Austin Police Department Internship

When I saw that the Anthropology Department here at Texas State University was offering a brand new internship program, I was thrilled. I have taken several classes within the Department and was ready to get some hands-on experience. I have had an interest in law enforcement since I was child and decided to apply to the Austin Police Department. The Police Department decided to let me join them and I was placed into the Organized Crime Division’s (OCD) Alcohol Control Team (ACT). My time with the Police has been a great learning experience, one that has allowed me to further my anthropology skills through writings and analyses of various issues that relate to the Police Department, such as social hierarchies, how pop culture perceives them, and the mentality of those involved within the department. Along with improving my academic skills, I have gained insight into law enforcement and a new found respect for the individuals and related community who are involved with it.

The City of Austin resides in both Williamson and Travis counties, with an area of 258 square miles and a population of nearly 750,000 people. The Austin Police Department is the main law enforcement entity within the city, and has around 1,450 commissioned Police officers, with a supporting staff of nearly 600 civilians. There are several different divisions within the Austin Police Department, and all work together to make Austin the third safest major city within the United States (City of Austin).

Account of Experiences

I am an intern for the Alcohol Control Team and thus most of my work is alcohol related. One of the things ACT does is to work in cooperation with the Texas Alcoholic
Beverage Commission (TABC) and perform Minor Sting Operations. “Minor sting operations are undercover stings which identify retail establishments that sell to minors” (TABC). The way these minor stings work is to have a minor go into a store (which an officer will go into as well) and attempt to buy alcohol. The minor is watched by the officer, who poses as a regular civilian customer. If a sale is made to the minor, TABC will be called in and issue the store clerk the appropriate citation. “The minor is instructed to dress appropriately for their age. Minors who are youthful in appearance are used and are generally 16 or 18 years old. Pictures are taken of the minor the day of the sting to attest to the youthfulness of the minor” (TABC). These minor stings target people who clearly and knowingly sell to minors, or simply do not care to ID customers who appear to be very young in appearance.

I have participated in these stings not only at gas stations, but also restaurants, live music venues and bars in the downtown 6th street district. It is very surprising to witness the stupidity of some people who sell alcohol to these minors; they knowingly break the law and do not suspect anything will come of it. They are wrong and are punished justifiably.

As far as my office work goes, my main assignment is to help process permits for establishments that apply to sell beer, wine or liquor. Anytime a business applies for a permit, they must go through a series of paperwork that needs to be processed. I enter the personal information of the business managers, the property owners, and all related spouses, such as Social Security #s, Drivers License #s, addresses, date of births, and any related pertinent information.
While working within the Organized Crime Department, I have been able to experience things I never thought I would be exposed to as a civilian as I have been able to accompany the detectives during several exciting events.

I have had the opportunity to take a tour of APD’s cadet academy with a detective with I work with and also is a driving instructor for the academy. I was shown the shooting range and the building’s various rooms and classrooms, and then was allowed to go to the driving course. At the driving course, I got in one of the squad cars and an instructor drove me around the various training set ups at the course. The mini courses are set up to emulate various scenarios and types of driving that future Police officers will have to face, such as highway pursuits, high speed turns, quick stops, quick decision making, etc.

My first day on the job was a very exciting beginning. I started out getting an ID badge at the main station in downtown Austin, and than proceeded to another station further north where my actual office is located. I met the detectives I would be working with, and spent some time setting up my desk. After learning how to use the computer system and getting a tour of the floor, I was told that later in the day I would be going on a raid with the narcotics squad.

I attended the briefing for the raid not knowing what to expect, and it was interesting to see how everything was explained. A dry erase board had the schematics of the target house and surrounding area, and the officer who was leading the raid assigned the detectives to different duties and explained how the operation would take place. As we headed to the house, I sat in the passenger seat of the van after it had been loaded, and as we pulled up to the suspect’s house, all ten officers rushed out the back and entered the
house and detained everyone. Once the premise was secured, I was allowed to enter the house and help the detectives during the search. Approximately twenty pounds of marijuana, thirteen small marijuana plants, several items of paraphernalia, a scale, pistol ammunition, and a sawed off shotgun were found in the house. The sawed off shotgun ended up being a federal firearms offense, which ended up meaning the case against this individual became much more severe.

I was also able to attend another narcotics raid on a house that was suspected of trafficking crack-cocaine. At the pre-raid briefing the detectives explained that the suspected dealer was living in the house and that several people (an expected seven or eight) would be in the house at the time. I was given the duty to stand in the corner of the property near the curb line and to film the officers making the entry with a hand held video camera for the Street Response Team which were working with the narcotics squad for this operation. As we pulled up to the property, I got in position as the officers made their entry through the front door, I filmed away. Thirteen people, several more than anticipated, were at the house. Ten people were inside, two people were loitering in the front yard, and a person from inside the house ran out the back door as soon as the raid commenced. I managed to film this individual as he fled the scene, dropping the crack-cocaine he possessed which was than later recovered. The inside of the house was a disgusting and dilapidated scene. It was littered with all sorts of miscellaneous junk, the rooms had their mattresses on the floor, doors were hanging from hinges, and the smell of filth was beyond pungent.

I also had the opportunity to observe the SWAT team storm a house, which was very exciting. To prepare for this, I woke up in San Marcos at 3:30am, drove to the main
station in Austin and made my way to the SWAT office for a 5:00am briefing. An officer from the narcotics squad explained the scenario: an individual was suspected of dealing cocaine out of his house and was to be there in the early hours of the morning. A SWAT officer then took over and explained the raid in great detail: what area of the house each officer would be at, who would cover who, which officers were to make the entry, and who would detain people once the entry had been made. When the briefing was over, I joined a sergeant in narcotics and we went to the neighborhood where the house was located and met the rest of the narcotics squad. He and I jumped in the back of a pickup truck and rode along to the street where the house was located at, parked about a block away and waited for the SWAT team to arrive. It was just about 6:00am as we heard them coming down the street, and we hopped out and watched them make their entry. They threw a flash bang grenade (which was much louder than I had anticipated) near the left rear of the property, right outside the master bedroom’s window, and then proceeded to break down the front door and enter the property. When everyone was detained and the house was given an initial inspection to make sure it was safe. The SWAT team handed it over to the narcotics squad and we began to search the property. A canine was used, searching all over the house and back yard. He found nothing. The house was turned upside down with everything pulled out of the drawers and dumped on the floor, but still no illegal substances appeared. Finally, the canine walked by one of the cars and reacted in a manner that suggested that something illegal was inside the car. The detectives began to search for the car keys, and when they were found the trunk was popped open. A briefcase was found that contained several ounces of cocaine, roughly
two thousand dollars, a scale, a white powdery substance to cut the cocaine with, and several bags with cocaine residue.

The officers who participate in the alcohol stings, narcotics raids, as well as general undercover work must possess a cultural awareness of the particular group they are dealing with. I went to a presentation that the current class put on which portrays a program they had gone through which is designed to immerse a group of ten or more cadets into a minority cultural group such as the Black, hispanic, and Middle Eastern communities that officers might encounter while working within Austin. Officers must be well aware of how to handle with different cultures; I was told that Middle Eastern men are very macho and would not want to appear submissive or have their authority undermined in front of their wives or in front of another. Rather than confronting a Middle Eastern man in front of his wife or fellow male friend, it would be better to ask him to step aside and talk to him; he may be more compliant if he feels he is not being undermined in front of his own people. Officers need to know how to handle and attempt to reason with people who are extremely intoxicated. Their thought processes and reasoning capabilities have been undermined, and officers need to be aware and approach them in a different manner. By being better able to relate and connect to the citizens of the Austin, the Police Department can operate more effectively and have the people of Austin trust them at higher levels.

Analysis of the Austin Police Department.
Austin Police Department’s Social Networks

The Austin Police Department is full of social networks. Police must interact amongst themselves and with their community. Strong civilian and Police ties must be made to effectively Police the city, and as a result, several different social networks exist.

Social networks begin to form between officers the day they start the academy and meet fellow cadets. These cadets progress through their training, and as they graduate from the academy, become commissioned officers. Two years of patrol are required before a cadet becomes a Senior Police Officer (SPO). For an SPO, work on the street continues unless a lateral move is applied for, such as a transfer to SWAT or Street Response. After five years on the force, an officer is allowed to take a test to be promoted to Corporal, who continues to work on the street, or to Detective, who generally works off of the street in an investigative manner. As officers advance in their careers and take different courses within the Police Department, their initial friendships made within the academy, on the street, or wherever routine interaction occurs continues and helps to form a close social network amongst each other. Many of the detectives I work with still maintain relationships with officers they first met within the academy or whom they worked with on the street in the past.

This social network helps officers as they progress with their careers. As openings become available in different departments which require Detective status, an earlier bond or friendship makes the possibility to fill the vacancy, and in the case of it happening, the transition much easier. If a detective has a question or request that must be directed towards another Department, he or she might try to find a member within their social network going back to the days of patrol to direct it to. Having friendships
across departments can make a detective’s job less tedious and more gratifying.

As promotions occur, the expansion of an officer’s social network begins to occur. A cadet will form a close relationship with fellow cadet class members. As commissions occur and the cadet begins the transition to officer, the social network expands to officers and supervisors directly involved with their respective patrol district. As time goes on and communication with former cadet classmates lessens, new networks form from new promotions and moves. If an officer pursues higher ranks within the Department (such as sergeant or lieutenant), he or she will likely know the people involved in their new circle, which furthers their social network connection within the force. Detectives may work in several different divisions in their careers, and social networks and bonds of friendships are made within each division, and continue and carry over even though a detective has moved on.

Finally, a social network exists between the APD and the cities municipal government leadership. The Police Department is a department of the City of Austin and many people may not realize this, thinking that the police may be a separate entity, but this is entirely untrue. The Police Department is confined to an annual budget, and is subject to supervision by city officials to make sure their actions are justified. Recently, the Los Angeles Police Department was engaged in an act of suppression of a peaceful pro-immigration rally. The police chief decided to launch his own investigation within the department, but recently Los Angeles County District Attorney Steve Cooley has decided to launch his own independent investigation into the incident. This serves as another example how the police department must act with the cities other various departments. Currently, the city of Austin is in the process to hire a new Chief of Police.
The former Chief of Police stepped down in 2006, and Cathy Ellison was promoted to be the Acting Chief of Police. The City Manager, Toby Futrell, is directly involved in the hiring of a new Chief of Police. The City Manager, however, is elected by the City Council, which consists of six council members and the mayor of Austin. Austin is unique in the way which the council members are elected; they are elected across the board instead of separate districts. The citizens of Austin thus have input and say for who becomes the Chief Police, they elect the people in charge of the hiring as well as attend hearings, monitor, and question potential applicants throughout the application process. This network of Police management working with city management creates an important social network within the city of Austin.

**Group In: The Police Culture**

Within law enforcement agencies, a group in mentality exists that could be perceived as a mini culture; the culture of law enforcement officials. I have asked the detectives I work with several questions about this manner and they agree that this exists.

Officers stick together for several reasons. One of the reasons is for their own personal protection; not protection in the sense of danger and self preservation, but protection of their careers and personal integrity. Once someone becomes a commissioned officer, he or she must be very careful with the decisions and actions they make. Their personal integrity is on the line when they are on duty, as well as off duty. As an officer you are held to a higher standard, and surrounding yourself with people who also adhere to this standard helps to create a protective layer against people who do not have to worry about their actions as much as an officer. Associating with friends who
engage in questionable behavior would not be wise—friends who drive while under the influence or engage in criminal behavior are risky and detrimental.

For example, if an officer’s friend is indicted on drug trafficking charges, or a similar crime, this would reflect greatly upon the officer whose integrity would be questioned. If an officer is known to have a flaw such as this, it could be brought up in court by the suspect’s defense team, and to have this exposed would create doubt in the eyes of the jury or judge about the officer’s statement. If a group of civilians get together and go out for a night on 6th street drinking, it is likely that someone in the group will still drive everyone home even though they are all drunk, risking everyone’s well being and possibly facing DUI charges. If officers get together and go to a drinking establishment, they are more aware that they must take extra caution; DUI is a serious offense for an officer and grounds for termination. With this in the back of their minds, officers need to make better choices, such as having a designated driver or taking a taxi, something that most civilians (even though they should) do not routinely do.

Officers also fraternize with each other out of convenience. Law enforcement does not stop at five in the afternoon as most professions and jobs do; the APD must be on the job twenty four hours a day. Officers must become accustomed to odd hours such as graveyard shifts and the requirement of working long hours several days in a row. Fellow officers understand this. If an officer’s friends are getting together at eight in the evening to grab dinner with each other, they might get upset if their officer friend routinely skips out for whatever reason; such as sleeping from the graveyard shift the night before or too worn out from working several long shifts. By surrounding themselves with fellow officers who understand, the officers need not worry about
making anyone upset or attempting to make them understand why they can not engage in social activities as much.

The police culture has a direct connection to their social network as well. As far as being a mini culture, they all wear the same clothing (APD uniforms), speak the same code language, and adhere to the same higher social standard. These are elements that cultures at broader levels share. Think of a leader of a small tribe or band of people. The chief is typically an older and wiser individual, and is greatly look upon by his subjects. His actions and mentality help to guide the tribe, and this is much like the inter-workings of the police department. The Chief of Police is not only the boss, but must set standards and be a representative of these standards for the law enforcement culture.

**Group Out: The Media, Pop Culture and the Police**

Today our country is very exposed to pop culture, so much that it is nigh impossible to go a day without hearing about something pertaining to it. The reputation of law enforcement is constantly tarnished by different aspects of the media, and whether it is television, movies, music, radio, printed publications, or the internet, the average American is exposed to large amounts of media every day.

In 2001, the movie Training Day was released, and this movie is a great representation of pop culture, from hit music, to celebrity award winning actors, and famous cameos from celebrities such as Snoop Doggy Dog, one of America’s most beloved stoner and rap icons.

The movie won Denzel Washington the Academy award for Best Actor. Training Day follows around a new recruit within the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD),
who is exposed to Police corruption at several different levels as he follows around Denzel Washington. Within this movie, very few honest Police officers are portrayed. Denzel Washington acts the role of Alonzo Harris, the corrupt leader of a LAPD narcotics unit. The officers who comprise this narcotic unit are all corrupt and involved in criminal activities themselves. The viewers are made to believe that these officers can behave and act as they do and are able to get away with it. These corrupt officers appear to be seasoned veterans of the Police force and seemingly do not worry when they themselves commit murder to obtain a cut of thousands of dollars of drug money. The viewer is made to believe that these officers have done activities such as this in the past, and will continue to do so in the future, not bothering to worry about repercussions, yet alone the possibility of being caught.

The movie featured the hit single “Still D.R.E.”, which was written and produced by Dr. Dre, a Grammy-award winning producer. The movie featured “Still D.R.E.”, a hit single which received a Grammy nomination in 2000 for Best Rap Performance by a Duo or Group (in company with Snoop Doggy Dog). According to Billboard charts, Dr. Dre’s album “2001” which the song is on, was the #2 album for the year 2000, and has sold over 10 million copies world wide. All this goes to show how popular this song and album was (and from a college student’s perspective continues to be so, most people my age are familiar with this song). The lyrics of the song contain many references to illegal crime and activities, as well as a direct message of Dr. Dre’s disdain for Police officers.

"Dr. Dre is the name, I'm ahead of my game. Still, puffing my leafs, still with the beats. Still not loving Police"
Because of this song’s popularity, it received immense radio play. There is no age requirement to turn on a radio and tune into a station of your choice, therefore, anyone of any age had the ability to be exposed to these lyrics. This includes children who were elementary and middle school age, children who should have not been able to be exposed to this song’s message of drug use, violence, and Police bashing. Exposed to music such as this, and movies such as Training Day, children are exposed early on to the message that the Police force is a negative entity. Drug dealing and violence is glamorized, and the organization that helps to protect society gets a bad reputation.

Today, rappers’ audiences have very little, if any cultural connection or relativity to what the lyrics of songs such as “Still D.R.E.” are speaking of. Snoop Dog is a MTV regular, MTV being a network which has a target audience of middle school and high school student. Gangster rap has become marketed to a public that has no connection to gangster life, and thus the messages and meanings of these songs are delivered out of context. Not many teenagers know first hand about the drug and crime references that are routinely mentioned, or have “grills” for their teeth, or get to experience night clubs. This audience would have no reason to hate the police as well, they are not engaged in the type of behavior that these gangster rappers are in. Aside from possible speeding tickets, or minor citations, I can not imagine anyone in this misdirected audience in trouble with the law for major drug trafficking.

Dr. Dre, who had an acting role as an accomplice and fellow officer of Denzel
Washington in the movie, was a member and producer for popular rap group NWA, who spawned a hit song in 1988, entitled “Fuck the Police” which contained lyrics such as

“Without a gun and a badge, what do you got?

A sucker in a uniform waiting to get shot,

By me, or another nigga

And with a Gat it don't matter if he's smaller or bigger”

This song and other songs released around the same time, such as Public Enemy’s “911 is a joke”, created immense tensions between the black community of Los Angeles and the LAPD in the years subsequent to their release. The lyrics promoted hatred towards the Police, and encouraged people to fight back against them. It was just a few years later in 1992 when the Los Angeles riots occurred in which over 50 people were killed, sparked by the Rodney King beating and accusations of LAPD racial profiling.

Now not all rap music is negative towards police, in fact hip-hop began as a movement that brought people together in arms against the violence and crimes that were infesting their neighbors. The pioneers of hip-hop, artists such as Afrika Bambaataa, Grand Master Flash, and the Sugarhill Gang, put on concerts in New York City that were geared to resisting violence. However, as hip-hop progressed and new sub-genres emerged, gangster rap (as it is called) began to dominate. Artists such as Ice Cube, 2pac, and Dr. Dre had begun to glamorize the life of crime, and the youth of America was tuned in.
However, in the past, NWA’s music admittedly had a reason behind it and a cultural connection for its intended listeners. Black youth who turned on the TV and saw footage of Rodney King being beaten could relate to what they saw. Within the city of Los Angeles, poverty runs rampant in many neighborhoods, and violence and drugs become a way of life. Many of these people were dealing drugs or embracing a life of crime to make an income to put food on the table and pay their necessary bills to sustain life. They had been used to a police presence and attempted intervention of crime. Many police officers are unfortunately, racist individuals. As I mentioned above, currently the LAPD is back in the minds of people as being a police force with an appetite for action. As tens of thousands Hispanics took to the streets for a peaceful pro-immigration rally, the LAPD began to fire foam bullets at the rally participants, which included members of the media. Journalists and camera men were beat down with batons and subdued, along with several Hispanic individuals. These actions became fuel for the fire, and brought back to memory the Rodney King incident. Now the Los Angeles media has a direct reason to portray them negatively; as they were suppressed for no apparent reason. Three investigations into the actions of the police against the media have begun, and the police chief released the following statement, “As Los Angeles' oldest news media organization, we wish to express our concern about police officers' attacks on news reporters and photographers yesterday during the immigration rally in MacArthur Park. There is no excuse for these attacks which sent several news professionals to the hospital for treatment of their injuries” (Associated Press).

I asked a few detectives that I work with what their opinion is on how the media perceives and portrays the Police force. I got the response that much of what is
portrayed about the Police force is not true. High speed pursuits, the use of fire arms and constant action do not happen every day. Detectives who are dressed in suits and ties without any body armor do not break down doors and enter with SWAT following behind (as seen in Law and Order). I was told that the way the Police force is portrayed in film and television is pretty much as far as it gets from reality. I have seen this from a first hand perspective while interning with APD. Not to say I have not experienced the action that is associated with the Police force, but much of what happens day to day is office and paper work. The detectives within the Organized Crime Division are not breaking down doors and chasing people in cars every day. While there is a fair amount of action associated with their work, there is a lot of paper work to precede and follow it. I witnessed a patrol officer bring a suspect to the Travis county jail one night at 9:30pm and fill out the required paper work on the individual, which lasted till midnight.

As people are exposed our pop culture, from its television shows such as CSI, to movies such as Training Day, to the newest hit rap song, they should keep in mind that what they hear is not necessarily the truth. Someone is out to make money with these television shows and music, and if they had positive things to say about the Police, revenue and profit would drop. As long as pop culture is fascinated and has an easy way out for portraying the Police negatively, they will continue to do so.

**Outcomes and Conclusion**

One time as I rode along patrol with an officer, we encountered a heavy intoxicated individual. Upon making contact with this person, he proclaimed “I respect you guys for being the thin blue line between order and chaos”. I could not agree more.
The Police Department protects the citizens of this great town and maintains the order that is required to live in our progressive society. At the end of the day, they aren’t thanked nearly enough for their sacrifice, yet continue to make it. The Police force is a necessary entity in today’s world and society. People can not police themselves, and it is unfortunate there are predators and criminals who not only prey upon the people, but that there are criminals out there who harm people by acting out violently against other criminals. Protection against terrorism, rape, drug trafficking, as well as dealing with homicides, traffic accidents, as well as the general protection of the populous can all be attributed to the police, and for this they are owed a big a thanks by the citizens they protect.

The internship program has required me to work on my skills of observing and analyzing, skills crucial to anthropology, at levels that I had never been required to in previously. Before I entered the program, I had never been forced to observe and then come up with ideas and concepts to think critically about. After my experiences with the Police, I feel as if I can now come up with more critical questions and observations than I previously would have been able to. I have also learned how to adjust into an office environment, and what will be expected for employees entering a “real” job upon graduation. My interest in law enforcement greatly expanded, and I have recently switched my minor to Criminal Justice. My appreciation and respect for the Police Department has grown immensely, and I feel I can relate to the struggle and issues officers must face with compassion and empathy.
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