

2023

## The experiences of Latina police officers in patrol

Jasmine Ivonne Reilly  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Psychology and Community Services

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

Jasmine I. Reilly

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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Walden University  
2022

Abstract

The experiences of Latina police officers in patrol

by

Jasmine I. Reilly

MS, Holy Family University, 2016

BA, Temple University, 2008

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Forensic Psychology

Walden University

February 2023

## Abstract

The purpose of this research was to describe the experiences of Latina police officers working in a patrol function. Latina officers working in law enforcement agencies must contend with an agency that is traditionally male and White, leaving these officers with the need to navigate territory that has, historically, not taken their needs into account. In an age where police agencies are attempting to better serve the public, the need for officers that fit minority demographic characteristics is necessary if police agencies are to continue legitimizing their space in modern American society. This research addressed some of the issues that Latina officers were faced with in their personal and professional lives. This research utilized tokenism theory as presented by Kanter and intersectionality theory as described by Crenshaw. It addressed the importance of human connections within the agency and the population that it served. Seven officers were interviewed on the telephone; Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used to understand the unique experiences of this population. This research found that Latina officers often reported that their ability to connect with the population it served as a foundational factor in job and personal satisfaction among this population. The findings of this study indicate that while overall, police agencies have made intentional strides to recruit and retain Latina women, there is still a culture of fear and distrust among the majority group. The recommendations of this research include creating policies and procedures within police agencies that are inclusive for all officers. The implications for positive social change include revisiting policies for minority officers to allow for enhanced inclusivity within their agencies.

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## Dedication

Para mami y papi.

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My dissertation journey would not have been possible for the many people that God or kismet placed in my path. I want to thank everyone that helped me along in this journey, who shared encouraging words, or held my hand when I experienced moments of doubt and despair. Thank you to Dr. Price-Sharps, Dr. Beyer, Dr. Goldstein, and Dr. Latifses for your kind words and gentle support throughout this process. I truly would not be here if not for your help. Dr. G, grab your lab coat!

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Introduction**

While the landscape of American policing is beginning to shift, overall, officer demographics remain mainly Caucasian and mostly male (Todak & Brown, 2019; Wilson et al., 2016). According to DataUSA (2020), approximately 85.2% of the law enforcement officers are male and 67% are White. Although there are more women in law enforcement than ever before, female representation still remains low, as does the number of minority officers within these agencies (Wilson et al., 2016). With changing population demographics within the United States, law enforcement agencies recognize the need to better reflect the communities that they serve. There is recognition for the need to increase the number of females and minorities that these agencies hire, however, it is not for lack of trying that these targeted efforts have fallen short.

One proposed reason for this difficulty in recruiting female and minority officers lies with who these populations perceive as being law officers. The media and Hollywood have played their part in highlighting the roles that men and women play in law enforcement. However, police agencies have also contributed to how the public perceives their organization. History itself has played a pivotal role in how minorities and females view police, as in the past, the police were used to keep “undesirable” groups in check under the guise of law and order (Durr, 2015).

The fact remains that despite the perceived difficulties of entering into law enforcement by these non-traditional groups, there are female and minority officers within the ranks. There are also female and minority officers at all levels of the

organization from patrol officer to chief. What lacks in the literature is a thorough examination of the experiences of minority female officers at all levels of the organization, what their inspiration was for becoming law officers and more importantly, how they managed to navigate landmines that were left behind by years of organizational rituals and subcultural norms. Even more specific, the literature lacks a detailed examination of the experiences of Latina officers, a fact that should seem surprising given that Latinos comprise 18% of the US population and accounted for 52% of US population growth between 2010 and 2019 (Noe-Bustamante et al., 2019). These data hold serious implications for law enforcement agencies as the divide between police and the community grows larger and agencies continue to struggle with legitimacy.

In this chapter, I introduce some key concepts that may affect the way that minorities and women view law enforcement. These include the marred relationship between law enforcement and minority communities and how targeted policing within minority communities continues to perpetuate feelings of mistrust between minorities and police. I will also discuss how traditionally male dominated workplaces alienate women, and how police culture both reinforces and constrains female minorities into type-cast roles and may give female officers the impression that they do not belong among the ranks or in supervisory positions within these agencies.

### **Background**

While the landscape of American policing is beginning to shift, overall, officer demographics remain mainly Caucasian and mostly male (Todak & Brown, 2019; Wilson et al., 2016). According to DataUSA (2020), approximately 85.2% of the law

enforcement officers are male and 67% are White. Although there are more women in law enforcement than ever before, female representation remains low, as does the number of minority officers within these agencies (Wilson et al., 2016). With changing population demographics within the United States, law enforcement agencies recognize the need to better reflect the communities that they serve. There is recognition for the need to increase the number of females and minorities that these agencies hire, however, it is not for lack of trying that these targeted efforts have fallen short.

As already stated, one proposed reason for this difficulty in recruiting female and minority officers lies with who these populations perceive as being law officers. Although the media and Hollywood have played their part in highlighting the roles that men and women play in law enforcement, police agencies are not without fault in how the public perceives their organization. History has played a crucial role in how minorities and females view police, as in the past, the police were used to keep minorities and women “in line” (Durr, 2015).

Despite the perceived difficulties of entering into the law enforcement by these non-traditional groups, there are female and minority officers within the ranks and at all levels of the organization. Although few and far between, more women are finding themselves at the helm of police agencies. As it stands today, approximately 8.3% of all police chiefs in the United States are women, a number that is below the percentage of women actively employed by police agencies (Zippia, n.d.).

Unfortunately, the literature lacks a thorough examination of the experiences of minority female officers at all levels of the organization, what their inspiration was for

becoming law officers and more importantly, how they managed to navigate landmines that were left behind by years of organizational rituals and subcultural norms. Even more specific, the literature lacks a detailed examination of the experiences of Latina officers, a fact that should seem surprising given that Latinos comprise 18% of the US population and accounted for 52% of US population growth between 2010 and 2019 (Noe-Bustamante et al., 2019). These data hold serious implications for law enforcement agencies as the divide between police and the community grows larger and agencies continue to struggle with establishing and maintaining legitimacy.

In this chapter, I introduce some key concepts that may affect the way that minorities and women view law enforcement. These include the marred relationship between law enforcement and minority communities and how targeted policing within minority communities continues to perpetuate feelings of mistrust between minorities and police. I will also discuss how traditionally male dominated workplaces alienate women, and how police culture both reinforces and constrains female minorities into type-cast roles and may give female officers the impression that they do not belong among the ranks or in supervisory positions within these agencies.

### **Problem Statement**

Although women make up the majority of the workforce in the United States, their numbers have remained relatively low in male-dominated occupations (Law, 2020; Parker, 2018). According to the Bureau of Justice statistics, female law enforcement officers account for 1 in 8 officers; their numbers increasing from 10% in 1997 to 12.3% in 2016 (Hyland & Davis, 2019). Although the number of female officers has increased,



these numbers are problematic for several reasons. Firstly, while this increase in female representation is a step forward in creating a more equitable police workforce, 12.3% falls below “representative numbers” given that women account for over fifty percent of the United States population (Warner et al., 2018). Secondly, and more specific to law enforcement, several studies show that female officers rank higher than their male counterparts in communication and conflict resolution (Robinson, 2015; Rabe-Hemp, 2008). In an era where police tactics and excessive force have come under scrutiny, alternative approaches to conflict resolution should take center stage.

Findings from several studies indicate that male officers were more likely to use excessive force as compared to their female counterparts (Bazley et al., 2007; Lonsway et al., 2002; Bolger, 2014; Salerno & Sanchez, 2020). Given that excessive force continues to be perceived as a problem area in community-police interactions, it seems intuitive to reason that the active recruitment and long-term retention of an increased number of female officers should be prioritized amongst all law enforcement agencies. Increasing the number of female officers not only reflects the communities served but can potentially help law enforcement agencies transition away from violent images of “iron-fist law enforcement” to that of true community policing. Further, a well-rounded police force capable of carrying out a wide spectrum of skill sets may not only help police agencies better serve their communities, but it may also help to legitimize their purpose to the public and increase public trust.

The need to diversify law enforcement agencies does not stop with female officers. The Bureau of Justice statistics reports that minority officers (those of black,

Hispanic, or other origins) comprise about 25% of local law enforcement agencies (Hyland & Davis, 2019). Black male officers have taken the lead in minority officer representativeness; however, these numbers are not equal in regard to other races or female officers (Hyland & Davis, 2019). Despite the increases of minority officers in policing, the lack of parity between officer race and community reflection becomes readily apparent in urban settings (Morin et al., 2017; Maciag, 2015). This lack of representativeness is problematic because studies have shown that race equity within police departments promotes representative bureaucracy, which in turn increases positive community-police interactions (Lasley et al., 2011). Scholars have argued that by diversifying law enforcement agencies, trust in police will increase and negative experiences of discrimination and racism stemming from the organization will decrease (Miles-Johnson & Pickering, 2018). This is a high-profile issue that has resurfaced in the wake of George Floyd's death (George Floyd Justice in Policing Act of 2020, H.R. 116-434, 116<sup>th</sup> Cong. 2019-2020).

With the research pointing to underrepresented numbers of female and minority officers in modern American law enforcement, what scholars do not know is what constitutes the experiences of minority female law enforcement officers on patrol. In their review of the current literature, Todak and Brown (2019) pointed out that "research on the unique experiences of minority women across all fields of study has tended to lag behind those focused on minority men" (p. 1052). Further, studies that focus on minority men, while still limited compared to white male officers' experiences, ignore the privilege that the male sex affords the minority male (Todak & Brown, 2019). What is missing in

the literature is an overall understanding of the experiences that minority female officers face in male-dominated, traditionally White law enforcement institutions.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to understand Latina police officers' lived experiences and perceptions while on patrol and during their daily interactions with fellow co-workers. The literature to date suffers from a lack of insight into the experiences of Latino and Latina populations, and studies that investigate their experiences in police service are no exception. This study sought to understand the experiences of Latina police officers' when interacting with their communities and co-workers while on patrol. Given that Latina officers constitute a small percentage of individuals within a traditionally White and male occupation, this study was interested in understanding what were Latina officers' perceptions of their sense of belonging within their departments? This study also sought to understand how Latina officers navigate their experiences within their department and uncover what barriers or supports may be present in the workplace. To guide this study, an interpretive phenomenological approach was utilized. IPA investigates how individuals make meaning or sense out of phenomena within specific contexts (Sloan & Bowe, 2013).

### **Research Questions**

RQ1: What are the experiences of Latina police officers in patrol?

Sub-question 1: How do Latina police officers experience workplace interactions with peers?

Sub-question 2: How do Latina police officers experience interactions with the

public?

RQ2: What are the experiences of Latina police officers within the police department?

Sub-question 1: What are Latina police officers' perceptions of support by department commanders?

Sub-question 2: What are Latina police officers' perceptions of acceptance or "belonging?"

### **Conceptual Framework**

This study utilized two theories steeped in feminist tradition. Tokenism theory, developed by Kanter (1977), describes how numerically outnumbered members of minority groups often shape the majority group's perceptions through shared interactions. The majority group, having limited experiences or interactions with members of the minority group, will often rely on stereotypes and highlight differences observed between themselves and members of the minority group (Kanter, 1977). The pressures of the majority group on the minority group to assimilate or be accepted into the culture can in turn create pressure on the minority group to either break away from their pre-assigned role or recede further into the shadows, prizing anonymity over accolades that may threaten the majority group's competence or power within an organization (Kanter, 1977). This theory helps to explain why police departments continue to have low numbers of female and minority applicants and why retention continues to be problematic, particularly with female and minority officers.

While tokenism theory can explain some of the processes behind behaviors in the workplace, it does not fully encapsulate other factors that may be associated with the

Latina police officer's experiences. Acknowledging that multi-layered perceptions of self do not operate within a vacuum (i.e., minority women may experience events from a gender and race standpoint combined) and that there is often an interplay between these embedded concepts of the self in daily interactions, it is critical to examine the ways in which race and gender are experienced together by members of doubly-marginalized groups. Crenshaw (1991) argues that individuals who occupy more than one marginalized group (i.e., Latina females—who are a gender and race minority) often experience racism differently than minority males and that minority females do not have the same experiences as White females. Crenshaw's (1991) intersectionality theory offers a more holistic approach when looking at race and gender, where purely feminist or race inequity theories tend to exclude the experiences of individuals who occupy more than one marginalized group.

### **Nature of the Study**

This study lends itself to a qualitative phenomenological approach because the research questions focus on describing the lived experiences of a group of individuals who share something in common. The first research question focused on the lived experiences of Latina police officers working in a patrol function within their department. The sub-questions sought to understand how Latina police officers perceive interactions with co-workers (sub-question 1) and the public (sub-question 2). The second research question concentrated on how Latina police officers interpret their experiences within the police department. The sub-questions sought to understand how Latina officers perceive support from commanding officers (sub-question 1) and general feelings of acceptance or

belonging within their department (sub-question 2). By using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), the study provided a detailed examination of Latina police officers' experiences within policing, with an emphasis on how these officers made meaning out of those experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Semi-structured interviews with Latina police officers who work within municipal (local) police departments helped identify and measure the phenomena in this study. Based on the recommendations provided by Guest et al. (2006), the proposed number of interviews for my study was eight, however data saturation was reached after seven interviews.

### **Definitions**

*Discrimination:* This term is used to describe a wide variety of prejudicial behaviors that oppress or deflate another's experiences.

*Equality:* Equal representation of males and females throughout a culture without the sex of one group being subordinate to another group.

*Hypermasculinity:* Behavior that highlights male attributes of strength, bravado, and oversexualization.

*Intersectionality:* The meeting point between two or more demographic or social characteristics (Crenshaw, 1990).

*Latino:* Also, Hispanic or Latinx. Used to describe an individual of Spanish- or Portuguese-speaking heritage and whose ethnic background includes those of Iberian, indigenous and African descent. Latinos are individuals who come from Mexico, Central and South America, and Spanish-speaking Caribbean nations.

*Police Officer:* Typically, uniformed personnel employed by agencies authorized to arrest individuals who violate laws.

*Tokenism:* Categorization based on race or sex that limits expected behaviors from minority groups from majority groups (Kanter, 1977).

### **Assumptions**

Every study makes assumptions about the data used. For this study, I assumed that the female police officers interviewed provided honest answers to the questions posed by the researcher (me). I also assumed that the answers provided and their participation in the study was of free will, and without fear of consequence to their standing at their workplace.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

The participants in this study were required to be female, full-time, sworn police officers with a minimum of five years of law enforcement experience. The reason for the employment minimum was due to gaining experience into everyday operations in policing as well as having a thorough understanding of workplace interactions. The study was originally limited to female officers who were recruited from several local or municipal law enforcement agencies in the Northeast region of the United States. The rationale behind focusing on a smaller geographical area was because policing experiences vary widely throughout the United States and focusing on a smaller geographical area, in addition to agency size, can improve transferability of findings to similarly situated police agencies. However, given that recruitment limited to a specific geographic location proved more difficult than initially expected, participation in the study was extended to

individuals who met previous study criteria and worked as police officers in the United States. Because the number of individuals recruited for the study was very small and geographical parameters had to be extended, caution must be used when generalizing the findings of this research to Latina police officers.

### **Limitations**

There were several foreseeable challenges in conducting this study. The first challenge was recruiting Latina females interested in telling their story. In recent years, police officers have been under intense scrutiny from the public, and any attention (whether through the news media or scholarly study) that may highlight negative attributes of policing may discourage participation. Additionally, in telling their stories, participants in this study could have been exposed to past trauma, which could have led to re-victimization. To mitigate the negative effects of reexperiencing past trauma, information for a toll-free peer support hotline was provided to the interviewee prior to the interview (1-800-COPLINE). Research participants were also reminded of the presence of their agency's Employee Assistance Program (EAP). A second issue of concern was in recruitment itself. Although this researcher had access to a large metropolitan department in the Northeast region, her position as a supervisor within that agency presented possible dual-relationship and informed consent issues. Because of the potential ethical pitfalls, the researcher's department was avoided entirely. Given that fact, access to other departments was limited and recruitment for this study relied on snowball sampling which was then expanded to other regions in the United States using various social media platforms (such as Facebook and LinkedIn). The final challenge in



this study was acknowledging the researcher's role as the researcher. Because of the researcher's personal experience with the research topic, it was imperative that the researcher approach this study with bracketed assumptions and consistently engage in reflexive journaling. The use of IPA for the study encouraged a thorough analysis of the data through the double hermeneutic process utilized in IPA.

### **Significance**

As discussed by Todak and Brown (2019), there is a lack of general literature, data, and understanding concerning the experiences of female minority police officers. In the available police literature, there are studies that cover the experiences of women, the experiences of minorities, physical fitness ability, stress, sexual harassment, discrimination, and job satisfaction. However, very few studies have examined the experiences of Latino officers and to my knowledge, no studies specifically examine the experiences of Latina police officers working in a patrol assignment. This research contributes to the literature by identifying and analyzing the experiences of this often-overlooked population within law enforcement agencies. The findings contribute to social change by providing Latina police officers perspectives to the literature, identifying experiences that inspired these women to first seek, and then remain, in law enforcement as patrol officers. Additionally, the findings of this study have the potential to encourage agencies to revisit policies and procedures that encourage inclusivity and reduce bias.

### **Summary**

While police departments across the country have generally seen an increase in the number of female and minorities amongst their ranks, the number of women that are

employed by these agencies falls short of representative numbers. Nationally, the average for female law enforcement officers is about 12%, with some larger local agencies boasting numbers well above the national average (Ziegler, 2021; Kanik, 2021). Additionally, while many police agencies saw an increase in minority officers, not all departments saw equal increases in the number of minority officers recruited. In short, although gains have been made in the recruitment of minority female officers, and more specifically, Latina officers, their numbers still remain relatively low when compared to their White male counterparts.

In this study, I extracted data from interviews conducted with Latina police officers. Demographic information, researcher's notes, and questions related to their experiences during training and on the job shed light on the barriers and bolsters available to Latina law enforcement officers.

By studying Latina police officers' lived experiences, the study addressed a gap in the literature. The findings provide a voice for women and other minorities who have been historically overlooked in the literature. Of equal importance, these findings also form a foundation to understanding how to better recruit Latinas in the future. Chapter 2 provides a thorough examination of the literature to date regarding the history of the relationship between minorities and police, the entrance of women into law enforcement, current recruitment strategies and retention issues faced by police departments.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

This literature review includes scholarly literature on the early history and establishment of police departments in the United States and how women and minorities eventually found their way into the rank and file. Without some contextual framing of historical issues, it is difficult to understand why minority and female recruitment continues to be problematic despite widespread intentional efforts to recruit more women from minority demographics (Wilson, et al., 2016; Suboch et al., 2017; Todak & Brown, 2019). This review examines the holistic experiences of minority officers and takes into account not just their workplace interactions with peers and supervisors, but their interactions with community members, and the role that media plays in their perceptions of self (both as individuals and as law enforcement officers). This review will also examine the experiences of minority female police officers and how they perceive support from their supervisors and feelings of acceptance within their department.

The enactment of the EEOC Act of 1972 leveled the playing field for minorities and women to enter law enforcement in greater numbers. While both women and minorities worked in some capacity within law enforcement prior to the EEOC Act of 1972, women's roles were relegated to support functions—with female officers not afforded the same powers of arrest or ability to occupy equal policing roles (i.e., investigations, patrol, etc.). In the United States, it is likely that these role restrictions were carried from Western cultural gender norms, with the police subculture taking on facets of the larger culture and used to support the traditional vision of policing (where

physical brawn and intelligence was needed to overpower dangerous adversaries) (Hassell & Brandl, 2009; Suboch et al, 2017; Hunt, 1990). However, Koenig (1978) found that by the 1970s, community members expressed general support for the presence of women in law enforcement. On the other hand, male officers and supervisors expressed more ambivalent views of their female coworkers, with many chiefs voicing concerns over the female officer's ability to control dangerous adversaries (Koenig, 1978).

Examining literature specific to Latino or Hispanic officers is difficult, as traditionally, Hispanic and Latino officers were lumped into either Black or White categories based on their physical characteristics. It was not until 1976 that the term Hispanic was adopted by the U.S. Congress to denote individuals who were descendent of Spanish-speaking nations (Taylor et al., 2012). This delineation of ethnicity mandated that research publications use this additional category to describe Spanish-speaking individuals from Spanish-speaking nations, as they were not exclusively Black or White. Because of this limitation in the literature, and the fact that the scholarly literature continues to remain limited in its examination of Latino officers, I will also be examining literature relating to minorities in general.

Given that the demographics of police departments have historically been white, male, and hypermasculine, being outside of those character markers can produce feelings of outsider-ness and contribute to further alienation when individuals outside of those characteristics are numerically underrepresented (Kanter, 1977). Conceptually, it is important to view these issues through representative bureaucracy in addition to

Tokenism and Intersectionality. These concepts, taken holistically, can help researchers who are reviewing police recruitment strategies in hiring and retention of minority officers, understand what barriers may be in place, and best practices for improving selection and retention of minority and female officers long-term.

The second section of the literature review provides a review of two theories. The first theory discussed is Tokenism Theory, developed by Kanter (1977). The second theory discussed is Intersectionality Theory, coined by Crenshaw (1989). I will review each theory's weaknesses and validity in order to appropriately support the theoretical assumptions contained within the study. The third section of the literature review focuses on law enforcement officers' behaviors and actions. It includes how officers perceive their roles within law enforcement agencies and how race and gender influence their perceived interactions with the community, co-workers, and commanders. The fourth section of this literature review looks at the role that media play in perceptions of police officers from the public view and how officers view themselves in relation to how they are portrayed in the news media, social media, and popular culture. This chapter closes with a summary of findings from my literature review.

The main goal of this literature review is to analyze and understand how workplace culture and interactions can play a role in how Latina police officers interpret their workplace experiences. Workplace culture and the perceived interactions that individuals have with potential peers and management can play a role in how attractive an organization is to an individual considering applying for a position within an agency. With these concepts in mind, it is important to think about how representative

bureaucracy can influence how adjusted individuals feel once within that agency and how they can further assimilate into the culture and expectations of their police department. Representative bureaucracy may play a role in whether that individual remains within that law enforcement agency.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

To develop a framework for this research study, the analysis of literature included peer-reviewed academic studies directly relating to the hiring of minorities into law enforcement agencies, public policies relating to hiring of females and minorities into government agencies, and the retention of females and minorities in policing. The scholarly literature research process includes searches utilizing academic databases, such as the Walden University online library. Additional searches were done through EBSCO, SAGE, Emerald Insight, ERIC, Pro-Quest, Google Scholar, and Semantic Scholar. Multiple database searches were conducted using the following subject-based specific inquiries, Boolean operators, and advance search structuring:

- “Female” OR “women” OR “woman” OR “females” AND “police officers”  
OR “law enforcement” OR “cops” OR “police” AND “retention” OR  
“attrition” OR “turnover”
- “Female” OR “women” OR “woman” OR “females” AND “police officers”  
OR “law enforcement” OR “cops” OR “police” AND hiring
- “Female” OR “women” OR “woman” OR “females” AND “police officers”  
OR “law enforcement” OR “cops” OR “police” AND “selection”

- “Female” OR “women” OR “woman” OR “females” AND “police officers” OR “law enforcement” OR “cops” OR “police” AND “experiences”
- “Minority” OR “Minorities” AND “police officers” OR “law enforcement” OR “cops” OR “police” AND “experiences”
- “Latino” OR “Latina” OR “Latinx” AND “police officers” OR “law enforcement” OR “cops” OR “police” AND “experiences”
- “Hispanic” AND “police officers” OR “law enforcement” OR “cops” OR “police” AND “experiences”
- “Screening” OR “assessment” OR “test” OR “diagnosis” AND “selection” AND recruitment” AND “police officers” OR “law enforcement” OR “cops” OR “police”
- “Female police officer” AND “supervisor support”
- “Supervisory relationship” OR “supervisory support” AND “police officers” OR “law enforcement” OR “cops” OR “police”

The literature reviewed for this chapter ranged from publications dated from 1977 to 2021. The oldest work included in this literature review was Kanter’s theory of tokenism (1977), which has formed the basis of many studies that examine power imbalances in the workplace stemming from underrepresentation of “outsider” groups. This is particularly helpful when examining police agencies, a profession that has been traditionally marked as being occupied by mainly Caucasian men. The scholarly literature was organized using Zotero citation management software; Excel and Word were utilized for the purposes of keeping literature matrices. The literature will be analyzed utilizing

this author's own manual coding and the assistance of qualitative software such as NVivo.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Women working in traditionally male organizations must contend with several factors that often mark them for "outsider-ness." Historically, law enforcement agencies and police departments have been predominately White and male, with few minority males and even fewer women. When women began to slowly trickle into the profession, they were relegated to traditional female caretaker-like roles; duties that revolved around social work or prison matroning (Koenig, 1978). This division of labor and responsibility continued through the 1960s and into the 1970s, when the Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1972 mandated that government agencies, including police departments, open all positions within their agencies to women. This meant that women could not be limited in policing roles and could now take on the same assignments as their male counterparts.

As can be expected, this shift in policing was not easy to bear from within police organizations. Widespread organizational change often poses challenges for all organizations, not just law enforcement agencies. As a profession that prides itself in traditionalism and masculinity, the entrance of women into the field posed significant hurdles for the organizations themselves. How were women, who are not traditionally regarded for physical feats of strength, going to be included into the fabric of law and order, where using force to gain compliance was common practice? How were men, protectors of women, expected to react when their female coworkers were in physical



altercations with male subjects? Although difficult to frame these questions in a patriarchal fashion, it is somewhat easier to understand the hesitancy and uncertainty that male officers at the turn of the EEOC revolution faced, even if doubts and misgivings may have been misplaced.

This present research will utilize two theories steeped in feminist tradition. Tokenism Theory, developed by Kanter (1977) and Intersectionality Theory developed by Crenshaw (1989). Tokenism theory describes how numerically outnumbered members of minority groups often shape the majority group's perceptions through shared interactions. The majority group, having limited experiences or interactions with members of the minority group, will often rely on stereotypes and highlight differences observed between themselves and members of the minority group (Kanter, 1977). The pressures of the majority group on the minority group to assimilate or be accepted into the culture can, in turn, create pressure on the minority group to either break away from their pre-assigned role or recede further into the shadows, prizing anonymity over accolades that may threaten the majority group's competence or power within an organization (Kanter, 1977). This theory may help to explain why police departments continue to have low numbers of female and minority applicants since good spokespeople or recruiters for the organization are often employees themselves. It may further explain why retention continues to be problematic, particularly with female and minority officers.

Literature specific to Latino and Latina officers is limited. However, in the first study known to look at tokenism in Latino police populations, Stroshine and Brandl (2011) found that minority females (Black and Latino) experienced the higher levels of

tokenism when compared to Black, Latino, and White males and White female officers. Their study also found that tokenism is experienced at different levels by members of different ethnic groups, pointing out that even among minorities, there is a racial hierarchy (Stroshine & Brandl, 2011). Also significant in their study was that race rather than gender was a greater predictor of tokenism in police agencies.

While tokenism theory can explain some of the processes behind behavior in the workplace, it may not fully encapsulate other factors that may be associated with the Latina police officer's experiences. Acknowledging that multi-layered perceptions of self do not operate within a vacuum (i.e., minority women may experience events from a gender and race standpoint combined) and that there is often an interplay between these embedded concepts of the self in daily interactions, it is critical to examine the ways in which race and gender are experienced together by members of doubly-marginalized groups, or as referred to by Martin (1990) as "double deviants". Crenshaw's (1989) intersectionality theory offers a more holistic approach when looking at race and gender, where purely feminist or race inequity theories tend to exclude the experiences of individuals who occupy more than one marginalized group.

### **Tokenism Theory**

When individuals within an organization are few and far between, several phenomena occur. Firstly, their low numbers and rarity make these individuals highly visible within the organization (visibility). This high visibility, according to Kanter (1977), causes the interactions that majority groups have with these rare groups to form the basis of the majority group's beliefs of how individuals from these minority groups

behave or think; these differences are often highlighted to show how different the two groups are when compared to one another (polarization or contrast). This polarization also leads the dominant group to feel uncomfortable, and thus, the dominant group tightens the liaisons they hold with other members of the dominant group.

According to Kanter (1977), if, or when, a token assimilates into the organization's culture, the token will often feel trapped into behaving in pre-determined and regulated roles that are based on the interactions of the dominant group with the token members of the organization. This not only reinforces what the majority group believes about the token group, but it also influences the way that the minority group view their positions within the organization (Kanter, 1977).

In an empirical study conducted by Stroshine and Brandl (2011), the authors were interested in discovering whether token police officers (those whose gender or race categories comprise less than 15% of the group total) experienced tokenism as predicted by Kanter (1977). As it relates to Latino and Latina officers, Stroshine and Brandl's (2011) study found that Latinos "perceived greater feelings of polarization, reduced opportunity, and overall tokenism as compared with White officers" (p.360). Their study was also consistent with previous studies that indicate that even among racial minorities, there appears to be a racial hierarchy in which, despite numerical outnumbering of Black to Latino officers, Latinos perceive that they fair better than their Black counterparts (Conti & Doreian, 2014; Irlbeck, 2008; Carter, 1986).

While Kanter's (1977) theory has been tested numerous times throughout the literature and has been applied to skewed sex ratio studies in the workplace, the validity

of the theory has received mixed results (Archbold & Schulz, 2008; Chatman et al., 2008; Biernat et al. 1998). A study by Stichman et al. (2010) found that there was some support for Kanter's (1977) theory in regard female officers reporting similar workplace experiences as male officers in a police department that had more than 15% female employees. The Stichman et al. (2010) study did not find any differences between males and females with respect to assimilation and visibility. However, the construct relating to contrast (exaggeration of differences between majority and token group) showed significant differences between males and females with females reporting that they were more likely to be underestimated because of their physical characteristics. It should be restated that the 15% tipping point for tokens was surpassed in this study, which may explain why there were no significant differences in assimilation and visibility (Stichman et al., 2010).

### **Intersectionality Theory**

Crenshaw (1989) coined the concept of intersectionality to describe how women of color understand their experiences through a multi-layered lens. According to Crenshaw (1989), purely feminist theories, or theories that focus on race, often exclude the interaction that race and gender play in the experiences of individuals. Crenshaw (1989) argues that these characteristics often perform an interplay that can lead to the oppression of individuals who fall within these categories. Where previous feminist movements focused on equity between white women and white men, intersectionality argues that although the plight of women and men continues to exist, the differences for

women of color are enhanced given the inequity of race and social class (Crenshaw, 1991).

While measuring the intersection of race and gender can be difficult and even problematic, the benefits of viewing intersecting identities can be invaluable to researchers (Bowleg, 2008). It is important to think of intersectionality as a layered lens, as opposed to a cumulative approach to understanding the human experience (Bowleg, 2008). Understanding that occupying more than one minority category can disadvantage individuals can help agencies ensure that the appropriate policies, training for personnel, and support services are in place to reduce bias and mitigate their effects when they are experienced. In her study of the lived experiences of women, ethnic minorities, and LGBTQ individuals in the English police service, Zempi (2018) found in her qualitative interviews that officers often felt targeted because of the occupation of multiple minority categories within the organization. Further, some of the minority females described that they believed both their race and sex presented barriers to the advancement of their careers as officers (Zempi, 2018). As these officers felt their “outsider-ness” highlighted, some withdrew, others put up barriers, and some left the profession all together (Zempi, 2018). Given that workplace interactions can play a significant role in employee retention, it is essential that employers examine how workplace policies and training foster feelings of acceptance and belonging for members of marginalized groups.

### **The Entrance of Minorities and Females into Law Enforcement**

The employment of minorities into law enforcement is not a new venture. As a matter of fact, the hiring of minorities can be traced to 1867, when Selma, Alabama

employed its first African American officers (Colorado State University, 2021). The first African American female officer is cited as being Georgia Ann Robinson of the Los Angeles Police Department in 1919, who found paid employment with the department after volunteering as prison matron from 1916-1919 (Bryan, 2016). The first Latina police officer was Josephine Serrano Collier, who was also employed with the LAPD from 1946 to 1960 (Colker, 2014).

While today we often celebrate firsts, this shift towards praising trailblazers is a recent one. Unfortunately, these pioneers in law enforcement were often met with derision and disdain, with their differences highlighted among the long-standing majority group already firmly in place within these organizations. Many police chiefs and officers expressed that the entrance of women in policing was a fad and that their role cut into the importance of police work being used as a punitive measure rather than a preventative one (Koenig, 1978). When it came to female officers, the general sentiment was that females took away from the police force, rather than adding any real value or producing benefits (Johns, 1979).

The belief that females should be relegated to working within tight spheres in police work can be witnessed in their deployments throughout history—from female officers patrolling limited areas to the heavy loading of females into clerical and administrative positions within police departments (Archbold et al., 2010). While it may seem that the presence of women in administrative roles may have been a tactic employed to keep genders in place, it is important to note that women often have conflicting home-work expectations, and many women may choose to take on more

administrative roles within their agencies if these positions offer better work hours of steady schedules. As will be evident throughout this literature review, gender in policing is a multi-faceted issue, and one that is not exclusive to the law enforcement profession, however, starkly highlighted when compared to other, less-gendered professions.

Regardless of preferred work schedules for women working in law enforcement, many early women who worked in the profession expressed desires to break away from their confined roles in policing. As mentioned above, the role of women in law enforcement has evolved from their entrance and has been documented in the literature over the years. In one of the first studies to look at women in policing, Koenig (1978) described the burgeoning needs of city departments to employ women for their skills in advocacy and communication, especially around issues surrounding juveniles and women. As it pertains to the employment of minority officers, and more specifically, Black officers, early beliefs were that Black officers would be better able to police their own communities (Kuykendall & Burns, 1980). While research has been mixed on whether Black officers are less likely to use excessive force than White officers, or even whether Black officers are able to secure minority community trust, some studies have pointed out that an increase in Black officers can lead to increased public trust in police agencies (Ramsey & Robinson, 2015; Chaney & Robertson, 2013). However, balancing the agency is essential, as an imbalance in demographic makeup of police departments can have adverse effects on races in the community that are not properly represented in the agency (Ricucci et al., 2018).

Recognizing that there was a rift between law enforcement and the community, in 2014, President Barack Obama created a task force to investigate where breakdowns between the police and the community occurred and what steps needed to be taken to rebuild community trust (Ramsey & Robinson, 2015). Among many of the findings in the report, the task force made several recommendations to improve recruitment practices in law enforcement agencies—suggesting that when police departments do hire, they should do so with the forethought of diversity at the entry level and through all ranks of the department (Ramsey & Robinson, 2015). Despite the importance of the report, and the actionable recommendations provided within, many of the recommendations did not come as a surprise. As a matter of fact, many police agencies were actively attempting some of the recommendations provided, such as the need to recruit female and minority officers.

From a historical perspective, the entrance of females into law enforcement presented challenges not only for the women entering these establishments, but for the organizations themselves. After Title VII of the Civil Rights act was passed, employers in general (not just police agencies) were forced to look at how screening requirements excluded or made it difficult for women to enter their workforce (United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 1983). For example, in *Dothard v. Rawlinson*, the Supreme Court ruled that height and weight requirements could not be used to exclude female applicants on the sole standing that gender (and not so much weight and height) posed a “substantial security problem, directly linked to the sex of the prison guard” (United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 1983).



Because of the sometimes highly physical aspects of the job, law enforcement agencies can have minimum fitness requirements in order for applicants be screened into the job. Police agencies throughout the United States often use separated tiers for fitness for men and women. While this process aims to ensure fairness by placing an equal amount of burden on each sex, it also comes with criticism. Some scholars have argued that the different tiers, at minimum, call the physical abilities of females into question. Male applicants have also disputed the fairness of different physical ability requirements. Contested as recently in court cases such as *Bauer v. Lynch*, the supreme court has consistently held that physical fitness tests, so long as they are “equally burdensome” do not violate Title VII (Thomson Reuters Practical Law, 2016).

Reading and writing requirements are also used by law enforcement departments in the United States today. The argument standing that officers must be able to read complex case law and fill out legal forms to appropriately carry out their duties. Interestingly, some studies show that advanced reading is also a predictor of good police performance, while other studies have found that predictors of police performance in the police academy do not always translate into performance in the field (White, 2008; Walker & Katz, 2002). Given that reading and writing assessments can disadvantage minority applicants in particular, some agencies have considered altering reading assessments for potential cadets (Schmit & Ryan, 1997; Carless, 2007). The findings are often mixed on whether this practice is helpful or harmful for the agencies and the applicant. While studies have shown that some applicants will stay in the hiring process longer, the practice does not equal a greater chance that the applicant will be hired since

the person will self-select or be rejected after a considerable amount of time and money have been invested in their success (Linos & Riesch, 2020).

Despite Supreme Court rulings on equitable employment and affirmative action policies and procedures, the number of female police officers today has plateaued. Although the number of minority officers has increased since the 1980s, the number of minority officers in relation to community demographic make-up remains low. Some researchers have questioned whether current recruitment practices foster opportunities for minority and female officers, pointing to unfair practices within recruiting that involve screening process barriers, such as reading assessments and physical agility requirements that may disadvantage low-income and female applicants and recruitment strategies themselves (Donohue, 2020; Kringen & Kringen, 2015; Wilson et al., 2016).

Finding a way to correct lapses in recruitment may take a fair amount of “out-the-box” thinking. With current budget deficits in major cities throughout the US after the COVID-19 pandemic and current calls to “defund” the police, agencies may have to think about how to institute low-cost measures to increase recruitment (Rainey & King, 2020; Johnson & Phillips, 2020). A study by Linos et al. (2017), while conducted in the UK, showed promise in executing low-cost recruitment improvement for minority officers while avoiding lowering standards. Linos et al. (2017) found that by changing strong wording and having applicants reflect on how their role as police officers in the community would be important to them, the number of minority officers that passed a Situational Judgement Test (SJT) increased by 50% over the control group, which did not receive the reflection and positive wording instructions. Whether these types of low-cost

changes in the recruitment process will translate into positive outcomes in the US remains to be seen.

### **Current Trends in Minority and Female Recruitment**

Since the mid 1980s, there has been a concerted effort to recruit more minority and female officers into law enforcement (Donohue, 2020). As it relates to female officers, the average percentage of females employed in law enforcement has maintained a national average of approximately 12%. Some agencies have seen an increase in female officers that exceed those percentages such as the Baltimore Police Department (16%) the LAPD (18%), and the Philadelphia Police Department (22%) (Anderson, 2019; Los Angeles Almanac, 2020; Kanik, 2021).

Minority officers have also seen an increase in their representation within police departments, although these numbers remain below representative percentages (Keller, 2015; Afful, 2017). Data from the United States Census Bureau and the American Community Survey Public Use Microdata Sample (ACS PUMS) 1-year estimate shows that White officers comprise most of the ethnic representation within police departments at 67% (2019). Black officers comprise approximately 12.4% of police officers within police departments, the second most represented ethnic group in policing (United States Census, 2019).

Although Latino officer representation remains low, the data shows that there has been a steady increase in Latino officers in police departments at the local, state, and federal level since the mid- to late-1980s (Guevara Urbina & Espinoza Alvarez, 2015). Using data from the US Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), Census of Federal Law

Enforcement Officers (FLEO), and Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics (LEMAS), Guevara Urbina & Espinoza Alvarez (2015) found that as the population of Latinos within the United States grew, so did the number of Latino law enforcement officers. In 2007, the percentage of Latino officers in local law enforcement agencies stood at 10% (Guevara Urbina & Espinoza Alvarez, 2015). Today, that percentage has increased to approximately 12% (Lopez & Krogstad, 2017).

A review of the literature on minority and female recruitment and selection shows that minority women often cite the same reasons for entering into policing as males; that is to help others, for excitement, and for occupational prestige (Todak & Brown 2019; Todak, 2017; Raganella & White, 2004). Although these reasons for joining the police force have remained relatively consistent throughout the literature, Gibbs (2019) found that only 6% of the females she surveyed stated that they became police officers to “make a difference.” Her study found that nearly 23% of the females could not articulate the initial reason for wanting a career in law enforcement. Latino officers that applied to police jobs stated their reason for applying was fulfilling a childhood dream (12.5%) and job security (12.5%) (Gibbs, 2019). Despite the somewhat conflicting Gibbs study, the majority of studies conclude that despite similar drives for seeking jobs in law enforcement, women are more likely to be rejected during background screenings or self-select out of the profession all together (National Center for Women & Policing, 2001).

### **Current Trends in Female and Minority Retention**

When it comes to the hiring and long-term retention of women, many studies have focused on why females leave policing, with little focus on why they stay (Suboch et al.,

2017). Monetary compensation, flexible work schedules, excitement, and mobility around the department were identified as reasons for staying in police work (Suboch et al., 2017). However, research has consistently shown that females in male-dominated professions are more likely to leave the profession early (Kahn & Ginther, 2015; Torre, 2017). While agencies have enacted institutional policies to help women be more successful, these policies appear to be more helpful at retaining and promoting White women than they are for minority women (Zhao et al., 2006; Zhao, 2001).

In addition to institutional policies aimed at leveling the playing field for minority females, research has also shown that external factors, such as the percentage of minorities within the community influenced the hiring of minority female officers (Zhao et al., 2006; Zhao, 2001). This is important because minority women who work in demographically diverse areas stand a greater chance of being hired by agencies that serve these populations. However, without representation within departments, efforts to retain more minority women will fall by the wayside as increased visibility has been cited as a contributing factor to long-term retention (Kanter, 1977; Wilkins & Williams, 2009; Suboch et al., 2017).

This is particularly important when issues surrounding tokenism are considered and how a lack of representation within police departments can affect not only female and minority recruitment and retention but also how the community engages with police officers and how trust is fostered between the two groups (Saltzstein, 1979; Wilkins & Williams, 2009; Ramsey & Robinson, 2015). Without bureaucratic representativeness,

proclamations of serving the public in their best interest becomes questionable, especially when cultural, racial, and gender worldviews, lenses, and experiences come into play.

### **Minority Female Interactions with Coworkers**

The literature has produced ample evidence that stressors associated with police work can influence both mental health outcomes and decisions to stay in the police profession, although stress in and of itself does not produce significant findings for intentions to quit (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020; Pinals & Price, 2013; Allisey, et. al, 2013). While there are limited studies specific to Latina police officers' experiences on patrol, there is a more expansive bulk of literature relating to minority officers' experiences. Controlling for race, research has shown that all races and genders experience both occupational and organizational stressors while carrying out their duties. However, the literature has also uncovered differences present between Black and White officers, and male and females within the law enforcement profession (Brown & Campbell, 1990; Repasky et al., 2020). Studies that investigate the effect of ethnic bias on occupational stress in minority officers have found that race is an indicator for increased occupational stress, and that issues surrounding gender and sexual harassment lead to poorer physical and mental health outcomes (Morash et al, 2006; Padilla, 2020; de Haas et al., 2009; de Haas & Timmerman, 2010).

The interactions that minority female officers have with their coworkers can also shape how these individuals perceive their role within the group. Several studies have highlighted the role that the intersection of race and gender play in the experiences of female police officers. Studies by Dodge and Pogrebin (2001) and Martin (1994)

highlight that women who occupy a minority category and female category often feel “doubly marginalized” in their interactions with coworkers. Padilla (2020) found that occupational stressors (those related to job specific functions) were more pronounced for minority officers than organizational stressors, a finding that is in stark contrast with studies that look at organizational and occupational stressors. However, consistent with previous literature, Padilla (2020) found that race can influence the amount of stress that officers experience.

Rotating shifts, long work hours, and organizational culture and climate have all shown to influence mental health outcomes for employees, regardless of their specific occupation (Purba & Demou, 2019). Previous studies have found that these characteristics, which are typically involved in police work, and as well as high job demands and odd work schedules, are strong predictors for anxiety, psychological distress, and burnout, especially in instances where reward and effort were imbalanced (Purba & Demou, 2019; Violanti et al, 2018).

Although the issues associated with poor sleep habits, loss of productivity, anxiety, and depression have been well documented as it relates to shift work and rotating schedules, it stands that the majority of police departments in the United States still implement these schedules (Amendola et al., 2012) As mentioned previously in this paper, work-life balance for officers that experience childcare issues can also increase the amount of stress officers experience (McCanlies et al., 2019). Traditionally, these childcare stressors are mainly experienced by females, but of course, male officers can

experience these stressors as well. This is especially true when male officers are the primary caretakers for children or have dependents that rely on their support.

Studies have also highlighted the gender-specific difficulties that female officers face in their workplace environments (Lonsway, 2013; Lonsway & Alipio, 2007; Kingshott, 2009). Often cited throughout the literature is the focus of hypermasculine qualities and characteristics “needed” to successfully carry out policing duties (Kingshott, 2009; Nolan, 2009). Adding to masculinized views of policing, studies have pointed out that females, who culturally and historically have been type-casted into nurturing roles, find themselves at odds with what is acceptable in society at large and what is expected within police culture (Wilson & Henderson, 2014; Suboch et al., 2017). Further, women in male dominated fields must contend with fitting in to the social fabric of the agency. Feelings of belongingness, regardless of race and gender, are important for any employee. While we often think of “belongingness” as a thing to be achieved and holding a fixed status, Rabe-Hemp (2008) found women in law enforcement often must negotiate acceptance on a daily basis.

Haarr (2005) and Hassel and Brandl (2009) found that lack of community, family, and peer support contribute to early resignation for minority and female officer. In their study of female and minority police officers, Suboch et al. (2017) found that although family support was important to some participants in their study, it was not important to the majority of those interviewed. Further, community support for many of their interviewees was deemed as not relevant to their continued work as police officers. Consistent with prior research, their study found that peer support was essential to their



continued employment within their agency (Suboch et al., 2017; McCarty & Skogan, 2012). Given that policing is a gendered profession with the vast majority of officers falling into the Caucasian category, the role that mentoring can play in long-term retention of minority groups should be explored further and piloted throughout law enforcement agencies to determine whether this style of peer communication is effective for these non-traditional groups.

The difficulties that female officers experience as a gendered minority within their institutions cannot be understated. Several studies have pointed to a high prevalence of sexual harassment, a phenomenon that is not uncommon when gender disparities are present (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2011; Jackson & Newman, 2004; Raj et al., 2020). Koenig (1978), crediting Anderson (1973), stated that women in early law enforcement were cautioned against wearing heavy make-up, suggestive clothing, and rough language as they may be “pinched, patted or played with” (p. 269). In the interest of avoiding exhibiting over-feminine features may lead some women to adopt tough, masculine behaviors and outward characteristics. Although this may benefit some women, others describe the difficulties associated with adopting a style that’s inauthentic to who they are. These “script” adoptions can even translate into speech and communication with some women feeling the need to adopt hypersexualized scripts to assimilate into the larger culture (Brown et al., 2019; Davies-Netzley, 1998).

Recently, the United States has seen an increase in individuals voicing concerns of sexual harassment in the workplace. Research into the experiences of females working in male-dominated occupations document the pervasiveness of sexual harassment in

gendered workplaces. In gendered institutions such as policing, research has consistently found that in workplaces where males significantly outnumber females, women often experience elevated levels of discrimination and social isolation (Archbold et al., 2010; Brown et al., 2019; Shelley et al., 2011). The physical, emotional, and financial implications of sexual harassment have been extensively documented in the literature and they include increased loss of wages, increased sick day usage, and poorer emotional and mental health outcomes when compared to those who do not experience sexual harassment at work (Friborg et al., 2017). The psychological, financial, and social impacts that this form of harassment can incur on an individual not only hold long term implications for the individual and their families, but for the organization as well.

Sexual harassment can lead some employees to feel isolated from others and can bring how they fit into the larger group into question. Rief & Clinkinbeard (2020) found that females who perceived lower levels of group fit were more likely to feel that their values do not align with that of their workgroup. This is an important area to consider, especially when assessing how Person-Organization (P-O) Fit is processed internally by current employees and how P-O Fit may influence an employee's decision to stay, recruiting efforts when attempting to onboard more female and minority applicants, and subtle messaging processed by community members when interacting with members of law enforcement.

While the bulk of studies to date have focused on why minority and female officers eventually self-select out of the profession, very few have investigated the reasons why they stay (Suboch et al., 2017). In their study of female Hispanic and

African American officers, Suboch et al. (2017) found that compensation, challenge and satisfaction in their role as police officers, peer support, and commitment to their profession as reasons for staying in law enforcement. Some factors that were identified as barriers for these female officers included the need to “prove themselves” to male colleagues, overt and covert sexist comments and behaviors by colleagues and supervisors, and perceptions of limited advancement opportunities—both into specialized units and into supervisory positions (Suboch et al., 2017). These findings are consistent with previous research that points to job satisfaction as an indicator for retention in professions and the importance of mentorship for underrepresented groups within agencies (Farnese et al., 2016).

### **Minority Female Interactions with Supervisors**

The interactions that female and minority officers have with their fellow coworkers can play a significant role in many facets of the professional and personal lives. Direct supervisors can play an even more significant role when it comes to the minority female officers feelings of belongingness and acceptance within an organization. Front line supervisors come into frequent contact with their subordinates, have a direct impact on the subordinates’ assignments, and are the most visible and tangible representation of the agency they work for. Many studies have highlighted the importance of positive supervisor-employee relationships for overall job satisfaction and long-term retention of employees (Pohl & Galletta, 2017; Tillman et al., 2017). The importance of these positive supervisor-supervisee relationships extends into the police profession.

In a study by Violanti et al. (2016), the authors investigated highly rated and frequent stressors among female and male officers using a survey method. Among the top stressors for female officers in their study was “other officers not doing their job,” “inadequate support from supervisors,” “poor quality equipment,” and “using force” (Violanti et al., 2016). When it comes to “inadequate support from supervisors,” the authors found that female officers in their study reported 37% higher feelings of lack of support from their supervisors when compared to male officers (Violanti et al., 2016).

When supervisor support is perceived as inadequate or lacking, the behaviors exhibited and internalized by employees can affect work performance. This is not surprising, especially when taken into a context of representativeness, reflectiveness within the organization, and overt and covert messages sent to female and minority employees. A 2016 Bureau of Justice Statistics report found that approximately 1 in 10 front-line supervisors were female and approximately 1 in 5 were Black or Hispanic (Hyland & Davis, 2019). These numbers do not reflect representative law enforcement agencies as the internal percentage of minority and female officers does not reflect national percentages of minority and female community members.

Several authors have investigated why women and minorities do not promote within their agencies. Archbold and Schulz (2008) cited that although some female officers were encouraged to apply for promotions, many often did not because they felt they were being encouraged to do so based solely on their status as women. In other words, women were being asked to promote because they were women, and not because of their skills and abilities in producing quality work. However, Morabito and O’Connor

Shelley (2018) found the opposite to be true; women officers in their study were uplifted by supervisor and coworker encouragement to apply for promotions. Striking a balance in encouraging female and minority police officers to promote is in order. It is crucial that supervisors and coworkers highlight these officers' effectiveness and value to the organization in ways that do not focus on demographic factors but rather the contributions that individuals from varying backgrounds can bring to police work and the merit of the officer's performance.

Perceptions of organizational fairness are also crucial for all employees, regardless of their demographic makeup. Organizations that are perceived as fair positively correlate with positive employee behaviors and performance (Colquitt et al., 2013; Colquitt et al., 2005). Reynolds and Helfers (2018) found that officers attitudes change throughout career phases as organizational policies and interactions with coworkers, front-line supervisors, and command staff influence their perceptions of organizational justice within their agency. This is important as the authors of the study note that career satisfaction tends to be highest during the first two years of joining the agency and wanes between the third and thirteenth year (Reynolds & Helfers, 2018). This suggests that the agency would benefit from increasing understanding among police officers and front-line supervisors of how command-level decisions are made. If patrol officers and front-line supervisors perceive that their organization is fair, there will be positive behaviors and attitudes from these individuals—individuals who have the most frequent contact with community members.

Supervisory support can also help mitigate the effects of negative or stressful incidents in the workplace; issues that are often encountered in “routine” daily police operations. According to Lambert and Steinke (2015), positive supervisory relationships can play a role in increasing help-seeking behaviors, a crucial need in the police field, where avoidance of help and denial of problems is used to buttress acceptable behaviors within the organization.

### **Minority Female Interactions with the Public**

As was noted previously in this literature review, police departments have felt increased pressure from community members to recruit police officers who are reflective of the surrounding community. As explained above, police departments have ramped up recruiting efforts, especially for minority and female applicants. Although police departments have increased their efforts to recruit from minority populations, recruitment efforts have fallen short on delivering numerically reflective departments.

A plethora of studies have consistently found that female officers often must prove their value not only to their co-workers, but also to members of the community. Adding to this difficulty, minority female officers are often subjected to outsider status from community members who often view their employment with police agencies as “selling out” or buying into an oppressive police culture, one that has historically been at odds with minority communities (Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001). Despite this, many minority officers feel that their race helps them to better communicate with members from minority communities, as they have shared insight into the problems faced by minorities and power issues that exist between police and minorities (Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001).

The value that minorities and females bring to communities cannot be understated. Minority officers can provide departments with a better understanding the needs of minority communities and can act as liaisons between minority communities and their police agency. Cultural diversity can affect the lens with which problems are viewed leading to an increased understanding for both the agency and the community. Female officers also bring unique skills to the table. They are less likely to use force and more likely to use their communication skills to deescalate violent or stressful situations (National Center for Women & Policing, 2019; Rabe-Hemp & Schuck, 2005).

### **Media Portrayals of Minority and Female Officers**

The influence of the media on policing is often viewed in a negative light, although the interest that movies, television shows, and books draw could arguably influence many to look for careers in law enforcement (Wilson & Blackburn, 2014). These leisurely consumption habits, while eliciting excitement and providing entertainment, often skew and romanticize policing and misinform the public on issues surrounding available technology, length of time needed for investigations, and techniques used by police (Kluger, 2002; Cole & Dioso-Villa, 2009; Barthe et al., 2013). Unfortunately, I found no mention in the literature as to whether viewing police shows increases a viewer's desire to work in policing or whether viewing influences recruitment, but several studies show that it can influence college student's interests in pursuing a criminal justice degree (Collica-Cox & Furst, 2019; Sarver et al., 2010; Walters & Kremser, 2016). However, research has also shown that college major does not necessarily translate to employment within the same field (Holzman et al., 2020). In a

longitudinal study conducted in Texas, researchers found that only 14% of college graduates worked in a field directly related to their major (Holzman et al., 2020). While the “free advertisement” that police shows give the police profession can be valuable, it can also negatively impact lay perceptions of police. Several studies have investigated how media portrayals of police officers or policing shape general attitudes of the public towards police (Graziano, 2018). In her review of the literature, Graziano (2018) found that in studies where subjects were aware of negative police stories, their attitudes regarding police tended to be more negative. In other words, if individuals were aware of negative coverage of police officers, their awareness also increased how these individuals perceived the consistency with which police misconduct occurred.

The manner in which media consumption occurs also matters. Graziano and Gauthier (2018) found that those whose primary mode of media consumption was through local news were more likely to perceive the police as legitimate. Adding to general perceptions, it is important to understand how attitudes towards police affect civilian-police interactions and how individuals perceive their suitability for becoming police officers.

According to a report by the National Institute of Justice (2019) on women in policing, female law enforcement officers felt that female officers were portrayed as “bad, angry, black women”, but that male colleagues were often portrayed in a more positive light (p.12). This is not entirely surprising, given that in movies, television shows, and news media, the female officer has often been cast in a supporting role, angry, often masculinized, and far from the norm of “usual officer”. Wilson & Blackburn (2014)



found that many films that focused on women in law enforcement roles from 1971 to 2011 had storylines that revolved around difficult emotional pasts or involved female police officers engaging in sexual relationships with other officers.

Criminal justice texts are not blameless in stereotyped depictions of minorities and officers. Sever and Grillo (2016) and Dorworth and Henry (1992) found that White males were more likely to be portrayed as authority figures while females (both minority and White) were more likely to be depicted as victims. Both studies found that Black individuals were not more likely to be portrayed as criminals. However, Sever and Grillo (2016) found that minorities were more likely to be pictured as criminals than as authority figures.

Modern use of technology and social media has made communicating with the masses across long distances easier (Dai et al., 2017). While social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube have gained in popularity among everyday people, it has also become increasingly popular as a tool for police agencies to not only share information with the public, but also for police departments to recruit more members (Dai et al., 2017; Walby & Joshua, 2020; Hu et al., 2018). Although social media provides a cost-effective strategy for recruiting, studies in the area, although limited, point to issues regarding lack of representation for minority and female officers (Sever et al, 2018).

Given these findings, police agencies posting on social media can also play a role in how the public perceives their agency. This can come in the form of stand-alone images of officers, their interactions with the public, and photos depicting routine duties

of policing. A study by Sever et al. (2018) found that social media pages were disproportionately dominated by White officers and minority offenders. Further, a study by Rabe-Hemp and Beichner (2011) found that women in *Police Chief* magazine were often excluded from the imagery found in trade publications. Therefore, police agencies must use caution when using social media and trade magazines as a form of interacting with a wide-cast audiences since the use of images can further cement perceived “goodness-of-fit” within that agency, their overall acceptance into the agency itself and public trust in police agencies (Sever et al., 2018).

### **Summary**

This chapter provided a summary of the current state of literature relating to females and minorities in law enforcement. Unfortunately, the area relating to Latinos in law enforcement has remained relatively unexplored and because of this, inferences had to be drawn from other minority groups. Although this is not a fool-proof way to show similarities, it can provide insight into some of the experiences that Latina officers may face as gendered and racial minorities within their agencies.

The available research points to difficulties encountered by female minority officers that differ from their male counterparts and from the majority group. Although all genders and races experience stressors unique to the police profession, the rate and prevalence at which these stressors are experienced by gender and racial minorities differs than those from the majority group. These include higher prevalence of sexual harassment towards female and minority officers, stress specific to dueling gendered roles within the agency and at home, and perceptions of limited advancement or

opportunities and stress inherent with perhaps well-meaning but wayward encouragement to promote or go into special units to fulfil a token status.

When individuals occupy more than one minority demographic, their experiences can be viewed from multiple lenses, not just one; although the research also points to instances where one characteristic (i.e., female or minority status will persevere in how the individual interprets their experience). Although there is an intersection of gender and race when discussing the experiences of minority females, studies seldom take this approach in understanding how the experiences of doubly marginalized groups differ from the majority group or from each other. The experiences of Black males and Latino males, while differing from their White counterparts, will differ significantly with Black women and Latinas, as a Black male or Latino's male status will afford him some opportunities that his female counterpart will not receive (Todak & Brown, 2019).

Given that Latino police officers are the fastest growing minority in the United States and that the number of Latino officers has burgeoned in the last two decades, the need to understand why Latinos, and more specifically Latinas are drawn to police work is important. In addition, it is equally imperative to understand the experiences that Latina officers encounter during their daily work routines, both with co-workers, supervisors, and the public and identify what barriers may be affecting how Latina women patrol, decide to promote, or self-select out of the profession. Because my research will be asking Latinas about their daily patrol experiences, it is also crucial to understand the adversities faced by this population as well as what keeps these women cemented in the profession.

The literature shows that understanding minority and female police officers can be absorbed from a wide variety of different theories. However, framing these issues in the context of Tokenism (Kanter, 1977) and Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) are important to understanding not only *why* minority females experience issues in a particular way but also *what* agencies can do to ensure that they are meeting the needs of these populations in a way that is healthy for the employee and beneficial to the agency. Understanding that police departments derive their power and authority from the community that they serve, representative bureaucracy must be kept in mind when recruiting officers into these agencies. Representative bureaucracy can help police agencies build stronger trust with the community and ensure that the needs of community members are heard.

Making sure that minority and females permeate ranks throughout the agency is also crucial, and for several reasons. Firstly, women and minorities that see themselves reflected throughout the department (both in rank and special assignments) may be more readily able to see themselves engaging in the same kind of work as other women occupying these assignments. When this representativeness is observed first-hand, it not only encourages these women to engage in promotion or special assignments but normalizes their presence to other officers. Secondly, as has been mentioned several times throughout this paper, women bring special skill sets with them upon entrance into police agencies. Women are more likely to use verbal communication to deescalate volatile and tense situations, are less likely to use excessive force, and more likely to engage in community-style policing—a direction that most police agencies across the

United States have adopted as a form of engaging more positively with community members and gaining community trust. While research has shown that these skills can be learned, it may be helpful to swell the ranks with officers who engage in these behaviors more naturally, as peer behavior and attitudes have been shown to be highly influential factors in changing undesirable behaviors into more conforming behaviors.

As can be seen in this literature review, the complexities associated with being a Latina police officer encompass early gender exclusion to minority exclusion in the profession. Further, the often-conflicting work-life balance encountered in police work can present a significant barrier for all women, regardless of race. Police work takes a fair amount of personal sacrifice for all who enter the profession, but perhaps more so for gendered and racial minorities who must find a way to get comfortable with the incongruities within the organization or face seeking another form of employment.

As was evidenced in this literature review, the experiences of Latina police officers have held brief mention. With this growing demographic both within police agencies and in the United States population, what the research lacks is a general understanding of Latina officers in patrol, including their interactions with co-workers, supervisors, and the general public. Many of the studies contained within this literature review are dated—showing that there has been a decrease in scholarly inquiry into the experiences of minority female officers in recent years (Todak & Brown, 2019). This present research aimed to fill this gap in Latino patrol officers experiences and helped to identify barriers to their continued employment in law enforcement as well as support for their continued work with police agencies. This study employed a qualitative,

phenomenological approach to understanding what Latina police officers' experiences are, in their own words. An important concept for giving voice to the oppressed and unheard.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe and understand the lived experiences of Latina police officers in patrol, including how Latinas experience workplace interactions with their supervisors, peers, and the general public and how these interactions shape their perceptions of belongingness within the organization. Latina police officers' perceptions of belongingness was qualitatively explored through interviews, researcher memos, and reflective journaling. In this chapter, the researcher describes the research design for this study, instrumentation, participants criteria for selection, and the rationale behind using a phenomenological approach to understanding the experiences of Latina police officers working in a patrol capacity. The sampling that was used in this study, the data analysis, and data collection plan will also be discussed in this chapter. Finally, the role of the researcher, confidentiality issues, and how the researcher avoided ethical pitfalls will be addressed.

### **Research Questions**

The core of this qualitative phenomenological study was guided by several research questions. The central questions were the following: (1) What are the experiences of Latina police officers in patrol? (a) How do Latina police officers experience workplace interactions with peers (b) How do Latina police officers experience interactions with the public? (2) What are the experiences of Latina police officers within their police department? (a) What are Latina police officers' perceptions

of support by department commanders? (b) What are Latina police officers' perceptions of acceptance or "belonging?"

### **Research Design Rationale**

A qualitative, phenomenological approach was used to explore the experiences and perceptions of Latina police officers in patrol both internally (with coworkers and supervisors) and externally (with members of the public). A phenomenological approach was warranted for this study because it allowed me to understand these officers' experiences in their own words and gain insight into their perceptions of how they have processed their experiences within their departments.

Qualitative inquiry is used when a researcher is interested in exploring the depth, rather than the breadth, of details (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). In qualitative research, the researcher understands that *they* are the instrument that is measuring outcomes and their personal life experience plays a role in how they interpret the findings of their research (Patton, 2015). Because of this, the researcher must do several things. Firstly, they must consistently question how their own biases and experiences color how they view what they observe. Secondly, to ensure that the researcher is reporting accurate information (or, in other words, that the data is trustworthy), he or she must use several methods to ensure they are not reporting on their own assumptions (Guba, 1990). Using triangulation (such as interviewing several participants to study the same phenomena, using a theory or theories to frame the researcher's questions, and method triangulation) can help the researcher show how they understand the phenomena of interest and how the researcher reached their findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Janesick, 1999).



A qualitative design for this research was chosen because it allows for more in-depth exploration and focused understanding of the phenomena. Although studies in this area in general have failed to produce more than a glancing mention on Hispanic females in law enforcement, understanding what brings this demographic to this line of work is important to understanding why Hispanic female officers go through the arduous selection process and why they stay. As has been mentioned previously, the statistics show that Hispanic officers are the fastest growing minority group in law enforcement. However, this statistic favors Hispanic male officers, with the Census of Law Enforcement Training Academies (CLETA) indicating that female officers have a lower academy completion rate than their male counterparts (Buehler, 2021). Therefore, understanding Latina officers' experiences, the barriers they have encountered, and the support they have found along the way are essential to improving recruitment and retention with Latina officers.

Minority women who work in law enforcement have traditionally been silenced by the traditions of the organization. As was seen in the previous chapter, women of all races were often forced to fit in, or get out; cut their hair, wear less make-up, and masculinize their behavior and appearance. While these revelations have come to light using quantitative approaches, the trauma and damage inflicted by these acts may not be so easily discerned when using quantitative methods. While an appropriately structured quantitative study may be able to draw these issues out from the data, what truly gets lost in a quantitative approach are the voices themselves and the depth of lived experiences from these events.

Phenomenology is used when a researcher is interested in understanding how events are viewed *through the eyes* of the person who experienced the phenomena in question with the purpose of finding shared meanings amongst the group being analyzed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). An interpretative phenomenological analysis allowed the researcher to appropriately analyze the interviewees' statements, perceptions, and lived experiences that may color how they posit themselves within their departments and their communities. Using phenomenology allowed the researcher to reduce bias and preconceived assumptions given the researcher's own personal interest and closeness to the subject (Moustakas, 1994).

### **Setting and Sample**

The original target area for this study was the Northeast region of the United States. The rationale behind choosing the Northeast region was due to several large departments in the area, such as the NYPD, Baltimore PD, and Boston PD. All three of these departments have over 1,000 police officers and serve areas where the population reaches over 500,000 people. The size of the department, the demographic makeup of the departments (where several rise above the national 12% average female police officers) and the diversity within the neighborhoods served framed the rationale behind using large metropolitan police departments. Firstly, because these larger departments are more gender and racially diverse. If the gender and racial diversity of the department surpass token numbers as suggested by Kanter (1977), then, according to her theory, racial and gender minorities within these departments will experience less incidents of tokenism. Secondly, because inner cities are often the focus of gender and race disparities as they

relate to officer composition, the researcher was interested in seeing whether increased gender and racial minorities in these departments have any bearing on minority officer and community member interactions. As was discussed in Chapter two, the research in this area has been mixed.

### **Participants**

This researcher proposed that this qualitative study use purposive sampling. Because the researcher was seeking specific information from females who identify as Latina and who currently work as police officers in a patrol function within their department, the use of purposive or non-probability sampling was warranted in this study. Purposive sampling is a commonly employed method in qualitative research since the aim of using this type of sampling is to ensure the appropriate individuals who experience a given phenomenon or phenomena are evaluated during the study. The sample size for this proposed study was eight participants, based on recommendations from Guest et al. (2006) for the number of individuals needed before thematic saturation occurs. The number of participants could have been expanded if the researcher felt that thematic saturation has not been reached. Confidentiality concerning the police departments that employed my research participants was maintained using a numbering system that coincides with participant number (i.e., Department #1, Participant #1; Department #2, Participant #2; etc.). Inclusionary criteria for this study was (a) being female, (b) actively working in a large metropolitan police department (more than 1,000 sworn officers) in a patrol capacity (i.e., answering radio calls for service, patrolling geographic areas within the municipality either on foot, in a vehicle, on a bicycle, or on a motorcycle), (c)

working in the continental United States, (d) identifying as a Latina, (e) currently employed as a full-time police officer, (d) with a minimum of 5 years full-time experience.

### **Instruments**

The researcher created a demographic information sheet that includes a pseudonym for the participant (participant will then be labeled as #1, #2, #3, etc.), their age, the date of the interview, their race, current rank, years of experience, marital status, number of children, educational level, any other special assignments held within their department, number of years living in the United States, previous countries lived, and whether the individual is a first generation police officer or legacy officer. The estimated time for completion of the questionnaire was less than five minutes.

In searching the literature for the perceptions of female officers' experience, this researcher found that there were limited measuring instruments that directly utilized the research questions of this study. Therefore, the researcher created a questionnaire to capture the experiences of Latina patrol officers. The first section asked the participant to introduce themselves and included questions about their age, rank, and inspiration for becoming a police officer. The second section asked the participant to describe their experiences on the job, including common interactions with peers, supervisors, and experiences with discrimination. The third section of the interview guide asked the officer to describe their relationship with the public and how their minority status helps or hinders communication with the public. The last section of the interview guide asked the

participant to define belongingness, and what belongingness and acceptance mean to them.

The validity and reliability of the data are concerns in any research project. Using triangulation methods is one way to reduce researcher bias. This will be accomplished not only through interviews with the participants, but also through the use of scholarly literature and member checking. My dissertation committee members will also be available to ensure that the instruments that I use to measure the data are appropriate and valid. Everything presented in this study will be vetted by my committee, and Walden's Institutional Review Board (IRB) will act as a final gatekeeper to ensuring that the instruments used to measure the phenomena are appropriately constructed.

### **Role of the Researcher**

The ability to remain objective during research is essential to ensuring that the researcher is reporting back the true experiences of the research participant. Scholars have argued, specifically when it comes to qualitative research, that the researcher must use caution because the *researcher themselves are an instrument* in the qualitative process (Lofland et al., 2005; Ravitch & Carl, 2015). That is why it is important for researchers who are using a qualitative inquiry to employ methods of triangulation. Triangulation not only ensures that the data are being analyzed and confirmed from multiple angles, but the added benefit of using triangulation methods also reduces the amount of bias that can invariantly creep in when a human being is on the other end of data analysis, regardless of the research design used.

Choosing a qualitative approach in this case is essential because there is very little research that focuses on the experiences of Latina officers. While accruing demographic and quantitative data are important to further understanding this understudied group, hearing this specific group of women speak about and put their experiences into their own words is crucial given the history that often befell women and minorities in law enforcement—a silencing of sorts that occurred when their existence was neatly categorized into the dichotomous variables of “Black” and “White” with little attention paid to how Latinas may view themselves amongst these groups. The collapsing of groups into these categories that do not accurately capture the Latino culture can further ostracize this group, leading to further feelings of alienation and calling into question their fit into the group.

Given that the researcher closely relates to the topic (the researcher is a Latina police officer who worked in patrol for a long time), it is essential that the researcher acknowledge how her own experiences may have influenced how she processed the information received from the research participants. Reflexive journaling, member checking, data source triangulation, and theory triangulation were essential to not only understanding the experiences of this group, but also to ensure that the researcher’s own biases and preconceived ideas did not overtake what the interviewees are telling her.

Originally, the researcher was interested in conducting a quantitative study of female police officer’s workplace incidents of sexual harassment, but the literature revealed that minority women, not just Latinas, continued to be an understudied population. The importance of furthering research in this area cannot be understated,

especially in light of renewed calls for diversity in police departments and the need for police to gain the public's trust. As Sir Robert Peel pointed out almost two hundred years ago, the police derive their authority from the citizens whom they serve. Without public approval, the police cannot legitimately carry out their duties (Law Enforcement Action Partnership, n.d.).

### **Data Collection Plan**

Given the questions that the researcher asked during the interview, her position as a police supervisor within a large metropolitan police department, and in the interest of avoiding ethical issues relating to dual relationships, the data collection plan entailed posting a recruitment flyer on social media platforms such as Facebook and LinkedIn (Appendix A). The researcher's own police department was avoided, and a screening question asking which department the interviewee works in was used. As suspected, recruiting into a small geographic location (i.e., Northeast United States) proved difficult and resulted in too few participants, so recruitment of Latina officers throughout the continental United States occurred. As part of the confidentiality agreement, the researcher noted the department surveyed, however, the specific department surveyed was not named in the final study. The departments were identified using a numerical marker (i.e., Department #1) with no further description on the department. "Large metropolitan police departments" was defined as "a department that employs more than 1,000 sworn members and serves a population larger than 500,000 residents." Participants were informed that their police department would not be named in any published manuscripts that resulted from this study.

Once an individual expressed interest in taking part of the study, an email was sent to the participant containing a recruitment letter (Appendix B), and a demographic information sheet (Appendix C). The recruitment letter contained information on what was needed from the participant, how the interview would be conducted (via telephone or Zoom and audio recorded) and that participation in the study was voluntary and could be terminated at any time. Non-compensation for their participation in the study and the limits to the confidentiality agreement, the purpose of the study, and the anticipated time for completing the study was explained in the informed consent form (Appendix D). Once the individual returned the demographic information sheet and recruitment letter, and it was determined that the individual met criteria for the study, an interview time was arranged with the participant based on the participant's availability.

Confidentiality and informed consent were discussed prior to conducting the interview. The researcher ensured that the participant fully understood their rights, potential risks, and benefits to participation prior to beginning the interview. The participant was also reminded that they can stop the interview at any time, without fear of penalty for not completing the interview. The participant was informed that the interview was expected to last approximately 45 minutes, however, several interviews were over an hour.

Prior to the interview, all necessary signatures were collected. The informed consent form (Appendix D) was modeled after Walden University's informed consent form. The researcher's contact information (name, cellphone number, e-mail) was



included on the form, as well as the contact information to a Walden University representative.

Each participant was interviewed separately, at different times, and all interviews were audio recorded to ensure accuracy. To establish rapport with the interviewee, the researcher informed the interview participant that she was not affiliated with their department in any way and that information gathered from the interview would not be shared with their department. The researcher also reiterated that the lack of knowledge in the area was important to understanding what departments can do to ensure minority recruitment and longevity within departments. The participants were encouraged to be as honest and as open as possible to any questions asked but were also assured that if the question made them uncomfortable, they could refuse to answer the question asked.

Open-ended questions were used during the interview. The rationale behind using open-ended questions was to ensure that the researcher was not guiding or leading the participant to respond in a particular way. It also encouraged the interviewee to discuss their experience at length in a way that was meaningful to them. While the researcher took some notes during the interview, it was done to either keep track of what the individual was saying or to note an observation made during the interview. It was not used to transcribe the interview verbatim at that time.

The interviews were audio recorded to so that the researcher could go back and analyze the interview at a later time. It was used as a means to ensure the appropriate information was analyzed and that any bias that arose during the interview process were thoroughly confronted and did not replace what the participant was conveying. Before

analyzing the data, the researcher transcribed the interviews verbatim and input the data into NVivo for further analysis. To ensure the validity of the research findings, multiple triangulation methods were used, including journaling, audio recording of interviews for verbatim transcription, and the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) process for data analysis. According to Denzin (2012), multiple triangulation allows researchers to verify the validity of their findings.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

Before conducting an analysis of the interviews, I read over all accumulated data. According to Giorgi et al. (1971), before any coding can begin, the researcher must look at all data accumulated to “get a sense of the whole” (p.83). After analyzing the data as a whole, I used content analysis to identify codes, categories, and themes in the data. To further ensure that all themes are accurately captured, the researcher employed computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (NVivo) to help her organize the data and identify themes that may have missed during hand coding. By using the software, the researcher ensured that all findings were accurately organized, and big-picture findings were not missed.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

Issues surrounding trustworthiness of data findings is often a point of discussion in qualitative studies. Regardless of the method employed by the researcher, all research studies must be analyzed with the question, “How trustworthy is this data and the findings of the study?” To ensure validity of the current study, the researcher’s committee members and Walden University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) examined all

instruments that were used in this study and addressed any concerns they had regarding the use of such instruments. Ensuring that the instruments measure what they purport to measure is essential to making sure that the validity of the data, and the findings from the data, remain intact.

Ravitch and Carl (2015) discuss four ways of ensuring validity of research findings. These include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility can be achieved by ensuring the appropriate research design, instrumentation, and data are used. Open-ended questions will be used to ensure the credibility of the data. Credibility is also achieved by using multiple forms of triangulation, member checking, and discussing cases that don't fall in line with many other cases presented (Toma, 2011). In other words, credibility is how the researcher shows that the findings of the study are accurate.

Transferability refers to the findings of the data having applicability to other similar contexts (Ravitch & Carl, 2015). Unlike quantitative data which looks for generalizability to other populations, the purpose of transferability in qualitative data is to develop context-specific rich descriptions that can contextually be applied to other settings (Ravitch & Carl, 2015). Research findings that are consistent are considered dependable and ensuring that the findings are dependable relies on the rationale behind the methods used to collect data and triangulation of the data using multiple "fact-checking" processes, as described above (Ravitch & Carl, 2015). Because qualitative research struggles with eliminating biases, confirmability will be achieved by

acknowledging how the researcher's own biases may have crept into the analysis, and steps the researcher took to minimize their bearing on the findings.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The American Psychological Association (APA), under their general principles requires that psychologists "do no harm," establish professional trusting relationships with individuals that they work with, promote honesty and truthfulness, remain fair, and respect the dignity and rights of others (APA, 2017). Among the many guidelines provided within the ethical principles and guidelines, as it pertains to research and research subjects, the APA also requires that IRB approval be attained prior to the start of any research where humans are the subject of the research, that participants of research receive informed consent concerning their participation in such research and that research participants be provided with an opportunity to be debriefed (APA, 2017).

The APA and Walden University's IRB provide guidelines and safeguards to ensure that participants are shielded from foreseeable harm. Ensuring that each participant understands informed consent for the study and the limits of confidentiality are essential to safeguarding participant well-being. Taking steps to ensure that the participants' identifying information is kept safe is also a part of this process; referring to the participant by number and agency number, as opposed to participant name and agency name are part of the confidentiality clause.

Because the nature of questioning involved discussing workplace relationships that, based on the literature, have traditionally been adversarial, the researcher believed that there was some probability that trauma would come to the surface as a result of

reliving difficult past experiences. The researcher did avail herself as someone that the participant could speak to in the event that they later decided to not be a part of the research study. In addition, prior to beginning the interview and as part of the informed consent process, the researcher provided the interviewee information on an international police hotline geared towards police officers, their contact phone number and website. The researcher reminded the participant that their own department has an EAP program, and that they were able to use that service if they felt more comfortable with that option. These EAP programs are often short-term meetings between the employee and a peer counselor. If the interviewee or the peer counselor believe that they need further services, the peer counselor will refer them to a long-term, in-network counselor, the cost of which is usually covered by the employer. The participant is responsible for paying their co-pay (if applicable).

Participant data and information was securely stored on the researcher's laptop, which was password protected. No other individuals had access to the computer or the data. Information was backed up on an external hard drive that only the researcher had access to and was also password protected. This external drive is locked in a safe in the researcher's household office and will be retained for five years. After that time, all data will be destroyed.

### **Summary**

This chapter outlined the research design and method that was used to conduct this study. The study and research design explored what constitutes Latina patrol officers' experiences with co-workers and supervisors, their experiences with the public, and what

Latinas' experiences constitute feelings of support, acceptance, or belonging (or lack thereof) within their organization. The data collection and analysis plan was presented in this chapter, as well as the measures, instrumentation, recruitment, and sampling for this population. Ethical concerns for the study were also discussed, as well as how the researcher mitigated any negative effects that came to light as a result of discussing difficult experiences. The findings of the data are presented in chapter four.

## Chapter 4: Results

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to examine how Latina law enforcement officers experience their role within their law enforcement agency with coworkers, supervisors, and the general public. This study also sought to understand how Latina officers perceive belongingness within their agencies. This study utilized one-on-one interviews of purposefully selected participants to gather data based on their expertise in understanding these issues.

RQ1: What are the experiences of Latina police officers in patrol?

Sub-question 1: How do Latina police officers experience workplace interactions with peers?

Sub-question 2: How do Latina police officers experience interactions with the public?

RQ2: What are the experiences of Latina police officers within the police department?

Sub-question 1: What are Latina police officers' perceptions of support by department commanders?

Sub-question 2: What are Latina police officers' perceptions of acceptance or "belonging?"

This study was designed to understand the experiences of Latina police officers in patrol, and what their workplace interactions are with peers and the public. The study also sought to understand what Latina police officers' experiences were within their police

departments, their perceptions of support by department commanders and their perceptions of acceptance or belonging within the organization. As has been discussed several times throughout this research paper, it remains unknown how Latina officers frame their feelings of belongingness and acceptance within their organizations. Feelings of belongingness are crucial to an individual's sense of worth within the organization and, as was discussed in the literature review section of this dissertation, can play a role in longevity within the organization.

Open-ended phenomenological interviews were used to explore the lived experiences of Latina police officers working in patrol. This chapter presents the findings from these in-depth interviews with seven research participants who met study criteria. The participants in this study were all Latina police officers working in a patrol function, with a minimum of five years of law enforcement experience, working in large metropolitan police departments that employ over 1,000 sworn members. The semi-structured interviews examined the officer's experiences working in patrol, their interactions with coworkers and the public, their feelings of support by department commanders, and their overall feelings of belongingness within the organization. The interviews conducted centered on the officer's past and present experiences within their agencies to understand the essence of those experiences. The semi-structured interview provided a guide for the officer in recounting their stories, while maintaining parameters surrounding the research questions.

Chapter four is presented in five major sections: (a) settings, (b) demographics, (c) data collection and analysis, (d) evidence of trustworthiness, and (f) results. This



chapter concludes with a summary. The first section of Chapter four describes the settings within which the present research was conducted, and steps taken to establish the participant's privacy. The second section describes the demographic makeup of the participants of the study. The third section of this chapter explains the data collection process, analysis of the data, and findings. The fourth and final section of this chapter provides a summary of the research findings and answers to the research questions.

### **Setting**

The setting utilized for conducting research interviews hinged on confidentiality and privacy. In order to ensure research participants felt comfortable, the researcher ensured participant confidentiality as described in the Research Invitation and Informed Consent. Participants were given a choice between a telephone or virtual interview (i.e., Skype or Teams), although all participants chose a telephone interview. In addition to added privacy measures that telephonic interviews can provide interviewees, the researcher also allowed the research participants to choose a date and time that was most convenient to them. All interviews were conducted within the researcher's private home office, where privacy was guaranteed. Each interview was done behind closed doors and conversations could not be overheard in other rooms within the researcher's home.

### **Demographics**

Inclusion criteria required that interview participants be Latina and full-time active police officers with a minimum of five years of law enforcement experience in an agency that employs a minimum of 1,000 sworn members. The individuals interviewed must also work in a patrol function, meaning that the individual must have frequent

interactions with members of the public. Exclusion criteria for the study included the inability to meet inclusion criteria in addition to being Latina law enforcement officers in the Philadelphia Police Department. Eight officers were invited to participate in the study. The small sample size was due in part to the qualitative nature of the study in addition to the ability to meet saturation quickly in non-random sampling with tight inclusion criteria (Guest et al., 2006).

Given the “blue line of silence” that is often experienced when interviewing law enforcement officers, who often fear speaking out in ways that reflect unfavorably on their personality or their profession, recruiting participants proved to be extremely difficult (Sgambelluri, 1993, O’Neill & Singh, 2007). However, once assured that the confidentiality and anonymity would be preserved, participants were very forthcoming in their interviews.

### **Data Collection**

Telephone interviews were slated for 45 minutes to one hour, giving the interviewees time to provide in-depth responses to the questions listed in the interview guide. At recruitment, participants were e-mailed a packet containing a recruitment letter, a demographic information sheet to (to be filled out by the interviewee and returned to the researcher) and an informed consent document (see Appendix B, C, and D). All research participants replied to the e-mail containing the documents with “I consent.” The researcher in this study also provided her personal cellphone number and extended the opportunity for research participants to contact the researcher prior to the interview to clarify points within the document or about the study itself. During the e-mail exchange,

participants in the study were re-assured that any answers or information provided to the interviewer would be kept strictly confidential.

During the telephone call, but prior to the start of the interview, the researcher discussed the informed consent document, and the participants were once again assured that any information that could be linked to them would be concealed and not be included in the published final study. As explained in the Informed Consent document, participants were reminded that the researcher would securely store the data from the interview for a period of five years, as required by Walden University, and then destroyed in accordance with best practices and legal standards. The interview protocol (Appendix E) was read to the research participant and the research participant was reminded of the toll-free hotline available to them in the event the interview brought back difficult or painful memories. The interview participant was alerted to the use of a recording device prior to the start of the interview.

The interview was guided by nine open-ended questions, presented to elicit responses to help answer the research questions: (1) interest and recruitment in applying, (2) experiences during the hiring process, (3) discrimination, if any, faced while on the job and the basis of the perpetrator's discrimination, (4) the role that ethnicity plays in community perceptions, (5) the role of ethnicity in communication, (6) the role of gender in communication, (7) acceptance into policing and police culture, (8) gender and ethnic minority support within police departments, and (9) how Latina presence in communities improve interactions with community members.

The neutrally worded semi-structured interview and the conversational style in which it was conducted allowed the participants to elaborate their answers based on their experiences, reducing the possibility of response bias. As appropriate, the researcher utilized interview techniques, including the use of motivational probes to elicit detailed responses (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Interviews were recorded using the “RecordMyCalls” application available through the Apple Application Store. As a back-up, the researcher also purchased a hand-held recorder. The use of multiple recording devices provided additional security in the event that a technical failure occurred. All conversations recorded could only be heard by the interviewer as the interviews were conducted using an earpiece and connected microphone.

Upon the conclusion of the interview, the researcher would ensure that the interview was captured in its entirety. The “RecordMyCalls” application does provide transcription services, which are automatically produced and do not utilize the services of a human transcriber. Unfortunately, the software does not always accurately transcribe conversations, so therefore, a visual edit along with a play-back of the interview was needed. This allowed the researcher to sit with the data multiple times before analysis and coding was conducted. After the initial playback, the file was encrypted and stored on a password-protected laptop that could only be accessed by the researcher. Field notes that were taken during the interview were stored in a locked filing cabinet within the researcher’s home office.

## Data Analysis

The research in this chapter is based entirely upon this researcher's analysis of the data extracted from the interviews conducted with my research participants. While other researchers can confirm or refute this researcher's findings, the themes presented below are this researcher's interpretation of the findings.

This researcher began analyzing the data by hand after transcribing the interviews. Each interview was carefully reviewed three times before a final copy of the transcript was produced. This was to ensure that the researcher did not miss anything during the transcription since all the data was transcribed by the researcher.

After transcribing the data, this researcher reviewed several methodology books to ensure that the methods remained sound. Moustakas' *Phenomenological Research Methods* (1994) and the *Essentials of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis* by Smith & Nizza (2022) were used to ensure that the methodology remained in line with IPA standards. Moustakas' (1994) book provides a theoretical approach to understanding IPA while Smith & Nizza (2022) provides novice researchers with a more pragmatic way of approaching data analysis. Although Moustakas (1994) and Smith & Nizza's (2022) methods have slight variations, both fall under the IPA umbrella, and the variations in the approaches can complement one another, specifically during the data analysis phase.

Using Smith & Nizza (2022) as a guide, this researcher used several approaches to analyze the data. First, this researcher read through each transcript individually and listened to the recording again (this was now the fourth time the researcher was performing this task). This was done not only to refresh the researcher's memory of the

interview, but to also remember how the participant emphasized certain parts of their story. Initial reactions to what the participant was saying were recorded on the right-hand margin of the printed transcript. These were initial exploratory notes (Smith & Nizza, 2022).

After the researcher's initial reactions to the participant's interview was noted, the researcher then went back three other times to look at the transcript through different lenses. The first in-depth approach taken was descriptive note taking. Descriptive notes provide explicit meaning of what the participant was saying and what matter to the participant most through the participants own words. The second in-depth approach was conceptual note taking. Conceptual notes involved me questioning what the participant was attempting to convey through the participant's standpoint, not the researcher's. It provided a way for the researcher to deeply engage with what the participant was saying. The last in-depth approach involved linguistic note taking. Linguistic notes look at what and how the participant said. The researcher looked at hesitation and metaphors in the transcript, which might indicate how difficult the experience was for the participant or how difficult it may be to describe the experience.

After making notes on the transcripts, the researcher then moved on to formulating experiential statements. This required that the researcher take all the notes made from the previous steps and form succinct statements about what the experience meant to the participant. It required a psychological summary of the experience, all while staying close to the data. Some of these experiential statements required that the researcher go beyond what the participant actually said and question what could be

inferred by what the participant did or did not say. Although it sounds as though the researcher would jump to conclusions, these inferences were still grounded in the data - but allowed the researcher to interpret what the individual meant at specific junctures- a key feature of IPA.

Once these experiential statements were formulated, the researcher then printed each of the statements out and arranged them for clustering. Clustering was done by taking all the experiential statements and grouping them with "like" ideas. This clustering allowed the researcher to create personal experiential themes which were found in the participant's interviews and taken out of the clusters. This entire process was repeated for each case, individually, until it came time to perform a cross analysis of the interviews.

Once all the data had been grouped for each participant and a case-specific memo had been completed describing the process for each, the researcher then looked across all data to identify similar and divergent responses. From this, a group experiential theme table was created, where themes of participants' experiences and themes were grouped together, while acknowledging "outlying" responses. The semi-structured interviews yielded four group experiential themes: (1) Peer interactions in the workplace, (2) Community interactions, (3) Organizational culture, (4) Organizational belonging.

**Table 1**

*Group Experiential Themes*

Categories	Themes
Experiential Theme 1	Peer interactions in the workplace

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Experiential Theme 2    Community expectations

Experiential Theme 3    Organizational culture

Experiential Theme 4    Organizational belonging

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### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

Credibility is the backbone of both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Credibility in this study was established by ensuring that the best possible data collection method was utilized to address the research questions posed. Using IPA allowed this researcher to examine the personal lived experiences of Latina patrol officers and their feelings on how they are received by the community, how they fit into organizational culture, and how their presence in law enforcement contributes to positive social change in their communities.

Interviews were utilized to ensure that the participant's story would be brought to light using their own words. Each interview was audio recorded and then carefully transcribed to ensure the accuracy of the participant's statements and experience. On average, the transcripts were approximately 15 pages, although one interview was 25 pages. The process of carefully listening to each interview, transcribing, and re-listening to each interview to ensure accuracy was a several-hour process, often performed over several days.

Because each document was proofed several times, this ensured that the interviews were accurate and complete. The interview guide was utilized during the



interview process, so the researcher was careful to ensure the research questions were being answered by the participant.

In addition to a process of listening, documenting, re-listening, proofing, re-listening, re-reading, and then utilizing several forms of notetaking for hand-coding, this researcher also imported the transcripts into NVivo, a computer data analysis software program to help the researcher identify and organize patterns in feedback from which common terms, phrases, patterns, and trends were extracted and separated into superordinate categories and subcategories for analysis. Interestingly, because this researcher used an additional method of coding (hand-coding) there were themes that the researcher was able to extract during the initial coding of the interviews. These methods afforded the researcher the ability to then begin a structural synthesis of the experiences of each research participant. Throughout the entire process, the researcher was careful to bracket her own assumptions and biases throughout the process of data collection, coding, and sorting of data, and wrote memos before, during, and after each analysis of the participant's interview.

As crucial as credibility is in any study, equal benchmarks of trustworthiness also lie in dependability and confirmability of the data presented. Consistency was attained by the use of an interview guide that contained nine open-ended questions that focused on the participants' personal experiences and contextualization. The interview guide was paramount in ensuring a thorough and accurate audit trail was established, and so that researchers in the future would be able to utilize it for confirmability. Due to the small sample size of this current research, it does have limited transferability outside of the

bounds of the present study. This researcher addressed potential errors in methodology, analysis, interpretation, and final reporting by maintaining records of the research path for future review, reviewing the data several times, and having the study audited by outside subject matter experts. To further assure confirmability, the researcher engaged in the process of reflectivity by examining her own assumptions, preconceptions, beliefs, and values, and how they may impact research decisions.

### **Results**

The seven Latina police officers who participated in this study described their present and past experiences working in municipal police departments. All participants are active police officers with more than five years of experience in local law enforcement. All officers described their experiences working in police departments and how they have come to make meaning of those experiences with peers, supervisors, and the community. The one-on-one interviews conducted with each research participant allowed the researcher to gain knowledge and insight into what it means for these Latina officers to be feel accepted in their organization and within their community.

While all participants had unique stories of how they became interested in law enforcement and what their experiences on the job have been thus far, most participants described four core experiences: peer interactions in the workplace, community expectations, organizational culture, and belonging.

### **Group Experiential Theme 1: Peer Interactions in the Workplace**

When it came to peer interactions in the workplace, more than half of the study participants described a hypermasculine departmental culture where males see themselves as the protectors of females, where uncomfortableness is often alleviated by making inappropriate jokes or banter, and where machismo is often the norm. Regarding jokes and banter in the workplace, one study participant (P1) stated, “Nobody has ever come up to me and said, ‘because you are only a five-foot Latina woman, you can’t do your job.’ But indirectly, you know, the locker room talk, especially in the roll call room...we’d get a lot of like quote unquote jokes.” Another participant (P4) described an atmosphere that was hostile and intimidating towards females and minorities. “It’s a struggle for a woman. We are not being accepted by White people or by Black people. At one point I was working as a detective...I was number one in my state [for case clearances]. The put roaches in my desk and put transfer forms in my desk.”

Many of the Latina women interviewed for this study also expressed the need to ensure that their behavior stays in close line with traditional behaviors of the organization. Although the majority of the participants from this study did not describe instances of discrimination by peers, at least two participants described pronounced discrimination. Participant 2 described an instance where she was ridiculed and rejected by peers for engaging with the community in a non-traditional way. “During me dancing with the kids and stuff, my hair came out of my bun, so it’s not in conformance with department standards...[once the video got out there] it was astonishing to see how ugly they were and how unsupportive they were. They were saying things like, ‘she should kill

herself; she couldn't make it on her own merit. That's why the police need to make a certain compliment when it came to getting females on the job.' They would say things like, 'she should be stripped of her badge.'”

**Table 2**

*Peer Interactions in the Workplace*

Themes	Number of participants who responded
Subordinate theme 1: Peer interactions in the workplace	7
Sub-Theme 1: Hypermasculine departmental culture	4
Sub-Theme 2: Proving self	6
Sub-Theme 3: Safety	5
Sub-Theme 4: Peer support	6
Sub-Theme 5: Peer acceptance	5

Most of the participants in the study acknowledged that the ability to speak another language was beneficial to their interactions with the community. However, Participant 5 described an instance where her linguistic abilities made her coworkers uncomfortable. “When I started speaking their language, they [family of individual being

questioned by police] calmed down, only for me to turn around and have my field training officer and five other officers behind him telling me to speak English.”

Almost all participants, save one, described an atmosphere where officers, especially female officers, are subjected to “proving” their ability to do their job. Safety in the profession is often a theme repeated by many officers, not just females. However, most participants talked about safety in a wide spectrum of ways – from risking personal safety by not calling for additional help to knowing one’s physical limitations. Almost all participants described both positive and negative peer support, from other female officers giving them a difficult time to coworkers not feeling comfortable with the officer’s use of a foreign language when speaking to victims and officers feeling accepted amongst peers when in like age or racial groups.

### **Group Experiential Theme 2: Community Expectations**

A second group experiential theme that occurred across all participants was community expectations. All participants described acceptance by community members to some degree, especially among Latino community members. Participant 6 described that it is not just her position as female and a member of the Latino community has helped her connect with the Latino Population, but also her geographical ties to the location that she serves that gains an additional layer of trust from the community. As she stated, “...when I do talk to these individuals, it’s not difficult for me to be like, ‘hey, I understand what you’re going through. I used to live down the street’...Especially when...trying to relate to people so that they feel comfortable talking to me.”

**Table 3***Community Expectations*

Themes	Number of participants who responded
Superordinate theme 2: Community expectations	7
Sub-theme 1: Acceptance by community members	7
Sub-theme 2: Community distrust	7
Sub-theme 3: Communication/connecting	7

All participants in this study described that being a female officer was perceived by community members as being a better listener, and helped these officers connect with individuals, particularly women and children. Participant 3 stated that, “most of the time, they think you are more sensitive. They tend to talk to you more because they think that you might, and I would say, most of the time it’s true, we will listen a little bit better than a male.” Participant 2 stated that, “when kids are involved...especially domestic violence cases, I find that the children, at least in my experience, definitely have a greater ability to connect and be able to talk to...and get information from a female officer rather than a male.”

While the participants of this study described their interactions with the public from the female and Latina perspective as positive, all participants also described distrust from the community, with some of that distrust coming from historical police practices that still linger on the in community. A few participants also described experiencing

difficulty in navigating police service with White, Black, and even Latino community members. However, all participants described that being a Latina and a woman often improves their outcomes with the community. One participant described her experience with Mexican families as:

There is a very traditional Hispanic community that feels that I should be, you know, standing in the back. That I shouldn't challenge a man. I see that from the community at times and I understand it and I will respect it, if I can. And I'll let the officers know hey, he or she would rather talk to you because I can sense how they feel... But then the other side is that they gravitate to me more because I'm more like them physically and I can understand their struggles.

Overall, the experiences among the participants of this study indicate that their presence in the community, particularly in minority communities, is helping to build bridges with individuals who may not readily trust the police.

### **Group Experiential Theme 3: Organizational Support**

The third group experiential theme discovered in the data was experiences surrounding organizational support. Most of the participants felt that they were supported by their supervisors and commanders, although some did describe instances of a lack of support from their supervisors. Participant 4 described a general lack of transparency when joining her department, which affected her perceptions of support within the organization. Participant 4 was recruited into her department while in college and experienced several instances of discrimination and sexual harassment by peers and supervisors. Participant 4 made several attempts throughout her career to report instances

of Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) violations, none of which were satisfactorily resolved.

“I can tell you stories that really happened to me and you cannot say nothing because what do you do? Create Chaos? You create more conflict, more dilemmas...I had a sergeant that actually - I was in roll call asking a question about a crime that occurred and he started marking me. [He started asking,] ‘What did you say? I don’t understand you...’ and everyone was laughing at me and the way that I speak...You write them up and nothing happens. Nothing ever happened. So that’s what you’re gonna do – suck it up.”

**Table 4**

*Organizational Culture*

Themes	Number of participants who responded
Subordinate theme 3: Organizational culture	7
Sub-Theme 1: Commander support	4
Sub-Theme 2: Mentorship	4

From the interviews conducted for this study, Participant 4’s experience was an outlier. However, her experiences have been mirrored by other minority women in law enforcement, particularly in the wake of the #MeToo movement (see Choi et. al, 2022; Khan, 2020; and Mettler & Chason, 2021).



Participant 2, who also experienced an extreme form of harassment at work stemming from a community outreach incident described a very different experience by commanders in her organization.

I received a call from a female Captain where she said, 'I just want you to know that you have my full support. And you know, a lot of these guys don't understand what it takes to be able to, you know, think outside the box and be able to put yourself in uncomfortable situations. A lot of people wouldn't do that...I just want to let you know that I am taking [the harassment] so serious, and writing people up. There's an internal affairs investigation going on.' So, the people that were important, stuck up and had me.

A theme that came up several times throughout the interviews was that seeing women in leadership positions made the Latina officers feel as though they could also succeed in supervisory positions. One participant described that although she could model her behavior after male officers who she shared a similar policing style with, it was often difficult because she had to continue tailoring the style until it fit who she was as an individual. Participant 7 stated,

I think the comfortability factor of knowing that you can survive in this very uncomfortable profession at times - you can survive here and do well and you can thrive. It makes it easier to see that if there's other people around you that are willing to walk you through it and that are more like you. It makes it easier; it makes you feel like, okay, I can do this. I can see what a female command presence looks like versus a male command presence.

### **Group Experiential Theme 4: Organizational Belonging**

The last theme across all interviewees was that of organizational belonging. Almost all the participants in the study described the existence of groups that are readily accessible to police officers that are geared at gender, race, or both. Law enforcement associations are crucial to helping officers engage in their profession at a deeper level and can aid in professional development. They can also help officers form a sense of belonging within that group, which can sometimes be difficult at the station. Many police agencies across the United States have affiliations with local law enforcement associations such as Spanish American Law Enforcement Association (SALEA), the Latin American Law Enforcement Association (LALEA) and the National Latino Law Enforcement Organization (NLLEO). There are also national associations geared at female officers such as National Association of Women in Law Enforcement (NAWLEE) and the International Association of Women Police (IAWP). Because these organizations are not directly linked to the agencies themselves, they may be able to provide an additional outlet for empowerment, and a sense of community when specifically geared at a specific race or sex.

**Table 5**

*Organizational belonging*

Themes	Number of participants who responded
Subordinate theme 4: Organizational belonging	7
Sub-theme 1: Group support by race or sex	6

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Sub-theme 2: feeling or being different	7
Sub-theme 3: Lack of appreciation from organization	5

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As discussed earlier in this paper, nationally speaking, 66% of police officers in the United States are White and 86% of police officers are male (DataUSA, 2022). While large metropolitan police departments have a more diverse pool, the majority of these departments remain male and White. Given the demographic breakdown, it is easy to understand why all participants in this study described instances in which they felt different from other police officers or were treated differently because of their race or gender. As the civilian demographics within the United States continue to shift, it is crucial for police departments to continue their search to not only recruit diverse candidates, but also retain the ones that they already have.

Whether organizational belonging is experienced internally (within the organization itself) or externally, as in what their contributions give to society, all participants in this study acknowledge that their existence within the law enforcement community contributes to positive social change. Whether it manifests itself in increased communication with the public, the de-escalation of force, or a sense of belonging for the community members themselves, Latina presence in law enforcement is essential to improving police-community relations as law enforcement continues its slow but steady transition into 21<sup>st</sup> century policing.

## Summary

Chapter 4 presented the findings of the current study. Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to identify individual case themes and group experiential themes, this researcher was able to identify how the Latina officers in this study make meaning out of their experiences within their police departments and with members of the public. Their stories came to life using semi-structured interviews that were steered by an interview guide that was based on the study's research questions. The purpose of this research was to understand the experiences of Latina police officers who work in a patrol function.

The findings of this study revealed that although the experiences of Latina police officers differ from officer to officer, certain experiences appear to be consistent across study participants. Firstly, all participants described that their ability to connect with members of the public was enhanced due to their ethnicity and their gender. Most participants described an advantage over male officers when it came to communicating with members of the public and de-escalating tense or volatile situations. Many of the officers in this study also describe a period of "proving" their ability to their co-workers, some acknowledging that this "proving" period applies to both male and females, but that women were often subjected to prolonged periods of showing that they were capable of completing officer duties and that the process was often continuous, not linear.

This chapter included the participants views surrounding organizational culture. All participants in this study, at some point during their interview, described being different from the "norm" of officers in their department, and described that difference as

a benefit when it came to connecting with the public. While the majority of the officers in this study described a command staff that was generally supportive of their presence in the organization, some officers described instances where command staff was openly hostile or indifferent to their experiences in the organization. While some agencies may think that silence is better than open hostility, some of these officers admit that the silence can be just as telling.

Interviewing these officers made clear that their services in underserved and minority communities was generally seen as positive, even amongst organizations that were perceived as hostile by the officer. While most officers described an outdated and hypermasculine culture within police departments, many conceded that their departments were actively attempting to make strides in progressing the organization forward, with many departments formally endorsing organizations geared at helping minority and female officers.

The next and final chapter, chapter 5, provides a summary of the key findings of the study. The interpretation of findings discuss how the findings confirm, disconfirm, and extend knowledge in the discipline by comparing the findings to what was already discussed in chapter 2, including how the findings relate to the original conceptual frameworks presented in the literature review. The limitations of the study are also presented, as are the recommendations for future research. The implications of the study are discussed, including the impact of the study on positive social change. The chapter closes out with a conclusion to study.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative study was to uncover the experiences of Latina police officers within their organization and among community members. This includes Latina police officers' experiences with peers and supervisors, and how those interactions translate to a sense of belonging within the organization. Given that policing is at a crossroads and under public scrutiny, it is also important to understand how Latina police officers interact with members of the public. Previous academic literature shows mixed results as it relates to community acceptance of minority officers with minority community members, and that was certainly the case here (St. Louis & Greene, 2020; Kincade & Fox, 2022). However, most participants in this study discussed their interactions with the public, specifically, minority community members, as being positive.

This chapter will provide a deeper dive into the themes that were uncovered from the seven semi-structured, phenomenological interviews that were conducted for this study. This study utilized Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to understand, examine, and explore each participant's experience. This study uncovered four experiential themes that were consistent across research participants. (1) peer interactions in the workplace, (2) community expectations, (3) organizational culture, (4) organizational belonging. Although NVivo was used to identify patterns in the research, the research themes uncovered were done through hand coding and a careful examination of the participants words and contextual experiences. Although IPA allows for interpretation of experiences, the interpretation remains close to the data and is derived

directly from the words of the participants. This process will be discussed at length in the following sections, along with the conceptual framework that scaffolded the study.

Chapter 5 will also provide a summary of the research findings and will review the conceptual framework in relation to each research question. This chapter consists of the following sections: (a) Introduction, (b) Interpretation of Findings, (c) Limitations of the Study, (d) Recommendations, (e) Implications, and (f) Conclusion of the Study.

### **Introduction**

Using the literature that informed the current study, the research questions used to explore the research problem, and the responses given by the research participants, my study uncovered that Latina police officers generally see their experiences within their organizations and with the public in a positive light. The basis of this belief comes from their positive interactions with community members and in instances where the participants of the study drew on “soft skills” to communicate with community members. This was accomplished not just by using the Spanish language, but also by displaying empathy, understanding and utilizing listening skills to deescalate tense situations. This is consistent with the literature that points to women’s ability to rely more heavily on verbal judo than their male counterparts, with many participants of this study noting that when it comes to physical confrontations, women tend to have a physical disadvantage, specifically when it comes to fighting men (Bochantin & Cowan, 2008; Bolger, 2014).

Despite the fact that police departments are exploring the need to rely more heavily on de-escalation tactics and minimal force, most of the participants in the study described a need to “prove” a physical ability and willingness to do their job. Some of the

women in this study discussed the importance of being physically able specifically, although the overwhelming majority described this “proving” as basic as someone who is willing to take on a lot of work, with some research participants admitting that this was partially self-imposed. Overall, women in this study described that their gender, more than their race, was often the point of friction with individuals within the organization and with the public, while most also described that they found that their Latina appearance and/ or ability to speak Spanish as a point that improved their ability to connect with members of the public. This remains consistent with the current body of literature.

Given that most law enforcement organizations tend to be male dominated, one would have expected that these differences would either be pointed out by co-workers and peers or made evident by the officer herself. All participants in the study described feeling or being different from the majority of officers in their department, and some even described that this “difference” was also picked up by members of the public. The experiences in being different were both seen in positive and negative lights – from being able to provide additional services to community members to being shunned, unappreciated, or working within an agency where a “Latino” designation did not exist.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

#### **Theme 1: Peer Interactions in the Workplace**

Theme 1 and its sub-themes suggests that many Latina officers experienced a culture of hypermasculinity during their official duties as police officers. The officers in this study described instances in where their physical stature and their gender was often



the focal point of questioning by fellow officers. This is consistent with the current literature and is in line with many of the theoretical underpinnings that are found in Kanter's theory of Tokenism (1977). Kanter specifically points to the need for the majority group to point out differences of the minority group. This polarization leads to a hyperawareness of differences for both groups and leads the dominant group to feel uncomfortable with the presence of the minority group, forcing an even stronger bond with members of the majority group (Kanter, 1977). Participant 1 described that much of this talk took place in the roll call room, and that she and her female partner were often subjected to verbal probing concerning their ability to "physically" handle situations on the road. Ignoring that policing is at times physical would be foolish, as many know that the profession often carries dangerous and uncertain assignments. However, it would also be disingenuous to suggest that physical strength should be the only, or even one of the most important metrics used when determining an officer's ability to successfully navigate police work. At a basic level, the importance of successfully carrying out officer duties lies in understanding the officer's personal limitations and mitigating risks whenever possible.

Although many of the participants in this study were aware of a hypermasculine atmosphere at the onset of employment (i.e., during their police academy training) or very early on during their patrol duties, some participants in this study did not describe an "overly masculine" culture. Two participants in this study did not describe this type of atmosphere and suggested that age was a determinant when it came to tensions within their patrol squads. Many of the participants also denied that there were discriminatory

practices within the organization, pointing to experiencing bias while in the community. That bias was mostly driven by the police officer's gender although some officers did divulge instances where community members were dubious or openly hostile towards their race.

While the differences in experiences are to be expected, it does appear that those who have less time within these law enforcement agencies experienced less internal discrimination than more seasoned officers. This makes sense given that more women have entered into the profession and many departments, although having arguably lagged behind in diversifying their gender pool, have made strides over the past decade to target more women in their recruitment efforts. Some departments have even taken on the addition of a diversity, equity, and inclusion officer aimed at finding disparities in the recruitment and retention of its workforce and policies and procedures that disadvantage traditionally minority groups. Others have joined several pledges, including the 30 x 30 pledge that aims to have 30% of recruitment classes comprised of female recruits by the year 2030.

It is understandable that in a profession such as policing that has traditionally been male and White that seeing an "outsider" within could cause friction, uncomfortable feelings by both the majority and minority groups, and polarization within the department. Understanding why tokenistic practices can be harmful to new groups as well as established ones within departments is crucial to diversifying law enforcement agencies. Departments are making strides towards improving ratios within their

departments, and as Kanter (1977) argued in Tokenism theory, once that tipping point is reached within the agency, then true equality will be attained.

The women in this study also occupy an intersection in race and gender that is of the Latino culture and the female gender. Many described a multi-layered experience while occupying these intersections, often describing instances where being a female was problematic, where being a Latina was problematic, or where being an officer presented its challenges when interacting with the public. At least one officer in this study described ranked positions by race and gender, stating that White female officers were accepted more readily than Black or Latina officers and that males in her agency generally preferred male partners over females.

While the purpose of this paper is not to argue for or against a feminist point of view, it is important to understand that the practices of a law enforcement agency, that derives its power from the people, are readily observed by the public it serves. Diversity within the department translates to more equitable practices when serving community members and improves communication with the public, which consistent with current literature and the findings of this research. When the public perceives that it is being served by a just and equitable police force, public trust increases, as does police legitimacy.

## **Theme 2: Community Expectations**

Theme 2 and its sub-themes addresses community expectations and their responses when it comes to interacting with police officers. The literature often discusses the need for officers who are reflective of the community, who are experienced in issues

that minority populations are faced with, and officers who take a community policing approach, as opposed to the more traditional approach to law and order (Sklansky, 2006; Hormant & Kennedy, 1985). Many of the officers in this study described their experience interacting with community members as positive, with many noting that community members were often *more* receptive to them when the community being serviced was Latino. Some officers also described that their presence was more welcomed in Black communities as compared to their White counterparts, although at least one participant stated that the reception was only better when she was responding to calls with White officers present.

Many of the participants in this study also touched on community mistrust towards police, specifically amongst minority community members. Given the historical tension between police departments and minority communities, and particularly with recent events concerning minorities (i.e., George Floyd and Michael Brown) the lack of trust that surfaces during police and community interactions is to be expected. However, the overwhelming majority of participants in this study discussed how they utilize verbal and non-verbal communication skills to connect with members of the public to build trust. And many of the participants described that because their presence was seen as less threatening, more nurturing, and more empathetic towards community members, that they were able to connect with victims more easily than their male coworkers.

This is not surprising. Scholars and community members alike have often embraced the community policing model which focuses more heavily on the importance of community-police partnerships. Community policing often looks at “soft skills” of

communication, empathy, and rapport building – characteristics that have often been attributed to females and female officers (Marin, 1990; Rape-Hemp, 2009). As Schuck (2017) described in her article, the increase of women onboarding into the police profession during the 1980s and early 1990s was seen as a way of reinforcing the importance of community policing, which was seen as an alternative policing model which could help rebuild community trust, specifically with minority communities.

This is in part supported by the literature. While some studies have shown that male and female officers do not differ in their responses to arrests or behavior surrounding dangerous or tense situations, as discussed earlier in this research paper, many studies have also shown that women are less likely to have complaints lodged against them for excessive use of force. Women are also more likely than men to gain compliance from both victims of crime and arrestees, with many interviewees in this study pointing to empathy and listening as ways of achieving connections with members of the public.

Although many of the officers in this study point to women's abilities to perceive emotions better than their male counterparts, the research on that is mixed; with some research pointing to a small to moderate advantage in emotion recognition among women and others finding no differences at all (Meshkat & Nejati, 2017; Fischer, 2018; Hoffman et al., 2010; Hall & Matsumoto, 2004).

### **Theme 3: Organizational Culture**

The third theme uncovered in this study is that of an organizational culture that points to a lack of peer support, which, in turn, requires the officer to prove their worth in

that organization before they can be accepted by their peers. This current research also showed that proving the self is a continuous process in policing and not necessarily a static state. Consistent with the literature, the participants in this study described that the need to show their ability and willingness to physically handle suspects was deemed important in being accepted by their peers. Cordner (2017), Yu & Lee (2020), and Workman-Stark (2021) have all described the importance of physical toughness to officers in policing and the need for officers to show that they are capable of carrying out physical aspects of their job. While the physicality of policework at times cannot be refuted, the actual physical strength needed to apprehend individuals varies. What is more important in policing is actual skill sets. According to a study by Delbridge et al. (2021), participant skill in using control holds and pressure points in apprehending suspects was a better indicator of successful apprehension than muscular strength. Further, when deadly force is used, the officer's hand size or grip strength (in other words, biological aspects in which men tend to have an advantage) has no significant bearing on marksmanship (Orr et al., 2021).

While the themes, for the sake of this research, have been categorized and separated, the truth of the matter is that these characteristics are more intertwined and nuanced than they appear at first glance. Often repeated throughout these interviews was the importance of relying on communication with the public, especially in instances where individuals were experiencing a crisis or when individuals were experiencing trouble relating to relationships and communicating with others. Some of the research participants in this study discussed, in varying degrees, that males were more apt to

display their masculinity more quickly or more often. While it is also true that a display of aggression can sometimes stem an escalation, it is also equally true that aggression displayed could result in an attempt for an individual to feel the need to match or overpower the initial display. More than ever, police departments are faced with a need for accountability when it comes to the use of minimal amount of force necessary to effect an arrest. Minimal force is not only a demand from the public, but also a requirement for most departments.

#### **Theme 4: Organizational Belonging**

The last theme in this study is that of organizational culture. Many of the participants discussed the importance of feeling supported within the organization as a way of feeling as if they belonged within the agency. Approximately half of the participants in this study discussed feeling supported by commanders, although about half also discussed the importance of mentorship that was reflective of who they were (i.e., female or Latino, or in some instances, both). Most individuals in this study discussed some form of organizational support or availability of police memberships that are geared at the individual's race or sex. All participants in this this study discussed how at some time or another, they felt "different" than their co-workers.

Revisiting Kanter's theory on tokenism (1977) and Crenshaw's intersectionality theory (1991) is important to understanding why feelings of belongingness and an openness or sensitivity to the needs of Latina officers is so important in ensuring that agencies not only recruit more Latina officers, but also retain them. Tokenistic practices are harmful to majority groups as they are to minority groups. The continued use of

tokenistic practices only contributes to further feelings of isolation and inadequacy in policing roles. It is a basic need for most individuals, in any profession, to feel as though they are an active contributor to their work and that their experience and expertise has a use in their profession. While it may be difficult for agencies to strike a balance in announcing that the need for softer skill sets is present, it is equally important for agencies to begin shifting away from law enforcement as the always rough-and-tumble job to a professional career that needs officers with varied skill sets, life-experiences, and backgrounds to bring the profession out of the past and into the future.

### **Study Limitations**

This study was an exploration of the experiences of Latina police officers working in patrol. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews consisting of nine open-ended questions (see Appendix F). Many factors contribute to an individual's willingness to be open and honest, including a desire to give the researcher answers that they believe the researcher wants to hear (subject bias) and fear of retaliation by others if one answers in a way that makes the agency look less than favorable. One participant disclosed that when she attempted to recruit someone that she knew to participate in the study, the individual "panicked" and refused to talk to the researcher and asked the interviewee to not disclose that she reached out to her out of fear of retaliation. As the interviewee sheepishly disclosed to the researcher, "people are afraid to talk."

In recent years, as has been discussed several times throughout this paper, police officers have been under the microscope, for actions both on duty and off. Perhaps, it is not surprising then that police officers have difficulty trusting researchers that are looking



to publish their findings, even when that researcher is an “insider.” Regardless, while some of the participants of this research may have been guarded, they were generous in explaining their experiences, and speaking about their organizations in a very balanced manner. This researcher does believe that she was able to gain more confidence from the participants because she is an officer, is Latina, and more likely to understand their hesitation and position since there are shared sociodemographic characteristics.

More important than the personal characteristics shared with the interviewees, however, was the confidentiality clause that was explained at length and in detail with each participant. This researcher discussed confidentiality with the interviewee during the recruitment process and before the formal interview. This was essential, not just because these are safeguards and protocols that are to be followed while conducting research with human participants, but also because as individuals, people need to know that what they are conveying to you is not going to be used against them in the future.

Equally dangerous to subject bias is confirmation bias, when a researcher analyzes data that affirms, or confirms, their predisposed assumptions (Cordington-Lacerte, 2018). This researcher has been open about the similarities to the participants and, because of this, used Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to conduct the study. IPA allows for some interpretation of the data, however, the interpretations come directly from the data itself, not from assumptions. Before, during, and after each interview, the researcher engaged in reflexive writing, to understand how my own thoughts or beliefs may have or did influence an interview. In addition to exercises in reflexivity, this researcher was in close communication with academic supervisors who

regularly examined and analyzed the researcher's findings and challenged incongruent information. The interview guide also provided additional parameters for the interview and allowed for topics to emerge.

Although qualitative data is known for its depth, the small sample size does not allow for the findings to be generalized. This study sought to uncover the experiences of Latina police officers working in patrol. Although the participants were purposefully selected, the interviewees came from across the United States, and individuals who were interviewed in the Southwest and South-Central parts of the United States described experiences that different substantially from those who worked in the Mid-west or Eastern parts of the US. While there may be a plethora of reasons as to why that may be (both subjective and external), the race compositions of these geographic locations may be one explanation, and one which future research may benefit from delving into deeper. Future research will benefit from a larger qualitative sample and quantitative samples that measure attitudes by US region.

The results of this study were supported by interviews that were conducted closely following the interview guide that was designed for this study. The interview guide was designed to ensure that there was consistency between participants and the interview questions were specifically formulated to ensure that the participant would give as complete of an account as they could. The interview guide ensured that the research questions posed in this study could be answered. The interview questions did not ensure accuracy of the event per-se. Phenomenology is about how individuals make meaning of their experiences and is therefore not necessarily fact-based.

Despite this fact, what emerges from the interviews with these individuals is that although some organizations have made great strides to be more inclusive within the workforce, policing is an antiquated and heavy machine. Although the organization may desire to become more progressive, the individuals within the agency, in this case, the majority, are experiencing resistance to the change. This researcher does not believe that this phenomenon is unique to policing and, as a matter of fact, many organizations that are gendered and steeped in specific codes, regulations, and directives, will be slow to change because it is not just a set of norms that are being traversed, it is an entire identity that needs to be re-written.

There is no debating that policing has been placed in the limelight of late, and in a position that requires that police agencies truly listen to what the community is asking of them. While policing saw drastic changes after the killing of George Floyd, and communities demanded a defunding of police agencies, as the crime rates rose in 2020, 2021, and 2022 in major cities across the United States, community members were tasked with asking themselves, in earnest, whether they wanted to abolish police agencies or demand better accountability. While more diverse workforces can help bridge the disconnect that police departments have experienced with the public, it is but one possible solution in a rapidly changing, post-Floyd law enforcement profession.

### **Recommendations**

Latina police officers, like many female police officers, and in fact, many working women, often have to navigate multiple demands placed on them in an attempt to achieve an adequate work-life balance. Unfortunately, and traditionally, police

schedules have a tendency to be rigid, with little consideration for issues that may arise in the home. Additionally, the difficulty for some female officers returning to work after maternity leave is often not taken into account, with some women expressing concern over the lack of flexibility when returning to work post-baby. One participant of this study described that maternity leave in her department did not have solid guidelines, with supervisors allowing female officers unfettered leave while on duty. While it would seem that this type of behavior would be beneficial to female officers, it can also work as a point of contention with male officers, who may see the practice as vague and unfair. Some agencies have made strides to alleviate this issue, with some providing more flexible scheduling and lactation rooms that are used for the sole purpose of expressing milk, feeding, or changing babies.

For family-centered individuals like women and Latinas, the rigidity of police work can cause a strain both personally and professionally. However, several studies have shown that despite this fact, the number of Latino officers in police departments continue to grow (Guevara Urbina & Espinoza Alvarez, 2015). Given that the Latino population continues to grow, these findings are not entirely surprising. However, the retention of these officers, especially Latina officers, remains questionable. Future studies may benefit in exploring the retention periods of Latina officers, early retirement or resignations, and the reasons behind quitting.

Another issue that surfaced during the research was that of inclusivity. While many departments have made changes to their policies to take into account a change in internal demographics, some departments have not allowed for an upgrade in how

individuals are categorized. For example, one participant in this study described having to claim her race as “White”, with no option given to Latino ethnicity. While on the surface it may appear as nothing more than semantics, in this participant’s case, it had very real consequences that affected her ability to serve on a promotional board since they were looking for ethnically diverse board members. Departments who still practice this type of categorization may benefit from revisiting race and gender categories within their organization.

### **Implications**

Now more than ever, police organizations are not only recognizing the importance of a demographically diverse workforce for police-community relations, but also seeing the benefits that diverse backgrounds can bring to revamping internal operations. Many departments have increased their efforts for hiring more female officers, with many agencies across the United States signing a “30 x 30” pledge. The 30 x 30 Pledge is a way for police agencies to make low- to no-cost improvements to aid in recruiting more female officers into academy classes (Policing Project at NYU School of Law, 2021). One way that agencies can do this, not just for women, but for women of color is to analyze internal policies and procedures that are not inclusive for women and minorities.

The results of this present study reveal several implications that are essential to research and practical applications needed to improve the experiences of Latina police officers within agencies. These include a review of current policies that affect female and Latina officers. While the majority of officers interviewed for this study spoke positively of their experiences within their agencies, many also pointed to the need for

improvement. Many of those interviewed in this study described an experience with the public that was mostly positive, with the majority of negative attributes assigned to organizational policies and practices. Many of these interviews revealed that the culture of the department itself was, at times, problematic; with some behaviors filtering down to the rank and file from above.

Given that there are calls for increase accountability from officers and agencies, police departments would benefit greatly from shifting prior practices into 21<sup>st</sup> century policing practices. As discussed earlier in this research, accountability, community-police relations, and inclusivity are possible avenues for law enforcement agencies to strengthen their relationships with the communities that they serve.

This research points to the fact that although law enforcement agencies have made great strides to improve their attractiveness to non-traditional applicants, there is still more work to be done. Analyzed by police agencies, the current research would at the very minimum, require a closer look at how policies and procedures within that department support inclusivity, how hiring practices prior to entry into the police academy or the tone set during academy training affects recruits, and what agencies can do to make the work-life balance easier for women.

### **Conclusion**

In traditionally male and White institutions, and in organizations where one is the minority, speaking up to express unfairness, dissention, or misconduct can be difficult. The police profession is one that is characterized by solidarity, an “us versus them” mentality, and sustaining the “blue wall of silence.” While this thought process has begun

to shift over the last few years, the fear of consequence in speaking out of turn is very real for many officers, especially women, and even more so for women of color.

Although the women in this study were promised confidentiality, some expressed that they have stayed silent for too long. As one participant noted, “if we don’t tell our story, who will?” The women who volunteered their time to take part in this study can be described as nothing short of courageous.

After recent high-profile shootings of people of color, the microscope became fixed on police. Countless studies have shown that the majority of officers come into the profession for noble and just causes, and this was reflected in the interviewee’s experiences in this study. It is also safe to say that the overwhelming majority of officers who make law enforcement a career experience minimal to no complaints for excessive use of force. Given that the narrative around police work since Ferguson has been largely negative the desire for officers to protect their jobs has led to more tight-lipped behavior. The need to balance speaking up with showing solidarity is compounded by the fact that police organizations in and of themselves are idyllically seen as beacons of fairness and trust.

Law enforcement is often the first contact that individuals have when they navigate through the criminal justice system. Whether the individual is a victim, a witness, or a perpetrator, police officers are often the first impression that the people have of a government that is supposed to protect and serve them. When officers are not willing to connect with those that they serve and treat them in a manner that is fair and equitable

under the law, trust from the community in their police departments, and to a substantial degree, their government, deteriorates.

While it is not guaranteed that having an officer that is reflective of the community they serve increases trust in police organizations, the fact of the matter remains that oftentimes, officers that look like victims and perpetrators are more readily able to convey a familiarity that can increase communication between the public and police that fosters understanding. Latina officers, particularly Latina officers that speak Spanish, are in a unique position of being able to bridge a gap with Spanish-speaking individuals who may not be able to communicate their needs with law enforcement officers who do not speak their native language. In communities where trust between officers and the individuals they serve have been eroded, the introduction of the female and Latina officer can help rebuild those severed ties.

However, it is important to keep in mind that the mere state of being Latina would do nothing if that officer does not have a desire to proactively interact with their community. In the same vein, the White officer that has a deep desire to connect with a minority community, takes time to be culturally sensitive of the needs of others, and is open to effective communication with the public would likely experience successes in serving that community. As Sir Robert Peel, father of modern policing, stated almost 200 years ago, it is incumbent upon police agencies that they maintain a relationship with the public that highlights that the police are the public and the public are the police.



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## Appendix A: Flyer

**VOLUNTEERS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH STUDY**

My name is Jasmine Reilly and I am a doctoral candidate at Walden University. I am recruiting female officers with a Latino or Hispanic background for a very important study. The title of my study is "*The experiences of Latina police officers in patrol.*" The reason this study is important is because researchers do not have a lot of information on Latino and Latina officers. This study will be supervised by Dr. Jana Price-Sharp, core faculty for the Ph.D. in Psychology program at Walden University.

This study is a qualitative exploration of Latina officers' experiences in their local police departments. This study seeks to investigate how Latina officers experience workplace interactions with their peers and supervisors, and what their experiences are when interacting with community members. This study also seeks to examine Latina officers' experiences within their departments, and how officers perceive support from peers and supervisors. Finally, this study also is interested in examining how Latinas perceive acceptance or belonging within their agency.

**LOCATION**

All participants will be asked to interview privately with the researcher for approximately 45 minutes to one hour. These interviews will take place over the phone or virtually (at the request of the participant). After all the data have been collected, I will follow up with you to make sure that I interpreted your interview correctly. This will take approximately 20-25 minutes and will take place several weeks after your initial interview. Your identity will remain confidential.

**POTENTIAL BENEFITS**

Participating in this study has the potential to help researchers and police organizations understand how Latina police officers' experiences may differ from other groups and what police organizations can do to improve retention and recruitment. Participation in this study is voluntary and there is no monetary compensation for participation.

**ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA**

Latina police officer with

1. Five years minimum experience working for a local law enforcement agency that employs more than 1,000 sworn members
2. Full time and active employment status in your police department
3. Working in a patrol function

**\*\*\*Philadelphia Police Officers are ineligible for participation in this study\*\*\***

Your identity will remain confidential. If you would like to participate in this study or have additional questions, please contact me by email or call or text my cellphone.

## Appendix B: Recruitment Letter

Dear (Prospective Participant Name):

My name is Jasmine Reilly and I currently work as a Philadelphia Police Corporal. I am also a doctoral candidate at Walden University. I am recruiting female officers with a Latino or Hispanic background for a very important study. My study is a qualitative exploration of Latina officers' experiences in their local police departments. This study seeks to investigate how Latina officers experience workplace interactions with their peers and supervisors, and what their experiences are when interacting with community members. This study is also seeks to examine Latina officers' experiences within their departments, and how officers perceive support from peers and supervisors. Finally, this study also is interested in examining how Latinas perceive acceptance or belonging within their agency.

I am seeking sworn Latina police officers who have a minimum of five years' experience and hold a full-time, active work status in their department. Female officers must also be assigned to a patrol function within their police department. I plan to begin collecting data in November of 2021. If you are interested in participating in this study or know someone who meets the criteria for the study, please contact me as soon as possible. I can be reached via e-mail or by telephone.

The interview will last approximately 45 minutes to an hour (with one follow-up several weeks after the initial interview that may last 20-25 minutes). Each interview will take place over the phone and will be audio recorded. If you prefer to utilize video conferencing, please let me know. In lieu of your actual name, a pseudonym will be used, and your agency name will not be shared with readers of the study or at final publication. Participation in this study is voluntary, and you can choose to end the interview at any time. All information gathered during the interview process will be kept confidential. However, as a mandated reporter, by law, illegal activity (i.e., instances of abuse) will have to be reported.

I appreciate your time and consideration in advance. Although participation in this study will help me fulfill my requirements for a PhD in Forensic Psychology at Walden University, the information gained from this study can serve to benefit many, including other officers and police agencies throughout the country.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Jasmine Reilly  
Walden University PhD Candidate

## Appendix C: Demographic Information Sheet

Please provide a response for each item listed below

Pseudonym: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Race/Ethnicity: \_\_\_\_\_

Police Department where currently employed \_\_\_\_\_

# of years in the US: \_\_\_\_\_

Family of Origin Country: \_\_\_\_\_

Current Rank (check one):

- Police Officer
- Corporal
- Sergeant
- Lieutenant
- Captain
- Other

Years of experience as a police officer: \_\_\_\_\_

Marital Status:

- Single
- Married
- Divorced
- Separated
- Other

Number of Children: \_\_\_\_\_

Highest educational level

- High School/GED
- A.A./A.S
- B.A./B.S.
- Master's/Professional
- PhD

## Appendix D: Informed Consent

Dear Participant:

You are invited to take part in a research study about “Latina Police Officers’ experiences in patrol.” This form is part of a process called “informed consent” to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study seeks Latina volunteers who are:

- Active duty and full-time sworn state certified police officers
- Have at least five years of law enforcement experience
- Are currently employed by a city police agency or municipality

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Jasmine Reilly who is a doctoral candidate at Walden University. She has more than 13 years of law enforcement experience in Philadelphia. Many of her own experiences motivated her to conduct research in this area.

### **Study Purpose:**

The purpose of this study is to describe and understand the lived experiences of Latina police officers who work in a patrol capacity within their police departments. This study seeks to explore how Latina officers experience workplace interactions with their peers and supervisors, and what their experiences are when interacting with community members. This study is also seeks to examine Latina officers’ experiences within their departments, and how officers perceive support, acceptance, or belonging from peers and supervisors within their agency.

### **Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to take the following steps:

- Participate in an interview that lasts approximately 45 minutes to one hour
- Agree to audio recording of the interview
- Complete the demographic questionnaire
- Interview over the phone or using a virtual meeting space such as Zoom or Teams
- Provide contact information, for follow up questions, which will be kept confidential

Please see below sample questions:

Tell me how you define “support” and explain to me a time where you felt you felt supported by your coworkers or supervisors. Can you explain a time when you saw



another coworker who was not supported by your coworkers and supervisors? What do you think made their story different from yours?

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Research should only be done with those who freely volunteer. It is important that you know that the decision to participate is yours, and yours alone. Everyone will respect whichever decision you reach. You also have the right to withdraw your participation at any time. There are no penalties for not completing the process.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study**

Being in this study could involve some risk of minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life such as sharing sensitive information. With the protections in place for this study, participation in this study would pose a minimal risk to your wellbeing. However, in the event that you experience trauma from reliving a past experience, you will already have information (given to you prior to the beginning of the interview) on a National Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for first responders. You will also have my contact information in the event that you decide to withdraw from the study after the interview has been completed.

This study offers no direct benefits to individuals volunteers. The aim of this study is to benefit society by leading to increased understanding of Latina police officers' experiences within their departments and provide a basis for improving policies, directives, and regulations for local law enforcement agencies

**Payment:**

There will be no compensation for participating in this study.

**Privacy:**

The researcher is required to protect your privacy. Your identity will be kept confidential, within the limits of the law. The researcher is only allowed to share your identity or contact information as needed with Walden University supervisors (who are also required to protect your privacy) or with authorities if court-ordered, which is extremely rare. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. If the researcher were to share this dataset with another researcher in the future, the dataset would contain no identifiers so this would not involve another round of obtaining informed consent. Data will be kept secure by password protection, use of pseudonyms, and encrypted files. Data will be kept for a period of at least five years, as required by the university.

**Contacts and Questions:**

You can ask questions of the researcher before or after your interview by contacting the researcher via email or calling the researcher directly. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant or any negative parts of the study, you can call Walden University's Research Participant Advocate at 612-312-1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is 12-30-21-0877176. It expires on December 29, 2022.

You may wish to retain this consent form for your records. You may ask the researcher or Walden University for a copy at any time using the contact information above.

**Obtaining Your Consent**

If you feel you understand the study and wish to volunteer, please indicate your consent by replying to this email with the words "I consent".

## Appendix E: Interview Protocol

Please read prior to beginning your interview

Thank you for taking time out of your day to meet with me to discuss some of your experiences as a patrol officer. Your privacy is important to me, and I want you to understand that your information will be kept confidential. In other words, any information that you share with me will not be traceable back to you or even your department. Some of the information you provide me with may be shared with members of my research team, however, they are bound to keep your information confidential as well. In order to ensure that I don't miss any important information, I will be audiotaping this interview. These audiotapes will be destroyed at a later date. This interview is expected to last between 45 minutes to an hour. You may refuse to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable.

## Appendix F: Interview Guide

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Pseudonym: \_\_\_\_\_

Time: \_\_\_\_\_

- Interviewee introduction
- Purpose of the study
- Confidentiality and Informed Consent
- Duration of the interview
- Participant questions before beginning

**Early experiences**

1. How did you become interested in applying to become a police officer and how were you recruited?
2. Describe your experience during the hiring process. Can you identify anything that assisted you or presented a barrier to your hiring?

**Experiences on the job**

3. Have you ever experienced discrimination on the job? If so, who was this person? Do you believe that the discrimination was related to race, gender, or something else?

**Experiences with the public**

4. In what ways do you think your ethnicity plays a role in how community members perceive you?
5. How does being a minority help or hinder your ability to communicate with the public?
6. In what ways do you think your gender plays a role in your interactions with community members?

**Feelings of support and belongingness**

7. Based on your experiences in your police department, how are officers accepted into the culture of the profession?
8. Do you believe that officers from different races and gender backgrounds are supported differently within the department? If so, can you explain?
9. As a Latina police officer, how does your presence contribute to improved police interactions with community members?

Thank you for sharing your story with me. I appreciate your time and the candor with which you explained your experiences with me. I have no more questions for you at this time. Before we conclude this interview, do you have any questions for me?