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International Drug Trafficking:  
Police Corruption On The US/Mexico Border

A Thesis

BY

John J. Rodriguez

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Texas-Pan American  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
of

Master Of Science

May 2003

Major Subject: Criminal Justice

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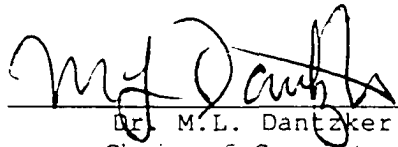
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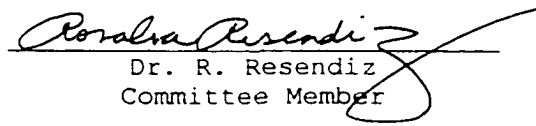
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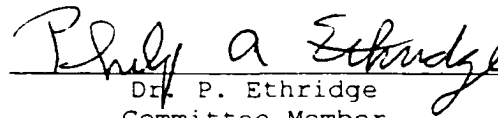
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## ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this thesis was to examine contemporary extralegal factors for the causation of drug-specific police corruption, particularly drug trafficking on the US/Mexico Border. Police included only those officers who were commissioned by municipalities. The researcher focused on a particular geographical area of the US border region consisting of a quad-county area, which includes Willacy, Starr, Hidalgo, and Cameron Counties. This region was ideal for its unique demographic composition and location. This is qualitative research based on grounded theory, which consisted of purposive and snowball sampling. There was no hypothesis due to the inductive nature of this research. The sample size for this thesis consists of eight ex-police officers from the various counties mentioned.

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## CHAPTER I

### *Introduction*

Many times when certain studies are conducted on issues of policing, they deal with unrelated topics of police corruption, such as community policing, police reporting process, urban policing, and sensitivity of police work (for example, see Cahalane, 2001; Jordan, 2001; Lersch, 2002; Meliala, 2001; Tooley 1972; Wong, 2001). Police corruption is one of the more sensitive issues in the criminal justice field, especially when drugs are involved.

There are a number of studies that focus on drugs in general (see Bewley, 2001; Hathaway, 2001; Leichtman 2000; MacDonald & Wells, 2001). Other studies are centered on the street value of drugs or policies dealing with drugs (Lupsha & Schlegal, 1980; Musto, 1999; Rotella 1998; Sechrest & Burns, 1992; US Mexico High Level Contact Group on Drug Control, 1997). Researchers, academics, and politicians are

often concerned with producing numbers and creating policies for funding projects. These policies and projects include DARE programs, "War on Drugs", and the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 (Bush, 2000; Hagan & Coleman, 2001; Hartnett, 2000). These policies and programs have had some contributions to the fight against drugs, but have failed in certain areas, to seek out some causes for those responsible in the importation of narcotics (Bush, 2000; Hagan & Coleman, 2001; Harnett, 2000). This thesis reaches where others have failed. This thesis looks at drug-specific police corruption to determine causes for such criminal acts.

Researchers, as well as policy makers, have failed to investigate some of the police officers responsible for the importation of these narcotics into the United States. Part of this failure includes an explanation as to why individuals, who are responsible for upholding the law, commit acts of such contradiction. How are these individuals involved in illicit activities, when they are contradicting everything they stand for? Those individuals on the front lines of the drug war are the only persons who can answer this question.

The drug battle has not only corrupted the streets, but also the persons who have sworn to protect them. The Rio Grande Valley in particular does not have a single study on the involvement of police officers with drug importation.

The Rio Grande Valley has had a shortage of criminal justice studies, more specifically police-related studies. The reason for this lack of research is due to multiple factors, which include but are not limited to language barriers, cultural ethnicity, and the sensitivity of issues (Briggs, 1976; Fernandez, 1989; Marin & Marin, 1991; Pereau, 1993).

The purpose of this thesis was to examine contemporary extralegal factors for the causation of police corruption. This thesis specifically focused on drug trafficking by police officers on the US/Mexico border. In the United States, specifically in the South Texas counties of Hidalgo, Willacy, Starr, and Cameron, several dozen police officers have been convicted with the intent to distribute narcotics from January 1990 to December 1999. Ex-police officers for this study included only those officers who were commissioned by municipal governments.

This thesis focused on a particular geographical area consisting of a quad-county area, which includes Starr, Willacy, Hidalgo, and Cameron Counties, Texas. This region was chosen for its unique demographic composition and its proximity to the Mexico border. The uniqueness of this area pertains to ethnicity, which is predominantly Hispanic; the level of education of the quad-county area is lower than that of the national average; and unemployment is also well above the national average (Briggs, 1976; Fernandez, 1989; Pereau 1993; Siporin & Wong, 1999).

This thesis is a qualitative research design based on grounded theory. This study was inductive research with no hypothesis; in this study the data speaks for itself (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

There were a total of eighteen possible participants/respondents identified, however, only eight of the eighteen voluntarily discussed their unique situation with the author. This was mainly due to the sensitivity and nature of the subject at hand.

Sampling data was collected through purposive and snowball sampling. These types of sampling differ from quantitative sampling and will be discussed in the methods section of the thesis.

Data collection techniques include only interviews. The interviewing technique was done through an open-ended interview questionnaire with a total of twenty-three questions.

In the following chapters the author will provide an overview of the literature review which will reflect the results. The literature review will discuss major topics such as financial gain as motive of police corruption, lack of ethics training, corruption learned, and the police subculture.

## CHAPTER II

### *Literature Review*

Literature on police corruption as it pertains to drug trafficking is scarce (see Carter, 1990; Lynch, 1989; Sechrest & Burns, 1992; Stevens, 1999; US General Accounting Office, 1998). Therefore, the literature for this thesis focused on various degrees of police corruption starting with a broad investigation finishing with causes of drug-specific police corruption literature.

Police corruption is neither a new phenomenon nor is it confined to any particular area of the world. In fact, police corruption can be traced back to the world's first police force in London, England where several accounts of police corruption have been documented since the force's inception (Cheurprakobit, Jenkins & Potter, 1986; Morton, 1986; 1993). Police corruption is also an inevitable outgrowth of all societies, and exists in every region including: Turkey, Thailand, Mexico, Africa, China, and The United States (see Beigel, 1977; Brereton & Ede, 1996;

Brogden & Nijar, 1998; Carter, 1990; Cheurprakobkit, et al., 1986; Goldstein, 1975; Kuntze, & Vaughn, 1998; McCormack 1986; Morton, 1993; Mutlu, 2000; Roebuck & Barker, 1974; Vagg, 1991; Verma, 1999).

Police corruption varies in many degrees as well. For example, police corruption can simply be sleeping while on duty to taking bribes, using drugs, or taking payoffs for purposes of personal gain (Beigel, 1977; Brereton & Ede, 1996; Carter, 1990; Goldstein, 1975; McCormack 1986; Morton, 1993; Mutlu, 2000; Roebuck & Barker, 1974; Verma, 1999). The phenomenon of police corruption comes in all forms and shapes and it exists in every country, but what exactly is police corruption? How can one define such a broad idea and narrow this spectacle to causes of drug-specific corruption? In the following section several definitions of what has been considered police corruption are presented. A definition that best served as a starting point for this thesis was chosen; the purpose of this was to allow the content of the thesis to flow from an abstract idea to concrete evidence in support for the causation drug-specific police corruption.

*Police Corruption Defined*

To begin, an overview of what police corruption means in its legal definition, and how it can be defined in several forms is offered. Some examples of police corruption in the broadest sense can be described as sleeping on duty to drug smuggling and everything in between consisting of items such as nepotism, racism, brutality, and theft. But, how does one define such a broad based idea? Some leading scholars in the criminal justice arena such as Wilson (1963) defines police corruption as, "Corruption occurs whenever a person, in exchange for some private advantages acts other than his duty requires" (p.189). Although Wilson tends to modify his definition periodically from one chapter to the next, his basic theme is constant, which is private advantage gaining.

According to Sherman (1974) the definition of police corruption is so broad that in most cases it must be narrowed to a specific type of corruption. He states that in order to narrow the definition, one should begin with the assumption that a corrupt act by an officer serves as a personal interest as opposed to an organizational interest. In other words the police officer is not concerned with the actual organization



itself but rather in the corruption for his own personal gains.

A third definition of police corruption is, "Any type of proscribed behavior engaged by a law enforcement officer who receives or expects to receive by virtue of his official position, an actual or potential unauthorized reward or gain" (Roebuck and Barker, 1974, p. 424). This definition is probably a bit more concise due to its rhetoric of "proscribed behavior" not only by the department but by criminal law. Another definition is "acts involving the misuse of authority by a police officer in a manner designed to produce personal gain for himself or others" (Goldstein, 1975, p.3). However, the public is all too quick in shifting the blame to the individual officer when in fact the officer is not always acting alone. Forces outside the officers' control, such as society and police environment, have a great deal of influence (Dantzker, 2003).

Dantzker (2003) offers three main perspectives applicable to defining police corruption: Individuality, society and police environment. In the first perspective the officer brings with him a differing "set of morals, values and norms in which he

or she operates" (p.175). These differing factors can contribute to a negative or positive working environment. Contributing to police corruption as well, according to the societal perspective, is the society itself. Finally, the police environment may also be guilty of assisting in police corruption.

Champion (2001) defines police misconduct as "any inappropriate behavior on the part of any law enforcement officer that is either illegal or immoral or both" (p.2). He also contends that no officer is above the law and that when any officer violates the law or behaves in ways that discredit his/her position, this is considered police corruption. However, to narrow these definitions the author must still specify a certain type of corruption. As mentioned the author will be referring to drug-related police corruption.

Kappler, Sluder, and Alpert (1998) mention five major categories of drug-related corruption. Keep in mind these are not specific definitions of police corruption but narrow the topic to a certain type of drug-related police corruption. Kappler, et. al.'s, (1998) first category mentioned is off-duty recreational drug use by police officers, which may

involve the greatest number of officers; the second category is on duty drug use by police officers. The third category is when officers violate the rights of defendants by planting drugs in order to make an arrest. A fourth broader category is referred to as traditionally conceptualized drug corruption. This category involves a host of illicit activities including, permitting drug dealers to operate, keeping confiscated drug money and drugs, carrying out robberies of narcotic dealers, and even dealing drugs themselves. The final category of drug-related police corruption includes the use of physical force to extract information from suspects who threaten the use of violence against drug users and drug dealers.

The fourth category of the aforementioned five was the most accurate for this study. This study was conducted with a focus on traditionally conceptualized drug corruption, more specifically what causes police officers to fall into this particular category. Throughout this study the focus was on the causation of drug-related police corruption; specifically, the traditional conception of drug importation.

### *Causation of Police Corruption*

The causation of police corruption can be attributed to many factors such as age, innocence, lack of integrity, police subculture, and hiring practices of many departments (Beigel, 1977; Brereton & Ede, 1996; Carter, 1990; Goldstein, 1975; McCormack 1986; Morton, 1993; Mutlu, 2000; Roebuck & Barker, 1974; Verma, 1999). To get a truer understanding of the content and nature of causation, each issue is addressed and expanded in the next sections. The following factors presented are not ranked in any particular order, due to the fact that there is no basis available on which to assess their relative importance. The extent of impact of each factor is also unknown; this is especially true for police subculture (US General Accounting Office, 1998).

#### *Police Subculture*

The US General Accounting Office (1998) states that drug-related police corruption differs in many ways from other types of police corruption in that it is much more dangerous. In addition to protecting criminals or ignoring their activities, officers involved in drug-related corruption were more likely

to be actively involved in the commission of a variety of crimes, including stealing drugs and/or money from drug dealers, selling drugs, and lying under oath about illegal searches (US General Accounting Office, 1998).

This type of corruption is found to be non-traditional in the sense that the police officers are not isolated individuals committing these types of violations, but rather a pattern of small groups of officers who have been known to protect and assist each other in criminal activities. These small groups of police officers often work within a subculture (Beigel & Beigel, 1977; Lynch, 1989; Skolnick, 1975; US General Accounting Office, 1998). This culture within a culture, or more specifically the police subculture, is often introduced to the rookie officer during the first few months out of the academy through the process of socialization. Incumbents are exposed to and quickly internalize a new set of values, which is foreign to their previously held beliefs (Bahn, 1974; Carter, 1990, Goldstein, 1975; McCormack, 1986). Many police officers often leave the training academy, and socialization to corruption proceeds rapidly because of the cultural shock of joining the inner

circle of police-hood, where a new set of values is bestowed upon them (Bahn, 1974; Brereton & Ede, 1996; Carter, 1990; Goldstein, 1975; Hughes, 2000; McCormack 1986; Metchik, 1999; Morton, 1993; Mutlu, 2000; Roebuck & Barker, 1974; Sharp, Harman & Rachlin, 1997).

McCormack (1986) mentions that these new perceived values ease the dissonance between good and bad, which reconciles corrupt behavior. In other words, the officers see and hear corrupt behavior, thus act in the same manner because he/she feels that acceptable behavior is probably not corrupt behavior, but rather a subculture he/she must adapt too (McCormack, 1986; Morton, 1993; Skolnick, 1975; Sherman, 1974; Wilson, 1963).

A study done by the United States General Accounting office (1998) found that a negative police subculture was a key factor associated with drug-related police corruption. Moreover, values and attitudes identified as characteristics of police subculture that supported drug-related corruption were as follows: code of silence, loyalty to other officers, and cynicism or disillusionment about the criminal justice system (McCormack, 1986; Morton,

1993; Skolnick, 1975; Sherman, 1974; Waddington, 1999; Walker & Katz, 2002; Wilson, 1963). An officer's code of silence and cynicism about the criminal justice system was found to be a reoccurring theme in drug-related police corruption (Beigel & Beigel, 1977; Brereton & Ede, 1996; US General Accounting Office, 1998).

In a study conducted by Weisburd and Greenspan (2000) nine hundred twenty five (N=925) officers were surveyed from one hundred twenty one police departments. Of these officers over half (52.4%) thought it was not unusual for officers to turn away from improper police conduct, and only thirty-nine percent (39%) report criminal violations, due to the subculture of the police (Weisburd & Greenspan, 2002). Walker and Katz (2002) point out that the police subculture not only initiates police officers into corruption but the subculture assists to sustain corruption by covering up illegal activities of other officers; this is especially true for the rookie officer who believes that this is part of the subculture's ethos. If police officers around the world perceive corruption as the subculture's ethos, then police corruption can never be eliminated only

controlled to a degree (McCormack, 1986). Another contributing factor to drug-related police corruption is the hiring practices of many police departments and lack of experience of these rookie officers.

#### *Hiring Practices/Lack of Experience*

Screening and background checks for possible police candidates can be costly (Alpert, 1991; Sharp, Harman & Rachlin, 1997). These procedures may not be feasible for many small police departments since screening and background checks of potential police participants are demanding and high-priced in some cases (Alpert, 1991; Sharp, Harman & Rachlin, 1997). This lack of funding for the hiring process can hinder the agency in the future by employing individuals with character or psychological blemishes, which are most prone to partake in drug-related corruption (Alpert, 1991; Hughes, 2000; Metchik, 1999; Sharp, et. al., 1997). In essence the hiring of these officers becomes a liability to the force and the public it serves (Alpert, 1991; Hughes, 2000; Metchik, 1999). Many small police departments recruit and retain officers who would have been screened out during the



hiring, training, and probationary periods, but without proper training there is a tremendous lack of experience, which is a major cause for drug-related police corruption (Alpert, 1991; Hughes, 2000; Metchik, 1999; McCormack, 1986). Once these police officers are employed in a small-town municipality the organizational structure of the department will have great influence on the inexperienced rookie officer (Sechrest & Burns, 1992).

Drug-related police corruption has been the result of both social structure or community changes, as well as departmental problems, mostly affecting the inexperienced officer (Sechrest & Burns, 1992). Sechrest and Burns (1992) have pointed out that departmental problems occur when the community experienced increases in crime, especially in drug trafficking. The departmental concerns for the study primarily focused on police corruption. Furthermore, they look at several case studies during a time of increased drug related activities. Investigations of several incidents suggested that the police officers partook in some type of drug-related criminal misconduct. The rookie officer attributed many departmental concerns for drug-related police

corruption due to his/her lack of experience (Brereton & Ede, 1996; Goldstein, 1975; McCormack, 1986; Mutchnick, 1979; Roebuck & Barker, 1974; Stevens, 1999). Due to the fact the police officer is a rookie his/her family, age, and educational attainment are also major causes of drug-related corruption (Mutchnick, 1979).

#### *Familism, Age, and Educational Attainment*

In a study conducted by Mutchnick (1979) on police corruption related to drug trafficking, it was hypothesized that police corruption is caused by the relationship among the variables of familism, age, and education attainment. Familism is one variable in which Mutchnick (1979) discusses deeply; familism is the regard for family. Whether it is considered positive or negative it can directly influence police involvement in drug-related corruption. If familism is negative the police officer will be more likely to participate in police misconduct, on the other hand, if familism is positive then police officers are less prone to participating in drug-related police corruption (Munchnick, 1979).

Major identifiable causes of drug-related police corruption found by the US General Accounting Office (1998) were the maturity or age of the police officer and educational attainment level of the officer. Officers lacking in experience and some higher education were considered to be more susceptible to involvement in illicit drug-related activities (Stevens, 1999; US General Accounting Office, 1998). The lowering of age and educational requirements in many departments have been two major causes for police corruption, especially in cities such as Miami and Washington D.C. Both cities went through major hiring incentives in which rapid recruitment permitted the hiring of unqualified candidates (Brereton & Ede 1996; Goldstein, 1975; McCormack, 1986; Mutchnick, 1979; Roebuck & Barker, 1974; Stevens, 1999). There is also a growing body of literature which indicates that college educated officers perform better, are more professional, and have a higher job satisfaction than their high school educated peers (Dantzker, 1993; Karkar, 1998; Lynch, 1976; Shernock, 1992; Smith, Locke & Walker, 1968). Since college graduates tend to be older, one might expect their moral maturity to be higher than that of the traditional candidate (Lynch,

1976; Smith, et. al., 1968). On the other hand, the young police candidates carry with them a great deal of innocence, lack of integrity and lack of ethics training (Brereton & Ede 1996; Goldstein, 1975; McCormack, 1986; Mutchnick, 1979; Roebuck & Barker, 1974; Stevens, 1999). Innocence, integrity and ethics have also had much impact on drug-related corruption (Brereton & Ede, 1996; Goldstein, 1975; McCormack, 1986; Mutchnick, 1979; Roebuck & Barker, 1974; Stevens, 1999).

#### *Innocence/Integrity/Ethics*

Researchers have acknowledged that other causes of drug-related corruption also included innocence and lack of integrity of the rookie officer (Brereton & Ede, 1996; Goldstein, 1975; McCormack, 1986; Mutchnick, 1979; Roebuck & Barker, 1974; Stevens, 1999). Stevens (1999) surveyed 255 police officers from North Carolina. His findings pointed to some disturbing figures. Of the 255 officers seventy-six percent, 194 did not trust other narcotics officers, and half of the 194 questioned the integrity of the officers. Twenty-six percent (N=66) of the reporting officers said that they often heard of other narcotics

officers personally consumed and/or sold controlled substances that had been taken away from drug-dealers, abusers, and other officers (Stevens, 1999, p. 4). Stevens' (1999) conclusion reiterates the findings of several studies; innocence and lack of integrity contribute to narcotics officers becoming corrupt officers (Doig, 1998; Stevens, 1999; US General Accounting Office 1998). Innocence and lack of integrity can also be attributed to the lack of training on ethics

Causes of drug-related corruption can also be attributed to the lack of training on ethics and background investigation, especially in small departments (Bahn, 1974; Hughes, 2000; Metchik, 1999; Sharp, et. al., 1997). Police officers in many small departments are inadequately trained on ethics and police corruption. Several studies agree that many departments lack adequate ethics training and all make recommendations that more hours are needed to better prepare the innocent officer (Bahn, 1974; Hughes, 2000; Metchik, 1999; Sharp, et. al., 1997). In fact, several studies have indicated that teaching ethics should not just be in the classroom but out in the field as well, to reinforce moral resolve, develop

moral sensitization, and to impart moral expertise (Hughes, 2000; Kleinig, 1990; Metchik, 1999; Sharp, et. al., 1997). In the following section the researcher will discuss corruption learned as a cause to drug-related police corruption.

### *Corruption Learned*

The socialization of police corruption begins when the rookie patrol officer learns to expect and receive small favors from the public he/she protects and serves. This type of behavior leads to small gifts, cash, and eventually drug-related corruption (Bahn, 1974; Brereton & Ede, 1996; Carter, 1990; Goldstein, 1975; Hughes, 2000; McCormack 1986; Metchik, 1999; Morton, 1993; Mutlu, 2000; Roebuck & Barker, 1974; Sharp, et. al., 1997).

Many police officers learn corruption through a process of interaction, which is in accordance with criminal endeavors. Endeavors in this aspect begin with minor infractions, such as acceptance of gratuities, petty bribery, and/or shakedowns (Morton, 1993, Mutchnick, 1979; New York City Mayor's to Investigate Allegations of Police Corruption, 1973). This type of behavior eventually leads to the

acceptance by the officers of a payoff to fail to enforce laws to prevent acts such as gambling, prostitution, and narcotics trade (Morton, 1993; Mutchnick, 1979; New York City Mayor's to Investigate Allegations of Police Corruption, 1973). As officers learn this repulsive behavior they seem to continue the process because they find the payoffs to be fruit-full on an economic level (Aultman, 1973).

#### *Financial Rewards*

Once the behavior is learned by a rookie officer it is only a matter of time before he realizes that this misconduct has now become an obligation. "Many policemen do things that are illegal in order to fulfill obligations that are required of them; some men exploit their obligations and authority to steal and to take payoffs" (Aultman, 1973, p. 325). Officers find these payoffs fruit-full on a financial level; however, some prefer narcotics as payoffs (Aultman, 1973; Carter, 1990). Some of these personally desirable rewards can often be large amounts of narcotics and cash. Some of the drug-tainted police officers are involved in incidents where money collected is considered clean money. In these

instances, officers partake in activities such as bribes and payoffs so that narcotics can be sold without disruption of the law. There are also many drug-related police officers involved in activities such as the distribution and the personal use of narcotics. Money gained from these types of activities are known as "dirty money" as opposed to the "clean money" mentioned above (New York City Mayors Commission to Investigate Allegations of Police Corruption, 1973, p. 99).

The *Knapp Commission Report on Corruption* also discloses information, about situations in which police officers score "money and drugs confiscated during a raid or arrest" (New York City Mayors Commission to Investigate Allegations of Police Corruption, 1973, p. 99). The confiscation of money or narcotics by police officers is known as a score. "One former member of the Narcotics Division recently assigned to other duties told the commission that in his experience eighty to ninety percent of the Narcotics Division participated in at least this type of score" (New York City Mayors Commission to Investigate Allegations of Police Corruption, 1973, p.



99). There were several sizable scores of money and narcotics discovered during the investigation.

These particular officers that participate in drug-related activities and/or partake in these sizable scores have become known as "meat-eaters". These meat-eaters spend a great deal of their time aggressively seeking out situations they can exploit for financial gain, as opposed to "grass-eaters" who only accept small amounts of cash but do not aggressively pursue corruption payments (New York City Mayors to Investigate Allegations of Police Corruption, 1973 p. 65).

Financial gain as a cause of drug-related corruption seems to be a pattern in many studies; researchers have pointed out that the cause for drug related police corruption is simply earning money or gaining other personally desirable rewards (Aultman, 1973; Morton, 1993, Mutchnick, 1979; New York City Mayor's to Investigate Allegations of Police Corruption, 1973).

Due to the aforementioned topics, police corruption is one of the more sensitive topics in the United States. However, police corruption must still be explored for a number of reasons. The lack of

criminal justice studies, especially in the quad-county border area is an indicator of the importance of this study for the causation of drug-related police corruption. One can only begin to imagine the causes for drug-related police corruption in the four county areas, especially due to the proximity of the US/Mexico border. To disclose information on the causes of drug-related corruption in the Rio Grande Valley, methods used to gather the data for this thesis are discussed in the following chapter.

## Chapter III

### *Methodology*

This researcher used a qualitative research design to conduct this study on ex-police officers' involvement in drug trafficking along the US/Mexico Border in the counties of Hidalgo, Willacy, Cameron, and Starr. A qualitative research design for this particular study was chosen because of the sensitive nature of the subject matter and the small sample size. Before proceeding with the discussion on the methodology for this study, the difference between quantitative and qualitative research designs will be briefly examined beginning with a brief overview of grounded theory.

#### Quantitative vs. Qualitative

Grounded Theory begins with a research situation (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In this particular case the situation is international drug trafficking committed by police officers. Within this particular situation the researcher's responsibility is to understand what

has happened or what is happening in the particular situation. In other words, how, what, when, and why are police officers in the quad county region becoming involved in narcotics trafficking? Understanding and collecting data of the particular situation is done mostly through observation, conversation, and interview (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

In this thesis, interviews were used to collect data. This data collecting was done by taking notes. In Grounded Theory, this is simply called "note-taking". Constant comparison is the core or heart of Grounded Theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The note-taking is constantly being compared from one interview to another; with constant comparison, patterns quickly emerge about the situation. The patterns that emerge are quickly written down on the margins of the note-taking, this is known as coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This type of research is a qualitative research design, which differs from quantitative.

Quantitative versus qualitative simply comes down to a question of "concepts as ideas or terms versus numerical value" (Dantzker & Hunter, 2000, pg. 74). On one hand, you have quantitative research where an objective analysis is based upon the numerical

findings produced from observations. On the other hand, "Qualitative research is the non-numerical explanation and interpretation of observations for the purpose of discovering underlying meanings and patterns" (Dantzker & Hunter, 2000, pg. 74). This type of analysis allows researchers to verbalize insights that quantifying data would not permit (Dantzker & Hunter, 2000).

Due to the differences in quantitative and qualitative methodology, the terms and definitions will vary in some instances. For example, the term data collection is used in both types of research designs and its meaning remains the same for both designs, which is basically gathering the research materials that the researcher will then analyze (Dantzker & Hunter, 2000).

The term coding, varies significantly from quantitative to qualitative, more specifically in Grounded Theory. For example, in quantitative research, coding is simply assigning values to the data for statistical analysis (Dantzker & Hunter, 2000). In Grounded Theory, the term coding is the general term for conceptualizing data so that one may

be able to categorize and then identify relationships across categories (Strauss, 1987).

The term sampling also comes in several different forms. For example, in quantitative research the most basic type of sampling is known as random sampling. Random sampling is simply giving all members of a given population the same chances of being selected (Dantzker & Hunter, 2000). In qualitative design one of the key features is usually "working in small groups of people nested in their context and studied in-depth" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, pg. 27). Qualitative samples tend to be purposive, rather than random, as previously mentioned. Sampling in qualitative research involves a key particular action: "You need to set boundaries to define aspects of your case(s) that you can study within the limits of your times and means that connect directly to the research question" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, pg. 27). In Grounded Theory the types of sampling most often used are known as purposive and/or snowball sampling, which will be discussed later in the text.

To better understand what was done in this study, it is imperative to discuss several essential relevant ideas, beginning with the discussion of inductive research. This will be followed by the discussion of sampling, interviewing techniques, and ethical considerations as applied to this study.

### *Inductive Research*

Due to the exploratory nature of this research, qualitative methodology was chosen as most appropriate due to the limited number of possible respondents and the sensitive nature of crime research. For this reason a qualitative design was chosen to conceptualize the data collected from respondents, which allows verbal insight that quantifying data does not allow.

Based on the nature of this research, the formulation of a hypothesis would have been inappropriate. Therefore, the use of inductive methods was most suitable. The qualitative research design for this study is based on the work of Strauss and Corbin (1990) grounded theory. The use of grounded theory allows the data to speak for itself. In other

words, patterns emerge from the data. The study was guided by inductive reasoning of data collection, which means that the researcher observes a response, makes an empirical generalization, and constructs a theory based upon the data (Dantzker & Hunter, 2000).

#### *Sampling*

A pool of participants for this study was chosen for their unique situation, a criminal history. The researcher was seeking individuals that had been certified police officers of local municipalities in the Rio Grande Valley and had been convicted of drug distribution or a closely related crime (i.e. conspiracy, intent to distribute). There was a population of eighteen possible participants and/or respondents from the quad-county region. The target population of the eighteen participants were identified initially through purposive and later through snowball sampling.

Purposive sampling is selecting participants from a list or source, in which the researcher feels is an appropriate sample for the study. Purposive sampling is also referred to as typical case sampling, or judgmental sampling, because the researcher believes that the chosen individual will provide the necessary



information. The researcher purposefully "chose sites, persons, documents" for his or her research (Dantzker & Hunter, 2000; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Other respondents were identified through snowball sampling, in which a respondent led the researcher to two more possible respondents (Dantzker & Hunter, 2000; Strauss 1987).

The researcher for this particular study chose his possible participants by purposive sampling. Sixteen of the eighteen possible respondents were discovered by the researcher in the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement (1999-2000) database, which is an online source. The Texas commission on Law Enforcement is a source that provided an online list of ex-police officers; these ex-police officers had committed drug-related crimes such as narcotics distribution.

Of the eighteen possible respondents' eight voluntarily discussed their unique situation with the author. The other ten declined to discuss their situations or could not be found at their last known address. Of the ten, four participants refused to consent to an interview. Another four of the possible participants could not be found. Last known

address and phone numbers could not be traced. The other two remaining participants are still in prison. One of these two last participants is incarcerated for the crime of homicide. This information was hearsay from officers in his ex-department.

Demographics varied from one respondent to another, but all data collected in this section pertains to information at the time of their arrest. Respondents' ages ranged from 30 years old to 49 years old, they are males, and all had worked in local municipalities, small police departments. One participant had some college hours, while two of them had obtained a General Equivalency Diploma. The remaining five all had secured a high school diploma. The number of years in service ranged from two to fifteen with a mean of six years. Incomes of participants ranged from seven (\$7.00) dollars an hour to thirty-six thousand (\$36, 000) dollars per year. Number of hours of ethics training varied as well; the number ranged from ten hours to twenty four hours. Two of the respondents could not remember the actual hours. All participants are Mexican-Americans from the quad-county region of South Texas.

Three of the respondents were convicted of "Possession with Intent to Distribute Marijuana". One of the Participants was convicted of "Possession with Intent to Distribute two kilograms of Cocaine". The four remaining individuals were convicted of "Conspiracy to Possess with intent to distribute" an X amount of Marijuana.

#### *Data Collection*

Data collection was conducted through interviews using an open-ended questionnaire. Interviews were conducted in various locations across the Rio Grande Valley. Some specific locations included restaurants, bars, and respondents' homes. To ensure confidentiality it was important that all information disclosed to the researcher was pertaining to past criminal endeavors in which ex-police officers were already convicted and charged. The interviewing instrument was an unstructured open-ended questionnaire. Although respondents were bilingual, the interview instrument was written in American English format.

The interview instrument in appendix A begins with definitions of potentially controversial words. This was done to protect from communication

breakdowns, in an effort to avoid any possible confusion regarding specific questions or vocabulary, and to decrease the possibility of false or inaccurate responses.

The interview session began by allowing the respondents to review the definitions and all questions on the interview instrument. Once the respondent understood all definitions and questions, the interview commenced with questions of demographics, which are followed by the definitions. The open-ended questions follow the demographic section.

#### *Interviewing Techniques*

The interview instrument, a self formulated consent form, and a university consent form were submitted to the Human Subject's Review Board prior to the actual interviews (see Appendices C and D). This was policy for commencing any type of interviews. Participants were contacted with a hand delivered letter from the researcher (see Appendix B). The letter pertains to the purpose of this thesis and the anonymity of the participants.

Prior to inception of the interviews, respondents' were informed that confidentiality will be held in the highest regards to protect all parties involved in this research. Ex-police officers needed a constant reminder of their confidentiality during the interview process to ensure psychological comfort. Some of the ex-police officers were insecure about their anonymity. Any information that would be disclosed would be for thesis purposes only. Second, each respondent has been assigned an alphabetical code based on the order of voluntary consent to ensure confidentiality. Lastly, interviews were not taped or recorded to stimulate the respondent's flow of data (Gorden, 1992), notes were taken instead. In some cases verbatim notes were taken, but many times the responses were paraphrased and repeated to the respondent to assure accurate responses (Erlandson, 1993).

Interviews were not commenced until participants fully understood the purpose and nature of this project. Upon comprehension of this thesis, participants signed or marked the researcher's and university's consent forms (see Appendices C and D).

Being an acquaintance to some of the ex-police officers allowed the author an insider status (Marin & Marin, 1991). Having the same background and the use of both the English and Spanish language allowed for the researcher to connect with the respondents at a more personal level, allowing for the respondent to feel confident about their responses.

The interviews were done in various locations. Once informed of the project, four of the participants elected to do the interview right after being informed. After signing the consent form, four persons were interviewed at their homes. One of the eight participants elected to conduct the interview at a local restaurant. Another respondent chose to partake only if I could meet him after work at his place of employment. This particular respondent wanted to conduct the interview in his company vehicle after working hours, when no one was around. The remaining two participants agreed to the interview if it was conducted in a public place. The interview was conducted at a local pub, in which the participants felt familiar and comfortable. Interviewing of the participants was a difficult task because interviews were not conducted in a controlled environment.

### *Interviews*

Interviews were all conducted in the same format. The first step was to make sure the ex-police officers understood the definitions given for certain words. This was done to ensure the safety of communications, that there was not a chance for communication to breakdown. The researcher first read the definitions to the participants. Next the respondent read the definitions on his own. If a definition was not clear the participant was given a chance to ask for a clearer understanding of what was being defined. All participants gave the researcher the okay to proceed with the next step of the interview. In the next step the researcher asked the participants questions which would allow for the collection of demographic information (i.e. age, income, level of education, age). Each participant answered most of the questions unless the participant felt the question was too personal or irrelevant to the thesis. However, demographics are essential to get a feel for the participants' backgrounds and life styles.

Lastly and most importantly, the researcher asked the participants questions involving a variety of categories that have been coded or conceptualized to include the following: profile, involvement, perception, role, official practices and responses, other criminal endeavors/associations, and advice/reflections. Each question was asked one at a time. The participant was given as much time as needed to answer each and every question. Some participants were still hesitant in responding and asked several times if the researcher was sure responses would remain confidential. The researcher reassured the respondents data collected would remain confidential and this confidentiality would be held in the highest regard. When interviews came to a conclusion, participants were thanked for their participation in the study which is vital to future studies for understanding drug-related police corruption. The participants were reassured once again that all information was for research purposes only.

As already mentioned, questions were divided into several categories. Questions 1-3 pertained to the participant's profile, these three questions asked the respondent to tell the researcher a little about



himself. The individual questions themselves were coded into a more concrete idea. For example, question one asked the participant, "Where did you grow up?" This question was coded as locality. Basically this question asked the locality of the upbringing of this individual. Question two asked, "Tell me a little about your self?" Question two was coded as identity, for the obvious reason of the ex-police officer identifying himself. Question three simply asked the participant, "What was your family situation like growing up?" This question was coded as upbringing.

Questions 5, 7, 8, 9, and 10 pertained to questions of participants' involvement in drug-trafficking; therefore they were simply grouped and coded as involvement. Question five reads as follows, "Why did you get involved in drug-trafficking?" This particular question was coded as reasons for involvement. Question seven asked participants, "To whom were you in contact with?" This question was coded as links. Question eight asked, "Who initiated the drug-trafficking?" this question was coded as initial contact. Question nine was coded personal gain, because it asked the respondents, "What was your

personal gain or what was promised to you for participation?" Question ten, the final question of this category was coded as situational context because the question pertains to the situation the ex-police officers were involved in. Question ten asked, "What conditions prompted you to get involved in criminal activities?" (i.e. personal financial).

Questions 4 and 6 pertain to the participant's role during criminal endeavors; therefore these two questions were coded as role. For example, question four asked the participants, "Can you explain your criminal situation?" Question four was coded as circumstance. Question six asked, "How did you partake in the drug-trafficking?" Question six was coded as task.

The next group of questions pertained to participants' perception of their criminal endeavors. This section includes question 12 and 13, these two questions were coded as perception. Question 12, for example, asked the participants if they thought their actions were criminal at the time of their endeavors, this question was coded as insight. Question 13 asked participants, "Did you anticipate consequences if caught?" This question was coded as consequences.

The next section is practices and official responses. In this section for example, question 14 asked the participants how they were caught for the activities committed during their time as officers.

Questions 11, 14, and 15 were grouped and coded as practices and official responses. Question 11 in itself was coded as discretion, because this question asked respondents, "Were you given free reign while on duty?" question 14 was coded as discovered, it asked respondents, "How were you caught?"; and the last section was question 15 which was coded as internal affairs, simply asking respondents, "What is your perception of internal affairs, or internal investigations in your department; if there is any at all?"

The next group of questions was coded as other criminal endeavors and associations. This group consisted of questions 16-20. Question 16 was coded as associated activities, it asked respondents, "What about your involvement in other criminal endeavors?" Question 17 asked, "Were you involved in drug trafficking or any other type of criminal activities before you joined the police force?" This question was coded as prior associated activities. Question 18

asked, "Did you know other officers who were apprehended before?" This question was coded as other corrupt police officers. Question 19 asked, "Do you know of other officers who were involved in the same activities but in other departments?" This question was coded as same criminal activities by police. The last question in this group was question number 20. Question 20 was coded as corruption by all others. This question asked participants, "Were close friends or family members involved in drug trafficking?"

The last three questions on the interview instrument were grouped and coded as advice and reflections. Question 21 was individually coded as reasons for continued involvement. This question asked, "Did you ever try to get out of your situation? Why? Why not?" Question 22 asked, "What would you tell the rookie officer" and question 23, simply asked, "Any recommendations?" Both of these questions were individually coded as advice.

For each question that was asked the participant was told to take as much time as needed to answer each question. Most participants were code-switching, meaning that they answered in both English and Spanish. There were a total of twenty-three questions

asked. All questions were asked in order of numerical placement and participants would not answer the question until they fully understood what was being asked.

#### *Research Considerations*

Due to the nature of the unstructured interviews, the researcher must be able to address specific concerns for the study to be successful. The researcher must be able to gain access to the setting, understand the language and culture of respondents, decide how to present oneself, locate a contact, gain the respondent's trust, and establish a rapport with the respondent (Dantzker & Hunter, 2000). Being an acquaintance to some of the ex-police officers allowed the research an insider status (Martin & Marin, 1991). For this particular insider status, having the same background and the ability to use English and Spanish languages, allowed for the researcher to connect with the respondents on a more personal level. This allowed for the respondents to feel confident about their responses. This connection of identifiable backgrounds allowed for a positive rapport with the respondents.

Another concern of unstructured interviews is that it is much more difficult to quantify the responses of participants and thus more susceptible to intervening and subject elements. Unstructured interviews also require an experienced and disciplined interviewer in order to be very successful (Dantzker & Hunter, 2000).

On a positive note, the unstructured interviews do not provide for a set of pre-determined answers, which allows for more in-depth responses. Unstructured interviews are also far less rigid than structured or semi-structured interviews because there is seldom a schedule kept and as already mentioned there are no pre-determined responses. Participants are allowed to think freely and conceptualize their ideas.

Another consideration is the confidentiality that must be kept. Ex-police officers needed a constant reminder of confidentiality during the interview process to ensure psychological comfort. Any other information that would be disclosed would be for thesis purposes only. Next each participant was assigned an alphabetical code based on the order of voluntary consent to ensure confidentiality.

Information was also limited due to the ex-police officers not wanting to disclose too much information about their organizations. Interviews were limited for the same reasons.

### *Data Analysis*

For the analysis of the data, the constant comparative method was used (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Data was open-coded and compared to other respondents to determine a pattern. For each participant response, the answers were coded into a single idea. For example, question five asked, "Why did you get involved in narcotics?"; responses were lengthy and varied from one respondent to another. However, the key or idea behind their responses all trickled down to one word "money". Here the lengthy responses were coded to this single idea, money. The responses of participants were then compared to each other to determine if a pattern existed or emerged from these simple codes. Patterns were often obvious when codes were compared from one respondent to the next.

## CHAPTER IV

### Results and Analysis

The major goal of this thesis was to examine the causation of police corruption, specifically drug trafficking on the US/Mexico Border. Through the use of grounded theory the researcher shows how patterns for the causation of police corruption have emerged from this qualitative investigation. As previously mentioned, questions for this study were coded into several categories which include: profile, involvement, perception, role, official practices and responses, other criminal endeavors/associations, and advice/reflections. The first group of questions was coded as profile. Within each of these categories, questions and responses were coded as well.

#### *Profile*

Questions 1-3 were categorized as profile because all three questions pertained to the respondent's personal background such as family situation and details about growing up. Each of these questions was



designed to get a feel for the respondent on a more personal level. These questions also broke the ice, so to speak, between the researcher and the respondent.

### *Locality*

Question number 1 asked respondents where they had grown up. Participants A, B, C, and D responded that they had all grown up in the Rio Grande Valley, no exact town or city was given. Participants E and F responded that they were raised "up north" giving no geographical location. Respondents explained that the reason for not giving any geographical location was due to their migrant status. Their families would often migrate to different states depending on the amount of work, pay, and type of work that was given to them by farmers. Participant G responded that he was raised in the Mid-Valley, which he considers Mercedes, Weslaco, and Donna. Respondent H indicated that he grew up in Hidalgo County. Six of the eight respondents essentially grew up in the Rio Grande Valley.

*Identity*

Question number 2 asked the participants to, "Tell me a little about yourself". Answers to this question varied significantly, since most respondents did not know how to answer this question. Respondent A simply said, "Don't really know what to say, I've never talked about myself in such a formal manner". Respondent B explained that he is just trying to live life, and forget about the past. Respondent C and G said that they were just regular guys. Respondent D replied in Spanish stating that he is now laying low and quiet [estoy, tranquilo en la vida]. Respondent E said that he messed up, referring to his criminal situation. Respondent F said that he was once stupid, but now is a bit wiser. Respondent H stated, "Get to the point".

*Upbringing*

Question 3 asked respondents about their family situation growing up. All respondents also indicated that growing up as a child, they were all from low economic backgrounds and some were migrant farm workers. Respondent A said he was a migrant farm worker and his parents had "no formal education".

Respondent B said, "We were poor, below any income standards". Respondent C said that, "we were so poor but so was everyone else I knew. So we really never knew how poor we were until later on in life".

Respondent D indicated that they had almost nothing, but that everyone was like that. Respondent E said in Spanish that they were "pobres" [poor people], "we had nothing and we all worked in the fields". Respondent F said, "we were as poor as everyone else around us, we shared community out-house and showers".

Respondents G and H indicated that they were poor.

Involvement was the next category of questions that will be discussed.

### *Involvement*

The involvement section was a series of questions pertaining to how the participants became involved in their criminal activities. The questions of involvement were questions number 5, 7, 8, 9, and 10.

### *Reasons for Involvement*

Question number 5 asked participants why they became involved in the narcotics trade business.

Respondent A indicated that he became involved in

narcotics trade because of his brother. Respondent B refused to answer question number 5. Respondents C, D, E, F, and H all indicated that they had become involved because of the money. Respondent C said, "It was mostly the money, but also peer pressure". Respondent E stated in Spanish, "La lana" [the money]. Respondent G indicated that he had become involved because of his friends. Respondent G stated, "My friends talked me into it". Respondent H said, "Money, what else". The three main identifiable factors for their involvement in the narcotics trade business was peers, family, and economics.

### *Links*

Question 7 asked the respondents with whom they were in contact with during there criminal activities. Respondent A indicated that he was mostly in contact with his brother. Respondents B, E, G, and H all refused to answer the question. Respondent C said he was in contact with, "Some vatos [guys], old friends from high school". Respondent D only responded by saying, "you know". The researcher can only assume respondent D was referring to undercover agents, because the respondent had persisted that the

undercover agents had been watching him throughout the activities. Respondent F indicated that he was in contact with "undercover agents, but did not know that", at the time.

#### *Initial Contact*

Question number 8 asked the respondents who initiated the drug-trafficking. Respondent A once again indicated that his brother was the individual who initiated the act. Respondents B, G and H declined to answer question number 8. Respondent C said, "My friends did everything since I was a cop, all I had to do was cross the shit". Respondent D answered with two words and gave no other response, "They did". Respondent E said in Spanish, "camaradas" [friends]. Respondent F said "I did", and explained that he had a drug habit to support at the time.

#### *Personal Gain*

In this category, question 9, the respondent was asked what his personal gain would be for helping to transport drugs. Respondent A said he was promised nothing; he did it to help his brother make money. Respondent B did not answer the question. Respondent

F said he was promised drugs if he assisted with the transportation. Respondents C, D, E, G, and H all indicated that money was the primary gain for their participation. Respondent D said he was promised "A couple of thousand". Respondent E replied in Spanish, "La lana" [the money]. In this section monetary reward was the key response for personal gain.

#### *Situational Context*

Question 10 was designed to clarify the situational context at the time of involvement. Question 10 asked the respondents what conditions, if any, prompted them to get involved in their criminal activities. Respondent A indicated that his family prompted him to get involved; his family was in dire need of money at that time, especially his brother. Respondent B only answered by saying that it was personal. Respondents C, D, E, and H indicated that money and/or finances were the root cause that prompted them to get involved in these criminal endeavors. Respondent C also indicated that his personal bills were piling up. Respondent H simply stated, "I needed money". Respondent F once again indicated that it was a bad drug habit that prompted

him to get involved. Respondent F said again in Spanish, "Las drogas" [the drugs]. Respondent G indicated that his friends pressured him into getting involved.

#### *Role*

Questions 4 and 6 pertained to the respondents' role in their criminal situation. Role pertains to the actual duties and/or responsibilities the ex-police officers were assigned during their criminal activities.

#### *Circumstance*

Question number 4 in this category asked to explain the criminal situation that the respondent was involved during the drug-related encounters. Respondent A, B, and C responded that they had been transporting the narcotics from one place to another. Respondent D explained that he was caught and charged with conspiracy. Respondent F said that he was caught selling cocaine to undercover federal agents. Respondents E, G, and H responded by saying that each of them was caught with a couple of hundred pounds of marijuana. Respondent E and H did not specify the

exact amount of narcotics. Respondent G indicated that he was in possession of over 200 pounds of marijuana. All respondents were convicted of the crimes committed to state and federal prisons.

#### *Task*

Question 6 asked, "How did you partake in the drug-trafficking?" Participants A and B did not want to answer the questions. Participants C, D, F, G and H responded that they were the "drivers" of the marijuana loads to be delivered. Respondent C also explained that every now and then he would unload the shipment as well, but did not like to do that because he was spending too much time with the drugs. When asked to explain, he said the duration of time with the drugs was too long. Respondent E said that his job was to wrap the drugs and to dip them in motor oil so that it would be impossible for dogs to sniff it out. He explained that this was a technique often used by drug-smugglers in South Texas.



### *Perception*

Questions 12 and 13 were designed to get an understanding of how the respondents saw their unique situations. Here again, like all questions above, respondents were given plenty of time to think about their responses before answering the questions.

### *Insight*

Question 12 asked the respondents if they thought their involvement was immoral or wrong. Respondents A, C, F, G, all said "yes" with their own variations of why. Respondent A explained that he was just trying to help his family make a little extra money. He said he knew it was very wrong and immoral, but that if he got away with it, his family would have enjoyed the benefits of the money. Respondent B said "yes" and "no": "yes", because it was against the law; and "no", because it was something "natural". When asked to explain himself, he said that marijuana grew from the earth and that there were no chemicals added. Therefore, he thought that what he was doing at the

time was not criminal. This respondent still thinks that marijuana should be legalized, since everyone does it. Respondents D, E, and H also said "yes" and "no". They too explained that it was against the law but that everyone was doing it, so at the time they felt that there was nothing immoral about their activities.

### *Consequences*

Question 13 asked respondents if they anticipated consequences at the time of their involvement. Respondent A and G said "yes". Respondent A commented that it did not matter at the time, if his brother would have gotten the money. Respondent F said yes, and that he was always paranoid during the activities. Respondent B said "yes" but he again mentioned that he did not comprehend the severity of the consequences. Respondent H said that at first he thought he would get caught, but after a while it just became a habit. C, D, and E all said "No". Respondent E said it was too simple and too easy to think of any consequences.

*Practices and Official Responses*

Only three questions were presented in this section. All three questions pertained to practices and official responses. The first question, question number 11, refers to free reign or discretion, whether the police officers were given complete discretion. The second question, question 14, refers to how the respondent was caught. The third question, question number 15, refers to internal affairs and what they thought about the internal affairs in their particular departments.

*Discretion*

Question 11 was answered "yes" by participant A, B, G, and F. Respondent B added, "That is the way all departments operate". Participants C, D, and E responded "Always" when asked if they were ever given free reign while on patrol. Participant H answered, "no one would ever check on us".

*Discovered*

Question 14 asked respondents, "how they were caught?" Participant A explained that he was caught on a routine traffic stop. Respondent A was speeding down

the highway, "I didn't realize how fast I was going", was his response. Participant B did not respond. Participant C, D, F, G and H said that they were caught by federal agents. One of the respondents did not want to be identified but he explained that there was alfalfa hay in the vehicle. It was a huge set up. He explained that his mobile phone was bugged and federal agents were watching his every move. Respondent E indicated an informant turned him in, "Un pinch ratero" [ A Fucking Rat].

#### *Internal Affairs*

Every respondent indicated that there was no internal affairs unit in their departments. Respondent A said, "Usually an officer was assigned an internal affair's case, but usually that officer was involved himself, so nothing ever gets solved, and the case slowly gets forgotten about or lost". Respondent B indicated that his police department was too small to have such a unit, and cops never turned cops in.

#### *Other Criminal Endeavors/Associations*

Other criminal endeavors pertain to their own activities or other officers who might have been

involved in the same criminal activities. Questions 16 through 20 were all questions in this category.

#### *Associated Activities*

The first question, question number 16, in this category asked whether they had participated in other criminal acts besides drug-trafficking. Respondents C and E indicated that they had used drugs before on a daily basis. Respondent C said he was a habitual smoker of marijuana. Respondent E indicated that he used, "marijuana, coca, bolo, lo que seia", [marijuana, cocaine, heroin, whatever]. All other respondents indicated that they had not participated in any other type of activity before.

#### *Prior Associated Activities*

Question 17 asked if they had been involved in other criminal activities before they joined the police force. All respondents indicated that they had not been involved in any type of other criminal activity before they had joined the police force, besides the drug use of respondent C and E.

*Other Corrupt Police Officers*

Question 18 asked the respondents if they knew other officers who had been apprehended in the past. Respondents A, B, and D indicated that they knew other officers who had been arrested before for drug-related activities. All other respondents said "no".

Participant A indicated that he once knew an officer who dealt drugs and committed murder. That officer was charged and incarcerated for both activities.

Respondent B indicated that he had only heard of many officers around the Valley that had been arrested for recreational drug use.

*Same Criminal Activities by Police*

Question 19 asked if they knew other officers in other departments who had been involved in the same activities. Participants A, B, C, D, and F indicated that they did know other officers in other departments who were involved in the same activities but were caught as well. Respondents E and G said "no".

Respondent H did not answer the question, because of an ongoing investigation.

*Corruption by all Others*

The respondents were also asked in question 20 if they knew other people who were involved in drug-trafficking. Seven of the eight participants answered most of their family and friends were involved in such activities. Respondent A said, "Several people in my community were targets and convicted of major drug-trafficking, and several relatives were involved, male and female". Respondent B said, "I knew several people, and I thought I was too smart for that shit, but I guess I was wrong". Respondent C indicated that mostly his friends had been involved in such activities. Respondent D said, "My friends mainly". Most of respondents D's friends were into the drug dealing business during and after high school. Participant E was the only one that indicated that everyone he knew was involved in criminal endeavors such as drug-trafficking, but everyone had been caught. Respondent E stated in Spanish, "Si, todos, primos, compadres, everyone" [yes, everyone, cousins, friends, everyone]. Respondents F and G both responded in Spanish, "Compadres" [friends]. Respondent H indicated that he really couldn't say who exactly was involved.

### *Advice/Reflection*

Advice/Reflection questions were the last three questions of the interview instrument. These questions were set up to finish the interview with reasons for their continued involvement followed by advice and reflections.

### *Reasons for Continued Involvement*

The first question asked if they had ever tried to get out of their criminal activities. Respondent A said he would have done anything at the time to help his family financially, but after this, not anymore. All other participants said no but with unique variations. For example, respondent B said "no" because of his weak morality. He said he knew the money was good, but at the time he thought that drug-trafficking marijuana was not immoral. C and D said "no" because the money was good. Respondents E simply said "No". Respondent F and H answered the question with the same response "Not really". Participant G



said "no" because he was in too deep and could not get out, "once you're in, olvidate" [forget it].

#### *Advice*

The next two questions were simply asking advice for future police officers or for rookie officers. Most participants said that their crimes were not worth it. Respondent A stated that, "Being a Police officer is not always black and white, and not always a straight line, rules have to be bent once in a while." Respondent A also stated that, "If you are not 110% committed to being a law enforcer, take time and think about it. Seek professional advice, not just any punk can be a cop, you have to be strong minded". Respondent B's advice was, "Not to get involved, you cannot go both ways, consequences are severe and embarrassing, especially if you're a police officer, but not just embarrassing to you but your family and close friends". Respondent C simply said, "It's not worth it, no la cagues" [don't fuck up]. Respondent D said the same thing as respondent C, but added that it ruined his life, and he knows he can never go back. Respondent E said, "Don't trust nobody, nobody."

Respondent F said, "Drugs ruin lives, it's not worth it". Respondent G also said, "It's not worth it, no matter how much money, the embarrassment is just too great". Respondent H said, "Don't become a cop if you're messing with drugs, because you get it worse". The constant comparison of the coding brought about two major themes.

During and after the coding two major patterns emerged from the responses. The first was the economic factor. Money was often the key answer in several questions. The constant comparison of responses lead the researcher to discover that money was the primary motivator causing these ex-police officers to partake in international drug-trafficking on the US/Mexico border.

The second pattern that emerged from the constant comparison was that which prompted the ex-police officers to get involved in their criminal activities, friends and family. Friends and family or peers, seemed to be a reappearing theme. The constant contact with peers involved in international drug-trafficking on the US/Mexico border contributed to the ex-police officers becoming corrupt themselves.

## CHAPTER V

### Conclusion

#### *Literature Review Revisited*

In the literature review chapter, several major issues on the causation for police corruption were discussed. One issue in particular emerged from several respondents. This issue is financial reward. In the literature review it is mentioned, that financial gain as a cause to drug-related corruption seems to be a pattern in many studies, which is the obvious case in this study. It was also shown that drug-related police corruption is simply the fact of earning money or other personally desirable rewards (Aultman, 1973; Morton, 1993; Mutchnick, 1979; New York City Mayor's to Investigate Allegations of Police Corruption, 1973). When respondents were asked what their personal gain was for their involvement, many of them said money. When asked what prompted them to get involved, again the responses were reiterated as money. Several answers from the respondents indicated that money was the root cause for their involvement.

The literature review also points out that these desirable rewards are often large amounts of cash and narcotics. As previously mentioned, several officers indicated that most of them were involved because of the money. One respondent explained that he had a habit to support and that he was promised drugs as a reward for his participation. As one can recall, Kappler, et. al. (1998) discussed five major categories of police corruption. The first two categories have the most number of corrupt officers. The first category mentioned is off-duty recreational drug use by police officers, which may involve the greatest number of officers; the second category is on duty drug use by police officers. This is exactly what the researcher discovered in this particular case.

Financial gain is an issue all too common in drug-related police corruption. Money seems to be the root cause in many corruption cases. Money has been proven time and time again as the major theme in most corrupt systems. What has been reinforced from this study is that money is a prime motivator in making a system of good people turn into a system of evil. This theme will continue to be in many more studies if

a solution is not presented to stop corruption, especially in the south Texas region.

The training on ethics can be looked at as well. All of these police officers had several hundred hours in training, yet the maximum number of hours on ethics for these officers was 24 hours. The minimum number of ethics training was 10. Police officers in many small departments are inadequately trained on ethics and police corruption. Several studies agree that many departments lack adequate ethics training and all make recommendations that more hours are needed to better prepare the innocent officer (Bahn, 1974; Huges, 2000; Metchik, 1999; Sharp, et. al. 1997). The researcher had some reservations about the respondents when they were asked in question 12 if they thought their actions were immoral. Several answers varied with a few saying "no". This is an ethical issue that can be discussed in the police academy. This can be a thesis topic in itself. Ethics is something that is very abstract to the nature of individuals' morals and upbringings. However, in the field of law enforcement professional ethics should be constantly reiterated regardless of how many other training hours' one has attained.

Police officers on a daily basis are confronted by many bad people, situations and drugs. Their ethical shield diminishes within and it must be refreshed from time to time; to remind the officers which side of the law they are fighting for. Dantzker's (2003) three main perspectives can be illustrated to understand the abstractness of ethics. In the first perspective the officer brings with him a differing "set of morals, values and norms in which he or she operates" (p.175). These differing factors can contribute to a negative or positive working environment. In the societal perspective, society too has much to contribute to police corruption. Finally, the police environment may also be guilty of assisting in police corruption. When all three begin to gravitate around a distorted system, corruption becomes an external force too strong to resist.

One issue not discussed in the literature review was friends and/or family as a cause for getting involved in narcotics distribution. Several of the respondents indicated that the people around them such as family and friends were often involved in such activities. One respondent in particular indicated that his involvement was due to helping out his

brother earn some money. This same respondent explained that he became involved because of family. Another respondent indicated that his friends pressured him into getting involved in the drug business. Another response that indicated "friends" as being the root cause of their involvement was that the respondent was in contact with a high school friend whom initiated the drug-trafficking.

Other than family satisfaction as a root cause for the participation in drug trafficking there was no other literature discovered on family and/or friends as being the cause of drug-trafficking (Mutchnick, 1979). This particular issue is non-existent. Nothing scholarly has been published about such a discovery, therefore, only assumption can be made. The researcher can somewhat assume reasoning behind the family and friends as a factor to police in drug-related corruption. This phenomenon has to do much with the culture. All participants were Hispanic, of Mexican-American descent. The culture itself is not a cause; however the structure of the culture may be a contributing factor. Fernandez (1989) discusses how the Mexican-American family structure is very strict and close knit. This structure expands to the

extended family and sometimes friends. Fong (1998) illustrates that the Rio Grande Valley is a third world pocket in the richest nation in the world, the United States. Due to these conditions the families and friends come together to overcome the cycle of poverty. Sometimes the means of their approach are not always the right ones. Nevertheless the structure works as a whole for the betterment of the group. This discovery should be explored in depth to justify its validity to the secondary finding of this research project.

The research has produced two significant findings indicating the causation of drug-trafficking on the US/Mexico Border. The first is the desirable rewards that officers may think is fruit-full on a personal level. These desirable rewards can be broken down into two subcategories money and drugs. This was the case in this particular study. The second finding is family and friends, which can be grouped as one, peers. Peers, in this study, have been a reappearing theme by several respondents. Discussion on peers is non-existent in the literature review, and the research found no information on such a topic even



after it begun to appear obvious in the results and analysis chapter.

This area still needs to be explored by the criminal justice arena, especially in the South Texas region of the Rio Grande Valley. There have been too many incidents of police corruption in the quad-county region and it needs to be remedied. Most recently five constables from the Cameron County region have been indicted for drug-related corruption and one chief of police in the mid-valley has also been implicated on charges of drug-related corruption. These officers were discovered in the month of November 2002, during the working span of this project. This is evidently an indicator that causes for drug-related corruption must be evaluated to reduce the epidemic. Recommendations are often available in many studies but when money is concerned how does one recommend a solution to an issue that has plagued the criminal justice system for decades? Peers and family, in the researcher's opinion, seem to be a new and abstract idea. To recommend anything would be ignorant when the issue has not been explored at any level of the justice system. This study may only be a fragment of drug-related corruption but the

researcher hopes that it will have some type of impact. If not in the reader's minds, at least in the mind of the respondents that participated in this thesis. This thesis has been a task that will at the very least have an impact in the researcher's personal life and family.

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APPENDICES:

Appendix A:

Interview Instrument

## Definitions

Drug Trafficking-Any amount of narcotics with the intent to distribute

Criminal Endeavors (Activities)-Those activities considered a legal wrong, specially targeted at Drug-Trafficking.

Ethics-principles, morals, or beliefs of good intentions

Internal Affairs/Internal Investigations -Those working within the department searching for criminal or civil wrongs of police officers

Free Reign - Power invested to Police Officers for the purposes of handling their expected duties

Perceptions - Ones view of something, someone, or an idea

## Demographics

Name (optional)

Age

Gender

Race/Ethnicity

Birthplace

Income

Religious Status

Years as a commissioned Peace Officer

Status of Rank during endeavors

Level of Education

Number of Training Hours

Number of Training Hours on Ethics

## Interview Questions

Where did you grow up?

Tell me a little about yourself?

What was your family situation growing up?

Can you explain your criminal situation?

Why did you get involved in transporting narcotics?

How did you partake in the drug trafficking?

To whom were you in contact with?

Who first initiated the drug trafficking?

What was your personal gain or what was promised to you for participation?

What conditions prompted you to get involved in the criminal activities? (i.e. personal, financial)

Were you given free reign while on duty?

Did you think your actions were criminal?

Did you anticipate consequences if caught?

How were you caught?

What is your perception of internal affairs or internal investigation in your department, if there is any at all?

What about your involvement in other criminal endeavors?

Were you involved in drug trafficking or any other type of criminal activities before you joined the police force?

Did you know other police officers who had been apprehended before?

Do you know of other officers who were involved in the same activities but in other departments?

Were close friends or family members involved in drug trafficking?

Did you ever try to get out of your situation? Why? Why not?

What would you tell the rookie?

Any recommendations?

Appendix B:

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is John Rodriguez, I am a graduate student at the University of Texas-Pan American conducting research for my thesis project titled, *International Drug Trafficking: Police Corruption on the US/Mexico Border*. I would be privileged if you were to assist me in this research, by consenting to be interviewed about the circumstances in which you were involved. Your particular situation would be invaluable to this thesis and my future academic endeavors.

Anonymity will be held in the highest regards. Names will be changed to protect individuals in every manner. Information disclosed will be used for thesis purposes only. Public records of your particular case will also be used to determine court response of your conviction.

It is important for me to note that I will not be liable for any information disclosed of ongoing criminal activities. I am only interested in your particular situation and information of public access.

Thank you,

John J. Rodriguez



## Appendix C:

## Researcher's Consent Release Form

I \_\_\_\_\_ (Print Full Name) agree to be interviewed by Mr. John J. Rodriguez for research purposes only. I understand that Mr. Rodriguez is not liable for any information disclosed to him about ongoing criminal activity. Information disclosed will pertain only to my particular circumstances and any public records available.

(Sign Here) \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix: D

## University Consent Release Form

I, \_\_\_\_\_, have been informed by, John J. Rodriguez, that I am one of approximately 8 subjects that have been asked to volunteer for this study entitled "International Drug Trafficking: Police Corruption on the US/Mexico Border". The study is designed to acquire and analyze activities of your participation in past criminal endeavors.

Participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw at anytime without penalty. This research has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board Human subject's In Research.

For research related problems or questions regarding subjects rights, the Human Subjects committee may be contacted through Dr. Bob Faraji, Chair, at 956-381-2287. I have read and understand the explanations provided to me and voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Signature of Subject \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Witness \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

VITA

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