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The Experience of Conflicting Identities Amongst African American Law Enforcement Officers

Jeremy R. Jones
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Jeremy R. Jones

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Walden University
2021

Abstract

The Experience of Conflicting Identities Amongst African American Law Enforcement

Officers

by

Jeremy R. Jones

MA, Troy University, 2016

BS, Troy University, 2011

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Forensic Psychology

Walden University

November 2021

Abstract

Law enforcement's unjust treatment of African Americans is a worldwide concern but impacts the African American community in different ways, particularly African American law enforcement officers who are placed in conflicting positions. They aspire to see change and more conforming police treatment, compared to other racial populations, but work for the same organization that exhibits the biased treatment they desire to have abolished. The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore African American law enforcement officers' experiences of conflicting identities. The theoretical foundation was based on Turner's theory of self-categorization (SCT). The key research questions addressed African American law enforcement officers' perceptions of the police after the killing of an unarmed African American and African American law enforcement officers' experiences of conflicting identities by being in law enforcement and being African American. The participants were eight African American law enforcement officers. Data from semistructured interviews were analyzed and interpreted using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), resulting in four emergent themes: non-African American law enforcement officers' inability to identify with African Americans, distrust of law enforcement's decision making toward African Americans, feelings as an African American in law enforcement, and frustration with law enforcement's treatment of African Americans. Understanding the participants' experiences is crucial to positive social change in this field because the findings will help develop mental health services specific for African American law enforcement officers, enhance cultural awareness, and improve the relationship between the African American community and law enforcement.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my daughter, Harmony Madison Jones. By completing this research study and obtaining my Ph.D., I hope to have laid the foundation for you, your children, and many generations to come. I hope you view this degree as a benchmark to accomplish more and continue to work hard at everything you do in life. I hope this is a reminder to continuously pursue your passions, regardless of how hard they may be, and to remain ambitious, always striving to improve.

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I want to thank God for his guidance and strength to achieve a goal that many people only dream about. Being a black male, born to a teenage mother, and from a broken home, makes this achievement even more special. Through his vision, I was able to see more than what I was encircled with and withstand this challenging journey.

I want to thank my wife, Nicole Jones, for your patience and support throughout the long four years of obtaining my Ph.D. We have grown so much throughout this time, from bringing Harmony into this world to purchasing our first home, each with its various challenges. I know this time has been stressful for you as well, but through your sacrifice and engagement, I was able to achieve this goal. I couldn't imagine going through this journey with anyone else.

To my friends and family: Thank you for your understanding and help to get through the daily grind of completing this research study. By taking my mind off research for a while or assisting in other ways was hugely valued.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Chattaraman et al. (2010) defined salient identities as a person's identity invoked in specific circumstances, continually adapting to fit the situation better. For African American law enforcement officers, this is a situation that they are all too familiar with. Being a good law enforcement officer requires empathy for others, integrity, devotion to the community, and cultural sensitivity because these fundamental qualities create a more pleasant interaction with the public (Birzer, 2008). However, African Americans' experiences with law enforcement are often adverse because they are met by a profession that treats them in a negatively biased way, resulting in the killing and/or severe injury of unarmed African Americans (Johnson et al., 2018). This makes it difficult for African American law enforcement officers who now have the burden of maintaining the two identities of being African Americans and being law enforcement officers, which can be challenging because both identities are in constant conflict.

By further exploring this conflict in identities for African American police officers, there can be a positive social change in supporting them to be comfortable with both identities and use this richness to help them do their job better.

In this chapter, I present an overview of the current study and a justification of why this research is essential. This chapter contains a discussion of the background and problem statement showing there is a prevalent gap in knowledge and consensus as well as that the problem is current, relevant, and significant to the discipline. I conclude the chapter by describing the study's limitations and the potential contributions of the

research that will advance knowledge in the discipline before summarizing the chapter's main points.

Background

As more viral videos and/or body camera footage are witnessed that depict the unjustifiable deaths and severe injuries of unarmed African Americans, it shows that negatively biased treatment towards African Americans is prevalent in today's society. African Americans have the troublesome burden of maintaining the multiple roles of being Americans, honoring the history, the culture, and the values while being African American; there is some absurdity in embracing patriotism that contradicts their experiences as African Americans (Johnson, 2018). In the United States, African Americans are at greater risk of experiencing law enforcement contact and police-involved harm than any other race (Knox et al., 2020). U.S. police kill more civilians at a much higher rate than any other wealthy country (Edwards et al., 2019), with unarmed African American men killed at a rate of close to 5 times that of European American men in 2015 (Robinson, 2017). The impact of watching this continuous cycle of law enforcement officers' biased mistreatment of African Americans, resulting in serious injury or death, affects people worldwide in various ways. However, for African Americans, they endure an additional 0.14 low mental health days per month of heightened perceptions of systemic racism, lack of fairness, loss of social status and self-regard, increased fear of victimization, greater mortality expectations, increased vigilance, diminished trust in social institutions, reactions of anger, activation of prior traumas, and communal bereavement (Bor et al., 2018).

To comprehend and address the difficulties encountered by African American communities today, people must examine African American communities' origins (Davis, 2020). Traditionally, law enforcement agencies are accustomed to exhibiting negatively biased behavior towards African Americans because society has not yet abolished African Americans' detrimental experiences when encountering the police (Brown, 2019). Until nearly the mid-1900s, since modern policing started, there was a shortage of African American law enforcement officers in the United States (Bolton & Feagin, 2004). As time progressed and new possibilities emerged, African Americans began to populate law enforcement agencies more, even outnumbering other races in some cities in the United States today. Despite this progression, African American law enforcement officers still experience racial profiling when off duty (Paul & Birzer, 2017). They have experienced being stopped, questioned, searched, and arrested due to racial profiling (Barlow & Barlow, 2002). The value of African American law enforcement officers to their agency and communities leads to decreased tensions between police and communities of people of color, enhances the appearance of transparency, and demonstrates inclusion and legitimacy (Bing et al., 2017). However, the practice of bias-based policing, whether by design, omission, personal bias, or failures in procedures, has become a punishment on African American communities in near epidemic proportions (Wilson et al., 2015).

To better understand the phenomenon of conflicting identities and African American law enforcement officers, researchers have explored different aspects of this topic. Duke (2018) focused specifically on African American law enforcement officers

and the occupation strain that they experience due to their ethnicity, determining that law enforcement agencies should promote an impartial culture and provide equal opportunities for everyone while hiring more African Americans for diversification, not solely for affirmative action. Inherited identities, such as race, gender, and class background, or achieved identities, such as occupation or migration, cannot be freely dismissed (Kulich et al., 2017). Female law enforcement officers often encounter conflicting identities that result in negative occupational implications (Veldman et al., 2017). For African American law enforcement officers, the conflicting identities of being African American and being law enforcement officers manifest when circumstances challenge their devotion, commitment, loyalty, roles, values, and expectations of one group against the other group (Kochel, 2020).

Although the research mentioned above yielded a wealth of vital information necessary to progress knowledge in this field, a gap remains that has yet to be filled. Compared to other officers, African American law enforcement officers will respond more favorably to quality-of-life issues, such as neighborhood disputes, family disputes, or fear of crime concerns, to help improve the neighborhood conditions and quality of life for others (Boyd, 2010). However, African American law enforcement officers feel they must transform their identities, mirroring those of their European American coworkers, by expressing their authoritarianism of negative bias towards people of color to survive in police cultures (Johnson, 2006). This way of thinking and the resulting policing methods, which often leads to the negatively biased treatment and/or killing of unarmed African Americans, conflicts with many African American law enforcement officers' beliefs. The

gap in understanding concerning African American law enforcement officers' experiences of conflicting identities of being African American and working in a profession that treats African Americans in a negatively biased manner has yet to be explored. The results of this study have implications for positive social change, condition improvements for African American law enforcement officers, and practical and academic application.

Problem Statement

Historically, African Americans and the police have had a challenging relationship with one another. Their relationship has been filled with distrust and the misuse of authority that persists still today (Carter, 2016). When compared to other races, African Americans are far more likely to encounter aggressive nonvoluntary interactions with the police (Edwards et al., 2019) and be disproportionately represented in all phases of the criminal justice system (Headley et al., 2020). This poor treatment, coupled with the killing and serious injury of unarmed African Americans, has created a sense of wariness amongst this population (Tyler, 2005). Today, police shootings of African Americans have reached epidemic proportions and have captured global recognition, with research discovering associations between racial bias and police violence (Ellawala, 2016).

Alongside this reality, there are also numerous African Americans who join law enforcement. They not only have to experience their colleagues being negatively biased toward African American citizens while on duty, but they continue to endure it while off duty. Such incidents further fuel African American officers' commitment to their goals of

wanting to make a change as law enforcement officers while also standing with other African Americans to prevent the unjustified killing of unarmed African Americans (White et al., 2010)

Dukes (2018) and Johnson (2018) explored patriotism and African Americans' conflicting identities, noting that African Americans continually perceive themselves through the lens of the dominant society, creating internal psychological conflict amongst their identities. Furthermore, African American law enforcement officers desire to display the American essence of patriotism and devotion to their duties; however, this directly contradicts the Black identity, an identity that Black Americans are the victim of Americanism, systemic racism, and hegemonic patriotism (Du Bois, 1903). In this study, I sought to fill a gap in the research by focusing specifically on African American law enforcement officers' conflicting identities and their perceptions of the killings of unarmed African Americans.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research study was to explore African American law enforcement officers' experiences of their conflicting identities of working in law enforcement that treats African Americans in a negatively biased way. There is an increasing need for a better understanding concerning this issue because the unarmed killing of African Americans continues to be a prevalent issue today (Robinson, 2017). I used a qualitative, interpretative, phenomenological approach and collected data through semistructured interviews in this study.

Research Questions

RQ1: How do African American law enforcement officers perceive the police after the killing of an unarmed African American?

RQ2: How have African American law enforcement officers experienced conflicting identities by being in law enforcement and by being African American?

Theoretical Framework

This study was framed by Turner et al.'s (1987) theory of self-categorization. This conceptual extension of social identity theory seeks to understand and explain how people form cognitive representations of themselves and others concerning different social groups. According to social identity theory, people develop a sense of personal identity, maintain multiple social identities, and group memberships guide intergroup behavior and influence an individual's self-concept (Tajfel et al., 1979).

SCT further developed social identity theory by explicating the cognitive processes by which people categorize themselves and others and define themselves in terms of membership within different social groups (Trepte & Loy, 2017). Furthermore, SCT addresses the psychological group's problem, providing additional information on individuals' ability to act, think, and feel as a collective group and express their different unique personalities and personal views (Turner & Reynolds, 2012). The concept of salient identity refers to how people respond to different situations, considering their multiple identities (Maeder & Yamamoto, 2019). For African Americans, being an African American law enforcement officer signifies that they have two identities. They

are African Americans and law enforcement officers working for a system that treats African Americans with negatively biased behavior. Thus, African American police may have their central identities at odds with each other.

Nature of the Study

In this qualitative study, I explored African American law enforcement officers' lived experiences working in a profession that treats African Americans with negatively biased behavior while focusing on their conflicting identities. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) guided the methodology used. IPA is used to help achieve a deeper understanding of individuals' subjective experiences while emphasizing personal perspective and interpretation (Bhar, 2019). This approach was appropriate for this study because IPA provides researchers with the best opportunity to understand how participants make sense of their lived experiences (see Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). IPA also empowers participants to express themselves and their stories as they see fit without distortion or reprisal (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). African American law enforcement officers revealed their experiences regarding a sensitive and personal subject to help me assemble a pattern of themes that could plausibly lead to the betterment of African American law enforcement officers' conditions.

I collected data from African American law enforcement officers by asking a sequence of questions during semistructured interviews. As per the IPA data analysis process, a series of discrete steps was followed, beginning with transcribing the interviews. I then reviewed the transcriptions of the interviews, which was followed by the transformation of emerging themes and the clustering of the collected themes before

concluding by writing a paragraph describing what the participants have experienced and how they experienced the phenomenon in a contextual format (see Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith & Shinebourne, 2012).

Definitions

African Americans: U.S. citizens who are mainly of African heritage, but also have non-Black ancestors as well (Lynch, 2020). Americans with at least partial sub-Saharan African ancestry (U.S. Legal, 1998).

Black: Those born in, or with ancestral roots linked to, the United States, Canada, South America, the Caribbean, and Africa (Griffith et al., 2011). In this study, the word “Black” was an alternative word used to describe African Americans.

Conflicting identity: When two or more identities with incompatible norms are equally salient in each moment, resulting in a state of behavioral conflict within the individual (Kulich et al., 2017).

Explicit bias: Attitudes, beliefs, and stereotypes that an individual claims as part of themselves and are measured by asking someone to identify their ideas (James, 2018).

Implicit bias: Subtle and largely unconscious or semiconscious attitudes that influence behavior; measured in a more nuanced way (Dasgupta, 2013).

Law enforcement officer: People who have taken an oath to uphold all laws and enforce violations of the U.S. Constitution, state, and local regulations. Law enforcement officers also have the responsibility to prevent crime, provide services, investigate crimes, apprehend criminals, and maintain order (Willis, 2009).

Lived experience: The Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research (2008) defined lived experience as a representation and understanding of research subjects' human experiences and choices and how those factors influence their perception of knowledge. Lived experiences refer to how subjective factors of individuals' identities, including race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, political associations, and other roles and characteristics, define how people live their daily lives and lead to self-awareness that acknowledges the integrity of individual life and how separate life experiences can resemble and respond to a larger public and social theme.

Minority: A racial, political, or ethnic group that is in less than most of the larger population and/or larger group (Greer, 2011).

Officer involved killings: Killings or deaths in any interaction with the police where the officer uses force and the citizen dies during or immediately after the interaction (Legewie & Fagan, 2016).

Psychological distress: Subjective uncomfortable states, including malaise (i.e., lethargy, weakness, headaches, cold sweats, trembling hands, fainting spells, etc.), anxiety (i.e., feeling afraid, worried, irritable, fidgety, and/or tense), and depression (i.e., feeling sad, lonely, etc.; Mouzon et al., 2016).

Racial discrimination: Any distinction, exclusion, or restriction based on race, color, descent, or ethnic origin that has the intention of invalidating or diminishing the recognition, enjoyment, or application of human rights and fundamental freedoms in any field of public life (Fugazza, 2003).

Assumptions

The assumptions listed below are significant to this study's meaningfulness because they are believed but cannot be demonstrated to be true. I assumed that in-depth, semistructured, face-to-face interviews were suitable for understanding African American law enforcement officers' experience of conflicting identities of being African American and working in a profession that has and continues to treat African Americans in a negatively biased way. The interview questions were formulated to deter confusion and encourage the participants to provide details and responses that were thoroughly elaborated on.

Another assumption was that participants possessed experiences similar to those of other African American police officers in terms of sample selection. Participants were assumed to not have overly positive or overly negative experiences compared to their peers.

I also assumed that participants were frank and straightforward in their disclosures and were not pursuing personal or ulterior agendas. Expressly, I assumed that participants were neither exaggerating nor minimizing the problematic experiences they chose to discuss during the interviews. Another important assumption was that as the researcher, I recognized and managed any biases that I may have had and remained objective throughout the entire process.

Scope and Delimitations

This study addressed multiple aspects of the research problem, with African American law enforcement officers' conflicting identities being the primary focus. Due to

the lack of information that has been ascertained on this topic, I chose this specific focus to provide law enforcement with the necessary knowledge to accommodate African American law enforcement officers with more functional mental health services. Another aspect of the research problem addressed in this study was the unlawful killing, serious injury, and negatively biased treatment towards African Americans by law enforcement. Legewie and Fagan (2016) discovered that the threat of Black crime predominantly stimulates group threat. As Black-on-White homicides increase, so does officer-involved killings of African Americans (Legewie & Fagan, 2016). I selected this aspect of the research problem to make law enforcement a more desirable profession for African Americans. Diversifying police agencies helps mitigate group threats and reduces the number of officer-involved killings (Legewie & Fagan, 2016). Lastly, the relationship between the African American community and law enforcement is another aspect of the research problem that was addressed in this study. The information yielded from this study provided insights into more culturally sensitive methods of managing calls for service.

My theoretical target population for this study was all African American law enforcement officers in the United States, with an accessible population of African American law enforcement officers in multiple cities and states in the United States. I employed self-selective and snowball sampling by advertising this study with multiple Black law enforcement organizations via social media, such as the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE), the National Black Police Association (NBPA), and the National Black Troopers Coalition, for participation. Inclusion

consisted of certified African American law enforcement officers to include individuals within the “African American” and “Black” categories as identified in the definitions section. Further inclusions were African American law enforcement officers that were active or retired with 2 or more years of service. This study excluded African American law enforcement officers who never worked in the United States, non-African American law enforcement officers, or anyone with a personal relationship with me. This included family members, friends, coworkers, or professional and personal associates

I established transferability of the study findings by providing comprehensive, detailed information of the phenomenon and fully reporting the data obtained from participants concerning their cultural and social connections.

Limitations

Several barriers and limitations are typically linked with methodologies and study designs similar to the ones used in the current study. Limitations associated with qualitative research studies consist of, but are not limited to: They generally have smaller sample sizes, which makes generalizability to the entire research population impossible, although generalizability is outside the aim of qualitative research (Almeida et al., 2017; Rahman, 2016).

The geographic limitation was also a factor because all participants were only from the United States. African Americans who relocate and work as law enforcement officers in other countries may have different experiences and perspectives. The negative racial bias could be more profound due to the lack of diversity in other countries or less severe, depending on their country of residence.

A third limitation may be self-selection bias, possibly the most notable bias that could affect this research study because participants can decide entirely whether they want to participate (see Lavrakas, 2008). It was reasonable to assume that some participants may have elected to participate in this study for reasons that did not serve the purpose of the research study, only their personal goals. In any research inquiry, researcher bias is always a concern that should be recognized, acknowledged, and addressed before starting the study. However, any possible areas for preference were managed, minimized, or eliminated through mindfulness, accountability measures, and journaling (see Trafimow, 2014; Yin, 2013).

Significance

This study filled a gap in understanding by exploring African American law enforcement officers' experiences of their conflicting identities of working in law enforcement that treats African Americans with biased behavior. This unprecedented inquiry provided insight into an area with a dearth of information and was significant to better understand salient identities in African American law enforcement officers (see Thompson, 1999). The results of this study will support professional practice and practical application because training methods for law enforcement can plausibly be developed and/or enhanced using the findings of this study to better support cultural understanding and more effective mental/psychological assistance of African Americans. Blumberg et al. (2019) emphasized that modern policing complexities require law enforcement agencies to expand how officers are trained to do their jobs and that it is no longer enough for training to focus solely on the law or perishable skills.

In terms of positive social change, this study provides information to address potential distress amongst African American law enforcement that is brought upon by conflicting identities (see Trujillo, 2018). Combating distress and anxiety amongst African American law enforcement officers can lead to improved physical and mental health, longer life expectancies, a decrease in chronic diseases common amongst African Americans, and alcoholism (Ellis et al., 2015).

Summary

Many studies have been conducted on African Americans and law enforcement officers because researchers have yearned to gain a deeper understanding of these two entities individually. However, only a few have examined the conflicting identities of law enforcement officers, and none has explicitly focused on African American law enforcement officers and conflicting identities. The lack of knowledge in this domain is troubling because African American law enforcement officers continue to battle mental health concerns from conflicting identities. At the same time, no practical or academic solutions have been identified. This study will improve the conditions for African American law enforcement officers by discovering the answers to the posed research questions. The following chapter will detail the strategies I employed to obtain previous literature, this study's theoretical foundation, a comprehensive discussion of relevant literature, and close with the summary and conclusion.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The relationship between the African American community and law enforcement has never been peaceful (Butler, 2017). The notion that African Americans are more threatening due to their more prominent statures (Wilson et al., 2017), the implicit dehumanization of African Americans (Ellawala, 2016), or other racial biases that influence law enforcement's decision-making (Correll et al., 2007) oftentimes leads to negatively biased treatment being perpetrated towards African Americans. This puts African American law enforcement officers in a challenging position. They now face the complicated difficulty of working for an organization that treats African Americans with negatively biased behavior while still needing to uphold their sworn oath of protecting and serving.

There is a shortage of information concerning conflicting identities and African American law enforcement officers. However, researchers have explored similar topics in studies on veterans' identities as soldiers and their identities as civilians (Smith & True, 2014), gender-work identity conflict amongst female police officers (Veldman et al., 2017), and African American police's experience of being racially profiled when off-duty (Barlow & Barlow, 2002; Wilson et al., 2015). In this study, I explored African American law enforcement officers' experiences of conflicting identities in law enforcement, a profession that treats African Americans with negatively biased behavior.

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the literature search strategies and the theoretical framework that guided the study. The literature review section will contain an overview of all the current and relevant literature related to the topic under study. I

conclude the chapter with a summary and a disclosure of how this study contributes to addressing the existing literature gaps.

Literature Search Strategies

To obtain peer-reviewed journals and scholarly articles pertaining to African American law enforcement officers' conflicting identities, I primarily used databases accessible through the Walden University Library and Google Scholar. because they furnished comprehensive articles relating to my search terms and provided ease of applying filters to match my search criteria for research articles related to my topic that were published within the last 5 years. I searched the PsycNET, PsycINFO, SAGE Knowledge, SAGE Journals, ResearchGate, ProQuest, and EBSCO databases and past issues of the *Journal of Black Psychology*, *Journal of Black Studies*, and *Police Quarterly*. Due to the absence of available research focusing specifically on African American law enforcement officers' conflicting identities, I explored conflicting identities in comparable circumstances, such as veteran-civilian conflict, religion-lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) conflict, women in a male-dominated profession conflict, and others. I also used academic books and renowned news articles to gather information specifically on the research topic.

I used various words, phrases, and Boolean operators to obtain a wide array of relevant articles. The keywords used were: *conflicting identity*, *African American law enforcement*, *law enforcement-African American relationship*, *law enforcement's perception of African Americans*, *African Americans' perception of law enforcement*, *negative bias treatment of African Americans*, *role conflict*, *mental health AND veteran*

to civilian identity conflict, sexual preference and religion conflict, experience of African American law enforcement officers, law enforcement treatment of minorities, double consciousness, African American law enforcement officers' perception of unjustifiable killings, and White officers,

Theoretical Foundation: Self-Categorization Theory

SCT served as the theoretical framework for this study. The origin of SCT began with psychologist, John Turner, who endeavored to advance Tajfel's social identity theory. In 1971, the initial development of SCT had begun as Turner conducted minimal group studies to explore the outcomes of reward magnitude and comparability of the outgroup on minimal intergroup discrimination where self-interest was related to ingroup profit (Turner et al., 1979; Turner & Reynolds, 2012). Turner presented a potential economic conflict to 62 teenage boys and girls and asked them to decide how financial rewards should be allocated between the ingroup and other groups, where personal gain depended on the amount of money awarded to the ingroup (Turner et al., 1979; Turner & Reynolds, 2012). Their study revealed that the social categorization of participants into groups, in isolation from all variables customarily thought to cause group formation and negative intergroup attitudes, were sufficient for discrimination (Turner & Reynolds, 2012). Continuing their work towards SCT development, Turner and Reynolds (2012) found it necessary to address what determines which identity emerges in a given situation. Over the next several years, Turner finalized the construction of SCT through three fundamental steps. First, Turner and Reynolds distinguished between personal identity and social identity and theorized that social identity is the source of group

behavior. They elaborated on the personal-social identity distinction to self-categorization levels and then systematically programmed research on the self-concept and stereotyping. Understanding that human beings are individuals and group members, Turner and Reynolds (2012) explained that people possess personal and social identities. Personal identity is a person's uniqueness from others, individuality, and distinctiveness, while social identity refers to the individual in terms of their shared similarities with members of certain social groups (Robins & Foster, 1994). Turner et al.'s (1992) view of social identity as the source of group behavior was based on the idea that as shared social identity becomes salient, individual self-perception becomes depersonalized. Individuals will define themselves less as individual persons and more as an interchangeable representative of shared social category membership (Turner et al., 1992)

SCT is a theory that acknowledges that people classify as both individuals and group members, describes how and when people will define themselves as individual and group entities and the implications of this, and analyzes the impact of this variability in self-perception for understandings of mind and behavior (Turner & Reynolds, 2012). People who belong to a specific group comply with their normative expectations of how other group members behave (Turner, 1991). When this identity increases, an individual becomes more likely to embrace the behavioral norms identified with that category. Simultaneously, the group's expectations will have a more negligible effect as identification with a social group declines (Hirsh & Kang, 2016). Embodying many theoretical propositions of social identity theory, SCT is an extended, valuable, new component of social identity theory differentiated based on its views on social and

personal identity (Hogg & Terry, 2000). Identity salience, the significance an identity has for an individual themselves or in their perception of others (Jackson & Hogg, 2010), and the probability that an individual will invoke a particular identity in social situations (Brenner et al., 2014) is a crucial SCT concept. The process of SCT takes place and shapes people's behavior within group settings through social identity salience, intra-group similarity, psychological attachment to the group, and adherence to the group (Beauchamp, 2019). People's identities become salient when they are perceived, or view themselves, as a group member rather than a unique individual, shifting their behavior from the interpersonal level, individual characteristics to the intergroup level, and social category memberships towards similarities (Bacharach et al., 1983; Bosak et al., 2018).

For example, African American law enforcement officers' identities as African Americans are most salient when they witness negatively biased treatment being committed to people who look like them by people who took the same oaths. Circumstances such as that invoke reflections of belonging and the significance of their group identities on their beliefs and values. SCT has the approach that social identity can operate to the relative exclusion of personal identity (Turner, 1995), hypothesizing that the goal is to generate group behavior and attitudes and that the cognitive mechanism makes group behavior feasible (Turner & Onorato, 1999).

There are three kinds of self-categorization: ingroup categorization, outgroup categorization, and intergroup categorization (Leonardelli & Toh, 2015). Ingroup categorization occurs when people identify others as similar to themselves but cannot identify others who are not similar to them as forming a salient identity (Leonardelli &

Toh, 2015). Outgroup categorization occurs when people view people who are similar to each other but dissimilar to the perceivers (Leonardelli & Toh, 2015). Intergroup categorization occurs when meta-contrast, the tendency for group members to see strong similarities between themselves and other members of their group and see significant differences with other groups, is observed from an individual and others (Leonardelli & Toh, 2015). Assumptions of SCT are that an individual's mental images of themselves take the form of self-categorization, categorization transpires when people evaluate similar and contrasting ideas, and self-categorizations exist as part of a hierarchy of increasingly inclusive self-categories (Haslam & Ellemers, 2005; Leonardelli & Toh, 2015). People will naturally group with others similar to them in social comparison and respond as a unique personality in one context while also displaying collective similarities as a group member in another.

Furthermore, people will define themselves differently in different situations, and the way they categorize themselves will influence how they will react to that situation (Self-Categorization Theory, 2016). As people take on multiple social and professional memberships, the likelihood of intra-group and intergroup conflicts escalates. For example, a law enforcement officer who supports the Black Lives Matter movement by protesting and advocating change while also supporting "Blue Lives Matter" will encounter conflict between the two groups and disputes between the members of one or both groups due to the conflicting ideologies. People stereotype themselves, which leads to a heightened perceptual identity between self and the ingroup members and a

magnified perceptual distinction between ingroup and outgroup members (Turner & Onorato, 1999).

Self-categorization is predicted by the interplays of perceiver readiness, comparative fit, and normative fit (Yang & Zang, 2012). Perceiver readiness is people's contribution to the categorization process as their differences influence them towards some categorizations but not others (Reid & Hogg, 2005). For example, an African American law enforcement officer committed to the identity of an African American and less so to the identity of a law enforcement officer would be more prone to self-categorize as an African American.

Comparative fit is a cognitive process where people recognize differences between various social groups, requiring people's individual qualities to align with the group's characteristics for comparative fit (Beauchamp, 2019; Marinho & Totaro, 2019). For example, African American police officers in a therapy group made up of other African American police officers will identify with a African American police officer's features to a greater extent when participating in that group than participating in a group that is not made up of African American law enforcement officers.

By contrast, normative fit is the extent to which similarities and differences account for group members' behavioral patterns and a person's individual perceived association with those patterns (Beauchamp, 2019; Turner & Reynolds, 2012). For example, suppose a law enforcement officer believes that their colleagues perceived ethical competencies are analogous to their values and beliefs. In that case, they may perceive themselves to fit soundly with that group. Conversely, if their colleagues are

perceived to be considerably more or less ethically competent than the individual, they may not see the individual fit within that group. Comparative fit often leads to social identities becoming salient as people observe smaller differences between group memberships. In contrast, people's expectations of group members' positions on content-related issues, in normative fit, are reflected by their observation of similarities and dissimilarities between them (Haslam et al., 1999; Hornung et al., 2019).

Although there is limited research on how SCT has been applied previously in ways similar to the current study, previous findings were impactful and meaningful to the target population. SCT has been used at understanding the perceived conflict between women's gender and leader identities (Karelaia & Guillén, 2014), the conflict between gender and work identities in male-dominated professions (Veldman et al., 2017), and bystander intervention during violent events (Levine et al., 2002). This is meaningful today because the world witnessed one of the most blatant acts of negatively biased law enforcement behavior towards George Floyd as other law enforcement officers and onlookers waited and observed until his demise.

My rationale for choosing SCT as the theoretical foundation for this study was that SCT provides the best opportunity to fill the gap in knowledge concerning African American law enforcement officers' experiences of conflicting identities from working in an organization that treats African Americans in a negatively biased way. Salience describes the way situations are categorized and given meaning because the way the perceiver views the situation will determine both self-perception and behavior (Turner & Reynolds, 2019). People often maintain dual roles that share equivalent underlying values

or inclinations, and this will lead to identity salience, depersonalization, and then group acclimatization. However, African American law enforcement officers' circumstances are a direct conflict with one another, prompting identity salience and raising the question of how it impacts their overall well-being. SCT centers on people's characteristics and their group memberships as well as how each plays a meaningful role in forming people's perspectives, values, beliefs, and behavior. Understanding how African American law enforcement officers view law enforcement amid the unjustifiable killing and serious injury of unarmed African Americans is aligned with the theoretical propositions of SCT. The research questions helped build upon SCT because they were used to examine a topic that has not been previously explored. The data obtained to address the research questions will help set a precedent for future researchers who elect to use SCT as their methodology in similar studies.

Literature Review

I conducted an exhaustive search of studies related to African American law enforcement officers' conflicting identities working in a profession that treats African Americans with negatively biased behavior. My search revealed that no studies focused specifically on this topic; however, researchers had explored conflicting identities and biased mistreatment of people of color in the circumstances comparable to the current study's topic. Other studies have examined people's emotional reactions to ethnic minority groups (Verkuyten et al., 1999), conflicting identities of sports employees who are also LGBT (Melton & Cunningham, 2014), identity influences on moral decision making (Carter, 2013), identity fusion among U.S. military veterans and service members

(Hart & Lancaster, 2019), and multiple identities among immigrants (Fleischmann et al., 2019). Despite the absence of specific research articles, the referenced studies guided the limited understanding of conflicting identities of African American law enforcement officers working in a profession that treats African Americans with negatively biased behavior before the current study took place. The following studies should be interpreted cautiously because they are not specific to the research topic.

Development of American Law Enforcement

May 14, 1607, marked the beginning journey to develop a new land as the Susan Constant, the Godspeed, and the Discovery all settled in Northern America. The 104 male settlers began making significant progress, prompting more people to come to the new land and expand into more unexplored territory. During this time, the need for more formal rules and rule enforcers became evident as cities became increasingly crowded, dangerous, and dirty (Lee, 2018). Crimes of stealing and looting had become common as people perpetrated unlawful conduct to survive (Herrmann, 2011). The United States began with a "watch system," consisting of volunteers called Watchmen, who were relied upon to ensure that the laws were being adhered to and were asked to enforce basic regulations (Camden et al., 2020; Stoughton, 2017). The watch system was ineffective due to the lack of ethical commitment amongst the Watchmen, so the United States replaced it with a practice developed by Sir Robert Peel in London (Camden et al., 2020; Stoughton, 2017). Peel's system is rooted in his nine principles. Those principles are: law enforcement's primary mission is to prevent crime and disorder, approval of the public must be gained through actions and good relationships, willing cooperation of the public

has to be earned and not forced, impartial service to the law is vital, necessary physical force to secure observance of the law is a last resort, actions should be directed strictly towards their duties, and that police effectiveness is based on the absence of crime and disorder (Williams, 2003). Peel's nine principles laid the foundation for starting a centralized and unified police system in England. This newly implemented system in London derived the first metropolitan police department in New York City, consisting of 16 officers that would be expanded to 800 officers merely one year later (Jones, 2004; Peak & Everett, 2017).

Although the Northern sector of the U.S. implemented many of Peel's principles, the South had an entirely different experience. Many historians demonstrate regional bias, as their historical accounts of United States' police development are only told from the Northern perspective (Reichel, 1988). Law enforcement evolved differently in the South as they were not primarily focused on mitigating crime and disorder but rather preserving the slavery system (Turner et al., 2006). Hundreds of slaves outnumbered many slave owners, so the fear of losing supremacy over African Americans and not having complete control over them was a concerning issue (Bass, 2001). This was addressed by the institution of slave patrols (Reichel, 1988), and it would establish the basis of how African Americans would be policed as law enforcement progressed throughout the history of the United States (Dulaney, 1996). Slave patrols were groups of White men who captured runaway slaves, imposed discipline upon them, and assured slaves were compliant in their involuntary servitude (Sandle, 2017).

Groups consisted of approximately ten people from the lowest white society ranks to plantation owners (Hadden, 2001). They were armed with guns and whips and allowed to exert any force deemed necessary on suspected runaway slaves (Sandle, 2017). Furthermore, they could enter anyone's home without permission if they were suspected of harboring slaves, thus violating the law (Turner et al., 2006). Slave patrols were flourishing, so more African Americans were enslaved, and the slave patrols were expanded upon. Slave codes were then established to justify racial power and legalize the ownership of slaves. This provided slave patrols with the basis of legitimate authority (Sandle, 2017). Slave codes were a set of rules that varied from state to state that controlled all enslaved African Americans (Parker, 2020). Slave codes were extremely repressive and resulted in harsh punishment if slaves were determined to have violated them (Turner et al., 2006). Slave patrols ultimately ended following the Civil War's conclusion between the North and South of the United States. They were replaced with a more traditional law enforcement unit that mirrored the North (Sandle, 2017). Although slave patrols were more than a century ago, they still influence modern policing of the concept of paying people to enforce rules, profiling individuals, and the terms beat and patrol (Sandle, 2017).

Once law enforcement became more uniform in America, its development to today's date progressed through three different law enforcement eras. Those eras are the political era (1840-1930), the reform era (1930-1980), and the community policing era (1980-present), with none of the periods being desirable for African Americans. The political era represents a time where law enforcement was closely tied to politicians.

Unlike its English model, United States law enforcement lacked the crown's powerful authority to establish legitimate agencies (Kelling & Moore, 1989). Corruption was at an all-time high (Sullivan, 2009). Law enforcement assisted political leaders in winning elections by forcing citizens to vote for their preferred candidates and rigging elections in exchange for employment and financial gratuities (Sullivan, 2009).

The reform era was when law enforcement became more technologically advanced, designing devices to mitigate criminal behavior and develop recruits into better officers (Sullivan, 2009). August Vollmer, the former Berkley police chief, was a pillar during this era, profoundly recognized as the father of United States modern policing. He has been credited with creating a centralized police records system, starting the first police academy, being the first to use radio communications between officers, forming the first juvenile division in the United States and much more (Peak & Everett, 2017). As law enforcement and the United States were forging ahead, African Americans remained in a time where their rights remained restricted, and their hopes for a better future were uncertain. Despite the daily resistance from White Americans, African Americans saw an opportunity for change in the reform era. Civil rights marches, boycotts, and peaceful protests were utilized to obtain this change. However, their efforts were met with strong-arm police tactics, police brutality, attack dogs, and water hoses (Lewis, 2005).

Lastly, the community policing era, which we are currently in, is an era where law enforcement's focus is to strengthen their relationship with the community (Sullivan, 2009). Community-law enforcement-specific units have been created to attend community meetings, create community events, and visit grade schools and colleges.

These units' primary goals are to promote law enforcement while building better relationships with the community. They hope that better relationships with the community will encourage more community participation in reporting crimes, more willingness to serve as witnesses, and present law enforcement in a more favorable light, rather than only being seen when someone is being carried off to jail or when disorder exists. Despite their efforts, the criminal justice system continued to add to African Americans' lack of trust in their system due to many inequalities.

African Americans Lack Trust in the Justice System

Many historical events, inequalities, and negative biased treatment have influenced African Americans' perceptions of law enforcement. The following will highlight other influencers that have shaped African Americans' opinions about law enforcement that remains today. This information is applicable as it further explains the conflict of African American law enforcement officers' identities.

Wrongful convictions are the conviction of innocent people whose judgments were obtained in violation of constitutional or other procedural rights in a manner not deemed harmless error (Zalman, 2012). Going to prison is difficult to bear, but going to prison as an innocent person makes it all that more troublesome. This is the reality that African Americans live in, as African Americans account for 61% of those released from prison through DNA exoneration (Howard, 2019). Most wrongful convictions occur from eyewitness/victim misidentification, flawed forensics, false confessions, law enforcement misconduct, incompetent lawyers, false confessions, and all-White juries (Duncan, 2019; Johnson et al., 2013). For example, the most notable is the Central Park Five (Antron

McCray, Raymond Santana Jr., Kevin Richardson, Yusef Salaam, and Kharey Wise). Their case encompassed most of the abovementioned circumstances, leading to their wrongful convictions and years in prison. All five African American teenagers were accused of physically and sexually attacking a White woman (Stratton, 2015).

Wrongful convictions are significantly higher among African Americans (Bjerk & Helland, 2020). Furthermore, like most American criminal justice system circumstances, there is a profound disparity between African Americans' and White Americans' judicial processing when charged with the same crime under the same circumstances (Hall, 2020). For example, White male Brock Turner, a Stanford University, swim team member, was convicted of three counts of sexual assault and was sentenced to only six months in prison while only serving three (Kebodeaux, 2017). His case had direct incriminating evidence and eyewitnesses who saw him on top of the victim, yet he still received a trivial sentence when facing more than a decade.

A system considered the most accurate method of determining innocent or guilt far too often imprisons innocent African Americans. As awful as this may seem, wrongful convictions are not just rare anomalies but rather numerous enough to indeed affect society's perceptions of the justice system (Bjerk & Helland, 2020). When wrongfully accused and convicted of a crime, the African American community suffers in many ways. They experience negative attitudes towards the criminal justice system, loss of identity, stigma, psychological and physical health difficulties, financial troubles, traumatic experiences in prison, and adjustment difficulties (Brooks & Greenburg, 2020; Scott, 2010). Recognizing that they contribute in some way to this injustice. African

American law enforcement officers will encounter a conflict of identity as they work for an organization that treats their community with biased behavior and unjustly confines them for crimes they did not commit.

The criminal justice system's negligence of convicting police officers or other White Americans who commit negative biased behavior and unjust murders against African Americans contributes to African Americans' distrust as a community towards the criminal justice system. For example, White law enforcement officers fatally shot unarmed African Americans Michael Brown, Samuel DuBose, and Tamir Rice. Still, they would never receive justice as they were never criminally convicted for their crimes. Between 2005-2019 only 104 police officers were arrested for murders during on-duty shootings, with only 35 convictions (Stinson et al., 2019) despite as many as 2,000 on-duty killings occurring between 2018-2019 (Schwartz, 2020). Too often, District Attorney's lack a sense of urgency for prosecuting officers who unjustifiably use lethal force against African Americans and then intensifies their absence of concern by failing to establish the presence of probable cause to a grand jury to secure an indictment (Lara, 2016). This incompetence can plausibly be motivated by the reciprocal relationship between the district attorney and the police, as they both depend on each other to be prosperous in their fields (Lara, 2016).

Race and other observable and psychological characteristics influence jurors when determining their innocence or guilt. (Devine & Caughlin, 2014). A defendant's race impacts how defendants are perceived as jurors generally perceive White defendants more positively than African American defendants (Huff et al., 2018), resulting in fewer

convictions for White people (de Lima et al., 2019). People will implicitly or explicitly decide a defendant's fate based on what is more familiar and comparable to them. For those jurors whose racial identity is salient, conviction rates tend to be lower (Maeder & Ewanation, 2018). Conversely, conviction rates are higher for outgroup defendants belonging to other ethnicities (Leippe et al., 2017). When racial issues are salient White people will respond in a socially desirable way, yet, conversely, when racial issues are not prominent, they express bias by relying on their racial stereotypes when evaluating evidence and rendering a verdict (Maeder & Ewanation, 2018).

There was a time when White Americans could merely accuse an African American of a crime or doing something offensive to them, and it resulted in an automatic death sentence, legally or illegally. For example, Emmett Till and Henry Marrow were falsely accused of saying offensive comments to two White women. This resulted in their family members taking the law into their own hands, mercilessly killing them, and avoiding criminal prosecution (Tyson, 2017). For further illustration, Latasha Harlins, a fifteen-year-old African American girl, was shot in the back of the head by a Korean woman, Soon Ja Du, as she thought Latasha was attempting to steal a bottle of orange juice (Cairns, 2014). The jury found Soon Ja Du's guilty on a lesser charge of voluntary manslaughter than her initial criminal charge of murder, and she received no prison time, only probation. The past and present lack of justice that African Americans obtain after being treated with biased behavior and unjustly murdered considerably mitigate the limited trust they have in law enforcement and the criminal justice system.

Law enforcement officers who are unwilling to report police misconduct further damage African Americans' trust in them. In law enforcement, the terms "thin blue line," "blue wall of silence," and "code of silence" are often spoken to inspire solidarity and establish an environment where police officers look out for one another. The simple display of a blue line going from one end to the other on a decal placed on a vehicle informs the police that this person is somehow associated with law enforcement and that special consideration should be given. Conversely, those terms represent further persecution and disappointment for African Americans as law enforcement officers continue to exhibit negatively biased behavior on African Americans without punishment. Some law enforcement officers are reluctant to report police misconduct as they want to remain loyal to their peers and the code of silence (Kutnjak Ivković et al., 2018). They have a sole bond that supersedes many of their dissimilarities, influencing their law enforcement identities to become salient (Crank, 2014). Perceptions such as that cause police misconduct to remain unpunished and incidents of biased behavior to continue against the African American community.

Racial Bias Incidents on African Americans

Whether implicitly or explicitly, law enforcement tends to treat African Americans with negative biased behavior. This behavior comes in many forms, such as disproportionately searches, criminal charges, bond amounts, conviction rates, physical abuse, psychological abuse, or verbal abuse (Alang et al., 2017; Arnold et al., 2018; De Lima et al., 2019; Pierson et al., 2020; Rehavi & Starr, 2014). Still, the most striking is the unjustifiable killings and serious injury of African Americans. The following

information will detail notable incidents of negative bias behavior by law enforcement on African Americans that also contribute to Black law enforcement officers' conflicting identities.

One of the most notable and blatant acts of police brutality and negative biased behavior towards an African American is the 1991 beating of Rodney King. A speeding traffic violation should have resulted in a citation, or even an arrest, turned into a gross misuse of authority. Four White Los Angeles police officers, Stacey Koon, Laurence Powell, Timothy Wind, and Theodore Briseno, took turns kicking, tasing and beating King with metal batons as 20 other officers stood by watching (Maurantonio, 2014). King displayed no signs of aggression or willingness to resist. However, they continued to abuse him, causing him to have multiple bruises and scars (Hathaway, 2019). Incidents similar to King's often are reported in hopes of an investigation or reprimand. However, Black and Latino citizens' complaints against white officers are less likely to be sustained (Faber & Kalbfeld, 2019). The bias and criminal actions taken out on Rodney King would have also fallen on deaf ears if it wasn't for concerned citizen George Holliday bearing witness and recording everything that transpired (Martin, 2005). His video illustrated a precise sequence of abuse by the five officers on Rodney King. When citizens evaluate the police reasonableness to use force in arrest situations via recordings, their perceptions of the police are harmed (Jefferis et al., 1997). Despite having irrefutable video evidence and public outcry, all of the officers were acquitted. Their defense convinced a majority White jury that each of King's movements while being beaten was a potential threat to the officers. African American law enforcement officers

witnessed a superior and colleagues surround, beat, tase, and kick a man viciously that has the same skin tone as them, which likely was their motivator, without receiving any legal punishment. It is plausible that they began to question their identity as law enforcement officers, causing their African American identity to become salient. Indeed, their identity as African Americans would have become salient, and a sense of not belonging would have developed in law enforcement. It took multiple days of rioting for a federal trial to be scheduled.

When the New Jersey Attorney General's office established that law enforcement officers were using racial profiling as a basis for traffic stops and searches (Byrne, 2004), it shed light on the root of African Americans' unjust killing and serious injury. The unprovoked traffic stops combined with White law enforcement officers being racially resentful, violent perceptions of African Americans, and renouncing anti-black discrimination (LeCount, 2017) made almost every interaction with law enforcement unpleasant. Profoundly publicized shootings of Black people by White police officers include Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Walter Scott, Rayshard Brooks, Breonna Taylor, Atatiana Jefferson, Stephon Clark, Botham Jean, Philando Castille, Laquan McDonald, and many others. When White Americans' racial identities are salient, they reject external explanations of African American circumstances and suggest that their decisions put them there (Johnson & Lecci, 2020). This has caused the African American community to confront the bias treatment they experience from law enforcement (LeCount, 2017).

This continued unjust killing of African Americans by law enforcement has been an ongoing concern for many years, so much that activist groups such as Black Lives Matter (BLM) have dedicated money, time, and resources to eradicate these problems. The unjustified killing of African Americans is arguably similar to lynching, a racialized form of terror authorized by the law (Petersen & Ward, 2015). Minorities are significantly more likely than White Americans to be killed by the police, with 1 in every 1,000 Black men killed over their lifespan (Edwards et al., 2019). A study identifying individuals' determinations on who and how quickly they shoot concluded that their decisions were rooted in racial bias. There was a tendency to shoot Black targets more as they associated Black people with danger, based on perceived threatening clothing and perceived threatening neighborhoods, amongst other things (Correll et al., 2014; Kahn & Davies, 2017). This stereotypical perception of African Americans is one of many challenges that they must overcome as they often lead to unjust killings of African Americans. The victim and officer's race is often a central topic in fatal encounters between African Americans and the police (Hall et al., 2016). Despite the division of opinions that manifest after discriminatory treatment of Black people emerge. The unjustifiable death of George Floyd caused unfamiliar solidarity amongst citizens globally.

George Floyd

As demonstrated throughout this literature review, the unjust killings of African Americans by the police are often justified by scrutinizing what the victims should have or should have not done, causing White law enforcement officers' actions to seem more

excusable. This response sparks intense discussions between citizens, law enforcement, and Black communities, as they examine the details of officer-involved shootings through video. That is, 68% of White Americans have a favorable view of the police, but only 40% of African Americans (Ekins, 2016). At the hands of Derek Chauvin, a White police officer in Minneapolis, Minnesota, George Floyd's suffered for 8-9 minutes as he was handcuffed, thrown to the ground, and then had a knee pressed on his neck until he died (Brooks, 2020). Floyd's death incited cohesiveness amongst people worldwide to seek justice for Floyd and hold the police accountable for their actions (Barrie, 2020).

Along with the rest of the world, African American law enforcement officers watched the incidents of Floyd's death unfold until the very end, when he took his last breath. African American law enforcement officers have expressed that what occurred was heartbreaking and shocking and that they are angry, disgusted, hurt, and have feelings of being caught in the middle (Collman, 2020). They were also confused at why no one intervened, and suggested that they would have stopped Chauvin if they were there. However, Black law enforcement officers experienced the same hurtful feelings, like the rest of their community, of seeing another African American killed or seriously hurt by people they trust to help them when needed. They must continue to serve their community with dignity and maintain order during BLM protests (Brunt & Press, 2020) despite being stuck between competing loyalties (Southall & Sandoval, 2020).

As BLM protests surged across the United States, differing views emerged amongst Black and White people. The differing views added to the tension as "White people believed police brutality incidents, like George Floyd, were exceptions that tainted

their profession while Black people saw them as consistent with a longstanding pattern of injustice that takes an emotional toll, and as an egregious exemplification" (Dixon & Dundes, 2020, pp 1). Given the lack of trust and negative biased behavior from law enforcement on the African American community, Black men can plausibly picture themselves in Floyd's place (Calvert et al., 2020). This includes African American law enforcement officers as they experience negative biased behavior and racial profiling, as well, when they take off their uniforms (Barlow & Barlow, 2002; Wilson et al., 2015). This is not surprising, as their journeys to become police officers were filled with mistreatment.

African Americans Police Journey to Employment

Like many other African American historical obstacles, gaining employment as law enforcement officers required resilience and determination. That resilience would ultimately come to fruition in 1867 as Selma, Alabama, provided the first African American a job as a policeman, with African Americans fulfilling police positions in almost every major city by 1877 (Satterfield, 2012). By the 1900s the number of African American police officers had increased to a sizable number in the North; however, in the South, Black people were not allowed any meaningful participation until the late 1960s (Jaynes, 2005). Despite most hired African Americans being better educated and qualified (Brandl, 2021) than White officers, their hiring was met with White America's resistance. The Civil Rights Act was deemed unconstitutional, and then separate but equal laws were upheld, causing nearly all African American officers to lose their jobs as police officers (Brandl, 2021). This continued discriminatory practice aroused a series of

civil rights marches, protests, and lawsuits to reach an epidemic proportion, with some groups being more assertive by rioting. Their collective goals were to correct the biased treatment by police of minorities, improve poor living conditions, unfair labor practices, unemployment, and increase Black police officers (Robinson, 2017). Rather than reacting with the expected violent response, more African Americans were given jobs, with the court's assistance by requiring police departments to meet quotas for the number of African Americans hired (Mccrary, 2007; Walker, 1985). For African Americans, hiring was a significant step to improve their economic deprivation from their oppression that has tormented them for so many years. However, White Americans' cynical belief was that once African Americans obtained employment as policemen, their loyalties to their African American identity and community would be weakened, and their group identity of police officers would become more salient (Cashmore & McLaughlin, 2013).

Nevertheless, African Americans continued to fill police officers' positions to the present day, as recruiting minorities has become a priority for many police organizations (Lee & Gibbs, 2015). Diversifying law enforcement agencies increases cultural competency, allowing citizens to observe officers with distinct backgrounds perform their duties uniquely (Kringen & Kringen, 2015). Despite the number of Black police officers steadily ascending since their inception, their treatment remained the same.

African American Law Enforcement Officers

Given the history and ongoing issues of negative bias treatment law enforcement displays towards African Americans, it is not shocking that African American police officers' experience contrasts with White officers' experience (Wilson & Henderson,

2014). African American police officers served their cities with pride and continued to fulfill their responsibilities efficiently, honestly, and impartially, but to no avail (Jaynes, 2005). African American police officers were provided offices separate from White officers. They rode bicycles or walked instead of driving cars. They patrolled only Black neighborhoods or the most dangerous areas (Cashmore & McLaughlin, 2013). They experienced repeated racist remarks and anecdotes of Klan logos and nooses; colleagues refused to shake their hands. They were denied promotions because of their race and were often punished after reporting their mistreatment (Bolton & Feagin, 2004). Black police officers were even shot by White police officers when serving in undercover roles (Jaynes, 2005). After occurrences of African American police officers arresting White citizens, complaints ensued, resulting in the demotion of their titles to patrolmen rather than police officers and the removal of their ability to wear uniforms or arrest White citizens (Brandl, 2021).

The African American community holds mixed views on African American law enforcement officers. Cities with larger African American populations sustain less favorable opinions toward the police. In some cities, both Blacks and Whites have reported negative or positive views toward their police departments. (Kusow et al., 1997). When the African American community began witnessing Black people integrate into police departments, those views were favorable. They believed that African American police officers would enforce laws impartially, and even protect them from the racially biased organization that has oppressed the African American community for so many years (Dulaney, 1996). However, as time progressed and more negative biased incidents

transpired, Black citizens' views were formed more by the policing institution as a whole, rather than by individual officers themselves (Brunson & Gau, 2015). This view causes pessimistic feelings for law enforcement, including African American police officers. Social-class and economic status are also circumstances in African American communities that affect their perceptions of African American law enforcement officers. African Americans in lower-income areas maintain that Black officers exhibit more austere behavior and that all law enforcement officers are biased and abusive toward African Americans compared to higher-income areas (Brunson & Gau, 2015). These mixed perceptions impact how African American law enforcement officers are treated by the public and influence the recruitment of more African Americans (Wilson & Henderson, 2014). Today as the recruitment of minorities has become a priority for most police agencies, it has not translated into improved African American-police relationships, despite their demographic and culture matching (Benton, 2020; Shjarback et al., 2017).

Despite African Americans occupying many law enforcement positions today, they still experience the same injustice of adverse biased treatment from law enforcement when they are out of uniform (Barlow & Barlow, 2002). Racially profiled, unlawful traffic stops, the display of unprovoked aggression, or the drawing of their weapons in seemingly unfitting circumstances are just the beginning (Holland & Bender, 2014; Stapleton, 2014). This type of treatment of African Americans by law enforcement instills feelings of exclusion and distress amongst Black law enforcement officers (Cochran & Warren, 2012), and the conflicting expectations from the Black community

and white police colleagues (Alex, 1969; Carter, 1995) further adds to that distress. Black police officers must manage their distress of conflicting identities as their racial identity becomes salient in the wake of incidents similar to George Floyd. This is the unwanted burden that all African American law enforcement officers must endure. Furthermore, they have children and other minors in their families who they would hate to see treated in such a thoughtless and insensitive manner. To work for an organization and witness colleagues engage in this type of bias treatment against minors that could one day be their family members begins the issue of conflicting identities.

Conflicting Identities

As depicted throughout this research study, the relationship between the African American community and law enforcement has consisted of violence, repression, and Black people's oppression. This negative bias treatment that results in the unjust killing and serious injury of African Americans divides Americans' opinions on the criminal justice system (Gau & Paoline, 2020). Non-Black Americans generally uphold White police officers' actions, while African Americans' confidence in law enforcement further depreciates (Kochel, 2017). These circumstances place African Americans in positions where their two identities conflict with one another, and one identity must become salient. For example, African American law enforcement officers working the BLM protests recognized and acknowledged, more than White officers, that the protests are a method to hold police accountable for their actions and were motivated by long-standing racial bias by police (Kochel, 2020). Considering the historical and recent acts of

negative bias behavior depicted on African Americans, African American law enforcement officers' experiencing conflicting identities seem inevitable.

Recently, African American Deputy Clyde Kerr III, of Louisiana, took his own life as he found it too difficult to manage his identity as a Black man with his identity as a law enforcement officer (Boyette, 2021; Gagliano, 2021). His struggle of conflicting identities is shared and experienced by African American law enforcement officers throughout the United States. Over 90% of the National Association of Black Law Enforcement members believe that biased policing and racial profiling occur in their agencies (Wilson et al., 2015). Incidents occurring against Black law enforcement officers such as Harold Thomas, who identified himself but was still attacked and arrested during an incident of mistaken identity, or four Black parole officers, in Ramapo, New Jersey who were held at gunpoint while serving a lawful arrest warrant (Paul & Birzer, 2017), further validates those beliefs. Too often, African American officers are conflicted. They are assigned to oversee and manage protesters of people displaying justified anger concerning the Black community by an organization that frequently exhibits negative biased behavior towards that community (Melamed & Purcell, 2020). They are attempting to remain centered on their jobs even as they may share the outrage concerning the police's biased and discriminatory actions. (Mullins & Thompson, 2020). Finding that balance to protect and serve honorably while at the same time understanding the anguish and passion of their communities is a difficult challenge for African American law enforcement officers.

Conflicting identities are, at times, inescapable. For example, "a biracial child must navigate the space between two racial identities, or a second-generation immigrant feels the tension between her parents' values and those provided by the broader cultural environment" (Hirsh & Kang, 2016, pp. 223). When two or more identities with incompatible norms are equally salient in a given moment, the result will be a state of behavioral conflict within the individual (Hirsh & Kang, 2016). This is especially true for African American law enforcement officers. They struggle with being African American, supporting the BLM movement, and law enforcement officers wanting to serve their community honorably. Conflicting identities such as this causes African American law enforcement officers to develop negative perceptions of the out-group and questions their membership (Bochatay et al., 2019). This internal conflict will eventually make one identity salient and cause physical and mental health concerns. Conflicting identities directly affects peoples' Behavioral Inhibition System. This neuropsychological system predicts an individual's response by environmental or internal cues (Serrano-Ibáñez et al., 2019) in physical health, emotional well-being, and cognition (Hirsh & Kang, 2016). More specifically, Behavioral Inhibition System causes mood and anxiety disorders, powerlessness, and lack of control, including overeating and aggressive social behavior after conflicts, helplessness, reduced overall life satisfaction, depression, social inhibition, difficulty to express themselves, distress, coping strategies, including cigarette use, alcohol, and drugs, and impact on self-regulation (Hirsh & Kang, 2016). For further illustration of conflicting identities, gender-work identity conflict was examined. As the number of roles and positions that people maintain increases, the likelihood of conflicts

between those multiple identities arises. Gender-work identity conflict is a circumstance that women often encounter when working in male-dominated fields, such as law enforcement. For example, when women feel judged based on their gender rather than their professional competence or are uncomfortable in work situations because of their gender, conflicting identities manifest (Veelen et al., 2019). Female law enforcement officers face various difficulties, such as an anguished sense of being viewed as less rational, susceptible, and less competent in performing certain job-related activities (Spinelli-De-Sa et al., 2017). As women in law enforcement encounter these negative stereotypes and feelings of lower value from their male colleagues, they develop more insufficient organizational identification, and their gender identity becomes salient (Veldman et al., 2017). This disconnect from their group identity of law enforcement officers tends to lead to higher turnover intentions, more burnout symptoms, lower job gratification, diminished work motivation, stress, tension, and lower perceived performance (Veldman et al., 2017). The unabating salience of gender profoundly influences who people are outside of their work and how they experience their jobs (Morgenroth et al., 2020). When gender-work identity conflicts with one another, the integration between them will be less attainable.

In White-dominated work professions like law enforcement, African Americans may feel the need to suppress their actual feelings and salient racial identities when conflicting identities arise from negatively biased treatment and unjust killings. Furthermore, African Americans feel that emotions of anger, frustration, and annoyance are discouraged when it comes to racial issues, so they will display emotions that reflect

the racial landscapes they inhabit (Wingfield, 2015), such as quietness or calmness. Like African Americans, the LGBTQ community may feel pressured to exhibit behavioral responses that go along with the majority. Being able to conceal their true identity and beliefs while displaying a perceived acceptable behavior can be challenging (Clair et al., 2005). Professional or collegiate athletes who are also gay find themselves managing those multiple conflicting identities. Although today's culture is more accepting of athletes who are LGBTQ, there was a time where gay athletes could face professional and personal consequences for being openly gay within the sporting industry (Anderson, 2011). With homophobia being widespread in Western countries of the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia, masculinity's image became more valued (Anderson, 2011). Attributes such as strength, toughness, competitiveness, risk-taking, muscular physiques, ability to dominate others, virility, aggression, and manliness were distinctions that are expected amongst their athletes (Channon & Matthews, 2015; Drummond, 2002). As a result, gay men were often compelled to compensate for their perceived lack of masculinity resulting in internalized homophobia, depression, poor wellbeing, sexual discrimination, body dissatisfaction, suicidal ideation, negative attitudes, and shame (Sánchez et al., 2009; Thepsourinthone et al., 2020). Displaying simulated personal qualities coupled with the practice of listening to dirty locker room jokes, sex stories, or managing heterosexual appropriate contact (Eng, 2008) further adds to gay professional athletes' distress and exhibits their willingness to remain undetected by managing their conflicting identities. Unfortunately, dropping out of sports is the result of the LGBTQ community. It provides them an opportunity to avoid the continued homophobic

persecution, sexism (Baiocco et al., 2018; Symons et al., 2017), and distress accompanied by managing conflicting identities.

Biased Behavior Psychological Affect

African American law enforcement officers have the burden of managing the stress and pressure of being law enforcement officers and everything that comes with being African American. Although both identities are greatly valued, they directly conflict with each other. The effects of multiple important identities on an individual's psychological well-being are abating (Brook et al., 2008). This, combined with the psychological impact of law enforcement's negative biased treatment of African Americans, causes African American law enforcement officers to be under immense distress continually.

Today the fear of African Americans being a victim of law enforcement discriminatory treatment, or even being killed, is very much still an actuality (Smith-Lee & Robinson, 2019). That daunting strain of steadily worrying when blue lights appear in their rearview mirrors or when someone's Black teenage son leaves the house can be overwhelming mentally. African Americans worry more than any other race about being brutalized by law enforcement (Graham et al., 2020). This endless worrying forces African Americans to live with anxiety and in a state of fear and stress. Law enforcement's biased treatment of African Americans not only affects those who directly experience it, rather those who share their experiences vicariously as well (Legewie & Fagan, 2019). This disproportionate experience of death, sorrow, and despair experienced by the African American community due to law enforcement's adverse biased treatment

affects their mental and physical health (Smith-Lee & Robinson, 2019). Potential mental health concerns are a weakened psyche, psychological trauma, emotional debility, race-related stress, depression, chronic anger, or substance abuse (Miller & Vittrup, 2020).

African American parents dread that their children may leave home and never return. This is a valid concern as Americans hold biases concerning African Americans, which influences social misinterpretations of the safety of others when a Black person is present (Brooks, 2020). For some parents, this is a reality as their children were the victims of a traffic stop, negatively biased conduct, and unjust killings. Law enforcement conducts traffic stops and searches of African Americans more than any other race (Fryer, 2019; Pierson et al., 2020). This precursor to their discriminatory treatment and unjust killing of African Americans affects children psychologically, regardless of experiencing it directly or indirectly (Aymer, 2016).

Furthermore, the frequency of police stops causes more frequent engagement in delinquent behavior for juveniles (Toro et al., 2019), increasing the likelihood of law enforcement stopping them. Knowing the potential negative consequences of encountering the police, African American parents racially socialize their children by teaching them how to survive in a prejudiced environment (Miller & Vittrup, 2020). When law enforcement encounters African American minors, there is a likelihood that they can experience discriminatory police behavior, too, as they are often regarded as guilty, misjudged as being older, and viewed as less innocent than White minors (Goff et al., 2014). The African American community is the most notable community that had to

endure law enforcement mistreatment. That behavior was also rendered to other populations as well, to a certain extent.

Law Enforcement's Antipathy With Certain Populations

African Americans have been historically and unfairly labeled as an undesirable group by law enforcement and society (Robinson, 2017). Still, the ending of the Civil War was a time of hope for African Americans, as it presented an opportunity for advancement and growth. However, it also provided White Americans a chance to create more repressive laws and statutes aimed at African Americans. Despite being free, African Americans continued to be targets of rules and regulations that ensured that they were kept within defined limits acceptable to White America (Robinson, 2017). Black Codes were a set of laws designed to restrict the rights of newly freed enslaved Black people (Jenkins & Heersink, 2016) by forcing them to sign yearly labor contracts, only work as servants or farmers, work without pay or accept meager compensation for their work, and pay unaffordable taxes (Robinson, 2017). The local police and state military were relied upon to enforce these rules (Forte, 1997). At best, the overall relationship between law enforcement and the Black community can be described as turbulent (Moore et al., 2016). The enforcement of unjust laws has forever tainted their ability to be harmonious. Those who were considered non-compliant were arrested for vagrancy, imposed hefty fines, or forced into uncompensated labor (Robinson, 2017).

Discriminatory criminal justice policies and practices have historically and unjustifiably targeted African Americans for centuries (Hinton et al., 2018). Jim Crow laws manifested after Black Codes ceased to exist. This era lasted much longer and had a

more considerable impact on the African American community. These oppressive laws, too, were enforced by the police and were used to control the African American labor force and the way they lived amongst White people (Robinson, 2017). The fact that law enforcement is an agent of the Constitutional state did not prevent them from acting on white supremacy (Martinot, 2014). During that time, law enforcement had active members in racial terror organizations for quite some time. They worked jointly with such entities to enforce laws, norms, or ideologies of White supremacy by nonenforcement or under policing of these threats (Novick, 1995). White supremacists often occupied high police authority positions (Ward, 2018), which was commonplace well into the 20th century (Novick, 1995). Not only were the police involved in unethical and demoralizing acts against African Americans, but they also routinely failed to protect them (Cohen, 1996). Incidents such as Officer James Johnson in 1950 attacking an African American man's business while wearing his police uniform under his Ku Klux Klan (KKK) robe (Patterson, 1952) or a police officer who went on a killing spree of Black people in 1945 without facing any criminal punishment (Patterson, 1952) weakens Black people's confidence in law enforcement. White law enforcement officers kidnapping, raping, and beating African Americans while avoiding criminal conviction were frequent during that time (Ward, 2018).

Law enforcement's treatment of African Americans has been well documented, with many discriminatory and bias treatment incidents still transpiring today. As national videos of unjustifiable murders of African Americans demonstrate, there is a disproportionate amount of negative bias treatment inflicted on African Americans by

law enforcement than other races (Cashmore & McLaughlin, 2013). African Americans are more likely to encounter brutality during police interactions (Fryer, 2019), to be searched during stops (Pierson et al., 2020), to be charged with more severe crimes (Rehavi & Starr, 2014), to be given higher bond amounts (Arnold et al., 2018), more likely to be convicted (de Lima et al., 2019), and have harsher sentences imposed (Exum, 2020).

The United States penal system is another example of unequal punishment geared towards African Americans. The United States incarcerates more people than any other country globally (Weidner & Schultz, 2019), with African Americans leading the charge with an incarceration rate of almost 6 times more than Whites and nearly double than Hispanics (Bronson & Carson, 2019). These disparities reveal that law enforcement's focus on crime and punishment has not fallen proportionately on all Americans. Instead, it has unreasonably and unjustly oppressed African Americans (Hinton et al., 2018). Demonstrations of White supremacy joining modern law enforcement have manifested in today's society. More recently, a University of Cincinnati police officer wore a Confederate flag shirt as he killed an unarmed Black person (Sewell, 2017). Additionally, a Washington D.C. officer arrived for court proceedings in a T-shirt displaying White nationalist symbols (Harrell, 2017). Both incidents are disturbing as they continued to occur in the modern era.

To further illustrate law enforcement's discriminatory treatment and biased policing style against entire populations, the relationship between the LGBTQ and law enforcement was explored. To a certain extent, their relationship is synonymous with

African Americans' experiences, so understanding the significance this treatment has on influencing conflicting identities is relevant for inclusion. The LGBTQ community and law enforcement's relationship has been described as unfriendly (Radford et al., 2006), distant, mistrustful, discriminatory, and threatening (Dwyer, 2011). Law enforcement's constant harassment prompted the rise of the gay liberation movements (Stewart-Winter, 2015) and inspired them to demand equal rights. Law enforcement would routinely bombard LGBTQ bars, charging them with lewdness, vagrancy statutes, and sodomy as these criminal charges were inappropriately applied and were disproportionately enforced against those who dressed in drag or engaged in sexual acts with others of the same sex (Cain, 1993; Dario et al., 2020). The LGBTQ community has also been subjected to physical and sexual violence by law enforcement (Ritchie & Jones-Brown, 2017). Some police misconduct against the LGBTQ community still transpires today (Lambda Legal, 2015).

Furthermore, law enforcement would dress in plain clothes to better monitor LGBTQ establishments and then "out" homosexual men and women by placing their photos and names in the newspaper following a raid (Stewart-Winter, 2015). Expectedly, law enforcement would punish the African American homosexual community more harshly, while White gay people had merely negative police experiences (Stewart-Winter, 2015). However, law enforcement has shown impatience and aggression towards the White LGBTQ community, resulting in physical abuse and the Stonewall Riots. Lastly, law enforcement's homophobic views have resulted in the mishandling of cases involving

LGBTQ victims and suspects (Dwyer, 2011), which have diminished their confidence in the police so much that they frequently do not report victimization (Dario et al., 2020).

In some respects, law enforcement treatment of African Americans can be seen in their treatment of the LGBTQ community. This can also be said for gay law enforcement officers. Getting hired as a law enforcement officer was challenging as specific preliminary questions during the hiring process were designed to eliminate gay candidates (Phillips, 2004). The few that were able to make it through the hiring process were regarded as incompetent and experienced discrimination from other police officers and the gay community (Phillips, 2004). A profession where people are deemed macho and mentally and physically tough (Silvestri, 2017) forced gay men to appear and behave more masculine while gay women had to try and act more feminine to mitigate their mistreatment (Nadal et al., 2015). Often, gay officers feel compelled to conceal their private and work lives (Phillips, 2004) since the costs of coming out at work could endanger their safety during on calls for service, cause career isolation, and risk the loss of promotions and assignments (Colvin, 2009).

Next, there is law enforcement's treatment of immigrants. September 11, 2001, forever changed the way Americans and the world view the Islamic community as they now face more hostility than ever before (Jackson, 2010). Law enforcement has tainted police-Muslim relationships by conducting embarrassing unprovoked questioning at airports (Baker, 2002), racial profiling, random detainment of Muslims, continued monitoring of Muslim populations, and infiltration into Muslim communities by informants (Poulakis et al., 2016). Somalis face the burden of being marginalized because

of their race, religion, and immigration status (Ellis et al., 2010). Their appearance of being African American often incites law enforcement contact. Simultaneously, the stigma of being Muslim and an immigrant shapes their experiences with law enforcement, as they are often perceived as threatening due to their religion and country of origin (Ellis et al., 2020). The Latino population in America is another group of immigrants with law enforcement issues. Law enforcement has failed to protect Latino Americans and even participated in unmerciful beatings (Sanchez & Rosenbaum, 2011). Today, being a Latino immigrant increases the likelihood of being stopped by the police (Dixon et al., 2008), leading to less accommodation and more extensive policing by law enforcement when compared to White people (Giles et al., 2012). Latinos will also be stopped more for trivial violations as expired tags and less for moving violations while also receiving more citations and more arrests (Giles et al., 2012).

Review of Methodology

A thorough literature search concerning African American law enforcement officers' conflicting identities yielded a shortage of results. However, the following studies are analogous to this research study regarding their use of SCT to explore conflicting identities.

Patton (2010) examined an incident in a classroom where gender-student social identities conflicted with each other. Students taking the course Women in Organizations were asked to assemble in groups of five, examine a topic relevant to women in organizations, and interview five women in leadership positions (Bilimoria et al., 2010). The groups were mixed with women and men except for one group that was all men

(Bilimoria et al., 2010). The all-male group made a mockery of the assignment and indirectly insulted several females in the class, causing one female student to respond harshly (Bilimoria et al., 2010). SCT was vital in explaining other female students' responses as some chose to support the female student (gender identity) or the male student (student identity) (Patton, 2010).

Recognizing that intergroup conflict and discrimination remain vital social issues worldwide, Paolini et al. (2010) discovered that negative contact causes higher category salience than positive contact using SCT. Kellen et al. (2013) utilized SCT to discover which identity would become salient, peace camp identity, or national identities between Jewish-Israelis and Palestinians.

Summary and Conclusion

The existing literature has presented conflicting identities in numerous diverse dynamics to thoroughly describe African American law enforcement officers' experiences of conflicting identities of being African American and law enforcement officers. Due to the limited amount of direct research on African American law enforcement officers' experiences of conflicting identities, I presented an aggregate of relevant research to capture their experiences.

The psychological effects of incompatible identities and African Americans' treatment by law enforcement officers have been well researched. What is unknown is how do African American law enforcement office process and interpret their current experiences of witnessing negative biased treatment being portrayed on African Americans by people in the same profession. The results from this research study's topic

will help fill a gap in knowledge of conflicting identities amongst African American law enforcement officers to improve cultural awareness and develop a more appropriate mental health treatment for African Americans.

In this next chapter, I will describe the method used for this study, the sample, instrumentation, and the analysis used to conduct the research study. Furthermore, I explained my role as the research, the rationale for this research design, trustworthiness issues, and conclude with a summary.

Chapter 3: Research Method

African American law enforcement officers have always been in a unique position by being African American while also working for an organization that exhibits negatively biased behavior towards their community. Recent years have further complicated and exacerbated those conflicting identities, with law enforcement's regular, unjust killings of African Americans. Although previous researchers have ascertained further understanding of conflicting identities and how the situation arises, how conflict is experienced and constrained remains unknown (Jones & Hynie, 2017). The purpose of this research study was to explore African American law enforcement officers' experiences of conflicting identities of being African Americans and law enforcement officers.

In this chapter, I discuss the research design and my rationale for selecting it. The chapter also includes an overview of my role as the researcher, the research methodology, and issues of trustworthiness. Then, I explain the data collection plan before concluding the chapter with a summary.

Research Design and Rationale

Research Questions

The following two research questions guided this study:

RQ1: How do African American law enforcement officers perceive the police after the killing of an unarmed African American?

RQ2: How have African American law enforcement officers experienced conflicting identities by being in law enforcement and by being African American?

Central Phenomena of the Study

This research study's central phenomenon was African American law enforcement officers' conflicting identities. I aimed to better understand African American law enforcement officers' experiences of conflicting identities and how they perceive the unjust killing and serious injury of African Americans by law enforcement. In this study, the term "African American" was used as a general term that referred to individuals mainly of African heritage who have non-Black ancestors and partial sub-Saharan African ancestry. Furthermore, the term "law enforcement" referred to primarily police officers but also encompassed probation/parole, state, and federal officers.

Previous research has found that people maintain multiple identities concurrently, of gender, race, employment, etc., and their perspectives and beliefs about those identities have increased intergroup division or inclusion (Graham-Bailey et al., 2019).

Research Tradition

Qualitative research is an iterative process that researchers employ to better understand a phenomenon (Aspers & Corte, 2019). This process consists of several different approaches used in various realms, centering on distinct areas of inquiry; nonetheless, the most commonly used designs are ethnography, phenomenology, and grounded theory (Korstjens & Moser, 2017b). For this inquiry, I chose phenomenology because it better accommodated the purpose and intentions of this study. Phenomenology

centers on people's lived experiences and their subjective perceptions of those experiences, yielding a population's meaning ascribed to a phenomenon (Korstjens & Moser, 2017b; Teherani et al., 2015).

The three contemporary phenomenological approaches are lifeworld phenomenology, postintentional phenomenology, and IPA (Neubauer et al., 2019; Tuffour, 2017). For this research study, I used IPA. IPA produces comprehensive information of people's lived experiences and their interpretations of those experiences rather than one prescribed by preexisting theoretical preconceptions (Smith & Osborn, 2015). IPA enables the methodical analysis of participants' consciousness (Tuffour, 2017) because they are encouraged to disclose their experiences in full detail without fear of consequences, narrative distortion, or information misinterpretation (Alase, 2017). I also engaged in double hermeneutics because it is often encouraged when conducting IPA research. Double hermeneutics is a sense-making process where researchers intuitively examine participants' understanding of the phenomena to obtain a more profound interpretation (Kafle, 2013; Tuffour, 2017). Reflexive journaling was the most appropriate method to use as I obtained a deeper understanding of participants' sense making of the phenomena in this study.

Ethnography, in contrast, is associated with anthropology and focuses on the culture of a group of people, requiring researchers to immerse themselves in participants' settings (Korstjens & Moser, 2017b; Teherani et al., 2015). Although culture is influential concerning conflicting and salient identities, this approach would not have revealed how African American law enforcement officers make sense of their experiences of

conflicting identities. Instead, ethnography would have explained behaviors that are associated with their group memberships.

Grounded theory focuses on devising theories by engaging with data, theoretical sampling, and comparative analysis (Chun Tie et al., 2019; Timonen et al., 2018). This approach was not suitable for this research study and would have required an excessive amount of time to analyze the inordinate data that this approach yields. Other approaches, such as case study or narrative, possess attributes that could have been advantageous to this research study; however, neither method was appropriate because they would have not accurately seized the depth of participants' lived experiences.

Rationale

I chose a qualitative research method because understanding individuals' personal experiences were essential to this research study. Unlike quantitative research that focuses on numerical data, hard facts, and cause and effect (Ahmad et al., 2019), qualitative research seeks to discover less perceptible meanings and understand the meanings people attach to their experiences (Tuffour, 2017). Each participant's experiences were diverse from one another. Still, collectively, they paint a comprehensive picture of African American law enforcement officers' sentiments, perceptions, and experiences of conflicting identities and unjust killings/serious injury of African American citizens. Preserving the natural complexities of human behavior is key to qualitative research (Agius, 2013). Qualitative research enhances the exploratory capability of researchers because they can utilize their interpersonal skills for a more extensive study (Alase, 2017). The use of the qualitative approach allowed each

participant's story to unfold at their discretion and for the phenomena to be better perceived. This research method was suitable for the current study because it provided me with an opportunity to collect in-depth data on African American law enforcement officers' experiences of conflicting identities to address the gap in knowledge on this topic.

Qualitative data collection methods include document review, participant observations, interviews, textual or visual analysis, and focus groups (Busetto et al., 2020). In-depth interviewing, an exploratory conversation between an interested interviewer and an interviewee (Guest et al., 2013a), was the most appropriate for the current study because interviews commonly yield more phenomena-relevant and in-depth data than other qualitative data collection methods (see Paradis et al., 2016). The versatility of conducting interviews was influential in my choice of data collection method. Qualitative, in-depth interviews can be conducted face-to-face; via phone; or using alternative interview methods, such as e-mail, instant messaging, or video calling (Krouwel et al., 2019). I recognized the busyness of peoples' lives, so I did not want participation in the study to be a burden or for the participant recruitment process to become arduous. By conducting semistructured interviews, I transformed the atmosphere from formal participation to merely a conversation. This aligned with the purpose of in-depth interviewing, which helped to obtain rich data that bridged the gap in the field by adding to the understanding of the phenomenon under study (see Minikel-Lacocque, 2019).

Role of the Researcher

As the sole researcher in this study, I had many responsibilities that had equal value. I recruited participants for the study; administered the in-depth, semistructured interviews; analyzed the resulting data; and ensured credibility and trustworthiness throughout every phase of the study. I had the challenging task of eliciting research participants' thoughts and feelings on the phenomenon under study, which was accomplished by asking open-ended questions, understanding their subjective feelings, and then categorizing them into themes (see Sanjari et al., 2014). Most importantly, I ensured that no physical or mental harm was caused to participating individuals, even if it would have impeded the research's progress. This was accomplished through self-awareness of acknowledging and addressing potential biases that I may have had and respecting every participant. Further participant considerations were taken into account by being transparent rather than misleading, preserving confidentiality, obtaining informed consent, protecting the analyzed data, and respecting a participant's decision to withdraw from the study if needed (see Vanclay et al., 2013).

The participants and I were connected only by profession and race because I am an African American law enforcement officer. None of the recruited participants had a personal relationship with me or were they anyone I had supervised, instructed, or worked directly with. Furthermore, I conducted the interviews via Zoom, not in any settings where I previously or currently have an existing position.

Knowing that numerous biases can occur at every stage of the research study, implicitly or explicitly, and the unfavorable impact it would have on this research study

(Pollock, 2020), I took proactive steps to mitigate those biases by first acknowledging them. My passion for improving the conditions of African American law enforcement officers and the African American community fueled this research study. Additionally, spending the previous decade as an African American law enforcement officer has led to personal experience and opinions related to the studied phenomena. Acknowledging these biases and employing mitigation strategies helped to avoid confirmation bias and other related biases. I reflected on how personal views of mine evolve and how I experienced them during the interviews and data analysis in my reflective journal. In this journal, I also documented any other biases that could have arisen through life experiences, opinions, and personal perceptions. Keeping the journal enhanced the transparency of potential research bias and mitigated its likelihood of emerging (see Smith & Noble, 2014).

Other methods of identifying and minimizing the emergence of biases included writing notes during data collection, reviewing the research with an outside source to bring awareness to potential preconceptions, being mindful of my cultural assumptions, and balancing passion (see Dörfler & Stierand, 2020; Neubauer et al., 2019; Smith & Noble, 2014; Tufford & Newman, 2012).

Methodology

Selection of Participants

The target population for this research study was African American law enforcement officers in the United States. I used self-selection and snowball sampling. Self-selection sampling requires potential participants to choose to participate in the

study of their own volition by responding to the invitation flyer (Mujere, 2016). Snowball sampling is similar but with variations in participant identification (Kirchherr & Charles, 2018). I located potential participants by providing Black law enforcement organizations with my recruitment flyer via social media and encouraging interviewees to pass the information along to people they thought may be interested in participating. Both methods were helpful because the target population was not easily accessible. Furthermore, by using these sampling methods, potential participants were committed to participating in this study, plausibly improving attendance, mitigating attrition, and improving their willingness to contribute more insight into the research's phenomenon (see Sharma, 2017).

Qualitative research entails purposeful sampling, with the most common strategies being purposive sampling, criterion sampling, theoretical sampling, convenience sampling, and snowball sampling (Korstjens & Moser, 2018a). The sampling strategies used were purposive to identify participants to take part in this study. Purposive sampling is most useful for participants and organizations who are hard to reach (Chamberlain & Hodgetts, 2018; Guest et al., 2013b) and only requires a small number of participants to attain saturation, typically fewer than 30 (Daniel, 2012). It also supports exploratory research (Daniel, 2012) and the interpretivism standard (Allen, 2017), all aligned with the design and goals of this study. According to interpretivism, the meaning of individuals' subjective experiences can be better explained through shared understanding and experiences (Allen, 2017).

The most important criterion for participant selection was that they were African American and law enforcement officers, either active or retired. Law enforcement encompassed the whole realm of the criminal justice field, including police, parole/probation, correctional, state, and federal officers. Participants had to have 2 years of service and have worked in the United States as law enforcement officers.

Sample sizes in qualitative research are often smaller than other research methods because the approach better preserves the depth of analysis that is integral to this method of inquiry (Vasileiou et al., 2018). With semistructured interviews as a form of data collection, IPA research studies have at most 25 participants, but as few as two, with the norm being towards the lower end (Alase, 2017; Eatough & Smith, 2017). With that in mind, I aimed for eight participants to participate in this research study. This was an adequate number of participants to reach saturation, determining sample size and sufficiency (see Vasileiou et al., 2018). I reached saturation when there was sufficient data to produce a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon requiring no additional data collection or analysis (see Hennink & Kaiser, 2019; Saunders et al., 2018).

To obtain the population for this study, I contacted numerous Black law enforcement organizations, such as the NOBLE, the NBPA, and the Indiana Black Troopers Association via social media, asking interested individuals if the flyer could be emailed to their members and publicized in common areas I posted the flyer in groups aimed at the target population or in common areas for public display. I created a

recruitment flyer that included the criteria for participation and my contact information. This process generated potential participants for the research study.

Once potential participants contacted me, I verified that they met the inclusion criteria and dismissed anyone who did not. I then indicated my plans to preserve their privacy and confidentiality regardless of their participation decision and conducted a prescreening for assurance. I followed up with all volunteers via email or phone to let them know whether they were selected for the study.

Participants who met the inclusion criteria were qualified to participate in the research study, so I emailed them the informed consent form. The consent form provided them with an overview of the purpose of this study, sample questions, risks, and benefits of participating, assurance of confidentiality, confirmation of their voluntary participation, and notice that they could withdraw at any time without fear of repercussions or ill feelings. Individuals who agreed to participate returned the consent forms to me via email with their confirmation of consent, prompting the scheduling of each interview with each participant individually. I completed the interviews by using the video chat telecommunications application, Zoom. The semistructured interviews lasted no more than 60 minutes per participant and were guided by a set of predrafted questions.

Instrumentation

As the sole researcher in this research study, I served as the primary data collection instrument. My knowledge and experiences as an African American law enforcement officer were an imperative element in understanding the context and experiences of the participants (McGrath et al., 2019). This enabled me to gather

participants' innermost feelings and perceptions of this research study's phenomena (Bahrami et al., 2016). My ability to actively listen enhanced the length and depth of participants' responses. This consisted of sitting up straight, making eye contact, paying attention, taking notes, asking questions, providing feedback, noting gestures, facial expressions, tone of voice, and stress in speech (Canpolat et al., 2015).

Furthermore, I utilized my character, interviewing experience, and communication skills to draw out this information and ensure that it was fitting and contributed to closing the knowledge gap. Interviewer characteristics are instrumental in conducting qualitative semi-structured and unstructured interviews, as they can effectively extract detailed narratives from participants (Pezalla et al., 2012). I conducted semistructured interviews consisting of predrafted open-ended questions while closely adhering to the interview protocol.

The interview protocol served as another data collection instrument as it provided guidance and assurance that I covered all research questions and obtained saturation. The quality of data I received from the research interviews was improved by increasing the reliability of the interview protocol. This was accomplished by ensuring alignment of interview and research questions, organizing the interview protocol to create an inquiry-based conversation, having others review the protocol, and guiding it in a way that produced the most fruitful information (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). I also used the built-in audio and video recorder in Zoom during telecommunication interviews. The interviews concluded with a debriefing of each participant.

**RQ1: How do African American Law Enforcement Officers Perceive the Police
After the Killing of an Unarmed African American?**

1. How does the treatment of African Americans by law enforcement officers affect your view of law enforcement as a whole?
2. What is your view of law enforcements' treatment of African Americans compared to other races?
3. How do you feel as an African American when you witness unjust killings of African Americans?
4. When police officers unjustly kill African Americans and are not criminally charged or indicted, how do you feel?
5. Describe your experience when non-African American police officers unjustly kill African Americans and are given shorter sentences than others convicted of similar crimes.
6. Describe your relationship with non-African American colleagues when African Americans are unjustifiably killed.
7. Do you feel that you can express your true feeling of unjust killings to non-African American police?
 1. Describe how that makes you feel.
8. How do you feel about yourself, as a Black police officer, after the unjust killing of an African American?
9. How do you see the police when you think about the unjustifiable killings of Black people?

**RQ2: How Have African American Law Enforcement Officers Experienced
Conflicting Identities by Being in Law Enforcement and by Being African
American?**

10. How does the biased treatment of African Americans by law enforcement officers affect your morale?
11. How do you feel when coworkers have different opinions than yours when debating incidents such as George Floyd?
12. How do you express your opinions to your colleagues?
 1. What makes you express them in this way?
13. Describe your feelings when you had to or if you were asked to work BLM protests?
14. What is your experience of talking about the police with your family and friends?
15. How do you explain the fact that you are both African American and a police officer?
16. How do these two identities come together within you?
17. What conflict, if any, do you experience between these two identities?
 1. Do you feel that non-African Americans understand the experience of maintaining both identities? - Elaborate
18. How does it make you feel when you have to work assignments aimed at the African American community? e.g., checkpoints in low-income and minority neighborhoods

1. How do you respond in such situations?
 2. What makes you respond in this way?
19. How do you bring together the fact that you are African American and you for an organization that has historically and continues to treat African Americans with biased behavior?
20. Have you ever experienced mistreatment based on your race as a civilian or as a law enforcement officer?
1. How did you feel about that? If yes
 2. What is your perception of officers who treat people that way (if no)?
21. Have you ever experienced coworkers making inappropriate comments about the African American community?
1. How did that make you feel?
22. How do you respond when Black citizens say that you are part of the problem and do not trust you?

Data Analysis Plan

Once I collected all the data utilizing the aforementioned methods, I began analyzing it through a six-step methodological process, beginning with becoming familiar with the collected data (Smith et al., 2012). The interviews were transcribed to allow easy coding (Ranney et al., 2015) using a free transcription service to cut down on self-transcribing time. I then immersed myself in the data with continuous transcription reading to obtain hidden themes and a deeper understanding (Bengtsson, 2016; Ranney et

al., 2015). This step was essential as nonverbal actions were described precisely to accurately reflect the entire interview (Korstjens & Moser, 2018a).

The following steps consisted of searching for themes, reviewing themes, and defining and naming themes (Labra et al., 2019). I categorized the transcribed data into themes. The interviews' collected data was grouped according to similarities or perceived patterns (Labra et al., 2019). Numbers were assigned to each participant and attached with correlating numbers for the collected data. Separating personal identifies from the collected data helped maintain participants' confidentiality

I begin the coding process by hand. I employed structural, emotional, and value coding, with all three applying to this research study. I notated participants' feelings with emotional coding and labeled their work perceptions with value coding as this method of coding is estimable for identity and intrapersonal and interpersonal experiences (Saldana, 2016). Lastly, I utilized inductive structural coding, which centers on content-based codes that may apply to large text segments that enable the identification of recurrences (Antes et al., 2018; Saldana, 2016).

The final step of this data analysis process was a clear presentation and discussion of the results. This step was written thoroughly and well-defined so that readers who are foreign to this study's phenomena will be able to comprehend it without erroneous interpretation (Labra et al., 2019).

Issues of Trustworthiness

Ensuring trustworthiness during this research study was essential, as it further adds value and soundness to its findings. To do so, I secured credibility, dependability,

confirmability, transferability, and authenticity as these are the measures of trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Salkind, 2010). Recognizing that I must consistently and exhaustively administer the data analysis while thoroughly revealing the analysis methods to enable the reader to determine trustworthiness (Nowell et al., 2017), I employed multiple approaches to ensure that I met each element and achieved trustworthiness. This approach was appropriate to the qualitative inquiry tradition's design, goals, and characteristics (Dawes & Levitt, 2017).

Credibility

By achieving credibility, I assured readers that this research study measured what it intended and that the results are an authentic representation of the social reality of the participants (Maher et al., 2018). I utilized peer debriefing, reflexivity strategies, member checking, and prolonged engagement (Shento, 2004).

Peer Debriefing

Peer debriefing is the process of allowing disinterested individuals, which are not participants in this research study, to review, ask probing questions, examine the methods, biases and explore the various aspects of the study (Earnest, 2020). This approach was sufficient to achieve credibility since individuals with no nexus to this research reviewed it independently and rendered an honest evaluation (Shento, 2004). Furthermore, peer debriefing discovers bias, inappropriate subjectivity, competing explanations, and suitability of the themes (Earnest, 202). Peer debriefing strategies that I utilized and are also valuable were providing transcripts for review, presenting

summaries of data and themes, and explaining my interpretations of the data (Earnest, 2020).

Reflexive Journaling

Reflexive journaling is a critical self-reflection of my own explicit and implicit biases of the research topic and how they could plausibly influence participants (Korstjens & Moser, 2018b). It provided an opportunity to uncover how perceptions attained through everyday life may affect the entire research study, from research interview questions to interpreting the findings (Attia & Edge, 2017). I maintained field notes and a journal consisting of narratives that documented my daily activities, thoughts, and insights during data collection and analysis, which helped control any personal biases that could have appeared (Nowell et al., 2017).

Member Checking

Member checking is regarded as an essential technique for establishing the credibility of qualitative analysis (Lincoln, & Guba, 1985). This method consists of providing participants an opportunity to examine the researcher's interpretations through summarized transcripts and review other analyzed data to assess and validate the trustworthiness of the inquirer (Birt et al., 2016). In the case of any misunderstanding or misinterpretation during the interviews or data analysis, member checking would have helped me identify and correct those that occurred, further strengthening the data (Korstjens & Moser, 2018b).

Prolonged Engagement

Prolonged engagement is a strategy to ensure credibility by becoming familiar with participants' environment and culture so that researchers can test for misinformation, build trust, get to know the data, and produce thick, rich data (Korstjens & Moser, 2018b). As trust increased, participants disclosed more information, making the data more valid (Morse, 2015). No other profession compares to law enforcement, as it comes with a myriad of complexities that law enforcement officers must manage daily. Equiposing professionalism, stress, and bravery while confronting daunting pressures and danger are circumstances that most people can only imagine. This, coupled with the constant discourteous interactions with unscrupulous people while also dealing with everyday life stress, places law enforcement officers under continuous strain. The same also applies to African Americans but in a different context, as they too have a strenuous uniqueness to their background. What emerges from this constant strain is a culture that only the ingroup members can understand. My experience as an African American and law enforcement officer was valuable at collecting credible, in-depth, and reliable data (Pelzang, & Hutchinson, 2018). Undirect disclosures (e.g., jargon, inclinations, facial expressions, hints) were understood, causing the interview to be more fluid with fewer misinterpretations (Arriaza et al., 2015).

Transferability

Transferability refers to the ability of the results to be applied to other situations and contexts (Forero et al., 2018; Maher et al., 2018). To establish transferability, an appropriate strategy that I used was thick description. Thick description is the process of researchers describing the behavior, experiences, and context to help convey the

conditions, circumstances, and extent of the investigated phenomena (Korstjens & Moser, 2018b; Shento, 2004). My comprehensive explanation of participant interactions and the communicative process was filled with enough information so that the readers can employ transferability judgment (Tracy & Hinrichs, 2017).

Dependability

Dependability refers to the stability of the research findings over time, and the process of thoroughly explaining the research study so that other researchers can conduct prospective studies with similar participants in similar conditions, ultimately replicating the results (Korstjens & Moser, 2018b; Maher et al., 2018). Each facet of this research study is meaningful to defending its results and ensuring dependability and consistency over time. They are further illustrated by Miles and Huberman (1994), who explain that the following elements equally contribute to dependability: straightforward research questions, precise specification of researcher roles, findings showing meaningful parallelism across data sources, and the utilization of peer review.

Audit Trail

Dependability was evaluated through an audit trail, which analyzed my methodological decisions and certified their soundness. (Lincoln, 2004). An audit trail is a process of describing the research steps taken from the start to the end (Korstjens & Moser, 2018b). Audit trails consist of raw data, data reduction, analysis notes, process notes, data reconstruction, substances associated with intentions and dispositions, and information on instrument development. (Carcary, 2020; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). By maintaining my audit trail, I assured dependability and secured trustworthiness. An audit

trail furnishes readers with a step-by-step understanding of my decision-making and serves as a strong argument against researcher impartiality (Carcary, 2020).

Triangulation

To establish dependability, another appropriate strategy is triangulation.

Triangulation uses different data sources, multiple researchers, and data collection methods to comprehensively understand the phenomena (Korstjens & Moser, 2018b).

Using those numerous sources, triangulation also tests validity (Carter et al., 2014).

Triangulation consists of multiple methodological resources of method triangulation, investigator triangulation, theory triangulation, and data source triangulation, with each one having its advantages to research studies (Carter et al., 2014). For this research study, I used the triangulation method of multiple participants to ensure dependability and trustworthiness.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to other researchers' ability to confirm the results of this study (Korstjens & Moser, 2018b). I contributed to confirmability by describing how I established my interpretations, emphasizing that the findings were derived directly from the data (Cope, 2014). That is why it is essential for confirmability and trustworthiness that the data represent the participants' responses and not the researcher's biases or viewpoints (Cope, 2014). To further establish confirmability, I utilized audit trail, which I described previously, and reflexivity.

Reflexivity is the researcher's understanding of how their values, background, and previous experience with the phenomenon can affect the research study (Cope, 2014). I

utilized reflexive journaling during data collection and analysis to document my thoughts and interpretations. This helped improve transparency by identifying potential biases and provide an opportunity to implement modifications to ensure the credibility of their findings (Darawsheh, 2014). Treharne and Riggs (2014) suggested coupling reflexivity with end-user involvement. It requires researchers to lean on nonparticipants during the planning, data collection, and analysis for critique and improvements, while reflexivity is more about self-reflection (Treharne & Riggs, 2014). This provides more coverage for trustworthiness and further ensures that other researchers can confirm this research with similar findings.

Ethical Procedures

Before I began recruiting participants or collecting data, I obtained approval from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB examined my research proposal to ensure that it aligns with their ethical standards and the U.S. federal regulations ("Research Ethics," n.d.). I obtained approval by assuring that no undue harm would come to any volunteers who chose to participate in this research study. Additionally, I followed Walden University's four-step directions of obtaining ethical approval and adhere to Walden University's research ethics approval checklist. Upon approval, I was assigned the IRB approval number 05-21-21-0736704.

To recruit participants, I distributed my recruitment flyer to various organizations via social media. Organizations such as the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE), the National Black Police Association (NBPA), and the Indiana Black Troopers Association. I also utilize social media platforms, such as

Facebook, by advertising the flyer in groups aimed at the target population or in common areas for public display. I did not compel anyone to read or respond to the invitation since participation was at their discretion.

I addressed any ethical concerns related to the recruitment of participants by adhering to the fundamental principle of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (Gyure et al., 2014). By respecting the participants, I provided them with an opportunity to consider the risks and benefits of participating and reminded them that their participation was entirely voluntary with no repercussions due to confidentiality (Brothers et al., 2019). Lastly, by being fair, culturally sensitive, respecting participants' right to privacy, and equally distributing the risks and benefits, I upheld justice and addressed all ethical concerns related to the recruitment of participants (Anabo et al., 2019; Gyure et al., 2014).

Following being contacted by potential participants, I conducted a prescreening by asking basic questions to ensure that they met the inclusion criteria for this research study. Once I identified the participants, I provided them with the informed consent form via email. This contained background information on this study, standard procedures, sample questions, a reminder of this study's voluntary nature, an overview of the risks and benefits of participating, an understanding of privacy, and all of my contact information. I also reconfirmed informed consent before commencing the interviews with each participant.

I addressed all ethical concerns related to data collection and its treatment through numerous meticulous efforts. I collected data through semi-structured interviews via the

telecommunication app Zoom. I recorded the audio and video of the interviews, which were transcribed later, and assigned participant numbers to each person to secure their anonymity. After each interview, I reminded each participant of the free resources they could access during debriefing if they desired to speak with someone further. The recorded interviews, collected data, and transcribed disclosures did not have any identifiers to associate with any participant and were appropriately stored on a password-protected encrypted external hard drive and locked in a drawer when not in use. I was the only person to access these files, and they will remain in my possession for 5 years per Walden University IRB policy. After 5 years, I will adequately discard all research material.

Summary

The qualitative research study used IPA to fill the gap in knowledge concerning experiences of conflicting identities amongst African American law enforcement officers. The recruiting and sampling strategies were conducive to locating participants, while the inclusion criteria helped identify qualified participants that furnished rich data. All the above data collection instruments were vital to the depth of details captured during interviews. The information collected from participants' interviews underwent the six-step methodological process of the IPA data analysis plan, which was assured with several methods of securing trustworthiness. The following chapter will detail the data collection process, the setting the interviews were conducted, and the participants' demographics. It will also describe the data analysis steps, evidence of trustworthiness, the results, and close with the summary and conclusion.

Chapter 4: Results

African American law enforcement officers maintain both identities of being African American and law enforcement officers. Similar to all social identities, those two identities possess normative standards for thought and action, profoundly influencing the behavioral choices of the individuals in every situation (Hirsh & Kang, 2016). When circumstances arise that force those identities to conflict with one another, one identity must become salient because people will identify more intimately with one identity group over the other. Circumstances that create disputes between identities are much more than social identities themselves; instead, they are situations where opinions, ideologies, beliefs, and expectations are all in disagreement. For African American law enforcement officers, law enforcement's continued, biased mistreatment and killing of unarmed African Americans can create that conflicting situation.

In this qualitative, phenomenological study, I explored African American law enforcement officers' lived experiences of being African American and law enforcement officers. Furthermore, I sought to understand their experiences of conflicting identities better while considering the killings of unarmed African Americans by law enforcement. The following research questions guided the study:

RQ1: How do African American law enforcement officers perceive the police after the killing of an unarmed African American?

RQ2: How have African American law enforcement officers experienced conflicting identities by being in law enforcement and by being African American?

In Chapter 4, I explain the settings in which data collection occurred, the participants' demographics, and the process employed for data collection and analysis. Additionally, I review the results before concluding with a summary of the chapter.

Setting

All the interviews were completed through the free teleconference app, Zoom. During each interview, I was in my home office or the confines of my vehicle, while the interviewed participants were alone and appeared to be in an office or private rooms. The interviews did not occur in any setting where the participants or I previously had an active role or were there any incentives for participation. Furthermore, I did not identify any personal or organizational conditions that could have influenced participants or their experience at the time of this study that could have affected my interpretation of the study results.

Demographics

There were eight participants ($N = 8$): six African American males and two African American females. All participants met the inclusion criteria by being African American and possessing at least 2 years of law enforcement experience. The amount of law enforcement experience varied from each participant. The shortest amount of time in law enforcement was 7 years and the longest being 31 years, with a median of 20.5 years of service. Five of the participants served in the state of Alabama, one in Georgia, one in Mississippi, and one in California.

With as many years of law enforcement experience as they possessed, it was entirely natural that each person had held numerous positions in law enforcement

throughout their careers. Except for one who served exclusively in corrections, all participants had patrol experience, which is typically entry level. Other positions included detective, parole/probation officer, federal officer, correctional officer, supervisor, homeless coordinator, and school resource officer.

Data Collection

I began the data collection process by recruiting participants. I utilized Facebook, LinkedIn, and Walden University's Research Participant Pool as my primary sources to identify potential participants. Furthermore, I posted my recruitment flyer on those websites and social media platforms and tagged numerous Black law enforcement organizations. By doing so, the members of those organizations were made aware of my recruitment flyer. As detailed in Chapter 3, I used self-selection and snowball sampling, which required potential participants to participate in this research study of their own volition and recommend additional participants. Potential participants contacted me via email and phone, which prompted my response to ensure that each interested person met the inclusion criteria. Once I established eligibility, I sent the informed consent form via email, which was returned with the words "I consent" for those who remained interested. I then scheduled dates and times for each participant to interview using Zoom.

Obtaining the intended number of eight participants took several weeks to secure. Each person was interviewed individually through Zoom, with each interview lasting approximately 30 to 60 minutes. Although the rapport-building phase of the interview motivated most participants to open up and disclose more details, some participants expounded very little after answering the questions. The interviewees and I were in

private areas to minimize distractions and maximize privacy. Before beginning the interviews, I reiterated to each participant that their personal information and details of their disclosures would be kept anonymous. I went over the nature of the study again and assured them that there were no right or wrong answers while encouraging them to answer based on their own experiences and feelings. All the interviews were audio and video recorded through Zoom. Before the start of each interview, I provided each participant with their Zoom link and familiarized myself with the functions of Zoom. This allowed participants to access the interview lobbies more comfortably and created more fluid interviews. There were no unusual circumstances encountered in data collection, or were there any variations in data collection from the plan presented in Chapter 3.

Data Analysis

After the eight interviews, I reached data saturation and began the analysis phase of the study. I applied the six-step methodological process of IPA to analyze the collected data, as detailed in Chapter 3. The automatic transcription service, otter.ai, was used to transcribe the interviews. This free, web-based program allowed for the audio recordings to be transcribed instantly. I then began repeatedly watching each interview and reading the corresponding transcription. This allowed me to be fully immersed in the data and understand all aspects of it. Each participant, except for one, had their cameras on during the interview, so I captured their facial expressions, body language, and emotional responses. For the one participant who requested that the camera remain off, I focused on

that participant's tone of voice during the responses. More in-depth and rich insight was obtained by capturing the nonverbal responses of each participant.

I continued the data analysis process by labeling and organizing sections of the transcripts into codes of short phrases that described meaningful and recurring thoughts. I hand coded the data, which I found to be more advantageous because I could incorporate nonverbal behaviors that I noticed during the interviews and truly immerse myself in the data. Each section was color coded to correspond with their respective codes. By doing this, I remained organized and could better visualize each code and its significance to the research.

The next step of the analysis process was identifying emerging themes related to African American law enforcement's experiences of conflicting identities. For the remaining steps, I reviewed, defined, and named the themes. Four common themes emerged after I completed analyzing the collected data: non-African American law enforcement officers' inability to identify with African Americans, distrust of law enforcement's decision-making toward African Americans, feelings as an African American in law enforcement, and frustration with law enforcement's treatment of African Americans. From those four themes, I developed 12 subthemes. Table 1 comprises a list of themes and subthemes that emerged from data analysis.

Table 1

Themes and Subthemes

Theme 1: Non-African American law enforcement officers' inability to identify with African Americans	Theme 2: Distrust of law enforcement's decision making toward African Americans	Theme 3: Feelings as an African American in law enforcement	Theme 4: Frustration with law enforcement's treatment of African Americans
More aggressive towards African Americans	Compliance during police interactions	Feelings of sadness, embarrassment, and anger	Desire for impartial treatment
Criminally punish more than educate	Experienced biased mistreatment	Conflicting emotions of working protests	Unethical police should not be in law enforcement
Recognize a need for change	Express true feelings concerning misconduct	Understanding of citizens' perceptions of the police	View incidents of biased mistreatment as lack of control and/or a lack of empathy for others rather than racially motivated

Codes were applied based on the participants' feelings and experiences.

Participants expressed sentiments, such as P5 stating, "I do understand that frustration with what is going on, you know, it can be scary when they put the handcuffs on. It is like, I do not know what this person is going to do to me," and "even as a law enforcement officer, I get it. That is anxiety when a cop behind you." Further examples are from P2, who expressed, "I got a Black son whom I got to raise and teach how to be a Black man in America," "African Americans are not treated equally nor fairly," and "I viewed it from like, a power perspective versus a race perspective." There were no contradictory results or discrepant cases found in this study.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Ensuring trustworthiness in a research study is essential to maintain its integrity and soundness. Understanding this, I employed multiple methods to ensure trustworthiness, including peer debriefing, reflexivity strategies, member checking, prolonged engagement, thick description, audit trail, triangulation, and reflexive journaling. Each method that I used was beneficial at establishing the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the analyzed data.

Credibility

In this study, I achieved credibility by using peer debriefing, reflexivity strategies, member checking, and prolonged engagement. Each method was integral for demonstrating that my data analysis was conducted in a well-defined, logical, and exhaustive manner with enough detail to enable readers to determine credibility (see Nowell et al., 2017).

Prolonged engagement was the most advantageous method for establishing credibility in this research study. It required that I become familiar with the participants' environment, culture, and context to test for misinformation, build trust and rapport, and get to know the data to obtain rich information (see Korstjens & Moser, 2018b). This process was greatly expedited because the participants and I related to one another through profession and ethnicity, amongst other things. Regardless of my assurance of confidentiality, law enforcement officers have a natural resistance to being utterly frank about specific topics, particularly when the conversations are recorded and they are speaking to strangers. By understanding this and being intimate with their environment

and the context of their culture, I collected and analyzed the data with the confidence of credibility.

I also found member checking and reflexive journaling to help ensure credibility. Reflexive journaling helped me manage my biases and personal opinions of being an African American law enforcement officer. Member checking added another level of support by allowing participants input in the analysis by assessing my interpretation of their experiences and feelings and ensuring that I captured it accurately. After providing each participant with a summary of my interpretations of their experiences, none of the members requested modifications. Lastly, I employed peer debriefing by allowing other people not associated with this research study to ask probing questions, examine the methods and possible biases, and explore the various aspects of the study (see Earnest, 2020).

Transferability

Transferability occurs when the results of a qualitative research study can be transferred to other settings with other participants (Korstjens & Moser, 2018b). I used thick description to evaluate transferability by providing a comprehensive and accurate description of the details, setting, quotes from participants, and a thorough explanation of how I conducted this research study (see Tenny et al., 2020). By doing so, the results of this research study can be replicated by other researchers who use other participants in another setting.

Dependability

I used an audit trail and triangulation to secure the dependability of the research findings and analysis over time and ensure that other researchers can replicate it using similar participants and conditions. Using an audit trail, I documented how the participants were selected and how the data were collected as well as maintained charts created to explore themes and transcripts. I used the triangulation method of multiple participants to ensure dependability and trustworthiness.

Confirmability

Confirmability is established when credibility, transferability, and dependability are all reached because it ensures that the interpretations and findings are all obtained from the data (Nowell et al., 2017). To confirm confirmability, I used an audit trail and reflexivity, as discussed in the preceding subsections.

Results

In this study, I explored African American law enforcement officers' lived experiences of conflicting identities. I used semistructured interviews with 22 open-ended questions to interview eight African American law enforcement officers. Nine interview questions corresponded to Research Question 1, while the remaining 13 corresponded to Research Question 2. I conducted all the interviews via Zoom. Participants consisted of six African American males and two African American females with a median range of experience of 20.5 years.

RQ1: How do African American Law Enforcement Officers Perceive the Police After the Killing of an Unarmed African American?

Theme 1: Non-African American Law Enforcement Officers' Inability to Identify with African Americans

As participants discussed their lived experiences of being African American and law enforcement officers, it was shared that non-African American law enforcement officers often fail to identify with African American community members. This lack of familiarity leads to problematic interactions, more aggression towards African Americans, and a profound readiness to criminally punish. As this theme emerged, so did the corresponding subthemes: more aggressive towards African Americans, more inclined to criminally punish rather than educate, and their recognition that there is a need for change.

Subtheme 1.1: More Aggressive Towards African Americans. Participants spoke about the more aggressive approach that law enforcement employs when making contact with African Americans. As P1 disclosed the details of her experience of biased mistreatment, she expressed that the interaction left her with a feeling that she “will never forget” because of the “aggressive approach” a non-African American law enforcement officer used with her as she was on her way to work. P2 stated that “it is definitely a different level of aggression,” as we spoke about law enforcements’ approach when interacting with African Americans compared to other races. P8 discussed how she does not think that law enforcement officers as a whole mistreat African Americans but explained that some officers “are already in fear, just because they are African American.”

Sub-theme 1.2: Criminally Punish More Than Educate. Participants expressed beliefs that there is a variation in how dissimilar cultures are policed, which is heavily guided by law enforcement officers' life experiences with that culture and upbringing. P2 said, "you can't put someone who grew up in the suburbs and have them police in the hood." African Americans are the predominant population that typically resides in lower-income neighborhoods. The manner in which African Americans, residing in poverty-stricken neighborhoods, talk can be misconstrued as being discourteous. P6 had a similar perspective as he explains, "when you have an officer that never been brought up around that environment, it's hard for them to kind of adapt and understand where they're coming from." Due to the lack of trust African Americans have in law enforcement, they are more standoffish when interacting with law enforcement and are at times more outspoken in demanding answers for police decisions. Comparing his ability to identify with the African American community better than someone who does not have the same background or experience within that culture, P2, explained

that he would be more willing to give someone a break for, a couple of grams of marijuana, then as soon as some other person who's never even seen it before has zero sympathy and total aggression towards Black folks, they'll say, okay, you're automatically going to jail, not realizing what that does to homes.

P2 concluded by saying that "instead of me punishing you for how you're living, let me show you, let me educate you and show you how to get out of this."

P6 disclosed similar sentiments as he presented a scenario of a non-African American officer who lacks exposure to Black culture, responding to a call for service.

He explained that

he thinks he needs to arrest somebody to take them to jail, in my mind is a black officer, I know that, well, once that guy bonds out of jail, he's coming back to the same house, so I'm going to spend a whole lot more time trying to interact with him and fix that situation.

It is quite common with calls for service involving African Americans that result in someone going to jail, that the person arrested return to the same house with the person they were involved in the dispute with. Educating them on evading impending conflict or healthy means of expressing their feelings will avoid intensifying the issue by taking someone to jail and will also mitigate future calls of service for conflict.

P3's disclosure supported these thoughts. As we talked about the disparity in treatment of the African American community by the criminal justice system, he responded by saying,

I believe it is based on biases that people just did not identify ...What law enforcement officers have to realize is that they got to be able to get beyond their biases, and when they see a young 18-year-old black male, you got to see that kid and not see everyone as a gang member.

As P3 continued to speak about the disconnect between the African American community and law enforcement and their desire for Black people to not be in law enforcement, he disclosed, "you cannot say, you shouldn't be a cop, then who is going to come to your

home, and identify with you and your son and say, I have lived this exact same experience you live in right now." He then provided an example of how two different cops of different races handle domestic violence calls, saying, "you have to have Blacks there to reflect or to help identify with that culture."

Sub-theme 1.3: Recognize a Need for Change. Citizens often generalize law enforcement officers, particularly after the unjust killings or biased mistreatment of African Americans. Like many citizens, African American law enforcement officers also recognize a need for change in how African Americans are treated. During the interviews, some participants spoke about being patient for change concerning the treatment of African Americans by law enforcement, while others talked about making a change from the inside.

As we spoke of law enforcement's treatment of African Americans compared to other races, P1 explained that "African Americans are not treated equally nor fairly on behalf of law enforcement and the criminal justice system." She explained that "in time, things are going to level out, but it will take some time." P2 took a more assertive approach by expressing his beliefs that "in order to change the system, you have to infiltrate the system." P3 asserted that "you have to have Blacks in uniform" and that citizens can't assume that Black law enforcement officers are not doing their best to try to change what's going on in police departments."

P6 and P8 took different paths from the previously mentioned participants as they desired to change African Americans' perceptions of law enforcement officers rather than changing the entire system. P8 disclosed that she speaks to citizens by stating, "I know,

there are some bad ones out there, but try to forgive them or put it to the side if you can." She further stated, "I just try to educate them on the importance of the police and just trying to change their perception of the police, especially with kids like teenagers." P6 expressed his dislike for being generalized with bad cops. He explained, "that's a mindset that you're not going to change overnight; that's why I'm hoping that we can get this Citizens Academy [multi-week academy consisting of classes instructing citizens on law enforcement-related topics to increase their awareness of its function] off the ground." He desired to portray himself more favorably to students and young adults, rather than only being seen when being called to take someone to jail.

Theme 2: Frustration with Law Enforcement's Treatment of African Americans

As I presented the interview questions to each participant, various feelings emerged about how African Americans are treated by law enforcement. The primary feeling was frustration which generated this theme, and its subthemes of feelings of sadness, embarrassment, and anger, unethical police should not be in law enforcement, desire for laws to be applied impartially, and view incidents of biased mistreatment as lack of control and/or a lack of.

Sub-theme 2.1: Desire for Impartial Treatment. Participants' feelings towards law enforcement after the unjust killing of African Americans were for the treatment to be applied impartially to every person they interact with. They disclosed how they conduct their jobs when interacting with people from different cultures and races, as examples of the type of change they would like to see. P2 stated that he is "nonbiased with everybody" by treating everyone the same regardless of race. P4 explained that he is

"firm but fair," with P4 adding that he "try to treat everyone with respect regardless of who they are, whether it's a homeless person to a politician." P1 simplified it by saying, "I definitely believe what's right is right and what's wrong is wrong." P8 added that she "treat[s] people the way I want somebody to treat my family." P7 explained that he is aware that he cannot control how officers treat African Americans but stated, "officers riding with me, know how we're going to treat African Americans, we're going to treat them fairly." Further adding, "I treat all races, whether they're Black, White, Hispanic, I try to treat them fairly across the board, and I try to be professional at all times."

Sub-theme 2.2: Unethical Police Should Not Be in Law Enforcement. During the interviews, we talked about law enforcement officers whose views were opposite of theirs concerning the unjust killings of African Americans. Several participants believed that the officers who committed the unjust killing are unethical and should not be in law enforcement, including those who support them or rationalize their actions. P2 expressed his feelings concerning this topic by stating, "people who look at that, and you know, say that was justified, are unethical, uneducated, and they shouldn't be cops". He continued by saying "you say, wow, that person's a bad person and doesn't need to wear a uniform." P1 declared similar feelings by saying, "that's what we need out of law enforcement, anybody that's putting a uniform on because they need to feel bigger about themselves." P7 disclosed "what we want to do is just try to get rid of the bad apples, because people forget, the police probably has been beating Black folks, well before videos."

Sub-theme 2.3: View incidents of biased mistreatment as lack of control and/or a lack of empathy for others rather than racially motivated. During the

interviews, participants expressed feelings that the regular incidents of law enforcement's biased mistreatment of African Americans are issues that go far beyond race. P3 talked about George Floyd's death and explained that it is a "law enforcement issue across the board that you can find within every race where cops don't identify with the people they have in to serve." He also viewed it as "a power incident," as well as a "lack of value" of George Floyd's life. During P8's interview, she added, "that is beyond a Black and White issue at this point; it's a humanity issue that is wrong."

RQ2: How have African American Law Enforcement Officers Experienced Conflicting Identities by Being in Law Enforcement And By Being African American?

Theme 3: Distrust of Law Enforcement's Decision-Making Toward African Americans

There was an overall distrust in law enforcement's decision-making concerning their interaction with African Americans during our conversations. Those feelings can be attributed to their own experiences with law enforcement, secondary information from friends and family, and what they have witnessed around the United States. The three themes that emerged were compliance during police interactions, experienced biased mistreatment, and expressing true feelings concerning misconduct.

Sub-theme 3.1: Compliance During Police Interactions. There was a consensus of feelings regarding interactions with the police, particularly with participants who have young children or young siblings. From speaking to each person, I gathered that regardless of whether they were not doing anything wrong, they would want to live

through the mistreatment and address it later. Their primary concerns were to get their loved ones home safely. P4 explained

as for my children, I try to tell them, listen to them, if the officer stops you, you do what he said, don't ask all those questions or make all those comments, you know, if they take you to jail, you go into jail, and we'll just sort it out at the end.

P3 continued with the same sentiment by asserting, "I have two young sons, they're not young anymore, but I tell them to follow law enforcement's instruction because there are people that will shoot you, if you have an issue, you address it once you leave the street."

P5 also had concerns for his children as he explained,

I want to train my son and my daughter up to if you get pulled over, put your hands on the steering wheel, if they ask you for your identification card, give it to him, if you got to go to court, take it to court and just try to fight it at court, do not try to fight it while you're in the vehicle. You know, if you feel like you were pulled over unjustly, just go ahead and comply.

P8 also shared corresponding feelings for her family. She explained,

I tell them to stop drawing unnecessary attention to yourself, especially right now how everything is going on with the police and stuff. I tried to tell him to try to have as least amount of dealings with the police as possible and try to just do whatever they say and do everything they tell you to do ... Don't be reaching and looking at grabbing, and don't be doing anything crazy.

Sub-theme 3.2: Experienced biased mistreatment.

Being an African American law enforcement officer is an experience like no other. Trying to make a change while on duty, but being subjected to the same biased mistreatment as other African Americans while off duty is an intricate circumstance. P1 informed me that she experienced several instances of mistreatment by law enforcement, with the most notable being when she was in uniform on the way to work. She explained, "the way he attempted to belittle me, while I'm in uniform, and to argue me up and down about certain things, and the reason for stopping me and all of that it's a feeling that I will never forget." After disclosing his experience of mistreatment, P2 stated, "I've definitely experienced racial mistreatment due to my race," with P4 adding, "I have, and actually in my hometown." P7 answered, "yes, I have, and this goes way back before I got into law enforcement, I've been pulled over by the police and been mistreated."

Those participants who have not experienced bias mistreatment by law enforcement directly still felt a heightened level of caution during interactions. P5 detailed an encounter with law enforcement where he stated, "when I get pulled over, whether if I'm in the wrong or right, my hands are most likely on the steering wheel, and it's yes, ma'am and yes, sir." From that, I deduced that he felt like he had to be over perspicuous when making contact with law enforcement, so I asked him, and he responded by saying, "yeah, I feel like that way when I get pulled over."

P3 shared his experience of bias mistreatment by saying, "I haven't had a lot of contact with law enforcement off duty, but as a young Black man growing up, I was always leery of making contact with them, didn't want to make contact with them." P6 explained that when he has come in contact with law enforcement while off duty, he

quickly identifies himself and complies, eliminating any possible experience for biased mistreatment. He then announced, "I've had relatives that will tell me that they've been stopped on the side of the road, questioned, why are you in this neighborhood."

Sub-theme 3.3: Express True Feelings Concerning Misconduct. Participants revealed mixed emotions concerning their ability to express their true feelings, concerning law enforcement's unjust killings of African Americans, to their non-Black coworkers. P1 responded by saying, "absolutely, I'm not one that bites my tongue," while P2 was tentative in saying, "some people are so stuck in their ways" while "some people are open-minded, and actually are willing to see things from a different aspect, a different point of view." P8 had similar feelings as she disclosed, "yes, and no, about 85% of my coworkers felt it was wrong, but that other small portion felt that not really that he deserved it, but I guess, they saw that he was resisting." P7 was confident in answering, "I feel like I can talk across the board, whether they're Black, White, Asian, or Hispanic because for me, what is was right is right." On the other hand, P4 believed saying as little as possible is the best way to approach it because "you can't express exactly how you feel because if you do, you'll be saying it in anger."

I inferred that P3 and P6 associated their many years of service and positions within law enforcement with their confidence in sharing their true feelings to non-African American coworkers. P3 explained that

as you become older in your profession, you're more comfortable articulating your opinion about tactics because you have experience, so now you feel that you

can speak on tactics with a bit more authority than you were when you're younger and trying to look, listen and learn, and you don't know exactly where you fit in. P6's sentiments were similar as he answered questions related to expressing his true feelings. He stated, "for me, I can, and that's only because I'm in the position I'm in now, you know, probably, if I've been a 6-year or 5-year officer with no rank or whatever, it may be maybe a little bit different." He concluded by referencing other Black officers and their ability to express their feelings. He said, "I think they kind of feel like that would probably hinder their progression here."

Theme 4: Feelings as an African American In Law Enforcement

Naturally, in this qualitative study, participants expressed many feelings and emotions as they were passionate about the research topic, and understanding their experiences was an aim of this research. The fourth and final theme of feelings as an African American in law enforcement emerged from the outpouring of emotional responses. This theme developed the three subthemes of understanding citizens' perceptions of the police, finding it challenging to work protests, and continuing job duties.

Sub-theme 4.1: Feelings of Sadness, Embarrassment, And Anger. Participants all revealed strong feelings concerning the recent years of law enforcement's continued unjust killings of African Americans. P5 cited the George Floyd incident specifically, announcing that as he saw him in that situation, "it did hurt my feelings," and P3 described it as "heartbreaking." P1 used "sadness" to express her feelings but also, when we discussed punishment for law enforcement officers who unjustly kill African

Americans, she stated that "it doesn't shock you, you've gotten used to people getting less sentences or no sentence at all, versus Blacks."

P4's response stemmed from his law enforcement identity as he disclosed that it is "embarrassing" and has affected his morale. He also expressed feelings of "anger" and "sadness." P3 stated that "it definitely strikes a nerve, and it worries me." P8 described her feeling concerning the unjust killings of African Americans by presenting a scenario to the assailants. She stated, "how would you handle someone doing your family like that? Police pull your wife over right now, throw her out of the car, and do your wife just like that? What would you do?" As P6 and I talked about the treatment of George Floyd and how it affected him and his relationship with non-African American coworkers, he responded by saying, "White officers feel like just because they work beside you, they know what it's they know what it's like to be a Black officer."

Sub-theme 4.2: Conflicting Emotions of Working Protests. Participants talked about their experience and feelings of working protests concerning law enforcement's biased mistreatment and unjust killings of African Americans. They all have witnessed, over the years, law enforcement officers representing the same culture as them unjustly killing another person who resembles them and their children. With protesting being an anticipated response to African Americans' unjust killing, it was necessary to understand participants' feelings and experiences of handling those situations. There wasn't a consensus of perception, as participants either found it difficult to work the protests or viewed the case as having the accountability of carrying on their job duties despite sharing the feelings of many protesters. P1 responded by saying, "I don't think that I can

do it, and I can say that with confidence." P3 expressed his feelings as he explained, "that's probably one of the toughest things you have to do." P6 stated, "I'm not going to lie, I wouldn't like the fact that I'd have to put myself out there for something to escalate in a situation that never should have happened from the beginning." P4 believed that working the protests after the unjust killing of an African American would be a "hard feeling" but acknowledged that it is "part of my job." P5 and I spoke in conversation about the negative backlash African American law enforcement officers endured while working the protests of the unjust killing of African Americans. He viewed working the protests as continuing his job duties as he responded by saying, "you have to put your uniform on, and forget about what they said, forget about where they think, and you have to do your job."

Sub-theme 4.3: Understanding of Citizens' Perceptions Of The Police.

Participants were not oblivious to the poor relationship between the African American community and law enforcement. They expressed feelings of understanding as to why there is a strong sense of distrust for law enforcement. As P1 recalled an incident where she experienced biased mistreatment by law enforcement, she asserted, "I've always understood that this is the citizens' viewpoint because I've been there." P3's views remained consistent as he explained,

some people have had a lot of negative experience with law enforcement, and I understand that, I give them that room because I know, they have either had negative contact or know people who have had negative contact or witnesses it.

P7 explained that some people just don't like the police, but "you have to understand what they're going through; every time you turn on the TV, you see the police killing Black people."

Summary

This research study aimed to explore African American law enforcement officers' lived experiences of conflicting identities. To accomplish this, I collected data from eight law enforcement officers through in-depth interviews utilizing semistructured interview questions. Each participant answered the interview questions by describing their feelings and experiences, which led to the emergence of four main themes and 12 subthemes that answered the two research questions. The primary themes were: non-African American law enforcement officers' inability to identify with African Americans, distrust of law enforcement's decision making toward African Americans, feelings as an African American in law enforcement, and frustration with law enforcement's treatment of African Americans. I answered this question as participants expressed a distrust of law enforcement's decision-making toward African Americans and disclosed their feelings as African Americans in law enforcement.

In Chapter 5 I will reiterate the purpose and nature of the study and why it was conducted, followed by my interpretations of my research findings. I will then discuss this study's limitations and provide recommendations for further research. I will conclude Chapter 5 by explaining the potential impact for positive social change this research study can have and complete this research.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

People who maintain multiple identities that are valued but conflict with each other tend to experience lower psychological well-being (Brook et al., 2008). Recognizing this, the goal of this interpretative, phenomenological study was to explore African American law enforcement officers' lived experiences of conflicting identities while considering the unjust killing of African Americans. To achieve this goal, I employed IPA as a methodology. This approach is used to describe the nature of a phenomenon by examining it from the perspective of those who have experienced it and the feelings they attributed to that experience (Neubauer et al., 2019). This method was appropriate for this research study because the foundation of the study was contingent on the feelings and experiences of African American law enforcement officers.

I interviewed eight African American law enforcement officers, asking them in-depth, semistructured questions. Each participant answered the questions by sharing their feelings and experiences related to the research topic. After analyzing the data, four themes and 12 subthemes emerged that provided insight into the experience of conflicting identities of African American law enforcement officers.

In this chapter, I provide an interpretation of the findings, an overview of the study's limitations, my suggested recommendations for future research, and the implications of this study's results.

Interpretation of Findings

The concept of conflicting identities has been explored by researchers from different perspectives, extending the knowledge to a field that lacks comprehensive

information on this subject. However, despite having a sense of what conflict is and when and where conflict might arise, less is known about how conflict is experienced and what it is about the identities involved that might constrain the experience of conflict (Jones & Hynie, 2017).

As I extensively detailed in Chapter 2, this is particularly true for African American law enforcement officers who, as African Americans, have historically and presently been subjected to biased mistreatment by law enforcement while, as law enforcement officers, are working to serve their communities. The following interpretation of the study findings will help extend knowledge in the discipline and provide more insight into African American law enforcement officers' experiences of conflicting identities.

Finding 1: Distrust of Law Enforcement's Decision Making Toward African Americans

Some African Americans unequivocally believe that law enforcement could never earn their trust, while others require equitable treatment, increased respect, and better community policing before their relationship could begin to be repaired (Pryce & Chenane, 2021). This is consistent with the findings in the current study. However, one of the most distinguished findings in the current study was that even though participants are law enforcement officers, they distrusted the decision making of other law enforcement officers, mainly when they interact with their children and family members. The notion of Black parents teaching their children to self-police their own identities and behave in specific manners when interacting with the police is not a new concept (Dow, 2019;

Harris & Amutah-Onukagha, 2019). Many participants alluded to it, adding despair and ambivalence with law enforcement officers' decision making when their family members interact with the police. This distrust of someone who wears the same uniform originates from their own experiences and cultural understanding of law enforcement's treatment of African Americans. Many of the participants disclosed personal recollections of biased mistreatment they experienced by law enforcement that manifested in complexity of feelings and perceptions of law enforcement. Those feelings of fear, worry, and uncertainty were profound.

Although it is necessary for societal progression, having an honest conversation about racial issues is unsettling and makes many people uncomfortable. This is even more true amongst people of different races because race talk is seen as inappropriate and discourteous and should be avoided or spoken about in a very light, casual, or peripheral manner (Sue, 2013). Participants recognized the importance of conversations and their impact on others truly understanding their feelings on racial concerns. Findings from this research study suggest that for African American law enforcement officers to be comfortable and confident in discussing issues concerning the biased mistreatment and unjust killing of African Americans to their non-Black coworkers, they must possess numerous years of service in law enforcement.

Participants presented different strategies to communicate their feelings about racial conflicts between law enforcement and African Americans. Some evaluated the mentality and ideology of their listeners, which defined the extent of depth that they would speak about the subject. Some participants believed that they should not talk about

it or say very little, while others felt strongly that they would express their feelings through serious and deep discussions, regardless of the audience. Participants who unhesitatingly responded confidently that they have always expressed their true feelings concerning African Americans' racial issues were veterans with many years of service.

It is plausible that those participants who felt differently were fearful of departmental reprisal or being blackballed from progression within their agencies. As they can relate to Amazon, Walmart, Google, and Microsoft workers' stand for justice through employee activism. They also dread being punished, such as Black athletes. Black athlete activists have often suffered professional consequences for their protest, reminding Black Americans of how the White power structures threaten to punish the outspoken and esteemed members of their racial in-group (Towler et al., 2020).

Finding 2: Non-African American Law Enforcement Officers' Inability to Identify With African Americans

Previous research has established that social class connotes race (Lei & Bodenhausen, 2017), so when people view Black people, they perceive people of a lower class and impoverished. This further adds to the intricacies of building compatibility with African Americans, as participants expressed that non-African American law enforcement officers lack cultural knowledge and maintain implicit biases that further separate them from the people they are required to interact with daily.

Participants in this study believe there is a disconnect between law enforcement as an entire organization and the lower class of people in the United States. Additionally, they consider the relatability gap between non-African American law enforcement

officers and the African American community sizeable. Participants' experiences demonstrate that this failure to connect with African American community members summons more aggressive approaches and an eagerness to punish rather than educate in culpable circumstances.

For participants, the unwillingness to give African Americans a second opportunity to correct their behavior, mainly when the infractions are minor, produces feelings of frustration. Factors affecting police discretion to arrest during traffic stops and when responding to domestic disturbances can be affected by police characteristics, with White male officers more likely to arrest (Schulenberg, 2015). Participants understood the significance of a second chance and its value to African Americans, particularly when considering the other barriers they face in their lives. Therefore, rather than punish African Americans for insignificant or minor infractions, they try and educate them, which gives them a second opportunity to correct their behavior and improve their view of law enforcement.

Previous research has shown that law enforcement officers correlate African Americans with a threat (James, 2018). This was also confirmed in the current study findings as participants' feelings towards this wrongful stereotype manifested when they discussed the amount of aggression law enforcement officers typically bestow on African Americans.

Finding 3: Frustration With Law Enforcement's Treatment of African Americans

Despite the continued emergence of viral videos displaying the controversial treatment of African Americans by law enforcement, this finding suggests that it is not

solely a racial issue. Participants acknowledged that non-African American law enforcement officers maintain racial biases towards Black people that affect their decisions but also expressed sentiments that law enforcement officers who exhibit that type of behavior lack the necessary emotional capabilities to serve effectively as law enforcement officers. These law enforcement officers lack empathy for those who are less fortunate or in troublesome predicaments and do not value these individuals' lives, regardless of race. Furthermore, these officers continually need to feel powerful and in control, responding with force and aggression when African Americans show rebuttal.

Finding 4: Feelings as an African American in Law Enforcement

The findings in this study show that African American law enforcement officers understand that some officers' unethical decisions do not reflect the entire system. However, they have strong feelings of anger and worry concerning the continued unjust treatment of African Americans by the criminal justice system as a whole, which tends to outweigh any explanation for those officers' behavior. African American law enforcement officers also value their responsibilities as law enforcement officers, so they are embarrassed when officers neglect to uphold their oaths and handle people unempathetically. Being so emotionally invested in both identities makes being an African American law enforcement officer very challenging.

Participants understood the distrust African Americans have towards police based on their own experiences and perspectives of how Black people are being treated around the United States. The participants could relate to African Americans' feelings and found it challenging to work protests aimed at seeking justice for the biased mistreatment and

unjust killings of African Americans. In the next section, I provide an in-depth discussion of how these two identities conflict and how this conflict is resolved.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study was Turner's SCT. SCT is a theory that acknowledges that people maintain multiple identities as both individuals and group members, describes how and when people will define themselves as individuals and group members and the implications of this, and explores the impact of this variability in self-perception (Lange et al., 2012). SCT consists of ingroup, outgroup, and intergroup categorization. Ingroup categorization is when people identify others as like themselves but cannot identify with others who are not similar (Leonardelli & Toh, 2015). Outgroup categorization is when people view others who are identical to each other but dissimilar to the beholder (Leonardelli & Toh, 2015). Intergroup categorization is when group members observe similarities between themselves and other group members but notice significant differences with other groups and their members (Leonardelli & Toh, 2015). The stronger a person identifies with a particular group, the more that identity becomes valuable and salient. More so than others, certain issues will stimulate identity salience because these issues are usually a reflection of certain groups' struggles and controversies in various cultural and historical contexts (Xu, 2020).

The findings of this research study can be interpreted considering this theory as it provides an understanding of why participants' African American identity becomes salient and the circumstances that contribute to it. Many participants alluded to their belief that their African American identity takes precedent over their law enforcement

identity. Despite both identities being extremely valuable to each person, the negatively biased treatment they have witnessed law enforcement inflict on other African Americans, combined with their adverse interactions, produced strong feelings and perceptions of law enforcement.

As African American law enforcement officers encounter the unfavorable circumstances of another law enforcement officer unjustly killing or inflicting biased mistreatment on another African American, it creates conflicting situations. It places them in a position where their two identities are no longer in sync with one another, forcing one identity to become salient.

As the anger and frustration grow with their African American identity, so does their desire to protest, educate, and make changes from the inside. However, despite sharing their feelings, they are still responsible for working those protests to control other African Americans' emotions and continue their daily job duties. With high regard for their profession, those situations would force some participants to suppress the salience of their African American identity and merely perform their job duties within their law enforcement identities. In contrast, others would experience intergroup categorization as they identify with African American protestors and supportive law enforcement officers but not with nonsupportive officers. Participants believed they would perform their jobs and support the protestors by praying and holding a closed fist in solidarity.

As it further pertains to SCT, the findings in this research study reveal that when African American law enforcement officers encounter conflicting situations, they implicitly evaluate the ingroup, outgroup, and intergroup. In the wake of conflicting

situations, such as the unjust killing of an African American, African American law enforcement officers who identify other African Americans with the same passion, desire, and sense of urgency to make a change will identify more with them, making their African American identity salient. They will also view how non-African American law enforcement officers bond together for support as a “blue wall of silence” with common goals far from those of African Americans viewing them as the outgroup. This will, too, cause their African American identity to become salient. Lastly, they will observe similarities between themselves and other group members but notice significant differences with other groups and their members, thus again forcing their African American identity to become salient.

Limitations of the Study

In every research study, some limitations are expected, and this study is no different. The study findings may not be relevant to other African American officers who have fewer experiences, higher ranks, are mixed races, or have a lineage of police officers in their families. Many of the limitations that I identified are attributed to the qualitative research design, which only requires a small sample size for saturation. The eight participants in this study provided valuable details of their own experiences and perceptions of conflicting identities of being African American law enforcement officers, which resulted in rich data and a greater understanding of the study topic. However, despite the available information, common themes and patterns may not be relevant to African American law enforcement officers because qualitative inquiries are intended to develop transferable theories rather than generalizable ones.

Another limitation is the participant selection process. I utilized self-selection and snowball sampling, which allowed me to gather enthusiastic participants in a short amount of time, as they chose to participate of their own volition. Each participant appeared genuinely interested in providing me with their experiences and feelings, which contributed to detailed responses. With that in mind, it is plausible that participants' decision to participate in this study may reflect some inherent bias in their characteristics that could lead to limited transferability of the current findings. There is also a geographical limitation as African American law enforcement officers who relocated or grew up in other countries were not included in this research study. Their experiences could be synonymous with the participants in this research study, but this cannot yet be ascertained.

An additional limitation of this study is the lack of prior research. Although the social implications for this research study are wide-reaching, a thorough search of the available literature resulted in a limited number of inquiries. This leaves a wide gap in the literature with many exploration possibilities but lacks a historical foundation for the research questions I examined. The last limitation in this research study is the lack of participation from correctional officers. Many of my participants were police officers who held various law enforcement positions, such as patrol officers, probation/parole office, etc. Only one participant solely worked in corrections in this study, offering a different perspective concerning the research questions.

Recommendations

As I demonstrated earlier in the literature review, research on African American law enforcement officers' experiences of conflicting identities is nonexistent. Therefore, I conducted this study to bring awareness to their experiences of conflicting identities and perceptions of law enforcement following the biased treatment of African Americans. Although I meticulously and thoroughly completed each step of this research study, some limitations prevent this study from answering every appropriate question to close the knowledge gap. Those limitations assist with the recommendations of future research.

I recommend that research be conducted on non-African American law enforcement officers who have been criminally or civilly convicted on charges regarding the unjust treatment of African Americans. That study will provide direct insight into their perceptions of African Americans during intense situations and their mindset before committing the discriminatory behavior. A study including non-African American law enforcement officers (as participants) examining their perceptions of unempathetic police officers and their approaches with African Americans will provide perspicacity into their feelings. Also, a study that explores the feelings of non-African American law enforcement officers who were not directly involved but stood by while the unjust treatment took place. This will further reveal the "blue code of silence" and officers' unwillingness to intervene amidst unethical treatment.

Most of the participants in this research study served as law enforcement officers in southern states of the United States. Five of the participants worked in Alabama, one in Georgia, one in Mississippi, and one in California. African Americans' experiences in the

South encompass entirely different experiences as law enforcement officers and regular citizens in other parts of the United States. Merely 60 years ago, White law enforcement officers in the South with aggressive dogs, water hoses, batons, and Black people hanging from trees were the paramount visions of the Civil Rights Era, striking fear in many. Today, laws in the South remain belated, presenting more arrestable offenses and increased chances of police contact. By replicating this study with participants who work solely in the Northern part of the United States, different experiences could be yielded.

Participants in this research study had several years of experience. A research study that gathers the perceptions and experiences of younger law enforcement officers could offer different perspectives as most of their experiences in law enforcement would have been amid the BLM movement and the deaths of numerous unarmed African Americans. Furthermore, all the participants served in multiple police roles in law enforcement, but only one person worked solely in corrections, and none of them were military police. Their experiences as African American law enforcement officers will help close the knowledge gap in this discipline.

Lastly, with protesting being a tool for change in the African American community and a typical response to African Americans' unjustified killing and biased mistreatment, this topic should be further explored. During the interviews, some participants found it challenging to work protests aimed at seeking justice for African Americans who were unlawfully killed by law enforcement, while others perceived it as another element of their job responsibilities. By extensively researching this topic

regarding conflicting identities, the results can help further close the knowledge gap in this discipline.

Implications

The implications for positive social change for this research study are wide-reaching, as African Americans maintain many positions in law enforcement throughout the United States. The current research has shown that African American law enforcement officers face various challenges and emotions related to their two identities. These challenges are so strenuous that they can induce psychological distress. Being a unique study, this research study's findings can have on social change is substantial.

Individually, for African American law enforcement officers, this research study's findings can create a better work environment, as their non-African American colleagues will have a better cultural appreciation and understanding. With training being a fundamental and dynamic aspect of law enforcement, police departments and training academies could review their curricula and training programs to revise or implement improved culture awareness training. Non-African American law enforcement officers will better understand that African American law enforcement officers' feelings and perceptions are similar to other African Americans during unjust killings even though they are law enforcement officers. The findings could plausibly encourage a willingness to learn more about African Americans' cultural differences and perceptions, inspiring a readiness to accept and respect those differences.

Furthermore, training can also induce social change in improving African American-law enforcement relationships by equipping officers with the necessary

knowledge to address calls for services properly. As the findings acknowledged, implicit biases often drive more aggressive approaches, lack of relatability, and eagerness to punish criminally. With law enforcement associating social groups with traits related to crime, such as African Americans with aggressiveness, danger, violence, and antagonism (Spencer et al., 2016), improved training can ensure that they do not reinforce the stereotypical association between Blackness and crime. Through modified training, non-African American law enforcement officers will understand African Americans' responses better and be better trained to handle all types of calls for service involving African Americans. Improved training will help highlight implicit biases and development areas and provide law enforcement officers with adequate cultural training.

As African Americans often do not utilize therapy to manage their mental health concerns (Smith & Trimble, 2016) or are reluctant to discuss their psychological distress at all (Memon et al., 2016), this study's findings will provide insight into their feelings. The findings of this research study can equip psychological professionals with the necessary information to modify treatment plans better aimed at addressing the mental challenge of conflicting identities, positively impacting social change.

As law enforcement commits biased mistreatment and unjust killings of African Americans, it produces psychological distress, physical manifestations of stress, altered parenting behaviors, empathic isolation, coping strategies, and internal strengths that shape their parenting for Black mothers (Joe et al., 2019). African American men are also subject to increased stress as law enforcement officers constantly experience trauma that

significantly affects their health and well-being, making psychological support imperative (Papazoglou & Tuttle, 2018).

For African American law enforcement officers, this is greatly magnified as their stress levels are prolonged with experiences of heightened perceptions of systemic racism, lack of fairness, loss of social status and self-regard, increased fear of victimization, and more prominent mortality expectations (Bor et al., 2018) coupled with mood and anxiety disorders, hypertension, compromised immune function, and burnout from conflicting identities (Hirsh & Kang, 2016). Managing the individual stressors of being African American and being law enforcement officers is a challenge within itself, adding situations that cause those identities to conflict further exacerbates their stress.

Conclusion

In the current study, I used IPA to explore the lived experiences of African American law enforcement officers' conflicting identities regarding African Americans' unjust killing and biased mistreatment. The findings reveal that African American law enforcement officers recognize a need for change in how African Americans are treated by law enforcement. Furthermore, they share the same feelings as other African Americans in a lack of trust, anger, and fear following the unjust killings of African Americans. Wanting to improve the way law enforcement treats African Americans while also working for a profession that employs poor treatment causes their two identities to conflict.

The results of this study can potentially impact multiple realms with positive social change as these issues have plagued the African American community historically

to the present day. They determined that as African American law enforcement officers encounter conflicting identities concerning the unjust killing of African Americans, their racial identity becomes salient. However, they uphold their professional responsibilities, forcing the law enforcement identity to come to the fore. Furthermore, they do not generalize a few officers' actions as the standard for how law enforcement officers treat them. Instead, they recognize that they possess racial biases and view those officers as people who fail to identify with African Americans and lack empathy for people in troubling situations, particularly those of lower economic status.

The psychological strain placed on African American law enforcement officers from conflicting identities of being African American and law enforcement officers is mentally challenging. Coupling this with job-related pressure, family obligations, race-related stress, and inadequately addressing mental health remedies make daily activities almost overwhelming. Combining this study's findings with research into non-African American law enforcement officers who have been criminally or civilly convicted concerning the unjust treatment of African Americans will present a better understanding of their perceptions of African Americans. In conclusion, to prevent further suicides related to conflicting identities, such as Deputy Clyde Kerr III, further consideration should be applied to this issue through more comprehensive research and practical application.

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