, 2003). Further, research indicated that concealed carry among students does not

decrease the chances of an injured individual compared to other protective actions, such as hiding or running from the situation (Dieterle & Koolage, 2014; Lewis, 2017). Participants in this study indicated that a person with a gun on campus or coming onto campus does not stop to consider who is possibly carrying a concealed handgun. Instead, when someone intends to harm, the belief is that they will follow through with their plan without overthinking everything.

Lastly, post-secondary education administrators should take the time to research how a policy allowing students to carry concealed handguns affects their campus enrollment and retention of students and faculty. As previously mentioned, one participant in this study indicated that a policy allowing students to conceal carry probably encourages enrollment. That perception is not supported as the prevailing perception in previous research. Nor does the perception that a policy allowing conceal carry encouraging enrollment aligns with most of the responses provided during the interview process in this study. Previous research indicated that faculty were concerned about telling prospective students and faculty that they are "profoundly afraid and that they should think twice about coming to the University of Texas" (Beggan, 2019, p. 34).

Further, administrators of post-secondary education should strongly consider how a policy that allows students to conceal carry on campus affects the role of international students who enroll in American institutions of higher education. An estimated 28% of annual tuition revenue comes from international students (Loudenback, 2016). A policy that allows for concealed carry may quickly shift the narrative as it applies to the demand for international students, thus impacting the school's revenue.

Implications for Campus Safety

Handguns on college or university campuses can create complications for all stakeholders. This study indicates that campus safety officers need support and investment from

college administrators. The participants in this study expressed the need for more significant school-based training requirements for students carrying a concealed handgun. Additionally, the safety department officers expressed the need to know which student carries while on campus. This need focused on when officers respond to a call; they would like to know as much about the scenario they are walking into as possible. CSD 4 put it best,

> In the event we are responding to a hostile or confrontational situation, we have to respond without prior knowledge of which student carries and doesn't carry. From a risk assessment standpoint, it puts more pressure on us to be hyper-aware in a situation in case a handgun is introduced.

Research has indicated that hyperawareness or hypervigilance can lead to mistakes. Junger (2018) described that the word hypervigilance is very different when used by law enforcement compared to the scholar's use. In the law enforcement community, hypervigilance can describe being acutely aware of or alert to potentially dangerous situations. It becomes a survival mechanism or a learned perception (Gilmartin, 1986), and this could plausibly explain CSD 4's use of the word. David Barlow (2004) suggested that law enforcement's current use of the term is closer to the definition of vigilance, being able to identify a threat. Hypervigilance in the academic community often is defined as hasty decision-making that can lead to mistakes (Junger, 2018).

The similarities between what CSD 4 meant from a law enforcement officer's perspective and that of the scholar's definition can be seen in the constructs of "acute stress, fear, anxiety, and decision making" (Junger, 2018, p. 3). If we intend to use the safety officers to maintain safety for students, staff, and faculty, it would be appropriate to help train the officers and

prepare them for stressful situations and allow them to use the tools they have learned to think clearly while also remaining alert.

All of the participants in this study indicated that not knowing which students carried a concealed handgun is an issue. Additionally, most participants acknowledged that they knew that information about who owns a gun is legally shielded, even from law enforcement. With that, if the college administrators continue to support a policy allowing students to carry, they must address the level of training that the college campus requires for anyone with a valid concealed permit to have before bringing their handgun on campus. “Basic training in the safety and proper use of handguns is not a prerequisite to gun ownership” (Morse et al., 2016, p. 8), but it should be. Administrators of post-secondary education should be cognizant of the lack of training required to receive a permit to conceal carry when designing policy to improve their campus’ safety. In this study, the perception that more training is needed for permit holders was consistent. Sixty percent of the participants stated that insufficient training could increase the lethality of the situation during high-stress situations. This perception was supported by previous research that indicated police officers have extensive training in handgun safety and in demonstrating discretion when to use lethal force (LaPoint, 2010). Police officer training occurs long before seeing actual duty (Students for Gun-Free Schools, n.d., para.31). Further, police officers typically have to qualify their service weapon 1- 4 times a year (Student for Gun-Free Schools, n.d.). Shouldn’t a college policy reflect this as well for those students carrying on its campus?

Lastly, this study seemed to indicate that more could be done to train the safety officers and faculty on the cognitive processes of the Theory of Mind. Brüne and Brüne -Cohrs (2006) wrote that those with psychosocial difficulties could have absent or impaired functioning of

ToM. Kerr et al. (2003) suggested that absent, or impaired ToM could be associated with bipolar affective disorder. Richell et al. (2003) suggested that ToM could be associated with an antisocial personality disorder. Further, studies on individuals displaying violent behavior, delinquent behavior, and antisocial behavior could have ToM impairment (Abu-Akel & Abushua'leh, 2004; Fonagy & Levinson, 2004). Training the safety officers and staff on how to understand the intentions, beliefs, and mental states of others could not only help de-escalate a potentially volatile situation, but training could also provide the tools to assess how officers approach these situations, using their predetermined frames of reference or schema for understanding.

Suggestions for Future Research

After conducting this research, I was able to glean some insight into possible future research related to campus safety alongside a policy that allows for students to conceal carry on campus. There are several avenues for future research. One avenue for future research includes conducting a similar study on college campuses that had experienced a campus shooting while employing either safety or sworn police officers. It would be interesting to compare the officers' perceptions on incident management in light of students carrying on campus with that of a campus that did not allow students to carry. This type of research is essential in giving law enforcement a voice in policy conversation and ultimately policy enforcement.

Future research on the motivations of students who conceal carry is another avenue to explore. A qualitative study could investigate whether the students carry because they perceive the handgun is an extension of protection. More specifically, does the student carry because he or she perceives the conversation around current trends in gun violence as significant and feel at risk? Or is there another reason? Additional research should be done to make this determination.

Conducting this future research could take place on both two and four-year campuses, along with rural and urban campuses.

Another avenue of future research could include studying campuses of post-secondary education that currently allow concealed carry to measure post-implementation perceptions about safety and the pervasiveness of handguns. The existing literature suggests that students and faculty do not support concealed carry. Perhaps this view would be different after a period of time had elapsed with a permissive concealed carry policy. More research should be done to make this determination.

Researcher Reflection

The Second Amendment protects the individual's right to possess a handgun, and as of late, this right has transferred over to students being allowed to conceal carry at some colleges within the United States. In previous studies, researchers documented the perceptions of students and faculty, but a gap remains in the literature regarding the perceptions of the men and women tasked with enforcing a policy that allows concealed carry. Further, very little research exists on how campus safety officers perceive the imposed risks of concealed carry on community college campuses.

This research project directly benefits administrative leaders and college safety officers when they heed the experiences of those enforcing the policy. A policy that does not allow concealed carry on campus can lessen the logistical nightmare campus safety officers face during an active shooter on campus and the potential legal ramifications administrators face after an accidental discharge of a weapon. Administrators that write policy disallowing concealed carry on campus can also lessen the "physical and psychological scars" (Somers & Valentine, 2020, p. 123) of those tied to higher education.

Conclusion

Our country's campuses of post-secondary education are some of the safest environments in our country (Patten et al., 2013; Students for Gun-Free Schools, n.d.; Somers & Valentine, 2020), but there is a movement among these United States to allow more states to let students conceal carry legally. This research study of a safety department on a community college campus will not offer how to solve the divide between those that voice their right to carry as stated by the Second Amendment and those that believe more guns are not the answer. This research will provide a foundation from which administrators of post-secondary education can use its information to form a well-crafted concealed carry policy fashioned around the safety of their institution. For this well-crafted and well-rounded policy to happen, we must heed the perspectives of the security officers on campus.

Through the processes, procedures, and methods used in this study, I obtained significant insight into the perceptions of campus security officers. Their perceptions concerning the risks of concealed carry on the community college campus led to a clearer understanding that a vital piece in crafting sound policy that keeps our institutions of higher education safe is listening to the voices tasked with the responsibility of keeping all on campus safe. Campus security must be valued as trustworthy, knowledgeable, and experienced so that they remain to be seen as the crux of the campus handgun safety equation. Campus security needs continuous education and if that includes training extensively with local law enforcement or taking advantage of the free training on the National Criminal Justice Training Center, the department should be supported and encouraged to do so. It is through this type of reflection and training that safer and more secure campuses, as related to students carrying concealed handguns, can be accomplished.

Appendix A

Interview Guide

1. How has concealed carry on campus impacted the evaluation of the school's physical environment regarding risk assessment?
2. What are some of the unique challenges concealed carry poses on your campus?
3. How has concealed carry altered how your campus prioritizes response strategies?
4. What is your relationship with the local police department responsible for responding to your campus in an emergency?
5. What are your perceptions of the concealed carry argument?
    a. What experiences have shaped these perceptions?
6. How does concealed carry influence the safety of your institution?
7. What are your perceptions concerning not having sworn police officers on your campus but allowing students to carry?
8. What do you perceive the immediate risks of students carrying to be?
9. What are your perceptions of the argument that concealed carry serves as a direct deterrent to criminals?
    a. What experiences have shaped these perceptions?

Interview Probes

Would you tell me more about that? Why do you feel that way? Would you describe what you were thinking at the time? What was that like for you? Why was that important to you? Would you give me an example? Will you explain what you mean by…? What do you think? What are your thoughts on this?

Appendix B

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Prospective Research Participant: Please read this consent form carefully, and ask as many questions as you like before you decide whether you want to participate in this research study. You are free to ask questions at any time before, during, or after your participation in this research.

PURPOSE OF THIS RESEARCH STUDY

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Alaina Adkins-Armstrong, a doctoral candidate at George Fox University. The purpose of this study is to gather information about how safety department officers perceive concealed carry and the imposed risk on one community college campus. In this study, *concealed carry*, according to Oregon law, ORS 166.291, allows those 21 years of age and older to obtain a license to carry a concealed handgun. The concealed handgun license allows an individual to carry a loaded or unloaded handgun concealed upon the individual or concealed within their control in their vehicle (OregonLaw.org, 2017). The term *campus carry* is a term often referenced when describing the action of carrying a handgun on a school campus. The two terms, campus carry, and concealed carry, will be used interchangeably throughout this dissertation.

PROCEDURES

The duration of this study will be May 1, 2021 through May 28, 2021. You will be asked to participate in one 30-45-minute interview via Zoom, and to provide the researcher with answers to various questions related to concealed carry on your school's campus. The researcher will schedule your interviews based on your availability. Observations made by the researcher will be checked with you throughout the study period. You will be apprised of any new or significant findings in the study, and upon request, you may receive a summary of the results from the study. There will be no financial compensation for this study. Your participation in this study is voluntary and can be discontinued at any time without penalty or bias.

POSSIBLE RISKS OR DISCOMFORT

The researcher has identified and addressed two risks associated with these interviews: confidentiality of participants and digital privacy. To ensure your confidentiality, your identity and that of place of employment will only be referred to by numbers and/or general descriptions in any documentation that will be part of the final report. You will have the opportunity to comment on your representation in that reporting. It should be noted that any records or data obtained because of your participation in this study may be inspected by the George Fox University Institutional Review Board. These records will be kept private in so far as permitted by law.

Data collected throughout this study will be stored, organized, and analyzed digitally on the researcher's secure, password-protected laptop. Zoom interviews will be conducted by the

researcher in a secure room. Audio of each interview will be recorded. Those files will be encrypted and password-protected on a cloud server managed by the researcher. All audio files will be permanently deleted once the researcher has transcribed the interview. There are no additional risks or benefits associated with this study identified for participants.

The findings of this study may be of use to higher education administrators in their planning to support safety officers, and to assist in implementing concealed carry policy that protects the entire campus community. This shared governance in policy making could assist the college in preserving the dynamic culture of campus life and academic freedom.

Any further questions you have about this study will be answered by the Principal Investigator, Alaina Adkins-Armstrong, by phone: (503) 381-1640, or by email: aadkinsarmstrong19@georgefox.edu

Any questions you may have about your rights as a research subject will be answered by the Faculty Dissertation Chair, Dr. Linda Samek, by email: Lsamek@georgefox.edu

AUTHORIZATION

I have read and understand this consent form, and I volunteer to participate in this research study. I understand that I will receive a copy of this form. I voluntarily choose to participate, but I understand that my consent does not take away any legal rights in the case of negligence or other legal fault of anyone who is involved in this study. I further understand that nothing in this consent form is intended to replace any applicable Federal, state, or local laws.

Participant Name (Printed or Typed): _____
Date: _____

Participant Signature: _____
Date: _____

Principal Investigator Signature: _____
Date: _____

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