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Black Citizens Experiences and Interactions with police in Coffee County

Brittany Nicole Palmer
Walden University

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Walden University

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Brittany Palmer

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Walden University
2021

Abstract

Black Citizens Experiences and Interactions with police in Coffee County

by

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MA, Walden University 2012

BS, Georgia Southern University, 2010

BS, Georgia Southern University, 2008

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration

Walden University

November 2021

Abstract

Media attention directed towards the relationship between law enforcement officers and communities of color has increased in recent years, specifically regarding the treatment of African Americans. In some cases, contact between police and African Americans had resulted in excessive and unjustified use of force. These types of occurrences have resulted in a divide between African Americans and police officers. The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to understand African Americans' experiences and interactions with police in communities with less-than-optimal working relations in Coffee County, Georgia. The theoretical framework for this study is the normative sponsorship theory. Data were collected from 20 individuals using semi structured interviews and surveys. I used a snowball sampling method to conduct surveys and transcribed interviews using NVivo. In addition, data were managed and analyzed using NVivo as well. Most participants indicated they had bad experiences with police officers. Participants indicated that many factors contributed to African American distrust of the police. The media, police officers' biases, police officers' abuse of power, and police officers' perceptions of African Americans also contributed to African Americans' distrust of the police. Findings of the research study may lead to positive social change through assisting law enforcement and policy makers with revising current policies. This study can also lead to positive social change by providing police officers with essential and effective training that considers how to implement effective relationship with Black citizens.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family. First and foremost, to my parents Theodore and Barbara Braswell who stood by me no matter what while I chased my dreams. My parents are both inspirations to me and always believed in education for their children. Thank you for raising me with discipline. This discipline resulted in me overcoming many hurdles and obtaining my PhD. The combinations of your traits have molded me into becoming the woman I am today. Without your wisdom and guidance, obtaining this PhD would not have been possible. To my husband Charles Palmer for being so understanding, patient, and kind. You always encouraged me when I wanted to quit. You never lost faith in me, and you always made me see the bigger picture ahead. To Ted, Donna, Anthony, and April for always encouraging me to reach beyond the stars to achieve my fullest potential. To my nieces, Tia, Alex and Dani, and my nephews Tripp, Teyton, and Trace: I love you all more than I can ever express. I pray that I have been a good role model and showed you how hard work pays off. To my daughters, Victoria, Asia, Keia, and A'driyanna: just know everything I do in life is for you, my nieces, and my nephews. I love you all more than anything.

To Dr. Sharon Tracy for making criminal justice so fun at Georgia Southern University that I decided to get a second Bachelors of Justice Studies and focus my dissertation on Criminal Justice issues. This has been a very hard but rewarding experience. I am very blessed to have had the opportunity to overcome many obstacles and accomplish so much in 30 plus years. I appreciate everyone who was supportive, loving, and understanding throughout this whole process. To my Grandmother Susie

Taylor: I would like to say that I love you and I heard your prayers of guidance and love over the years, and I hope I made you proud. To my angels in heaven, my niece Kayla, Grandma Maybell, and Grandpa Cleve: thanks for watching over me and protecting me throughout this process.

Most importantly, I would like to thank God for shedding his grace and mercy upon me. In times of frustration, indecision, failure, giving up, and disgust, God wrapped his arms around me and allowed me to find. When I felt like giving up, God showed me that with him, all things are possible. Finally, I dedicate this dissertation to all the individuals affected by police violence and all the police officers who strive every day to make this world a safer place. Your dedication to this country is greatly appreciated.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

In 2007, Sean Bell was killed by a police officer in Queens, New York while leaving his bachelor party. Bell was an unarmed Black male, but the police fired 50 plus gunshots into his vehicle. On July 17, 2014, Eric Garner said, “I can’t breathe” under the crushing weight of police officers until he died on a New York sidewalk. Mr. Garner’s death was one of many incidents of black men killed by police officers. The number of black people killed by police officers in the United States of America continues to rise (Chaney & Robertson, 2015). Police in America kill citizens at a higher rate than any other developed nation (Chaney & Robertson, 2015), and because of this, more attention needs to be directed towards this phenomenon. Further, though African American men represent 14.5% of the U.S. total population (United States Census Bureau, n.d.), African American men are overrepresented in state prisons and the federal prison system. At the end of 2006, African American men accounted for 37.9% of the prison population (Federal Bureau of Prisons, n.d.). In recent years, a significant amount of media attention reflected the relationship between police and communities of color, particularly police treatment of African Americans. Although the problem of police violence is discussed in many settings, the current study specifically focuses on how this issue is discussed in the public sphere.

Many African Americans are treated unequally by police officers (Archbold et al., 2013). Across the United States, police misconduct has grown over the last 7 years (Conlin, 2014). Several high profiles cases, locally and across the nation, have brought

the issue of police misconduct to the forefront of social, political, and scholarly research. In addition, deaths of unarmed young men have led to national protests against police.

This study is significant because it will help law enforcement officers and African American communities learn about negative perceptions and interactions between police and communities of color where police and citizens have less than optimal citizen-officer relationships in Coffee County. The findings of this study will aid law enforcement agencies and policymakers to comprehend and address better policies in the communities in which they work. Chapter 1 details the background of the study, problem, purpose of the study, research questions, and theoretical framework. I also discuss the nature of the study, definitions of terms, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, significance of the study, and a summary.

Background

African Americans throughout the United States have experienced unequal racial treatment by law enforcement officers and the criminal justice system for decades (Cochran & Warren, 2012). However, when African Americans complain about their unequal treatment at the hands of police officers, the officials who are responsible for investigating these complaints are typically apathetic towards their concerns (Cochran & Warren, 2012). Cochran and Warren (2012) said complaints made by African Americans regarding police treatment are typically dismissed. Cochran and Warren examined the different variations in perceptions of law enforcement officers, how citizens interact with officers, and if officers' race impacts citizens' evaluations of their encounter with law enforcement. African Americans were more likely to negatively evaluate Caucasian police

officers when being stopped and felt Caucasian police officers were racially stereotyping them.

Racial stereotyping can be found in many different law enforcement agencies across the US. Ferguson, Missouri's law enforcement method reflects and reinforces stereotyping (U.S. Department of Justice [DOJ], 2015). The U.S. DOJ began investigating the Ferguson Police Department on September 4, 2014. This investigation fell under the pattern-or-practice provisions of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994. The investigation findings revealed a pattern or practice of improper conduct within the Ferguson Police Department, which violated the First, Fourth, and 14th Amendments of the U.S. Constitution. Patterns and practice also violated federal statutory law. During a 2-year investigation of the Ferguson Police Department from 2012 to 2014, African Americans were subjected to high rates of motor vehicle stops (85%), arrests (93%), and uses of force (88%), and were jailed for more than 2 days compared to people of Caucasian, Hispanic, and Asian descent (DOJ, 2015). Furthermore, African Americans only comprised 67% of the Ferguson population between 2012 and 2014 (U.S. DOJ, 2015).

Many minorities, including African Americans, feel excluded and emotionally distressed due to the harsh treatment from law enforcement (Cochran & Warren, 2012). Miller (2013) said the way police officers were trained to fight crime was directly based on the intersection of racial stereotypes and criminal suspicion. Miller posited that police use training as part of their decision-making processes in terms of whether or not to stop African Americans in certain neighborhoods. Miller further explained that their method

of training leads to negative citizen-police relationships among African Americans, especially African American men.

Bonner (2014) said police consider race and other policing practices when interacting with African Americans who appear to be racially out of place in public areas. African Americans were concerned about excessive police use of force and differences in enforcement. Novak and Chamlin (2012) noted that African American perspectives provided insights into learning how law enforcement officers make decisions in terms of who to stop, search, and issue citations to.

A tremendous amount of research focuses on African Americans and police officers; however, there is a lack of literature focusing on African American experiences and interactions with police in communities with less-than-optimal citizen-police relations. I address this gap by adding new insight to the field. Results of this study provide insights to improve negative race relationship that exist between African Americans and police. The criminal justice system has long been a force for social change by addressing relations between communities of color and police officers.

Statement of the Problem

In this study, I attempted to address deep-rooted attitudes in communities of color that the criminal justice system is rigged against them, and the system designed to protect all citizens is failing and targeting them. One of the main debates pertaining to the criminal justice system revolves around inequalities in terms of the basic functioning of the criminal justice system. Topics of these debates have included police practices, use of force, aggressive policing, arrest policies, prosecution policies, criminal sentences

severity, and the impact of criminal justice policies on communities of color (Federal Bureau of Investigation [FBI], 2015). Police officers often treat young Black men who may look like others they have arrested differently from young White men (FBI, 2015; Nordberg et al., 2016). This conduct complicates the relationship between police and communities of color (Comey, 2015). In addition, current media coverage indicates that racial tensions between police and Black citizens have grown since 2014 in Ferguson; however, current literature provides limited understanding of this growth despite increased media coverage.

The accepted operational paradigm among most police departments is community policing. A key tenet of community policing requires that police officers and citizens' work together to positively address the immediate conditions of public safety issues such as crime, social disorder, and fear of crime (Barlow & Barlow, 2015). Citizens who have negative perceptions of police based on racial disparities may be less willing to work with them. Police officers and citizens working together is essential to community policing; therefore, no matter how hard the police try, their efforts may prove fruitless because some parts of the community will only perceive bias. Thus, understanding African Americans' experiences and interactions with police in communities with less-than-optimal citizen-officer relations will be useful in terms of implementing effective community policing policies in heterogeneous communities.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to understand African Americans' experiences and interactions with police in communities with less-

than-optimal citizen-officer relations in Coffee County. The issue of police interactions with African American communities has been studied from many diverse perspectives, including criminal justice and public policy. Numerous surveys have been conducted and several questionnaires have been developed. I used a qualitative case study method to inform this inquiry. Interactions and experiences with police in communities of color were used in conjunction with interviews to develop an understanding of how diverse communities view their interactions with police.

Research Questions

RQ1: How do Black citizens in communities with less-than-optimal public safety coproduction models perceive their experiences and interactions with police in Coffee County?

Theoretical Framework

When conducting scholarly research, researchers can use a specific theory to comprehend and guide their findings during the collection of data. It is essential for researchers to use a specific theory or theories to guide the data collection process (Maxwell, 2013). A selected theory can help connect the relationship between African Americans and police officers. Law enforcement must act in the best interests of communities to create a better social environment and bridge gaps between police and communities.

Community policing is ineffective without citizens' support (Trojanowicz & Bucqyeroux, 1990). The normative sponsorship theory was developed in association with research involving community perceptions of police. The role of a law enforcement

officer is that of leader, facilitator, educator, and role model. It is the officer's responsibility to work with and for citizens, which they serve. Law enforcement officers can meet their citizens' needs through observations and information that emerges from within communities. Once citizens of communities and law enforcement officers develop a working relationship, both parties can engage in the process of goal sharing, possibly resulting in more harmonious relationships (Trojanowicz & Dixon, 1974). Community policing implies that citizens and law enforcement officers' work together to solve community problems.

Nature of the Study

I employed a qualitative phenomenological research approach to conduct this research study. In this phenomenological research study, the goal was to explore African Americans' experiences and interactions with police in communities with less-than-optimal working relations in Coffee County. I also explored how media coverage informs the nature and experiences of African Americans' views of the police. I chose the phenomenological research approach because it can be used to gain an understanding of a phenomenon from the perspectives of individuals who experienced it, and there is meaning in shared experiences. In addition, the phenomenological research approach provides a deep understanding of the phenomenon because this approach reveals meanings that support perceptions (Moustakas, 1994; Waters, 2002; Waugh & Waugh, 2004). For the current research study, a phenomenological approach was used to provide details on how African Americans experience less than optimal working relations with police officers.

Data were collected via in-depth face-to-face semi structured interviews. I designed this study to collect information from African American citizens who have less than optimal working relations with law enforcement to understand the meaning of their lived experiences and interactions in Coffee County. To accomplish the goal of this research study, I collected data from African American (Black) citizens who met the criteria described in Chapter 3. To begin the research process, I received permission to conduct this research. Next, I conducted and audio-recorded interviews. Each participant in this research study was interviewed. Participants also completed a demographic information sheet, which allowed me to collect information regarding their age, gender, and ethnicity. I used open-ended interview questions as outlined in my interview guide. Research participant interviews and field notes was used as backup methods, along with documentation of my thoughts and any pertinent observations that I noted during the interview process.

A qualitative research approach was the best method for this research because this approach allowed me to accurately document African American citizens' responses regarding their individual subjective experiences and interactions with police officers. In addition, the study took place in Coffee County, in the state of Georgia. I chose this population because it is close to my home and has a large number of African American citizens who have interacted with law enforcement officers. There were 43,273 individuals living in Coffee County (United States Census Bureau, 2019). African Americans were the second largest population making up 28.8% of the total population

(United States Census Bureau, 2019). Information about participants' demographics, interviews, and the sampling design is provided in Chapter 3.

Definition of Terms

African Americans: African American is an official racial category involving individuals who are members of an American ethnic group who have origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa (U.S. Office of Management and Budget, 1997; Pinn, 1996).

Associative relationships: Associative relationships are based on one's rationality and individual beliefs regarding obligations to a particular social or ethnic group with the expectation that other members follow the same principles (Gane, 2005).

Caucasian Americans or Caucasians: Caucasian Americans or Caucasians refers to individuals with origins stemming from Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013).

Criminal typification or typification: Criminal typification or typification refers to characteristics of a criminal predator that are often identified with African Americans (Entman, 1992). African Americans are more likely than their Caucasian counterparts to be portrayed in the media as criminals as opposed to police officers, role models, news commentators, and other positive figures (Chiricos & Eschholz, 2002).

Communal relationships: Communal relationships are formed from an individual's feelings for others (Turner, 2012). This is where someone assume a great deal of responsibility for someone else.

Public safety coproduction model: When the community and police both have a voice in defining what they want their policing to look like. A less than optimal public safety coproduction model is when citizens do not help police officers regarding public safety. Citizens do not report crimes, provide information pertaining to crimes, or trust the police. This lack of trust undermines the authority of law enforcement agencies and creates an unequal society (Friedman, 2014).

Police officer/law enforcement officer: Body of officers representing the civil authority of government. Police and law enforcement personnel are uniformed officers who regularly patrol and respond to calls for service. Other personnel include investigators, those who perform court-related duties, and those who work in administrative roles or with other assignments (Kelling, Banton, Parker, Thomas, & Walsh, 2020).

Social relationship theory: Social relationships refer to collective or group encounters that involve orientation and adjustment in terms of the meaningful behavior of others (Weber, 1978, as cited in Gane, 2005). Thus, the social relationship theory is used to emphasize people's behaviors and actions toward other members of society as a form of status posturing (Weber, 1978, as cited in Gane, 2005).

Assumptions

I conducted semi structured in-depth face-to-face interviews to explore African Americans' perceptions and experiences with police officers. I assumed that participants honestly and openly answered interview questions by sharing their perceptions and experiences pertaining to each interview question. Results of the research will lead to

positive social change because police officers and policymakers can use study results to understand perceptions and experiences involving interactions between police in communities of color where police and citizens have less than optimal working relations in Coffee County.

Scope and Delimitations

Study participants included African American citizens in Coffee County. All citizens live and reside in Coffee County and had some type of interaction or experience with police in Coffee County. In this study, I focused on African Americans' perceptions of their interactions and experiences with police officers in communities that have less than optimal working relations. African Americans who reside in areas that have positive citizen-officer working relations were excluded from this study. In addition, individuals who were not African American were excluded from this study. I did not include anyone with whom I had a personal relationship in my study. This includes family members, friends, coworkers, and professional and personal associates. This helped prevent perceived coercion to participate due to any existing or expected relationships between participants and myself.

Limitations

A significant amount of limitations arose during this study. One limitation involved trustworthiness. Generalizing the results from 20 participants in a snowball sample may have led to one limitation. The findings based on the information provided by the participants maybe generalized to other populations of African Americans who have expressed distrust of police officers based off interactions. However, the results may

not be generalized to other populations or states. Due to this limitation of this study, future studies could address a different sample population to achieve an extensive understanding of the topic. In addition, different sampling strategies such as purposive sampling could be used in future studies.

Second, social desirability bias was a limitation because participants may have wanted to be perceived as being positive; therefore, it is possible that participants did not respond honestly to interview questions. However, it was presumed that each participant honestly and openly answered the questions that they were asked while sharing their perceptions. Finally, my personal biases as the researchers could also have been a limitation to my research study. However, all the information gathered by the participants was utilized to complete the findings of this study. In addition, it was reported accurately as collected during the interview process.

Significance of the Study

This research is unique because it addresses communities where police and African Americans have less than optimal relations. The number of these communities has increased in recent years; therefore, an understanding of perceptions, interactions, and experiences involving African American citizens and police officers is beneficial because the police need the help of all citizens to effectively deter and solve crimes.

Study results provide much-needed insights to decrease negative race relations that exist between African Americans and police. Insights from this study could aid police departments and communities in terms of decreasing barriers that affect race relations between officers and African American citizens. Implications for positive social

change are directed towards police officers and policy makers at the state and local levels of government. Study results will also benefit police officers by informing police training.

Summary

In this study, I explored African Americans' perceptions and experiences with police officers in communities that have less than optimal working relations in Coffee County. I also examined the effect media has on forming these perceptions. Data were collected using in-depth interviews and surveys. I transcribed interviews and managed data using NVivo. Findings may lead to positive social change through helping law enforcement and policymakers address the need for stronger policies, additional training, and implementation of activities to unite African Americans in Coffee County and police officers.

Chapter 1 includes the background of the study, problem statement, research purpose, research question, and theoretical framework. I also discussed the nature of the study, definitions of terms, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and the significance of the study. In Chapter 2, I discuss literature search strategies, theoretical framework, community policing, relationships between police and African Americans, ethnicity, demographics, police misconduct, citizen distrust in police officers in Coffee County, social media, and diversity. In Chapter 3, I detail the research design and rationale. I also discuss the role of the researcher, methodology, and issues of trustworthiness. In Chapter 4, I discuss study results, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, and credibility.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Debates exist regarding conversations about inequalities in terms of the basic functioning of the criminal justice system. These debates have involved topics such as police practices, use of force, aggressive policing, arrest policies, prosecution policies, criminal sentences severity, and the impact of criminal justice policies on communities of color. A deep-rooted attitude exists within communities of color that the criminal justice system is essentially rigged against them and is failing and targeting their communities. Police officers often treat young Black men who may look like others they have arrested differently from young White men (Comey, 2015). According to Comey (2015), law enforcement must develop a broad understanding and acceptance that this behavior complicates relationships between police and communities of color. Current media coverage indicates that racial tensions between police and Black citizens have grown between 2000 and 2021 yet literature provides limited understanding of this growth despite increased media coverage.

Most police departments operate under a form of policing known as community policing, which has become the accepted operational paradigm. A key tenet of this practice requires police officers and citizens working together (Somerville, 2009). Citizens who have a negative perception of police based on racial disparities may be less willing to work with them. Police officers and citizens working together is essential to community policing; no matter how hard police try, their efforts may prove fruitless because some parts of the community only perceive bias. Understanding citizens' perceptions of the police is an important concern for criminology scholars and

policymakers. Furthermore, a better understanding to police officers of how diverse communities view their interactions with police can inform effective community policing policies in heterogeneous communities.

The purpose of this study was to comprehend perceptions and experiences involving interactions with police officers in communities where police and citizens have less than optimal working relations in Coffee County. I used a qualitative case study design for this inquiry. In this chapter, I review research associated with perceptions and experiences of communities of color and police officers. Miller (2007) said police officers tend to withdraw from proactive policing where people who are ethnic or racial minorities live to avoid any administrative identification with bias-based policing. For example, police officers choose to not stop a Black or Hispanic person to decrease chances of being labeled as an officer that engages in racial profiling. The officer could also refuse to patrol communities of color that have less than optimal working relations with police officers. Tomaskovic-Devey and Warren (2009) said these neighborhoods often have higher rates of crime. Additionally, these neighborhoods often need police patrols the most. Literature in this chapter focuses on how communities of color describe their relations and experiences with police officers.

Literature Search Strategy

Literature search strategies for this research involved a comprehensive search of Walden University Library databases. I used the following databases to conduct my literature search: Criminal Justice Database, Oxford Criminology Bibliographies, ProQuest Central, SAGE Premier, SAGE Journals, and Political Science Complete. I also

used Google Scholar and GALILEO. Keywords I used when searching these databases were community policing, policing in African American Communities, use of force, diversity in police departments, officer involved shooting of African Americans, African Americans distrust of police officers, and media and the police. I used these key terms to identify germane scholars. In addition, this topic has been addressed in the media recently; therefore, I located many news media articles related to this research. Additionally, when conducting my literature review search, I noticed that a significant amount of the research from peer-reviewed journals were published prior to 2017.

Theoretical Framework

Although the literature is clear about the philosophy of community policing, its purpose is often misunderstood. In 1957, Sower et al. developed the normative sponsorship theory. This theory was developed in association with research about community perceptions of police. This theory serves as the theoretical foundation for this current research study.

Normative Sponsorship Theory

The normative sponsorship theory explains ways a group (e.g., the police) must act as a facilitator of social control (Sower et al., 1957). Sower et al. (1957) said the police should act in the best interests of the community to create a better social environment and communities, which in turn could bridge gaps between police and communities. Without citizen support, community policing would not be successful (Trojanowicz & Bucqueroux, 1990). Sower et al. developed the normative sponsorship theory in relation to research about community perceptions of police. The effectiveness

of surveys eliciting such perceptions depended on citizens' support. Normative means being "within the limits of established standards" (Trojanowicz & Dixon, 1974, p. 332) to all individuals and groups involved. Trojanowicz (1982) said the police could not make positive social change in communities without citizens' support. Therefore, those planning and implementing community development programs must consider how various groups can achieve agreement. According to Sower et al. (1957), communities that follow the tenets of the normative sponsorship theory will have success.

The roles of a law enforcement officer including being a leader, facilitator, educator, and role model. It is the officer's job to work with and for citizens in their community; doing so allows officers to gauge citizens' needs based on personal observations and information that emerges from citizens within communities. Once individuals within communities and police officers begin to develop working relationships, both parties engage in the process of goal sharing, resulting in harmonious relationships (Trojanowicz & Dixon, 1974). Although positive police-community relations by themselves do not lead to community policing, these relations are an essential first step in establishing positive working relationships with members of communities in which officers serve and protect. According to proponents of community policing, every police officer should be a professional and helpful public servant. Trojanowicz (1972) said, "Normative sponsorship theory are those programs that challenge the 'skeptics' through involvement, participation, and cooperative action will be more effective than programs that are conflict oriented" (p. 411). The police cannot be the only problem solvers and planners within a community. An effective police-citizen

relations program requires police and citizens working together to form partnerships and provide for a better quality of life.

Community Policing

Many communities are moving away from a reactive model (traditional) of policing and moving toward a more proactive model. Policing in America was ruled by the traditional model of policing until the 1960s. According to the traditional model, police officers only responded when victims notified 911. Police officers would investigate who committed the crime and make an arrest once caught. When police officers were not responding to calls, they were on patrol within communities. Police officers patrolled to be visible within communities. Police officer administrators knew that being noticeable discourages crime, a technique known as preventive patrolling.

Community policing was first incorporated because citizens were not happy with the way policing was being done. Grassroots organizations wanted to improve the traditional model (Skogan, 2004). Many new concepts failed; however, they gave police department's insight and lessons regarding what policing could actually entail. Through community policing, new relationships can be established with citizens in communities. Community policing also gives citizens a greater voice in terms of setting priorities for police.

Community policing has been developing slowly since the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. Individual essentials of community policing, such as improvements in police-community relationships, developed slowly from political and social upheavals pertaining to the Civil Rights Movement. Riots and protests against

racial injustices brought government attention to sources of racial discrimination and tension, including police officers. As main symbols of political authority, police officers were exposed to public criticism. Not only were people from minority groups underrepresented in police departments, but also police treated people from minority groups more harshly than White citizens. Police officers must become more receptive to the challenges of a rapidly changing society.

History of Relations Between Police and African Americans

Police misconduct has been seen within the African American community for a long time. Myrdal (1944) said policing and police officers were used to keep African Americans subjugated and subdued, which dates back to slavery. In the midst of the Civil Rights Movement, local police officers had batons and police dogs and claimed they were trying to restore order in local southern neighborhoods. In addition, the media would often portray stories of young and nonviolent African American teenagers being sprayed by water hoses, and some protestors were attacked by police dogs on television. McEwen (1996) said police officers used excessive force during apprehensions of a suspect or as an immediate response.

Public perceptions of police officers are an important social issue. Durose et al. (2010) said the relationship between police and African American communities was more violent during the 1980s and 1990s compared to the Civil Rights Movement and the present day. Incidents of police misconduct can still be seen today across the United States of America. According to Durose et al. (2010), African Americans (4.5%) were pulled over for traffic violations twice as often as White Americans (2.1%).

Race, Ethnicity, and Policing

Most citizens are confident, satisfied, and hold favorable impressions of local police (Durose et al., 2010). However, variations in public perceptions have been found based on individual characteristics, neighborhood contexts, and encounters with the police. Ethnicity is one of the most frequent demographic characteristics found to be linked with perceptions of the police. African Americans hold negative perceptions towards the police (Durose et al., 2010). 80% of citizens expresses favorable impressions of the police (Durose et al., 2010); however, African American citizens tend to score around 25% points lower when queried and surveyed about positive attitudes toward the Police. Brunson (2007) interviewed 40 African American adolescent males in disadvantaged urban communities to investigate their experiences and interactions with police. Young Black men are disproportionately suspected and stopped by the police (Hurst et al., 2000). According to Brunson (2007), “descriptions of black citizens’ mistreatment by the police are abundant in some African-American communities” (p. 71).

Building a diverse workforce is essential to building positive relationships between the police and African American communities. Sklansky said the general police workforce has become diverse with regard to ethnicity and gender; however, the pace of this change varies from one police department to another. Racial unrests and riots since the 1960s make race a key focus of research in terms of studying people's perceptions, experiences, and interactions with police. African Americans tend to be less satisfied with police performance than White Americans (MacDonald & Stokes, 2012). African Americans have constantly rated their perceptions, experiences, and interactions of the police lower than White Americans and are more critical of the police. African Americans often report that they receive unprovoked searches and rough treatment by the police in comparison to Whites (VanRyzin et al., 2014). African Americans are less satisfied with the police and have lower levels of trust as measured to other ethnicity groups.

Disparity in Treatments across Groups

Just like race and ethnicity, demographics and age play a significant role in terms of how African Americans experience interactions with police. These interactions affect how African Americans form their perceptions of police. Neighborhoods also help shape individual reactions to policing (Marschall, 2004). Citizens who feel safe in their neighborhoods and do not see crime as a problem are likely to have better perceptions, interactions, and experiences with the police (Weitzer & Tuch, 2004). Furthermore, many neighborhoods with higher percentages of minorities report lower levels of satisfaction with the police (Swindell & Kelly, 2005). In addition, individuals in high-crime neighborhoods tend to hold negative attitudes toward police (Community Oriented

Policing Services 2016). COPS (2016) said an individual's satisfaction with the police is impacted by their personal encounters with the police.

According to Weitzer (2015), younger people have more adversarial contact with the police compared to older people. This leads to younger people developing negative views of police officers. Moreover, Weitzer said youth from minority groups are especially vulnerable to unwanted police attention and are thus more likely to hold negative views of police compared to White youths. Brunson and Miller (2006) said negative views held by young Black males were attributed to frequent involuntary contacts and poor treatment.

Police Misconduct

Police misconduct has been the topic of many debates along with the issue of police use of force. How often police use force is a hot topic in the media and amongst African American communities. According to the National Institution of Justice International Association of Chiefs of Police, use of force is the amount of effort required by police to compel compliance by an unwilling subject (U.S. Department of Justice [DOJ]). National Institute of Justice [NIJ]). The general approach is that police officer should not use more force than is necessary to maintain control of an incident, to carry out an arrest, or to protect the public and/or themselves from imminent danger (U.S. DOJ, NIJ, 2012). Any force used beyond this standard would be deemed excessive and warrant an investigation. Under the Fourth Amendment to the United States Bill of Rights, a police officer may use such force only as is objectively reasonable under all of the circumstances.

With this in mind, police use of force has become an important social issue. Police use of force was brought to national attention in 1985, when restrictions were implemented on the use of deadly force by the police through a landmark Supreme Court case known as *Tennessee v. Garner*. This case was about a 15-year-old boy who was shot in the back of the head and killed as he began climbing over a fence after being told to stop by police responding to a prowler call. The issue at hand was regarding the use of deadly force when apprehending a fleeing, nonviolent felon (U.S. DOJ, 2015). The jury concluded that deadly force is not justified when the fleeing felon presents no immediate danger to the officer or to others (U.S. DOJ, 2015). A police officer may not seize an unarmed, non-dangerous felony suspect with deadly force. This means that a police officer cannot use deadly force unless the officer has probable cause that a suspect poses threat or physical injury to others (U.S. DOJ, 2015). Under the Federal Civil Enforcement, the provisions of police misconduct state that it is against the law for local or state police officers to take part in or practice behaviors that deny the individual rights granted under the United States Constitution (U.S. DOJ, 2015). Police misconduct towards African American individuals and within African American communities has been an issue featured on different television and other media news outlets in recent years. The history between police officers and African Americans has been the topic of many research studies and debates. Seron et al. (2004) surveyed citizens and their interactions with police. In an encounter with police officers, participants were encouraged to analyze the severity of police misconduct during their interaction. Participants then responded to questions pertaining to police–civilian interactions. In

these questions, citizens had to rate the seriousness of police misconduct in an encounter from 0 to 10. Seron et al. found that African Americans rated police misconduct higher than any other ethnic group while controlling for social status, political orientation, and prior experience with the police.

Many studies have focused on the views of police misconduct among individuals from different ethnic groups. For example, Weitzer and Tuch (2004) surveyed White, African American, and Hispanic participants about their views on police misconduct. Misconduct was defined as (a) police stopping citizens without any reason, (b) police corruption, and (c) police verbal and physical abuse. Weitzer and Tuch found that ethnicity and race continue to be a major issue in the composition of feelings and perceptions regarding police misconduct. Weitzer and Tuch also found that White participants were less likely to report experiencing negative encounters with police officers. African American and Hispanic individuals are more likely to be involved in reports from the media regarding police abuse and to live in neighborhoods with high crime rates where police enforcement efforts may be distrustful; thus, perceptions of police misconduct are perpetuated. Even though police misconduct persists towards African Americans, limited publications or articles examine race as a major aspect of the excessive use of force by police officers. Jeffries (2002) provided an essential viewpoint on police violence against African American males. Jeffries discussed incidents of police misconduct involving murder or beating of an African American by a Caucasian police officer. These events have been identified by police departments as isolated incidents (Jeffries, 2002); however, these isolated incidents lead citizens to believe that the police

officer conduct was unethical. Jeffries went on to explain that there are different groups of Caucasians who have a broad range of opinions about African Americans. Some groups believe that murder and assault of African American by Caucasian police officers as unethical, but do not think that these tragedies take place in African American communities on a regular basis. The other groups believe that African Americans are at fault because they resist arrest and are disrespectful to police officers (Jeffries, 2002).

People from other minority groups also experience police misconduct in addition to African Americans. Love (1997) explained that the racial element of police brutality is one that cannot be overlooked. Love pointed out that victims of police brutality are usually people of color. For example, 2.3% of Hispanics and 4.4% of African Americans experience excessive use of force by a police officer, in comparison to just 1.2% of Whites (Durose et al., 2005). In addition, Ridgeway (2006) found that African Americans were 12 times more likely to be stopped by police officers who used excessive force and 40 times more likely to be pulled over by police officers who use a firearm. Love and Ridgeway's studies demonstrate that African Americans are more likely to experience excessive use of force by police officers.

Citizen Distrust

One of the most consistent findings in research on perceptions toward police is that citizen distrust is more prevalent among African Americans than whites (Barlow & Barlow, 2002). Research on the relationship between perceptions and the perspective of citizens' interactions with police suggests that critical views of the police take place from negative (involuntary and voluntary) police contacts (Huebner et al., 2004). Though most

research on minority citizens' perceptions of the police emphasizes direct personal encounters, researchers have started investigating the significance of learning about other group's police contacts as well.

African Americans typically share their encounters with the police with family members and friends to help lighten the burden. Sometimes this sharing creates a ripple effect of anger across these communities (Feagin & Sikes, 1994). This ripple effect is often referred to as vicarious experiences. Gallup polling conducted between 2011 and 2014 showed that 37% of African Americans had only some confidence in police, 25% of African Americans had very little, or no confidence in the police (Newport, 2014). On the other hand, 59% of Whites had either a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in the police (COPS, 2015).

Prior studies have typically focused on individual experiences with the police and largely overlooked the importance of the media in shaping attitudes towards law enforcement. Studies show that television offers viewers a visual image and informational message. Empirical research and evidence suggests that television and other media influence an individual attitudes and behaviors (Engel, 2005). Many individuals watch television to learn what is going on around the world. Because most citizens have limited contact with the police (Engel, 2005), the media may significantly shape beliefs and expectations about law enforcement, especially given the substantial growth in the amount of crime-related media over the last 3 decades. Communicative studies establish that what is seen or heard from the media can influence an individual's perceptions of reality. These perceptions of reality may then begin to influence an

individual's attitudes and behaviors. A primary example of this type of influence is apparent in studies that observe violent television portrayals and violent behavior. Researchers have revealed a link between viewing violent television and violent behavior. According to many laboratory-based studies, young people who were exposed to violent television programming are more likely to exhibit aggressive or violent behavior than those who were not exposed (Cheng et al., 2004).

Research on cognitive and implicit bias has been useful for understanding African American males' experience with the police. Implicit bias refers to the attitudes and stereotypes that influence one's understanding, actions, and decision-making processes in an unconscious manner (Staats & Patton, 2013). Implicit bias is activated unconsciously and without control and may be transmitted or produced through visual media. For example, excessive news coverage portraying Black people as criminals can lead to the formation of implicit bias (Staats & Patton, 2013). In Staats and Patton's (2013) study, police officers were presented pictures of White and Black faces and asked to choose which face looked criminal. Staats and Patton found that the officers chose the Black faces over the Whites. Furthermore, Staats and Patton found that the Black faces were chosen over the White faces because the Black faces had stereotypically Black features. Thus, when patrolling Black neighborhoods or interacting with Black citizens, police officers may unwittingly rely on racial stereotypes about Black citizens. These stereotypes associate Black people with crime and violence, which can influence the type of action police officers take when encountering a Black civilian on the street.

Social Media

Not only do African Americans share their encounters with the police with family and friends, but they also share their encounters through social media. According to Bonilla and Rosa (2015) through a theorization of hash tag usage social media platforms have become powerful sites for documenting and challenging episodes of police brutality. Social media has also become a powerful platform to document the misrepresentation of racialized bodies in mainstream media. Videos of several killings of unarmed Black men have been circulated through social media outlets. These publicized cases include Eric Garner, who died as a result of an illegal chokehold by a New York City police officer. In addition, 17-year-old Trayvon Martin's killing in 2012 sparked a national outcry and spurred numerous forms of activism. The fatal shooting of Michael Brown, an unarmed African American male in Ferguson, Missouri, also captured the imagination of viewers across and beyond the United States. Protestors from all around the world came to Ferguson to have the shooter arrested. Television viewers tuned in across the country to watch live coverage of the violent confrontations that took place in Ferguson between the protestors and highly armed local police, and images of these violent confrontations quickly went viral across social media. According to Bonilla and Rosa (2015):

During the initial week of protests, over 3.6 million posts appeared on Twitter documenting and reflecting on the emerging details surrounding Michael Brown's death; by the end of the month, “#Ferguson” had appeared more than eight million times on the Twitter platform.

Community awareness of crime and justice is largely derived from the media. Media plays a significant role in the construction of criminality and the criminal justice system. Community member's awareness of victims, criminals, and police officers is derived from the portrayal in the media; this is particularly relevant in African American communities (Surette, 1990). Therefore, it is essential to examine the effect that media has on communities and African American perceptions.

It is axiomatic that the media affect public perceptions of social problems. The degree of influence depends in part on a particular audience's receptivity to media messages (Dahlgren, 1988; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). Therefore, it is logical to expect that the public's opinions regarding the police are influenced by media reports on police actions, though this has seldom been studied. Researchers have given minimum attention to media influences on citizens' views of the police, particularly in light of the abundant research documenting media influences on citizens' views of crime and fear of crime (Surette, 1998). Research has shown that watching police "reality" shows, such as COPS, increases White viewers' satisfaction with the police, though this is not true for Blacks (Eschholz et al., 2002). These shows typically present the police in a sympathetic light. Although officers frequently use verbal and physical aggression against citizens, it is portrayed as reasonable (Eschholz et al. 2002; Oliver, 1996).

Some researchers have established that media coverage of incidents of police misconduct also influences attitudes toward law enforcement. This research has revealed an increase in negative views of the police during or immediately after news coverage of brutality incidents or corruption scandals (Kaminski & Jefferis, 1998; Tuch & Weitzer

1997; Weitzer, 2015). For instance, Weitzer and Tuch (2005) conducted a national survey of White, African American, and Hispanic adults to examine how direct and indirect experiences with police shape citizens' perceptions of race-based policing. Weitzer and Tuch found that exposure to media accounts of police misconduct significantly increases perceptions of police bias against minority individuals for all three racial groups.

Many social campaigns have appeared on social media in response to police violence towards African Americans. One such movement is Black Lives Matter. The Black Lives Matter movement focuses on the fact that African Americans are treated unfairly by the United States of America criminal justice system and are in danger of being killed during encounters with law enforcement officers. A Caucasian officer killing an unarmed African American seems to be not only the template for such incidents, but also the standard of law enforcement interactions with African Americans all over the country. Movements like Black Lives Matter have done a lot to bring attention to individual acts of police misuse of force; however, the number of African Americans killed during encounters with Caucasian law enforcement officers continues to rise. This has prompted researchers from many different fields to start investigating from a scholarly perspective. These researchers have primarily focused on the number of people killed by police (Chaney & Robertson, 2015), as well as the number of officers indicted. The Black Lives Matters movement has focused significantly on the media's response to African American victims of law enforcement officers' violence.

Lack of Diversity

Lack of diversity in police departments contradicts some of the United States' most essential civil rights laws and protections, such as Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (COPS, 2016). Title VII prohibits employment discrimination on the basis of race, sex, color, religion, and national origin (COPS, 2016). This means that a job applicant, despite being qualified for the position, is not hired because of their race, sex, or another protected characteristic. Unfortunately, intentional employment discrimination remains a barrier in the law enforcement context.

Encounters shown on the news pertaining to African Americans (e.g., those seen in Ferguson, Missouri) have highlighted the absence of assorted qualities inside of police departments. Many media outlets have begun to focus on racial demographics of police departments. For example, roughly 66% of Ferguson, Missouri's residents are African American; however, just three of the town's 53 appointed police officers are African American (COPS, 2015). This means that the number of African American police officers in Ferguson does not adequately reflect the African American community. Recent events seen in the media have highlighted the tension that exists in minority communities, especially in Baltimore, Maryland and Ferguson, Missouri (COPS, 2016). This tension has called for improvement of diversity in police departments. Local leaders and the White House Task Force on 21st Century Policing have all weighed in and made several recommendations for improving diversity in police departments. One way to improve diversity would be to ensure the police force reflects the community that its officers are sworn to serve. Although workforce diversity alone may not resolve all issues

related to the fairness and effectiveness of policing, achieving diversity in law enforcement agencies can increase trust between those agencies and the communities they serve. Researchers are conflicted about the impact demographic diversity has on police departments and the ability for officers to perform their duties (COPS, 2016). Sklansky (2006) alluded to studies indicating that African American officers were less biased towards other African Americans than White officers. Such studies also indicated that African American police officers knew more about the African American community and got more assistance from African American citizens. Concurrently, Sklansky also highlighted studies concluding that African American officers were just as prone as White police officers to use their firearms, arrest civilians, receive citizen complaints, and be subjected to disciplinary proceedings. Demographics are part of the challenge that police officer face. For example, if a African American police officer obtains several complaints, will it be because they are having to act more aggressively, have tougher beats to patrol, and are more objectionable? Or is it because citizens feel there will not be any retaliation if they complain?

Conclusion

This research study will fill a gap in the literature by focusing specifically on the race relations between Black citizens and police. This project is unique because it addresses an under researched area: communities where police and Black citizens have less than optimal relations. The study results provide essential insights to decrease the race relations that exist between communities of color and police. Black citizens comprise some of the communities that police officers patrol; therefore, it is essential that

an enhanced understanding and knowledge of the race relations aspect of community policing take place.

Chapter 3: Research Method

In this study, I explored how Black citizens in communities with less-than-optimal public safety coproduction models described their experiences and interactions with the police. I also explored how media coverage of race and police interactions informs the nature and experiences of Black citizens' views of police. I collected data through in-depth face-to-face semi structured interviews and observations. I collected information from Black citizens who have less than optimal working relationships with law enforcement to capture the meaning of their lived experiences and interactions. Interviews were transcribed using a transcription service and qualitative data were managed and analyzed with NVivo. I analyzed collected data using Moustakas' modified version of the van Kaam method of analysis. The study was organized in accordance with Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines to ensure ethical protection of research participants. The IRB approved the application for the study and provided the approval number 11-05-20-0245456. In this chapter, I discuss the research design and rationale. I also discuss the role of the researcher, methodology, and issues of trustworthiness, and provide a summary.

Research Design and Rationale

In this section, I present the research question for this phenomenological research study. I also present the rationale for the study design. I organized this section into the following subsections: research questions, research design, and rationale.

Research Question

In this qualitative phenomenological research study, I addressed one central question: How do Black citizens in communities with less-than-optimal public safety coproduction models describe their experiences and interactions with police?

Phenomenological Research Design Rationale

I used a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore Black citizens' experiences with police in communities with less-than-optimal public safety coproduction models. I also considered how media coverage of race and police interactions informs the nature and experiences of Black citizens' views of the police. I used snowball sampling, a type of purposive sampling, in this study. Specifically, I used snowball sampling to recruit Black citizens in Georgia who were willing to complete in-depth face-to-face semi structured interviews. I used NVivo to manage data and the van Kaam method for my data analysis.

I considered using a mixed methods approach for this study. This method was considered because it combines qualitative and quantitative methods. In addition, this method might have offered reinforcement of the stud based on both methods (Creswell, 2009, p. 14). This particular method could have helped provide a better understanding of the study if the outcomes of one method did not fully explain the results (Creswell, 2009, p.15). A mixed methods approach was not appropriate for my research study because it was not required to answer the central research question associated with this study. I also considered using a quantitative research method to explore the variables that are associated with the problem to explain cause-and-effect relationships (Creswell, 2009,

p.15). However, Quantitative method was not the best method to use for this study because participants' perceptions or thoughts about officers cannot be measured with standardized instruments. Therefore, I used a qualitative research method in this research. A qualitative research method allowed participants' personal experiences of the phenomena to be explained in detail (Creswell, 2009). According to Johnson (2013), this method involves understanding and descriptions of participants' personal experiences involving phenomena.

I considered five different qualitative research designs for this research: case study, ethnography, grounded theory, narrative inquiry, and phenomenology. I chose the phenomenological research design after an in-depth review and study of these designs. I used the phenomenological research design to comprehend the phenomenon via the views of those who experience interactions and want to share those experiences. Therefore, it was essential to use a phenomenological research design to address the significance of Black citizens' experiences with police in communities with less-than-optimal public safety coproduction models.

Role of the Researcher

The qualitative researcher is participatory, which means they have to be involved in the research process and participants; the researcher serves as an instrument with this approach (Creswell, 2013). Whereas quantitative researchers distance themselves from participants and researchers due to the instrumentation used to gain information (Lodico et al., 2010; Merriam, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). My role as the researcher was an observer-participant during face-to-face in-depth semi structured interviews. I was in

direct contact with all participants. Participants were recruited via email, telephone, and face-to-face conversations. I personally transcribed, coded, analyzed, and interpreted semi structured interview data.

I refrained from recruiting friends or colleagues to take part in this study because it was in the best interest of the study not to have any personal or professional relationships with participants. I had no power over participants; they were able to participate in the study without being or feeling coerced or obligated to be part of the study.

When conducting a phenomenological research study, the researcher should not have biases; rather, the researcher should view the topic with a fresh eye (Merriam, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). I was very mindful of my personal biases that relate to the research study topic. I did not have any biases against participants and all participants were treated with respect. No participants were exploited, and I did not have any conflicts of interest. I considered perceptions of all participants. After the study was approved and completed, I emailed each participant a summary report of research findings and thanked them again for their participation.

Methodology

In this section, I discuss the study methodology. Information is provided so that researchers are able to replicate the study. This section is organized into the following subsections: participant selection logic, instrumentation, procedures for recruitment, participation, data collection, and data analysis plan.

Participant Selection Logic

I used snowball sampling to recruit potential participants who met the selection criteria. In addition, I asked participants to recommend others whom they believed met the study's criteria (see Appendix A). I specifically recruited Black citizens in communities with less than optimal public safety coproduction models who could describe their experiences and interactions with police in Georgia. Black citizens who met the selection criteria were contacted by email, telephone, or face-to-face conversations. I also sent letters to invite those who met the selection criteria to participate in the study.

In contrast to quantitative studies, the sample size in qualitative studies is typically smaller (Mason, 2010). Klenke (2008) suggested using a sample size of two to 25 participants in phenomenological research. Morse (1994) recommended using a sample size of at least six participants. According to Strauss and Corbin (2014), saturation is a matter of degree and there is always the possibility that new data will emerge. Strauss and Corbin said saturation occurs when data collection becomes counterproductive. Counterproductivity occurs when the new data do not necessarily add to the story, model, or framework of the study. In the current study, I used a sample of 20 participants to locate trends involving Black citizens' experiences with police in communities with less than optimal public safety coproduction models. Use of 20 participants allowed me to obtain the best data possible. This helped me reach data saturation.

Instrumentation

I developed a 45-minute interview questionnaire to conduct in-depth face-to-face semi structured interviews with each participant (see Appendix B). I structured interview questions to obtain data regarding Black citizens' experiences with police in communities with less than optimal public safety coproduction models. I also asked questions to obtain participants' perceptions regarding how the media's coverage of race and police interactions informs the nature and experiences of Black citizens' view of police.

I used semi structured interviews to obtain qualitative data through the use of open-ended questions and prepared probes. In these interviews, I was the interviewer and led the interviews. Although I used an interview guide when conducting interviews, the guide did not dictate everything. According to Smith and Osborn (2003), interview guides involve probing interesting topics that research participants bring up. During interviews, I ensured that broad issues were addressed by asking focused questions instead of leading questions. I listened carefully to each participant, which was essential to the study.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

I completed the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research human research protections training requirements (see Appendix C). I also complied with all federal and state regulations. After I received Walden University's IRB approval to conduct the study, I contacted citizens who were known to meet the selection criteria via email, telephone, and face-to-face conversations. I sent prospective participants an invitation letter and asked them to recommend others whom they felt met

selection criteria for this study (see Appendix A). Participants were informed that they could ask questions about the study by email, telephone, or face-to-face. The study sample did not include anyone with whom I had a personal or professional relationship. Family members, friends, and current or past coworkers did not participate in this research, thus eliminating any possibility of perceived coercion or obligation to participate due to an existing relationship.

The invitation letter instructed prospective participants to complete questions and email their answers back to me if they were interested in participating in the study. I used prospective participants' responses to determine if individuals met selection criteria for participation. After I received email responses from interested participants, I contacted each participant by telephone or email to set up appointments to conduct interviews. Interviews were scheduled at a time that was convenient for the participants. Interviews took place via telephone and video-conferencing.

I emailed each participant a consent form before conducting interviews. The consent form outlined that no money was offered to participants in exchange for their participation in research. I answered any questions participants had once they review the consent form. Interviews were audio-taped and lasted approximately 45 minutes (see Appendix B). Prior to conducting interviews, I answered any participant's questions or concerns. After all questions and concerns were addressed, I conducted the interview. Once the interview was over, I concluded the interview by thanking each participant for their participation.

It is unlikely that participation brought about any acute discomfort. However, to provide participants with protection from distress or psychological harm, I informed them they could seek counseling and provided them with the phone number for the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) national helpline. Participants only needed this information if they experienced any negative effects due to taking part in this research. After I transcribed interviews, I emailed each participant their interview transcript. I asked participants to review transcripts for accuracy and provide feedback if needed. The transcription review process helped ensure accuracy, credibility, and validity of interview transcripts.

Providing transcriptions helped make the transcript review more accurate. This also made it less burdensome on participants as they checked to ensure that interviews were transcribed accurately. I discussed participants' feedback with them by telephone or email. The transcription review process lasted approximately 25 minutes or less. I emailed a summary report of research findings to all participants. I secured all data in a locked file cabinet and password-protected computer in my private home office, and I am the only one with access to the data. Data will be kept for at least 5 years in accordance with Walden University research guidelines. After the 5-year time period expires, I will properly destroy the data. The data will be destroyed by shredding and demagnetizing.

Data Analysis Plan

Study data were managed and analyzed with NVivo. NVivo is a data management tool that is used to organize data. I used NVivo to index particular themes, link my

research notes to coding, carry out complex search and retrieve operations, and examine possible relationships between themes. This method includes the following seven steps:

- Listing and preliminary grouping
- Reduction and elimination
- Clustering and thematizing invariant constituents
- Identification of invariant constituents and, using relevant, validated invariant constituents and themes, Construct of an individual structural description of experiences based on individual textural descriptions and imaginative variation.
- Inclusion of verbatim examples from transcribed interviews
- Construct for each research participant a textural-structural description of meanings and essences of experiences. From individual textural structured descriptions, develop a composite description of meanings and essences of experiences, representing the group as a whole. (Moustakas, 1994, pp. 120-121)

During data analysis, I did not find any discrepant cases. Preliminary themes emerged. Additional themes and subthemes that emerged during the data analysis process are discussed in Chapter 4.

Issues of Trustworthiness

This section is organized into the following subsections: credibility, transferability, dependability, conformability, and ethical procedures.

Credibility

As the qualitative equivalent to internal validity, credibility involves the confidence a researcher can place in the truth of research findings (Holloway & Wheeler, 2002; Macnee & McCabe, 2008). Anney (2014) said qualitative researchers need to establish rigor of their inquiry by using creditable strategies such as extended and varied field experience, time sampling, reflexivity, triangulation, member checking, peer examination, interview techniques, establishing authority of the researcher, and structural coherence. In this study, credibility was established through reflexivity, saturation, and transcription reviews. Through reflexivity, I disclosed my biases and experiences related to Black citizens' interactions and experiences with police in communities with less-than-optimal public safety coproduction models. In addition, I disclosed my biases and experiences related to how media coverage of race and police interactions informs the nature and experiences of Black citizens' view of the police. I also worked to achieve data saturation. In addition, I emailed each participant a transcript of their interview and asked that they review transcripts for accuracy. I discussed participants' feedback with them by telephone or email.

Transferability

Another qualitative equivalent to external validity, transferability pertains to the study results being transferred to other contexts with other participants. Transferability is similar to generalizability (Bitsch, 2005). In addition, Bitsch (2005) suggested the use of thick descriptions and purposeful sampling as a strategy to establish transferability. In

this study, I ensured transferability through providing a detailed description of the study's context and participants. I also used snowball sampling, a subset of purposive sampling.

Dependability

As the qualitative equivalent to reliability, dependability pertains to how stable the findings are over a period (Bitsch, 2005). Strategies used to establish dependability include audit trail, a code–recode strategy, stepwise replication, triangulation, and peer examination (Ary et al., 2010). In this study, dependability was established using an audit trail. In regard to audit trail, I kept documents for cross-checking and interview notes, tape recorded interviews, and kept transcripts of the interviews and transcript review documents.

Confirmability

As the qualitative equivalent to objectivity, confirmability pertains to the degree to which the results of the study can be confirmed or corroborated by other researchers (Baxter & Eyles, 1997). Strategies that can be used to establish confirmability include an audit trail, reflexive journal, and triangulation (Bowen, 2009). In this study, confirmability was established through audit trails and reflexivity.

Ethical Procedures

I completed the NIH Office of Extramural Research human research protections training (see Appendix C) and conducted the research study in accordance with the parameters established by Walden University's IRB. In addition, this study was conducted in accordance with all federal and state regulations in Georgia to ensure the ethical protection of research participants. Data collection began after receiving Walden

University's IRB approval. The data collected presented no greater than minimal risk and I followed Walden University's IRB guidelines to protect the data that were generated from the interview questions.

All participants were e-mailed and asked to complete a consent form that was approved by the Walden University IRB. In the consent form, I outlined participants' protections and ethical guidelines, such as the voluntary nature of the study and participants' right to withdraw at any time without fear of retaliation or punishment. In the consent form, I also outlined any physical or psychological risks that the participants might experience. I also indicated that participants were not required to complete any part of the study if they felt uncomfortable. It is unlikely that participation in this study aroused any acute discomfort, but participants were given information about the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's national helpline in the case that they experienced any negative effects.

All participants' rights were respected during the research and data collection process. After the data were collected, all identifiable data was eliminated. The interviews were numbered or coded to match each participant, which protected the participants' identities. I do know the identity of the participants, and this information will be kept confidential. I informed all participants that their interviews would be audio-taped and that a verbatim transcription would be created.

All audio-recorded data were secured. Only my supervising committee had access to the data. All data were stored in a locked file cabinet and password-protected computer in my personal home office. This information will be kept for at least 5 years based on

Walden University's guidelines. After the 5 years, I will properly destroy all data through methods such as shredding, demagnetizing, and permanently deleting any electronic files. Participants were also provided with my contact information and the contact information for my Dissertation Committee Chair if they had any further questions or concerns about the research study. Participants were also provided the contact information for the Walden University representative with whom they could talk privately about their rights as participants during a research study. After the study was approved, I e-mailed a summary report of the research findings to each participant.

Summary

In this study, I explored the perceptions of 20 Black citizens in Georgia to find trends in Black citizens' experiences with police in communities with less than optimal public safety coproduction models. This exploration was conducted using data from in-depth, semi structured interviews that I personally transcribed. The study data were managed through the use of NVivo and data were analyzed using a modified van Kaam method of analysis by Moustakas. The collected data did not present greater than minimal risk and I followed Walden University's IRB guidelines to protect participants and the data.

Chapter 3 detailed the research design and rationale, role of the researcher, methodology, and issues of trustworthiness. In Chapter 4, I discuss the study setting, participant demographics, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, and results. Chapter 5 includes my interpretation of findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, implications, and a conclusion.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative was to understand 20 African Americans' experiences and interactions with police in communities with less than optimal citizen-officer relations in Coffee County. I used a phenomenological approach to explore the experiences and interactions between police and African Americans in Coffee County. I conducted interviews using semi structured questions to obtain in-depth responses from participants regarding their experiences and interactions with police.

I used Moustakas's (1994) modified van Kaam method of analysis to analyze data collected from interviews. The research question was used to identify emerging themes. In this chapter, I discuss the demographics, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, results and chapter summary.

Demographics

Twenty African Americans between the ages of 21 and 75 participated in this study. All participants reside in Coffee County and each had some type of interaction or experience with police officers in Coffee County. Of the 20 participants who were involved in the study, 12 expressed they had no confidence or trust in the police, and eight expressed confidence and trust in police officers (see Table 1).

Table 1*Number of Participants Along with Their Age*

	Participant	Age
Row 1	1	34
Row 2	2	35
Row 3	3	52
Row 4	4	60
Row 5	5	36
Row 6	6	32
Row 7	7	43
Row 8	8	25
Row 9	9	46
Row 10	10	34
Row 11	11	58
Row 12	12	47
Row 13	13	22
Row 14	14	36
Row 15	15	63
Row 16	16	44
Row 17	17	23
Row 18	18	75
Row 19	19	21
Row 20	20	25

Data Collection

I conducted most interviews between January 20, 2021 and March 31, 2021 via phone and video-conferencing. I collected data using a survey I developed specifically for this study to obtain responses from participants. Interview questions allowed each participant an opportunity to express their perceptions regarding the following topics: (a) location of their interactions and experiences with police officers in Coffee County, (b) whether officers worked for the city, county, or state, (c) how African Americans perceive their experiences and interactions with the Police in Coffee County, (d) whether African Americans views and perceptions of police officers are impacted by media coverage, (e) what is believed to be the cause of how African Americans view police officers in Coffee County, (f) how less than optimal working relations between African Americans and the police affect communities in Coffee County, (g) recommendations to create change in order to prevent less than optimal working relations between police and African Americans in Coffee County, (h) whether certain factors shape African American perceptions of police officers in Coffee County, (i) whether racial profiling affects African Americans in Coffee County, (j) whether certain police officers profile African Americans the most in Coffee County.

Interviews were recorded and each interview lasted about 45 minutes. I went over interview notes with each participant to make sure information I had written was accurate.

Data Analysis

To analyze interview question, I manually managed data collection and transcribed interviews. I used Moustakas' modified van Kaam method of analysis to analyze collected data. This method includes the following seven steps:

- Listing and preliminary grouping.
- Reduction and elimination.
- Clustering and thematizing invariant constituents.
- Final identification of invariant constituents and themes by application.
- Using relevant validated invariant constituents and themes; constructing for each coresearcher an individual textual description of the experience.
- Construct for each coresearcher an individual structural description of the experience based on individual textural descriptions and imaginative variation.
- Construct for each research participant a textural-structural description of meanings and essences of the experience. From individual textural structured descriptions, develop a composite description of meanings and essences of the experience, representing the group as a whole (Moustakas, 1994).

No discrepant cases were found during the data analysis. Themes that emerged during analysis are discussed in the results section of this chapter.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

I established validity and reliability through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was established through transcript review, saturation, and reflexivity. Reflexivity allowed me the chance to disclose all experiences and perceptions that were related to African Americans' perceptions of police in Coffee County. Each participant verified their interview transcript for accuracy, and I discussed their feedback with them. I ensured transferability through in-depth descriptions of the study's context and participants. I also used snowball sampling to recruit participants. I established dependability through audits to ensure that information obtained from the study was accurately transcribed. I cross-examined recorded interviews, interview notes, and transcriptions. Confirmability was established through reflexivity and audit trails.

Results

I identified seven themes through data analysis. Results in this section are presented in sections addressing the research question.

Central Research Question

RQ1: How do Black citizens in communities with less than optimal public safety coproduction models describe their experiences and interactions with police?

To answer the research question, all participants were asked to describe their experiences and interactions with police officers in Coffee County. In doing so, all participants shared experiences involving being pulled over and interactions with police officers during those encounters. Some were pulled over by the Georgia State Patrol and Coffee County Sheriff officers. The majority of participants were pulled over by local

City of Douglas police officers in Coffee County. Some participants stated that they had bad encounters with the police when they were pulled over. The majority of participants felt they were treated in an unfair manner during interactions with police officers.

The first five themes relate to participants' experiences with police. Table 2 displays the data for these five themes.

Table 2

Themes Related to African Americans' Experiences with Police

Theme	Number ($n = 20$)	Percentage
Police distrust	12	60%
Police officers' perceptions of African Americans	20	100%
Media and its effect on police distrust	15	75%
Police abuse of power	11	55%
Police biases	16	80%

Theme 1: Police Distrust

Twelve participants shared their reasoning for not trusting the police of Coffee County. They had negative encounters with police officers, which led them to distrust them. Theme 1 was reflected in responses of 12 out of 20 participants interviewed (see Table 2) through their encounters with police officers. Furthermore, participants felt that this distrust stemmed from unprofessional and rude behavior on the part of police officers. Participants explained that some of them were not informed of the reason for their traffic stop. They shared that officers would ask them several questions but would

not answer any questions they asked. Participants shared that they did not receive any explanation regarding why they were being arrested. P2 said:

In my younger days, police officers use to do some messed up stuff. For example, they would harass my friends and I for no reason at all. This is part of the reason, why I do not trust the police. I still remember when I was 16 years old, a sheriff officer stopped me while I was walking home from basketball practice. The officer arrested me for marijuana. I had never smoked marijuana or sold marijuana a day in my life; my parents did not play that. The officer planted marijuana in my bag when he search it. I tried to explain to the officer that I did not smoke or sell drugs. I even told him, that I would consent to a blood test. The officer's response to me was, "well I found this in your bag, so you're in possession of the drug, which tells me you do sell or smoke it." I was so hurt, I even tried explaining myself on the way to the jailhouse, but he was not hearing anything I had to say. I begged and cried because I knew my parents were going to be so upset that I was arrested. Since this incident, I do not trust police officers at all. I have had some good experiences with officers, but that experience as a child has outweighed the good.

P14 said:

Most African Americans, specifically males, do not trust police. This comes from police encounters we witness within our neighborhoods. Police officers present themselves in an unprofessional manner. Police officers should always present themselves as officers who are ready to protect and serve their community. In my

community in Coffee County, individuals feel as if the police are not there to help them, but arrest and hurt them. When I was around 17 years old, the same police officer would stop me several times. I would not be doing anything wrong. I felt as if I was targeted because I was a young African American male. Several times, he handcuffed me and made me wait in the back of his patrol car while he ran my name through the system to check for outstanding warrants. I would ask him questions, but he would not answer me. This led to me not having any trust in the police. After my incident, I went home and told my mother what had happened. We went down to the police station to make a report of the incident. The police officers told me that I would be arrested for lying on an officer. They called it falsifying information against an officer. They did not even take my information down or appear concerned about what had happened to me. I felt like if I were a Caucasian male, then the police officers they would have been concerned. This made me realize at a young age that I could not trust the police.

P16 shared that they experienced incidents with police that could have been handled better. P18 said she had several friends who were police officers, but she does not trust officers in Coffee County other than her friends. P18 said she had experienced rudeness from officers. Similar to P16, P2, P14, and P18, P20 shared that he had not personally had a negative experience with police. However, P20 did state that he had witnessed bad situations with police within his neighborhood when he was growing up, which led him to distrust the police. P20's views of police officers started to change when he saw police officers mistreat other African American males in his community. He felt

as if situations could have been handled better. Most of the encounters P20 witnessed involved police brutality. P20 said:

Police officers are given a tremendous amount of power than the rest of the world. Officers are sworn individuals that carry badges. When they are sworn in, they are obligated to protect and serve. However, some officers do not have good intentions. Some individuals I believe become police officers just to get power. Power is granted to police officers through their badge and they feel as if their badge will protect them from their wrongdoings.

P6 felt that most incidents with police officers that they witnessed were negative encounters that solely occurred due to the power that police offices are given. P6 felt that police treat people unfairly while expecting to be glorified because they carry a badge. P18 expressed that police officers often hide behind their badges; they often treat people badly because they know the local government protects them.

Participants who expressed distrust of police stated that their views of officers had been shaped by their personal experiences with police. These participants expressed how they had positive experiences with police, but negative experiences outweighed the good ones. P2 had many good encounters with police, but these good encounters did not happen until the participant was older. P2 stated their first encounter with the police was so negative that they never forgot it. In addition, P2 stated they had witnessed many bad encounters between police and other African Americans and would never trust the police. However, P2 did express that not all officers are bad officers.

Theme 2: Police Officers' Perceptions of African Americans

Many participants explained their experiences and interactions with police officers affected their decisions regarding police officers. Many stated that their decisions were based off police officers' perceptions of African Americans. Participants discussed incidents between African Americans and the police during their interview. The participants felt that police officers had negative perceptions of African Americans, especially males. In addition, many participants stated that African Americans' perceptions of police are shaped by perceptions of police towards African Americans. Theme 2 was reflected in responses of all 20 participants (see Table 2).

P10 stated they did not trust the police due to issues that are going on across the nation. For example, police officers can be seen on television or social media killing unarmed black men. This particular issues dates backs to the Rodney King beating all the way to current issues like Eric Garner.

P12 said:

Police officers have treated African Americans badly for years. There have been numerous unarmed African American males being killed by officers. Our criminal justice system has failed the African American community by not holding some of these officers accountable for their wrongdoings. It is as if the criminal justice system is telling the African American community, that if the person is African American, it is okay for them to be killed. These killings caused their families to suffer and people within our communities start to distrust police. If police officers are supposed to wear cameras and their encounters with African Americans

especially males have been recorded, then why are they given a slap on the wrist? Many African Americans like myself are afraid when they have an encounter with the police. This is because they are not sure if they will make it home due to the color of our skin. Police officers expect us to act naturally when they stop us but how can we act natural when we are so nervous? The reason we are nervous is that we are unaware of that officers' intentions, especially with all the unarmed killings happening across the nations. ... it is crazy that I already had to have that talk with my son who is only 10 years old. I told him if an officer stops him to make sure he keeps his hands up and do not make any sudden move. I hated to tell him, but I do not want to hear that my son was walking at the age of 13 or driving at the age of 16, 18, or 21 and got shot by the police.

Theme 3: Media and its Effect on Police Distrust

The the participants felt that media causes police distrust among African Americans. Theme 3 was reflected in responses of 15 out of the 20 participants (see Table 2). Participants referred to the media as strongly affecting the relationship between African Americans and police officers. The participants expressed how content in the media that shows police officers involvement in shooting unarmed African Americans keeps tension between officers and African Americans. As a result, the participants expressed that they felt African Americans distance themselves from the police to prohibit bad encounters. Participants 5, 13, and 15 discussed how the incidents that do receive media coverage are so graphic or harsh that it builds an unfavorable representation of the police. All of the incidents participants discussed involved the

killing of unarmed African American males. Similar to Participants 5, 13, and 15, Participant 2 discussed how the media has covered some high profile cases where police officers have done things that make individuals question police actions or intentions.

Participant 3 shared:

There is a significant amount of media coverage that exposes how some police officers seem quick to murder African American males. It does not even matter their age. African Americans still are treated differently than other races.

Therefore, African Americans are left with no choice but to have negative perceptions of police officers. African Americans are able to see police actions during media coverage, which has led to media playing a significant role in African Americans perceptions of police officers.

Similarly, Participant 1 shared:

I believe that media coverage is excellent at ensuring African Americans do not trust the police. Media will overexpose negative events that deal with the police and fail to expose the positive things that police officers do. It is as if the media wants the mistakes and bad choices of a few unethical police officers to represent police officers all together. Some police officers are doing an excellent job protecting and serving their communities. Some police officers out there are great at interacting with African Americans. I have not seen much media coverage that represents the good officers. Therefore, I understand along with others that majority of African Americans will not trust the police because of media.

Theme 4: Police Abuse of Power

Some participants discussed the poor decisions police officers make when encountering African Americans in Coffee County. Theme 4 was reflected in the responses from 11 out of the 20 participants (see Table 2). Eleven participants felt as if police officers abuse their powers more when encountering African Americans than when encountering people of any other race. These 11 participants felt that African Americans are mistreated in an overly aggressively manner that can lead to death. Participant 20 shared:

Police officers abuse their powers based off how they react and respond. When this happens, the officer is not treating the individual with respect and professionalism. I feel as if some officers in Coffee County abuse their powers because they disrespect and harm African Americans.

Participant 7 made similar assertions:

Many officers become police officers because officers are given tremendous amounts of power. This power is given to officers through the badges they carry. I feel as if some of the officers in Coffee feel as if their badge will protect them in their wrongdoings and bad intentions.

Theme 5: Police Biases

Several participants discussed police bias towards African Americans. These biases lead to African Americans not trusting the police. Theme 5 was reflected in responses of 16 out of the 20 participants (see Table 2). Participants noted racism as being one of the main causes of police bias. Participants discussed how a police officer's

upbringing could lead to the officer treating African Americans in a biased manner.

Participants said that police officer biases may not be intentional, but it does exist.

Participant 4 shared:

Many African Americans distrust the police due to the ways they are handled when they encounter the police, especially if they are arrested during the encounter. African Americans feel as if we are not handled with respect. When we as African Americans are not treated like human beings by police officers, this can create distrust in the police.

Similarly, Participant 6 noted:

Many African Americans assume they are automatically judged based on the color of their skin and the officers' personal bias of them as a race. So when an officer interacts in a community that they are not familiar with to conduct an investigation, they may feel as if they have to protect themselves. Therefore, they expect the worse out of the situation, especially when it comes to making an arrest. African Americans know that police officers carry weapons and have power. However, when the officer encounters African Americans and have bad attitudes, unprofessionalism, and reckless conduct, the trust of African Americans continues to be broken.

Participants 10, 12, and 16 all noted that their personal encounters with police officers in Coffee County have been unprofessional and led to unreasonable treatment. All three participants expressed how they felt they were viewed as criminal because of the type of vehicle they drove or because they had dreads.

The last two themes relate to participants suggestions for how to improve trust between African Americans and police officers. Table 3 displays the data for these two themes.

Table 3

Suggestions to Improve Trust Between African Americans and Police Officers

Theme	Number ($n = 20$)	%
Community involvement	18	90%
Better training	17	85%

Theme 6: Community Involvement

Most of the participants suggested community involvement as a way to increase trust between the African American community and police officers. Theme 6 was reflected in responses of 18 out of the 20 participants (see Table 3). Participants stated that there is minimum interaction with police officers. Some communities have neighborhood watch programs, but these programs are not typically in African American communities. Most of the interactions that take place between African Americans and police happens when African Americans are stopped or arrested. Developing relationship between African American and police can help increase trust between both parties. Most participants welcomed the opportunity to get to know the police better and to allow the police to know their families. Participant 1 stated:

Police officers need to get more involved with events in African American communities. This will help show the members of the community that the police is [sic] on their side. This might even eliminate some of the trust issues that

members of the African American communities have. African Americans can even learn the officers by name and the officers can learn their names.

Like Participant 1, Participants 8, 9, 11, 13, 17, 19 and 20 all stated that police officers need to attend more community events. However, these participants also stated that police should stay away from the event if they are going to cause problems like disrespectful behavior or using excessive force without cause. Police officers who start attending community events or hosting events in African American communities can help both parties become more familiar with each other. Participant 8 stated:

Interacting with the community is essential to change the way African Americans feel about the police. Police officers need to figure out how to successfully make themselves known to African American communities. Police officers need to display more that they are there to protect and serve. Many African Americans, especially the males, feel that officers are only there to harass them, write tickets, and arrest them. In order for the relationships to get better between the two parties, they must start with the youth.

Similar to Participant 8, Participants 9, 11, and 13 stated that there are many instances where police officers can get involved by assisting or even sponsoring events. Participant 17 shared: “Engaging in activities will help the police get more involved in the community. It can be something simple. Showing up at sporting events, donating water to sports team, emerging themselves in the African American community, and learning their culture.”

Participants 19 and 20 stated that they feel that officers in Douglas, Georgia must get involved within the African American community to understand African Americans better. This will help officers realize that not all African Americans are criminals.

Theme 7: Better Training

The majority of the participants recommended that police officers go through better training. Participants felt that police officers need to take courses or have training on how to deal with a diverse group of individuals. Theme 7 was reflected in responses of 17 out of the 20 participants (see Table 3). This training would help the officers make better decisions. Participant 2 stated:

Police officers should receive training before they are released to work on their own. This training should include things like ethical versus unethical behavior and understanding different cultures. In addition, they should receive training about the cultures in the community they will be employed at. Officers should have to go through required trainings over these topics every year as a professional learning requirement. In addition, they should receive yearly training on lethal weapons and less-than lethal weapons. I understand that they go over this stuff in Police Academy, but that should not be the only time they hear this information.

Similar to Participant 2, Participants 5, 12, and 16 stated that officers should have mandatory training, especially when it comes to use of force. Participant 10 stated, “Sufficient training of officers can help eliminate police officers killing unarmed African American males. In addition, it can help build the trust between African Americans and police.” Participant 15 shared:

I feel as if police officers need to have higher education. When police officers are better educated, they might make fewer mistakes. In addition, you should have to be at least 25 years old to be a police officer. If an officer earns a bachelor's degree in areas like criminal justice, political science, or even psychology, they will be better educated to handle different situations. They will know how to think logically and make ethical decisions. In addition, they will understand better what it means to protect and serve their communities.

Similarly, Participant 18 stated:

Police officers are considered public servants. Therefore, it is essential that they have better communication skills when interacting with the public. Police officers should represent the communities they serve. They need to also develop relationships with the members of their communities. I do understand that there are good cops and bad cops in each department. However, these officers are all aware of the choices they make. No matter what police administration put in place for officers to abide and go by, there will always be someone who violates those policies.

Similar to Participant 18, Participants 3, 4, 6, and 14 stated that during Police Academy, police instructors must ensure that the police trainees allowed to move forward are actually ready to move forward. This means that instructors will have to pay close attention to trainees at the academy. For example, instructors could develop a program that allows them to flag trainees who they feel are unfit. Trainees who do not improve by the end of the academy will have to receive additional training. If the trainee does not

improve after the additional training, then the trainee should not be allowed to become a police officer.

Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to understand 20 African Americans' experiences and interactions with police in communities with less-than-optimal citizen-officer relations in Coffee County. Twelve participants expressed that they had no confidence in the police and eight expressed they had confidence in the police. One central question guided this research study and seven themes emerged in response to the research question.

Most participants indicated they had bad experiences with police officers. Police officers' perceptions of African Americans contributes to African Americans' distrust of the police. Many factors contributed to African American distrust of the police. The media, police officers' biases, police officers' abuse of power, and police officers' perceptions of African Americans also contributed to African Americans' distrust of the police. Participants felt that media plays a significant role in how African Americans view the police. Specifically, participants expressed how media is effective at exposing police brutality, especially in encounters with unarmed African American males. Many African Americans felt that police officers viewed them as a threat, which led to them distrusting the police. The study findings suggest that police officers who encounter African Americans, specifically African American males, often abuse their power. Many participants expressed they had witnessed police brutality growing up and as adults. Participants also stated they are raising their children to distrust the police.

The study results indicated that participants who had the opportunity to interact with police officers in their communities were more comfortable with the police. The study findings also suggest that African Americans expect the police to be trustworthy because officers' job is to protect and serve; however, participants' expressed many instances where they did not trust the police.

Finally, the findings revealed recommendations that police officers become more involved in African American communities. The participants felt it was essential for police officers to understand the cultures and communities they are protecting. Education and training were recommended as a solution to this problem. The participants felt that additional education and training would help increase trust between the two parties.

This chapter detailed participant demographics, the study setting, data analysis and data collection methods, evidence of trustworthiness, and study results. In Chapter 5, I discuss my interpretations of the findings, the limitations of the study, recommendations for future study, and study implications, and provide a conclusion.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

In this phenomenological research study, I explored 20 African Americans' experiences and interactions with police to develop an understanding of African Americans' attitudes towards the police in Coffee County, GA. I collected data through in-depth semi structured interviews that were conducted by phone and video conferencing. I selected a phenomenological design to answer one central research question: How do Black citizens in communities with less-than-optimal public safety coproduction models describe their experiences and interactions with police in Coffee County?

I used Moustakas' modified van Kaam method of analysis. Seven themes emerged from my data analysis. First, study findings indicated that most participants believed that their personal encounters and interactions with police played a significant role in their perceptions of police officers. In addition, participants felt that police officers' perceptions of African Americans caused them to distrust the police. Next, study findings revealed that representation of police officer wrongdoings and killings in the media also contributed to African Americans' distrust of the police. In addition, African Americans tend to distrust officers when they abuse their power. Study findings also indicated that some participants did trust and have confidence in police. These participants expressed that they had good experiences with officers as they became older. They expressed that not all cops are bad cops, and some did a good job in terms of protecting and serving their communities; however, good cops often suffer because of bad cops' wrongdoings. Finally, the participants made recommendations for how to

increase trust between African Americans and the police. Community involvement was one recommendation and better training was another recommendation. In this chapter, I detail my interpretation of findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, and implications.

Interpretation of Findings

This qualitative phenomenological research study was designed to answer one central research question. I interpreted the study findings using Sower et al.'s normative sponsorship theory and the literature review.

Central Research Question

The central research question was the following: How do Black citizens in communities with less-than-optimal public safety coproduction models perceive their experiences and interactions with police in Coffee County? Results from the central research study suggested that most participants felt African Americans' distrust of police comes from their personal experiences and interactions with officers. Police officers' perceptions of African Americans also cause African Americans to distrust police. Many participants suggested that African American males specifically did not trust police because police officers treat African American males differently than men of any other race. Participants discussed experiences where police officers were very disrespectful and mistreated African Americans. Participants felt African Americans were not treated fairly by officers.

Findings for the central research question can be explained using the normative sponsorship theory, developed by Sower et al. in relation to research about community

perceptions of police. Normative is being within the limits of established standards to all individuals (Sower et al., 1957). African Americans who participated in this study explained how their distrust of police came from their prior experiences and interactions with police officers. Community policing is unsuccessful without citizen support.

The philosophy of community policing is supported by the theory of normative sponsorship. The police should act in the best interests of the community; doing so leads to the creation of a better social environment and communities, which in turn could bridge the gap between police and communities. Citizens and the police will work together in a concerted effort to solve community issues or concerns.

The role of a law enforcement officer is that of leader, facilitator, educator, and role model. It is the officer's job to work with and for citizens in their communities through identifying citizens' needs. Once African Americans and police officers begin to develop working relationships, both parties engage in the process of goal sharing, resulting in harmonious relationships (Trojanowicz & Dixon, 1974). Although positive police-community relations by themselves do not comprise community policing, they are an essential first step in officers establishing positive working relationships with members of communities in which they serve and protect. Community policing implies that citizens and law enforcement officers work together to solve community problems.

In this study, African American males were more likely than any other gender or race to distrust the police. I found that participants did not trust the police due to personal experiences and interactions.

Leading causes of African Americans' distrust of police include police officers' perceptions and biases toward African Americans, encounters displayed through the media, and police officers abusing their powers. The media often exposes police officers in officer-involved shootings, and footage of these shootings often shows White police officers killing unarmed African American males. The majority of officers involved in these shootings were let off easily for crimes they committed. Media sources are effective at exposing wrongful acts performed by police officers during encounters with African Americans, especially males. This exposure had led to an increase in African Americans not trusting police.

Many participants reflected on how police officers are often biased towards African Americans. African Americans commit crimes more than any other race; therefore, many officers treat African Americans differently, (Weitzer, 2015), Many participants in this study stated they tried to avoid police officers and have no interactions with them if possible. This aligned with the study finding that police bias towards African Americans tend to make African Americans distrust officers.

Many participants noted that because of police bias towards African Americans, officers tend to abuse their power. This abuse of power leads many African Americans to have negative views of police. According to Schuck et al. (2012), 67% of African Americans expressed being afraid when they had to interact with police officers, whereas only 21.5% of Caucasians expressed being afraid. In addition, Weitzer (2015) found that African Americans are more than likely to experience violence when interacting with police officers. African Americans do not trust the police due to police abuse of power.

Many participants made recommendations to improve relationships between African Americans in Coffee County and police officers. The first recommendation was community involvement. According to Robinson (2017), police officers need to positively engage with communities they police because many police officers do not live in those areas. If police officers become more familiar with areas they patrol or even live in those areas, they have better attitudes and relationships with people in that area (Robinson, 2017). Many participants felt that community involvement in African American communities could lead to better working relationships between police officers and African Americans in Coffee County.

The second recommendation was better training. Many officers in Coffee County are not familiar with African American culture. Therefore, participants suggested that officers receive cultural training at the Police Academy and after becoming police officers. Participants felt this training would help officers learn how to interact with African Americans more respectfully through learning how to relate better. In addition, this training could lead officers to handle conflicts without situations escalating. These trainings could involve proactive measures that could assist police when they have encounters with African Americans. In addition, the participants stated that better training would improve relationships between the two parties.

Limitations of the Study

A few limitations involving trustworthiness took place during this study. The first limitation of this study pertains to generalizing results given that a snowball sample of 20 participants was utilized. Findings may be generalized to similar populations of African

Americans in Coffee County and surrounding counties who have interactions and experiences with police officers. In addition, findings may be generalized to others who have witnessed issues between African Americans and police officers and distrust police; however, results may not be generalized to other communities or states. The findings of this study should only be taken as a generalization for individuals whose demographics match that of the participants in this study. Future studies can involve different communities or states to develop a broader understanding of the research topic. Additionally, a different sampling strategy such as purposeful sampling could be utilized, such as purposeful sampling.

The second limitation of this study involved the possibility of participants not being fully honest with their responses. Participants may have wanted to remain positive or be negative when sharing interactions or experiences. I did not witness any of the encounters that were shared with me as the researcher, so there is always the possibility that the participants did not mention something to me. However, it was assumed that all participants provided open and honest responses to interview questions.

Recommendations

Two recommendations for future research emerged from this study. The first recommendation was that future researchers extend the sample population. The population could be extended to other communities or states to gather a broader understanding of African American experiences and interactions with police in communities with less-than-optimal citizen-officer relations. Findings from that research could be compared to the findings of this study.

Second, a study could be conducted to focus on either African American females or males. According to Gabbidon et al. (2011), African American females and males have similar experiences and interactions involving dealing with police officers. As a result of this, research could be conducted to explain similarities between African American females and males. Findings from that research could then be compared to the findings of this study.

Implications

To create more optimal citizen-officer relationships, participants in this study suggested that officers complete more trainings and become involved in African American communities in Coffee County. These recommendations have several implications; therefore, it is necessary that police administration and policy makers accept and respect African Americans' feeling and viewpoints about police and evaluate these situations pertaining to African Americans and police interactions. Completing more training and becoming more involved in African American communities in Coffee County will be very beneficial because there is a need for policy changes to hold police officers more accountable for their actions.

The participants recommended improved training to help officers understand African American culture in Coffee County. This training would also help officers when it comes to self-defense and use of force, which could lead to more positive encounters with African Americans. This training would educate officers and teach them how to communicate and understand African American culture. Additional training can also teach officers how to prevent using excessive force when handling a situation.

Furthermore, participants mentioned that this training must be conducted using real life simulation situations. Officers need to receive this training during Police Academy and yearly thereafter to refresh their memories.

Study findings add insight to literature about African Americans and their perceptions of and interactions with police officers. This study can also help researchers in other fields such as criminal justice. Finally, the study findings could assist many local, state, and federal organizations and agencies that collaborate or communicate with police agencies.

Conclusion

It was essential to conduct this research to understand the perceptions and experiences of African Americans in Coffee County who have less-than-optimal relations with police officers in that area. Study participants had experienced or witnessed issues between African Americans and police that caused them to distrust the police in Coffee County. Robinson (2017) said African Americans do not trust the police. This distrust has led to divisions between police and African Americans.

Study participants shared their interactions, experiences, and perceptions to provide an in-depth understanding of African Americans who distrust the police. African Americans' encounters with police officers have created a need for national policies that address African Americans' distrust of police. Policy changes are needed to decrease the distrust that African Americans have of police, and results of this study can be used to help revamp policies and laws. Moreover, findings from this study can be used to impact positive social change in terms of training of police officers during and after the Police

Academy. These trainings must focus on cultural diversity, use of force, and community engagement. Each of these trainings will help build relationships between police and African Americans in Coffee County.

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Appendix A: Invitation to Participate and Recommendation Request

Dear (Name Will Be Inserted Here),

My name is Brittany Palmer and I am currently a doctoral student at Walden University. I am exploring African American's experiences and interactions with police in communities with less-than-optimal citizen-officer relations in Coffee County in the State of Georgia.

I would greatly appreciate your participation.

Your participation would involve participating in a phone, video-conferencing, or face-to-face interview which would take about 45 minutes. Interviews will be conducted at a time that is convenient for you.

The information from the interviews will be kept strictly confidential and no one who participates will be identified in any of the study's reports that I prepare.

If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to email me at or give me a call.

If you are interested in participating in the study and/or would like to recommend other African Americans in Coffee County in the State of Georgia please email me the attached consent form

Thank you in advance for your consideration and assistance with my research project.

Sincerely,
Brittany Palmer

Appendix B: Interview Guide

Introduction

- Welcome participant and introduce myself.
- Have participant review and sign consent form. Give participant a copy of the consent form to keep.
- Explain general purpose of the interview and why the participant was chosen.
- Discuss the purpose and process of interview.
- Explain the presence and purpose of the recording equipment.
- Address the assurance of confidentiality.
- Inform the participant that information discussed is going to be analyzed in aggregate form and participant's name will not be used in any analysis of the interview.

Discussion Purpose

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study is to understand African Americans experiences and interactions with police in communities with less than optimal citizen-officer relations

Discussion Guidelines

Interviewer will explain:

Please respond directly to the questions and if you don't understand the question please let me know. I am here to ask questions, listen, and answer any questions you might have. If we seem to get stuck on a topic, I may interrupt you during the interview.

It is my ethical duty to keep your identity, participation, and remarks private. Please speak openly and honestly. This session will be tape recorded because I do not want to miss any comments.

General Instructions

When responding to questions that will be asked please refrain from using any identifying information. Identifying information includes your name or names of other individuals. Your identity will be kept confidential. Any information that leads to permit identification will be removed from the analysis.

Possible Probes

- Will you elaborate more on that?
- That was helpful, but can you provide more detail?
- Your example was helpful, but could you give me another example to help me get a better understanding?

Interview Questions

1. Where was your interaction and experience with police officers?
2. Was the officer a police officers, sheriff, or Georgia state patrol officer?
3. What are your perceptions on how African Americans perceive their experiences and interactions with the police in Coffee County?
4. What are your perceptions on how African Americans perceive that their views of police are impacted by media coverage?
5. What do you perceive to be the cause of African Americans views about police officers in Coffee County?

6. What are your thoughts about how less than optimal working relations between African Americans and the police affect the community of Coffee County?
7. What do you recommend that police officers change in order to prevent less than optimal working relations between the police and African Americans in Coffee County?
8. What factors do you think shape African Americans perceptions of Police officers in Coffee County?
9. What are your perceptions about how racial profiling affect African American relationships with police officers in Coffee County?
10. What are the races of police officers who you believe profile African American the most in Coffee County?

Conclusion

- Discuss the transcript review process with participant.
- Ask and answer any questions.
- Thank the participant for his or her time.

Appendix C: CITI Program Certificate



Completion Date 04-Nov-2019
 Expiration Date N/A
 Record ID 34098455

This is to certify that:

Brittany Palmer

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Student's (Curriculum Group)
Doctoral Student Researchers (Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic Course (Stage)

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME. Do not use for TransCelerate mutual recognition (see Completion Report).

Under requirements set by:

Walden University

CITI
 Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w0e83de84-ba33-4eb5-a11e-9bad3bdfa76f-34098455

Appendix D: Consent Form

D1. Informed Consent

You are invited to take part in a research study about African American experiences and interactions with police officers in Coffee County. The title of this study is: How do African American experiences in communities with less than optimal public safety co-production models describe their experiences and interactions with police officers. This means that I want to understand the experiences and interactions between African Americans and police officers in Coffee County. This study is being conducted by a researcher named Brittany Palmer who is a doctoral student at Walden University. I obtained your name/contact info via _____. This form is part of a process called “informed consent” to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

Inclusion Criteria:

The following criteria is needed in order to be in this study.

- Must be African American.
- Must live in Coffee County.
- Must be 18 years or older.
- Must have had some type of interaction or experience with police officers in Coffee County.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to understand African Americans experiences and interactions with police in communities with less-than-optimal citizen-officer relations.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- Complete one 45 minute phone interview. The interview will be audio recorded. You will be allowed to decline or stop the interview at any time.

Here are some sample questions:

- Where was your interaction and experience with police officers?
- Was the officer a police officers, sheriff, or Georgia state patrol officer?

- What are your perceptions on how African Americans perceive their experiences and interactions with the police in Coffee County?

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to accept or turn down the invitation. If you decide to be in this study, you can still change your mind later. You may stop your participation in this study at any time. In addition, you can decline to answer any questions. Please note, that not all volunteers will be contacted to take part in this study. I will follow up with all volunteers to let them know whether or not they were selected for this study.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Being in this study involves minimal risks. The benefits of this study will generate information that can be shared with police departments to help them understand how their actions/interactions are perceived by the general public.

You may know me as Brittany, but this research study will be separate from that role. Information obtain will be confidential.

Mandated Reporter Obligation and Risks

If the research procedures might reveal criminal activity or child/elder abuse, then as a mandated reporter I am obligated to report this information.

If at any time during this study if you feel that you need additional help, or you experienced any type of psychological harm from participating in my research study you may contact the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration national hotline at 1-800-662-4357.

Payment:

A thank you email will be sent to show my appreciation to all participants that participate in my research study.

Privacy:

Reports coming out of this study will not share the identities of individual participants. Information that might identify participants, such as the location of the study will not be shared. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purpose other than this research project. Data will be securely stored in two different locations for safekeeping. The data will be locked with a password. The researcher will also utilize pseudonyms in place of names. If the researcher has to store any names, they will be stored separately from the data and discarded when possible. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by Walden University. After 5 years, the data will be properly destroyed by shredding and demagnetizing.

Contacts and Questions:

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via email. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call the Research Participant Advocate at my university at 612-312-1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is 11-05-20-0245456 and it expires on November 4, 2021.

Obtaining Your Consent

If you feel you understand the study well enough to make a decision about it, please reply your consent to this email with the words, "I Consent," and provide your responses to the questions included at the end of the consent form.

D2. Demographic Form

Please make sure you keep a copy of this form by either saving this form or printing it for your records.

Once you have provided your consent, please respond to the following questions in a reply email

1. What is your name?
2. What is your race? (Please select by **bolding** your answer)
 - a. African American
 - b. Caucasian
 - c. Hispanic/Latin
 - d. Asian
 - e. Other _____
3. What is your gender?
4. What is your age?
5. What is your phone number?
6. What is your email address?
7. Are you a citizen of Coffee County?
8. Have you had any interactions or experiences with police officers in Coffee County?
9. Are there others that you would like to recommend to participants in this study? If so what are their names and contact information.

Appendix E: Flyer

African Americans Experiences and Interactions with Police Officers

A new study “*African American Experiences and Interactions with Police Officers*” is being conducted. The study could help decrease the race relation barrier that exists between African Americans and police officers. You are invited to describe your experiences and interactions with police officers in Coffee County.

This interview is part of the doctoral study for Brittany Palmer, a Ph.D. student at Walden University. Interviews will take place during November of 2020.

About the study:

- One 45-minute interview that will be audio recorded.
- To protect your privacy, the published study would use fake names such as participant 1, participant 2, and etc.

Volunteers must meet these requirements:

- African America
- 18 years old or older
- Male or Female
- Reside in Coffee County
- Had some type of interaction or experience with police officers in Coffee County

**To confidentially volunteer, contact
the researcher:
Brittany Palmer**