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Examining Possible Challenges in the Recruitment and Retention of Female Police Officers in the Southeast Texas Region

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Abstract

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MS, Angelo State University, 2013

BS, Sam Houston State University, 2011

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Public Policy and Administration

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Abstract

Despite progress in other career fields, women remain underrepresented in law enforcement by a large margin, and recent numbers have been stable. Issues for women in law enforcement have been well researched; however, few recent studies have detailed female police officers' personal experiences. The study problem concerned the challenges and barriers faced by women who choose law enforcement as a career and their underrepresentation. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of female police officers, recruits, and applicants living in southeastern Texas and their perceptions of challenges and barriers for women in the field. Data were collected to understand women's experiences using in-depth interviews and a qualitative questionnaire. The research questions concerned the participants' perceptions of factors contributing to low representation, the barriers that they faced during the academy and hiring process, as officers, and while remaining in policing. The theoretical framework used to interpret results included labeling and conflict theories. A purposeful sample of seven full-time women police officers from three law enforcement agencies participated. The data analysis consisted of coding and theming, followed by describing the findings in a narrative form. Four themes emerged from the analysis: gender discrimination, sexual harassment and assault, family and personal factors, and leadership. The results may contribute to positive social change by raising awareness of women officers' employment, discrimination and harassment concerns, and accomplishments in law enforcement. Additionally, findings may assist police administrators and legislators in creating policies and procedures that reflect awareness of female officers' needs.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to all female law enforcement officers; stay safe and come home. Thank you all for your hard work, commitment, and willingness to share your personal stories, with hopes to better the law enforcement profession. I also dedicate this to my husband and children. The four of you are my motivation to conquer whatever challenges come my way.

Acknowledgments

I could not have completed this accomplishment without my dissertation committee, who supported me throughout this journey. I have learned so much from their dedication and passion during these past 5 years. I want to thank my parents and in-laws for instilling the value of education in me. Finally, I would like to thank my husband, Jared Webb, who has always supported my personal and academic goals. You have constantly challenged me to become better at everything that I choose to do, yet you have still accepted me as I am.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Although police departments across the nation have the mandate to hire without regard to gender, historically, the role of women in policing has reflected far less than equity relative to their male counterparts (Gossett, 2019; Kurtz & Upton, 2018; Rabe-Hemp, 2017; Segrave, 2014). Typically, women's roles have been ancillary to male police officers' roles (T. Brown et al., 2020; Rabe-Hemp, 2017; Schulz, 2017; Segrave, 2014). Many have suggested that these outcomes result from issues, even obstacles, that retard or prevent female officers from working in law enforcement. Women have made remarkable progress in the workplace during the previous century and have broken the glass ceiling in many fields. However, women in law enforcement have not entered higher levels of management and thus are not cracking the glass ceiling in this field (Rabe-Hemp, 2017; Yu, 2020). These obstacles continue to exist for contemporary female law enforcement professionals, and the police profession remains male dominated (J. Brown et al., 2019; Murray, 2021; Rabe-Hemp, 2017; Rabe-Hemp & Miller, 2018; Silvestri, 2017).

In 2013, women were only 12.6% of all sworn police officers in the United States (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS], 2014), and in 2019 the percentage had not perceivably changed (12.8%; Duffin, 2021; National Institute of Justice, 2019). These data suggest that the percentage of female officers has plateaued (National Institute of Justice, 2019). The stagnant level of women's representation may be partly due to their negative experiences (T. Brown et al., 2020; Rabe-Hemp, 2017; Rief & Clinkinbeard,

2020), leading to low job satisfaction and attrition (Alecu & Fekjær, 2020; Clinkinbeard et al., 2020; Todak, 2017).

The study aims included examining deterrents for women considering policing as a profession and the barriers encountered by female police officers from early-career onward. To understand the barriers and deterrents, the police culture encountered by female police officers should be described and better understood in the current cultural context. The results could contribute to a better understanding of the dynamics of becoming and working as a female police officer in a historically traditional male occupation. Additionally, analyzing recruitment and retention experiences related to women in law enforcement could help in detecting the underlying reasons for the low numbers of women in law enforcement (Clinkinbeard et al., 2021; Todak, 2017). If police departments hire interested women, police departments' environment and the perceptions of police work could lead to higher job satisfaction for women (Clinkinbeard et al., 2021; Morabito & Shelley, 2018; White et al., 2010). However, existing bias and stereotypes about women in the hiring process (Rabe-Hemp, 2017; Rabe-Hemp & Miller, 2018; Rice & Barth, 2017) and the tendency of women to accept stereotypes or reinforce the glass ceiling can thwart peer support (Ellemers, 2018; Faniko et al., 2017; Rabe-Hemp, 2017; Yu, 2020) and individuals' efforts to overcome barriers (Graue et al., 2016; Rabe-Hemp & Miller, 2018; Todak et al., 2021). Specifically, problems such as sexism, harassment, double standards, and paternalism cause stress (Rabe-Hemp & Miller, 2018; Rief & Clinkinbeard, 2020; Somvadee & Morash, 2008) and low job satisfaction leading to turnover (Todak, 2017; Todak et al., 2021); however, some have suggested that these

issues could be alleviated with more women being hired (Morabito & Shelley, 2018; Rabe-Hemp, 2017; Rabe-Hemp & Miller, 2018; Schuck, 2017). However, others have found that women moving into upper levels do not necessarily support other women (Faniko et al., 2017; Yu, 2020). Some studies have provided evidence regarding women's experiences in law enforcement and the barriers that they face (Morabito & Shelley, 2018; Seklecki & Paynich, 2007). Shelley et al., 2011); however, the literature remains sparse concerning the lived experiences of female law enforcement officers. Specifically, a gap exists concerning women's experiences working in smaller local municipalities and the barriers that they face in those environments as well as when working through the stages of a police career.

Background of the Study

Examining the history of policing is crucial to understanding how law enforcement has evolved and changed for the greater good. In early American history, the first known police were kin police because people were responsible for their relatives or kin (Martin, 2018; Uchida, 2020, p. 12). In Colonial America, a watch system was in effect until the mid-19th century, and members were male citizen volunteers. The police services provided to citizens included various health and social welfare tasks, such as lighting street lamps, running soup kitchens, recovering lost children, and capturing runaway animals. The watch system was volunteer based, and the method of patrolling was disorganized and irregularly timed. Their involvement in crime control activities was minimal and mostly ineffective (French, 2018). The roles of women, if any, remain

undescribed or are considered as lacking meaningful contribution (French, 2018; Segrave, 2014; Uchida, 2020).

The basic principles that served as a guide for police departments' formation in the United States originated in Great Britain. In 1829, the modern father of policing, Peel, introduced a bill in the British Parliament to create a police force to manage the social conflict resulting from London's rapid urbanization and industrialization (Kelso, 2018). As a result, the Metropolitan Police Force of London was established at Scotland Yard. Peel's nine principles of policing played an essential role in creating the modern law enforcement era (Root, 2018). Peel emphasized that respect and relationships with the community were the best approaches to secure police legitimacy and de-emphasized the need for force (Williams & Paterson, 2021).

Despite Peel's founding philosophy of modern policing, relations between the government and the police have historically been in the context of a male culture, thus establishing a culture of brotherhood fraternity. This term is often applied to the police force, as politicians perceived men as best suited for serving in a physical capacity, with adrenaline pulsing through their veins, brutally following through on orders designed to keep the peace and save lives (T. Brown et al., 2020; Silvestri, 2017, 2018a). The fraternal orders became a notable structure for policing during the 1800s due to the direct and powerful influences of politics. The customary practice was that the politicians within each city ward hired men who agreed to help the politicians stay in office. There were few standards regarding police officers' hiring or training; however, some hired police officers had no qualifications to serve in law enforcement. In America, the

political influence on policing was a problem for public and police reformers in the mid to late 19th century (Williams & Paterson, 2021). The earliest attempts at police reform in the United States were unsuccessful because departments would not focus on law enforcement officers' need for attitude changes. Eventually, early 20th-century reform efforts began to take hold and made significant changes to policing in the United States. The primary goal of police reform during the early 1900s was to professionalize the police by setting standards for the quality of the police officers hired. Men had to meet certain height and weight requirements and complete newly implemented police training. The professionalization movement of the police resulted in police agencies becoming centralized bureaucracies focused primarily on crime control (Bowling, 2019).

The historical origins of policing include the requirements and job descriptions for male officers, but there are no descriptions of female officers (Segrave, 2014). Initially, women could serve not as officers but as matrons (Gossett, 2019; Rabe-Hemp, 2017; Segrave, 2014). Women's entry into policing in the United States was founded on the American Female Moral Reform Society (AFMRS; Rabe-Hemp, 2017; Shaver, 2019). The AFMRS's goal was to develop the role of matrons in law enforcement (Shaver, 2019). A matron was and continues to be a woman employed by law enforcement agencies who lacks arrest authority (Rabe-Hemp, 2017). Matrons in the United States and Britain were often relatives of male officers. In London, matrons first began to work for the London police in 1883, and they had the assignment of guarding women and children. In London, the first policewomen were during World War I, and

women continued to serve police departments, in limited roles, for most of the following four decades (Fraser, 2018; Rees & Strange, 2019).

In the 1960s, police departments in the United States battled prostitution and illegal drug sales. These sex-based crimes resulted in law enforcement agencies developing an expanded role for women (Rabe-Hemp, 2017; Schulz, 2017). These women were crime fighters, not police officers. However, the police force remained segregated with distinct ranks, duties, and stations. The women's division of metropolitan police forces remained in place until 1973, and until the 1990s, many women had their rank prefixed by the word "woman" (Rabe-Hemp, 2017; Segrave, 2014).

Although various antidiscrimination laws were passed during this time, including the Civil Rights legislation and the Equal Employment Opportunity Act, the cultural perceptions, expectations, and negative attitudes toward women changed little, particularly in some professions such as policing (Rabe-Hemp, 2017; Segrave, 2014). Women continued to have "other roles," meaning the continuance of nurturing and submissive roles in contrast to roles requiring physicality (Ffrench, & Waugh, 2017; Kurtz et al., 2012; Kurtz & Upton, 2018; Schulze, 2012; Silvestri, 2017). Their male counterparts were given defined, independent jobs requiring physical prowess. These remain typical outcomes despite research indicating that women perform policing as well as their male counterparts do (T. Brown et al., 2020; Ffrench & Waugh, 2017; Kurtz & Upton, 2018; Lagestad & Van den Tillaar, 2014; Schulze, 2012).

Changes to police departments could begin with additional structuring of departments with a hierarchy enforcing modernized policies, new equipment, and better

training (Rabe-Hemp, 2017). A concerning aspect of policing is its status as a White male-dominated field, which has persisted from the "kin" police structure during Colonial America and through 20th-century reforms (Segrave, 2014; Uchida, 2020). Many law enforcement agencies have historically resisted offering women opportunities to integrate and participate in departments, an unfortunate legacy (T. Brown et al., 2020; Rabe-Hemp, 2017). As a result, there has been little change over the past 20 years, and more recently, law enforcement agencies remain almost as male-dominated as they were during the 1990s (Rabe-Hemp, 2017). In 1996, women held only 11% of the country's law enforcement jobs, and this fraction rose to 12.6% by 2013 (BLS, 2014; Duffin, 2021). From 2016 to 2017, the percentage had risen to 12.7%, and from 2020 to 2021, the percentage showed a meager change to 12.8% (Duffin, 2021; National Institute of Justice, 2019). These statistics support conclusions from researchers that the hiring practices and dynamics of police organizations have not evolved or adapted to reflect equality in the employment of female police officers (Rice & Barth, 2017; Todak et al., 2021).

Even with discrimination laws in place, female police officers are among the small percentage of women in the United States who have not made significant inroads in the labor market. Data obtained from the BLS (2021) categorized women by age, race, and ethnicity, and the results showed that in 2019, women achieved some parity across occupations and industries (47% employed were women). The BLS (2021) defined equality by balancing the supply of qualified and trained men or women to cover the skill gaps. However, the number of women in law enforcement demonstrates that significantly

lower percentages remain for women in traditionally male-dominated fields, such as construction (10.3%), agriculture (26.2%), and software development (18.7%; BLS, 2021). For example, the Texas Prison System has remained traditionally represented by men. In 2012, women accounted for 38% of the approximately 22,000 corrections officers in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (Texas Department of Criminal Justice, 2012), which is slightly under the national-level statistic (44.6%; BLS, 2021). Pertinent to the current study, according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2012), women in Southeast Texas accounted for 49.6% of the civilian labor force, while the number of female police officers was low, at 6%, and only 1% of women were in police command positions. Recent statistics are unavailable for the state workforce gender demographics for corrections, the prison system, and law enforcement in Texas Commission on Law Enforcement (2021) in the level of detail found in the past. For example, the reported statistics regarding broad categories of job roles showed that a little over 60% of professional employees in law enforcement are women. This percentage includes all occupations in law enforcement; thus, it is not clear how many are police officers or currently at any specific level of service other than nonofficer administrative assistants, a role that is 100% staffed by women. These statistics at the national and state level suggest that these organizations remain male-dominated organizations and should develop their recruiting, retention, and utilization policies in response to a changing society and workforce.

Problem Statement

The United States has entered a new era of gender equality, yet there remains striking gender inequality in law enforcement (Rabe-Hemp, 2017). Policing agencies appear resistant to opportunities for women to participate in all aspects of policing, and many researchers have shown that women face harassment, bias, and discrimination in policing careers (T. Brown et al., 2020; Rabe-Hemp, 2017; Rief & Clinkinbeard, 2020). Women account for only 12.8% of sworn law enforcement positions and 27.2% of all law enforcement employees (Duffin, 2021; National Institute of Justice, 2019). In 2014, women held only 5.3% of top command positions (i.e., chiefs, assistant chiefs, lieutenants, sergeants, and other leadership positions; BLS, 2014). Although the percentage of women in leadership has grown nationally to about 9% (BLS, 2021), these statistics combined with those for sworn officers suggest that women are far underrepresented in law enforcement. In the past, women officers' numbers in Southeast Texas have lagged behind those found nationally, at 6% overall and 1% in command positions (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Although more recent statistics for Texas are unavailable, the national-level statistics given above show that law enforcement remains consistent with lower numbers for women than for men. The problem for this study concerned the challenges and barriers faced by women who choose law enforcement as a career; specifically, the study focused on the problem of underrepresentation in Southeast Texas.

Policing culture has likely contributed to the disparity for women in law enforcement; the public has viewed law enforcement as an occupation best reserved for

men because of the types of duties (T. Brown et al., 2020; Rabe-Hemp, 2017; Schulz, 2017) and the potential for excessive force situations or those demanding heroic physical effort (Dirbaz, 2014; Rabe-Hemp, 2017; Silvestri, 2018a). However, there is no conclusive evidence that women differ from men in their abilities to police; moreover, they likely perform as well as men at most essential tasks (Ffrench & Waugh, 2017; Kurtz & Upton, 2018; Lagestad & Van den Tillaar, 2014; Schulze, 2012; Williams & McShane, 2018) and may outperform men in some respects, such as using communication to avoid the use of force (Ffrench & Waugh, 2017). Due to cultural expectations and attitudes, gender inequality remains firmly embedded in law enforcement. Analyses of gender inequality in the workplace have determined that women face significant obstacles in male-dominated areas such as law enforcement (J. Brown et al., 2019; T. Brown et al., 2020; Murray, 2021; Rabe-Hemp, 2017; Silvestri, 2017).

Therefore, additional research is needed to determine why women represent a small proportion of police officers, despite efforts toward gender equality in the workplace. Specifically, recent information exists concerning how women identify the challenges of gender inequality and experience them (T. Brown et al., 2020; Helfgott et al., 2018; Morabito & Shelley, 2018; Rossler et al., 2020; Shelley et al., 2011) and why they believe that these challenges and barriers remain and could be overcome (Helfgott et al., 2018; Morabito & Shelley, 2018; Shelley et al., 2011) and reduced (Morabito & Shelley, 2018; Rabe-Hemp, 2017). Understanding and addressing the challenges faced by female police officers could lead to diversifying the workforce demographics and assist

police administrators and policymakers in developing policies and procedures that support women in policing and provide opportunities for their advancement (Gibbs, 2019; Police Executive Research Forum, 2019; Schuck, 2017).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of female police officers, recruits, and applicants living in southeastern Texas and their perceptions of challenges and barriers for women. The aims were to understand how these obstacles contribute to the low percentage of female police officers and to better understand gender-related challenges and obstacles that women face in this field. The lived experiences explored in this study included those of applicants, recruits, and officers of various experience levels. In interviews, female officers shared their opinions, feelings, and experiences. The results could assist administrators in understanding and addressing the challenges faced by female officers and recruits. In addition, understanding women's experiences could create a more welcoming environment and increase women's representation in law enforcement (Gibbs, 2019).

Research Questions

The research questions framing this qualitative study were as follows:

RQ1: What factors do policewomen believe contribute to the lack of women in law enforcement?

RQ2: What do policewomen perceive as barriers in the field of law enforcement?

RQ3: Did the barriers affect the policewomen's desire to stay in law enforcement?

RQ4: What experiences at the academy affected the female's ability to complete the academy?

RQ5: What were the female officers' perceptions of the hiring process?

RQ6: What were female officers' experiences with the hiring process?

Theoretical Framework

I used two sociological theories in the framework for the study. The first was labeling theory. According to Williams and McShane (2018), labeling is the process of defining, identifying, and segregating people and then making them conscious and self-conscious of their faults and shortcomings. Male counterparts often label female officers as physically or emotionally incapable of police work as defined by men (T. Brown et al., 2020; Kurtz & Upton, 2018; Rief & Clinkinbeard, 2020; Schulze, 2012). Women are frequently excluded from traditionally masculine social bonding events such as firearm and tactical training, further segregating women as "the others" and leaving them open to discrimination because they are not in the "old boy's club" (J. Brown et al., 2019; Kurtz & Upton, 2018; Rabe-Hemp, 2017; Seklecki & Paynich, 2007). For instance, the design of the uniforms fits the male figure. Women may be characterized based on a persona other than that of an officer; for example, they are often described by their gender, using phrases or names to spread rumors about their sexuality and other demeaning information (T. Brown et al., 2020; Rief & Clinkinbeard, 2020). Police culture also includes

evaluating women by their attitudes, actions, and appearance instead of their performance (Rossler et al., 2020; Schulze, 2012; Shelley et al., 2011).

Labeling theory was relevant to this study because it provided a lens for the relationship between the bias against women officers and their high levels of dissatisfaction and negative self-perceptions (Graue et al., 2016; Schulze, 2012; Todak, 2017). According to labeling theory, individuals' behaviors and self-identity are influenced by the labels used to describe or classify them (Graue et al., 2016; Magnus, 2017). Seklecki and Paynich (2007) surveyed 2,000 randomly selected female officers. They documented the female police officers' responses to their subjective experiences. Their results showed that 19 out of 27 women reported facing discrimination and lack of acceptance from male coworkers because of gender. Whether for cultural or personal reasons, female officers face barriers that may involve labeling female recruits (Jolicoeur & Grant, 2018; Rice & Barth, 2017), affecting retention (Seklecki & Paynich, 2007; Todak, 2017). Several studies have shown that purposeful labeling enforces traditional gender stereotypes and imposes behaviors acceptable and expected for female recruits and officers (Jolicoeur & Grant, 2018; Seklecki & Paynich, 2007). The study results might shed light on whether the prevalence of labeling and the severity of the labels deter women from remaining in the law enforcement field. Understanding the possible effects of labeling on female police officers is the first step toward effecting change with decision makers, public policies, and administration.

Seklecki and Paynich (2007) found that barriers for women limit their roles and increase their vulnerability. Male colleagues labeled these policewomen as emotionally

weak and incapable of handling the pressure of uncertainty and danger. This stigma forces women to continuously prove themselves as robust and equivalent to men or behave in a hyper-feminized manner (Haake, 2018; Helfgott et al., 2018; Rabe-Hemp, 2009, 2017; Somvadee & Morash, 2008). Several studies have detailed labeling and name-calling of female officers by their male colleagues (T. Brown et al., 2020; Rief & Clinkinbeard, 2020; Schulze, 2012; Somvadee & Morash, 2008). Somvadee and Morash (2008) interviewed male officers who described their labeling of female officers using derogatory terms such as "kid sister," "tomboy," "lesbian," "gas can," "badge bunny," "bitch," and "crazy." Many participants also admitted that they distanced themselves from the other policewomen, especially those deemed "trouble makers" who had pushed back against the institution. These results showed that women are pushed to conform to men's perceptions of femininity to be accepted in law enforcement by male colleagues (T. Brown et al., 2020; Haake, 2018; Rabe-Hemp & Miller, 2018; Rief & Clinkinbeard, 2020).

To prevail in keeping the power dynamic favorable, men adopt exclusionary behaviors toward women (Kurtz & Upton, 2018; Murray, 2021). Exclusion is reflected in the numbers of women in law enforcement; for example, Hyland and Davis (2019) found that only 3% of women hold leadership positions in law enforcement, despite making up about 13% of the law enforcement workforce. Thus, women leaders in law enforcement remain a minority within a minority (Rabe-Hemp & Miller, 2018).

Conflict theory also contributes to explaining the subjugation and degradation of women in policing (Kurtz & Upton, 2018; Murray, 2021; Rief & Clinkinbeard, 2020),

which contribute to women's inability to attain high-ranking positions in policing because men have controlled the hierarchy and women are treated as subordinates (Graue et al., 2016; Silvestri, 2017, 2018a, 2018b). Rabe-Hemp (2017) stated that maintaining the patriarchal idea that women are deficient and are inferior to men supports the agenda to keep the police a boy's club as supported by conflict theory.

Nature of the Study

A qualitative approach using the philosophical perspective of phenomenology was the best research method for this study. The first goal of this study was to examine the female officers' experiences in a southern town to understand job satisfaction and mentoring experiences and examine how these experiences may have impacted their careers. Secondly, the potential barriers to employment and advancement were explored using multiple theoretical frameworks. The potential barriers were examined for each stage of the process. Therefore, I sought women interested in law enforcement to assess barriers when entering the policing profession. The study was designed to collect information from female police officers, applicants, and recruits to capture the meaning of their lived experiences and understand the stagnating level of female representation in policing. A qualitative design using a phenomenological approach allowed me to document female police officers' accurate responses to their individual subjective experiences.

Assumptions

I used a subjective sampling method to select participants from a region of Texas. This method is a nonprobability sampling method known as purposeful sampling that is

defined by the researcher's judgment to select participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Criterion sampling is a form of purposeful sampling preferred for phenomenological designs that include predefined characteristics before the investigator begins recruiting and selecting participants. Consistent with the phenomenological approach, criterion sampling delivers participants with similar access to experiences of the phenomenon (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). This method was useful for this study because a limited number of female officers were available to participate in the study. The sample size consisted of 20 participants. Potential participants met both of the following eligibility requirements to participate in the study: female and between 21 and 60 years of age. Additionally, they must have met the following criteria to participate (a) female; (b) living and working in the specified region of Texas; (c) previously sought, held, or was currently a full-time police officer; (d) aged 21 to 50 years old; and (e) interested in law enforcement. After ensuring eligibility, the human resources department of the district attorney's (DA's) office provided the email addresses of potential participants from their initial job applications. An email was sent to the female officers. The email contained an explanation of the nature of the research project, an invitation to participate in interviews, and a request to respond by email within 3 weeks. Interested participants met with me face to face for the interviews. I also emailed each participant questionnaires.

Scope and Delimitations

This study had the limitation of using the small population of female police officers. Each participant had to be female, have experience as a full-time sworn police

officer, and have a minimum of 1 year of law enforcement experience. Other requirements for participants applied to any female who participated in a police academy or who attempted an application process at the police departments. The study included female officers recruited from two city police departments and one sheriff's department located in Southeast Texas.

Limitations

A philosophical perspective of phenomenology allowed me to describe the female police officers' experiences, as each person has a subjective reality. The approach had limitations and strengths. The study had limitations in that the participants might not have responded truthfully (Johnson et al., 2020). Although I assumed that the respondents willingly and honestly provided feedback regarding their perceptions of their work experiences, the details of their responses cannot be independently verified without forsaking privacy and confidentiality. Because I aimed to evaluate the nature and magnitude of challenging work and career situations for women in law enforcement, the interview questions were designed with sensitivity to the content concerning discrimination and harassment. However, the fear that the police department could learn of a participant's identity or responses to questions could have created hesitation and inaccurate responses, even with confidentiality assurance. The female officers might have feared losing their jobs or experiencing labeling. Although these potential limitations could not be fully alleviated, face-to-face interviews with a researcher who had some knowledge of the experiences of female officers might have moderated the limitation; as

the researcher in this study, I could potentially gauge the truthfulness of responses (Johnson et al., 2020).

The final limitation was the number of women participating. The number of available female police officers was low relative to typical research parameters; nationally, only about 12.6% to 13% of the local police department employees were women working as police officers (BLS, 2014, 2021). Therefore, many local police departments likely had few women, notably smaller local agencies. Therefore, this was not a comprehensive study of all female officers.

A strength of the research study that could have reduced some limitations was the potential for me to connect with the participants, given my background in law enforcement; however, this could also have led to bias in my interpretations. Nevertheless, the interviews were designed with numerous questions about overlapping subjects in law enforcement, providing extensive information such that some bias could be eliminated by comparing answers across questions. Furthermore, I could ask follow-up questions to reveal distinctions in responses among the participants.

Significance

This study was focused on uncovering and describing the obstacles within a sociological framework. An outcome from the study is that police administrators can use the results to identify and target solutions to reduce barriers (Morabito & Shelley, 2018; Rabe-Hemp, 2017; Shelley et al., 2011), potentially retaining and increasing the number of women in policing (Rice & Barth, 2017; Todak, 2017; Todak et al., 2021). I gathered data on the female officers' experiences throughout their careers, including while they

were recruits, and the perceived barriers faced by potential applicants. Thus, this study expanded the potential to learn about the issues that slow women's advancement or stop them from moving up the ranks.

Furthermore, the results could point to how departments might diversify. Diversifying employees can allow greater flexibility and depth of knowledge within a department, enhancing the profession and better serving communities (Gibbs, 2019; Schuck, 2017). Female police officers face barriers from police administration; other police officers may perceive them as symbols or tokens and not as officers (Todak, 2017; Watkins et al., 2019; Yilmaz & Sürgevil Dalkılıç, 2020). Officers whose demographic background matches the majority of those hired in an agency tend to perceive that hires from one underrepresented groups will decrease the hiring of others from their own group or from other underrepresented groups. However, the evidence does not support that a trade of this type exists for hiring among officer ranks (Nowacki et al., 2021). Thus, the results could further enlighten administrators concerning the myths related to diversity in hiring (Rice & Barth, 2017).

The results could assist in developing recruitment techniques that inspire women to join the force, as law enforcement agencies could benefit from incorporating various methods and strategies to increase female representation (Clinkinbeard et al., 2021; Copple, 2017; Jolicoeur & Grant, 2018; Shelley et al., 2011). Female officers face challenges in the promotion process due to administrative resistance, and some choose not to pursue promotion (Collica-Cox & Schulz, 2020; Graue et al., 2016; Todak et al., 2021). The latter consideration could be driven by reluctance in the face of the glass

ceiling or encounters with the glass cliff (Faniko et al., 2017; Rabe-Hemp, 2017; Yu, 2020). This study may contribute to social change by affecting female officers' perceptions of the glass ceiling and encouraging appropriate policies and procedures. These improved policies and procedures could remove barriers and increase the number of women in law enforcement. By addressing the female officers' perceptions, the study results might be useful for police organizations and administrations to rectify the underrepresentation of women in law enforcement and contribute to the literature concerning this problem.

Summary

Researchers have shown that since the introduction of women to policing in the late 1800s, women have faced barriers that have limited female officers' retention and recruitment (Rabe-Hemp, 2017). Although history demonstrates that women in policing have faced pervasive discrimination (T. Brown et al., 2020; Rabe-Hemp, 2017; Rossler et al., 2020), they have made progress through persistence and determination (Helfgott et al., 2018; Morabito & Shelley, 2018). However, existing barriers remain within the police culture (T. Brown et al., 2020; Helfgott et al., 2018; Morabito & Shelley, 2018; Rabe-Hemp, 2017; Schulz, 2017). The problem for this study concerned the low percentage of women who have entered police work as officers. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of female police officers, recruits, and applicants living in southeastern Texas and their perceptions of the challenges and barriers for women. Thus, the study design was a qualitative phenomenology using interviews to collect data. The significance of the study lies in the potential for findings that officers

and administrators could use to increase the numbers of women and enhance female officers' work experiences. To explore these issues, two theories contributed to the framework for the study: labeling theory and conflict theory.

In Chapter 1, I presented an overview of the study, including a brief description of the background, problem, purpose, research questions, and theoretical framework. Chapter 2 contains a review of the literature concerning the theoretical framework, the history of women in policing, studies related to the problem for this study, and results related to the research questions.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The issues facing law enforcement in the United States are more complex than ever, and lack of representation and diversity among the ranks of officers contributes to these issues (Gibbs, 2019; Rabe-Hemp, 2017). The problem for this study concerned the challenges and barriers faced by women who choose law enforcement as a career; specifically, the study focused on the problem of underrepresentation in Southeast Texas. The study is significant due to the gaps in understanding women's experiences in law enforcement (T. Brown et al., 2020; Helfgott et al., 2018; Morabito & Shelley, 2018; Rossler et al., 2020; Shelley et al., 2011) and the potential to improve the situation for agencies and female officers (Helfgott et al., 2018; Morabito & Shelley, 2018; Shelley et al., 2011). The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of female police officers, recruits, and applicants living in southeastern Texas and their perceptions of the challenges and barriers for women. To facilitate understanding of the lack of representation for women and the discrimination that they face, a more detailed history of women in policing is included with additional evidence of the barriers to recruitment, retention, and progress of women. The culture of police departments and the history of women in policing are more fully discussed in a separate section. In the police culture section, I also elaborate on sexism, harassment, and barriers and challenges for women. Other major topics that follow on the foundations of police culture are gender discrimination, gender inequality and barriers, and sexual harassment.

History of Women in Policing

Understanding women's history in policing is helpful when evaluating the more current struggles and obstacles that they face. The histories of women in policing in Colonial America have been undescribed, if they existed at all (French, 2018; Uchida, 2020). The history of women as police officers in the United States appears to have begun in a meaningful way with the formation of the AFMRS, initially aimed to create matron positions (Segrave, 2014; Shaver, 2019). In 1845, after establishing the AFMRS, New York City hired two women as matrons to work in the city's jail. These women never had the same status as the men working as police officers and did not have full rights and responsibilities (Kurtz et al., 2012; Rabe-Hemp, 2017; Segrave, 2014; Shaver, 2019). The police command staff sought to hire matrons for the police stations and jails (Shaver, 2019). Retaining women in police stations and prisons allowed male officers and commanders to transfer unwanted or unnecessary calls to the female matrons. However, the police department resisted this reform effort until 1893 (Gossett, 2019; Segrave, 2014).

Similarly, during the 1870s, women supported their husbands, who served as sheriffs in the western territory. The women served as unofficial members of the local law enforcement team and did have arrest powers. Despite this informal local arrangement, women were never permitted to serve or assist at the federal level in territorial law enforcement, even when their husbands were appointed to serve as a deputy U.S. Marshal (Archbold & Schulz, 2012; Segrave, 2014).

The history of women's formal entry into policing has focused on municipal policing when women were joining police departments beginning in the 1890s and early 1900s. During this time, when policing roles for women were far less defined, the first women hired began as matrons to care for women and children in police custody (French, 2018; Segrave, 2014; Uchida, 2020). These first female officers sought to distinguish themselves from matrons. They had arrest powers, yet the community and their colleagues viewed these women not as crime fighters but as providers of social and protective services under the auspices of police departments (Gossett, 2019; Rabe-Hemp, 2017; Segrave, 2014). In small communities, matrons' and female police officers' duties were often overlapping, except for arrest authority (Martinez, 2017; Segrave, 2014).

The late 1800s and early 1900s were changing times for women in policing because the first women were recognized as police officers. America's first female police officer was Mary Owens, who overcame odds to receive a police officer's rank within the Chicago Police Department in 1893. Owens's husband was an officer for the department and died on duty. Owens's husband created a stipulation in his death benefit that his wife should receive a job at the department upon his passing. Mary Owens worked in the police department for 30 years. She assisted in cases involving women and children. Owens battled for her rights and eventually earned the right as the first woman to receive arrest powers. Although Owens received arrest rights, she was never a patrol officer (Martinez, 2017). Another of the first recorded female police officers and the first African American female officer was Lola Baldwin, a social worker (Hanna, 2019). She worked for the Portland, Oregon Police Department in 1905 and became the first woman

in the United States to be officially sworn as a police officer rather than a matron. She oversaw social workers who aided the police during the Lewis and Clark Exposition. Baldwin also patrolled, in street clothes, to assure that women were not accosted during this large fair. She set the standard for female officers assigned in plainclothes to areas where men and women assembled and where the potential existed for alcohol consumption and promiscuous behavior (Hanna, 2019). Such places included dance halls, poolrooms, train stations, entertainment areas, and movie theaters. Baldwin assisted her male coworkers in those environments because the male officers did not want to work with women and reported sexual crimes (Archbold & Schulz, 2012; Hanna, 2019). Baldwin received a director position but still faced discrimination, as her position only allowed oversight of young girls and women (Archbold & Schulz, 2012; Hanna, 2019).

Another pioneer female police officer was Alice Stebbins Wells, a former social worker who joined the Los Angeles Police Department in 1910 (Capsambelis, 2019; Martinez, 2017). Wells, often erroneously referred to as the first woman with arrest authority, argued that society was changing, and she has been reported to have made a case that abused children and sexually assaulted women more readily report crimes of these kinds to women. Thus, she argued for the need for female officers (Capsambelis, 2019; Rabe-Hemp, 2017). After Wells made her views known, the Los Angeles Police Department directed that male officers were not to question children and women during the investigation of such crimes, and only female officers could do so (Rabe-Hemp, 2017).

In response to this need for more policewomen, Wells, in 1915, created the International Association of Policewomen (IAP) to help form a support system for women in policing (Capsambelis, 2019). The group rallied extensively in the United States and Canada for the employment of policewomen (Gossett, 2019; Segrave, 2014). The IAP collaborated closely with the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), a group that aimed to expand women's roles in government and civic affairs to combat vice-crime and corruption. The WCTU and IAP reinforced the protective nature of policewomen's work. These groups assisted the progressive era reformers and others who sought to restructure policing by making it less strongly associated with politics. Early policewomen resembled those who advocated on their behalf (e.g., the WCTU) by promoting more women to join and bring their gifts and abilities to the profession, including less confrontational interaction, lower likelihood of excessive force, and greater empathy (Capsambelis, 2019; Ouellet et al., 2019). More current evidence has supported these behaviors for contemporary policewomen (Dirbaz, 2014; Koski, 2021).

The policewomen of the past era were overwhelmingly religious, college educated, native born, and upper middle class. They were among the first generation of women in the United States with professional status, mainly in social service fields (Archbold & Schulz, 2012; Segrave, 2014). Despite efforts from some like Wells, who sought to have female officers assume full policing duties, many of these women had no interest in having assigned tasks such as those for male law enforcement officers (Capsambelis, 2019; Rabe-Hemp, 2017). The public considered most male police officers as a group of uneducated, unprofessional immigrants, and these early female officers of

upper middle-class status sought little social or professional interaction with their male counterparts (Archbold & Schulz, 2012; Rabe-Hemp, 2017).

As the early Colonial American history paralleled that of Britain, women's history in policing followed a similar path, particularly in the early 20th century. In 1914 as Britain entered World War I, women continued to make strides toward equality in police service as volunteers. Some resistance remained to the Women Police Service (Fraser, 2018; Rees & Strange, 2019); however, there was a severe workforce shortage as World War I began and men had to leave their jobs to join the war effort. Some women chose to serve in local government, joining police forces as the entire police department staff became depleted (Rees & Strange, 2019). By the end of the war in 1918, some British women aged 30 years and over were given the right to vote for the first time, and in the changing times, women were recruited into London's Metropolitan Police force. During postwar and contemporary times, women stayed in the MET police force, working with men for lower wage rates (Fraser, 2018).

The entrance of women into the police ranks in Britain was further supported by the 1919 passage of the Sex Disqualification Removal Act, which supported some women's entry into the professions typically assigned to men, such as law and policing (Fraser, 2018). For the first time, women could become lawyers, veterinarians, and civil servants. Their fellow police officers reluctantly accepted the "lady policemen," but these women were not allowed to patrol. These women did face danger from criminals and thieves, ridicule from the public, and the chauvinistic rantings of senior law enforcement officers who told them that they ought to be at home. Despite the presence and efforts of

these women, and just as in the United States, their roles remained ill defined. The earliest women held the positions as matrons at jails to care for women and children in police custody (Rabe-Hemp, 2017; Rees & Strange, 2019). Early policewomen sought to distinguish themselves from matrons, and these policewomen had arrest powers but were not crime fighters. Society considered policewomen's duties as social and protective services under police departments' auspices for the community (Rees & Strange, 2019).

During the 1910s and 1920s, American men espoused the idea that women had inherent nurturing qualities (Rutherford, 2019) and should focus on fixing societal problems associated with moral weakness (Shaver, 2019). The idea was to place women into these roles and allow male police officers to be uninvolved with cases dealing with women and children, such as young runaways, shoplifters, and prostitutes (Segrave, 2014; Shaver, 2019). However, women in the established bureaus continued not to have the same status as the men working as police officers (Rabe-Hemp, 2017). These women pushed to establish opportunities for women seeking careers in law enforcement, and their efforts made inroads toward women's equality (Gossett, 2019; Segrave, 2014).

During the 1930s, society faced two significant challenges. The Great Depression resulted in a decline in employment for many, and employment loss was significant for female police officers (Gossett, 2019; Segrave, 2014). Public perceptions during this time were that working women took jobs away from men who needed money to support their families. Following the Great Depression and at the start of World War II in 1939, departments began rehiring women in policing but with restricted roles (Rabe-Hemp, 2017; Segrave, 2014).

After World War II, a new generation of women entered law enforcement. These women were not satisfied by solely protecting and managing incarcerated women and juveniles (Segrave, 2014). Some women who joined police departments had served in the military during World War II and had unique skill sets and backgrounds; most were middle-class and college-educated rather than upper class (Rabe-Hemp, 2017; Schulz, 2017; Segrave, 2014). These experienced women demanded power in policing and integration into the broader police environment. The women of this generation continued to push for equality and demand full integration. These demands were driven by societal changes and supported by the movement toward equal employment (Archbold & Schulz, 2012; Rabe-Hemp, 2017; Schulz, 2017).

As society changed, so did women and their responsibilities. These post-World War II women sought more involvement in police work than social services or protective work (Archbold & Schulz, 2012; Segrave, 2014). They often investigated illegal abortion clinics or worked on undercover cases where men might be identified as police. These women received undercover and decoy work assignments, often with male detectives, on investigations where a couple would be less likely to draw attention (Schulz, 2017). These women were sometimes issued firearms and expected to carry them. Before this shift, it was uncommon for women police officers to carry firearms (Schulz, 2017; Yu, 2020). The women's assignments continued to be gender stereotyped because the assignments were service oriented rather than apprehension oriented. Over time, policewomen used their experience in apprehension as a wedge to enter patrol work and become more involved on a street level (Schulz, 2017; Segrave, 2014).

In this era, female officers showed that women could successfully perform dangerous work and front-line policing. Women also began to seek promotions as their success grew. As women began to work closely with their male colleagues, their awareness grew that higher ranking positions were unavailable to them (Schulz, 2017). In 1961, two New York City policewomen sued the New York City Police Department for the right to take the promotion exam for the role of sergeant (Archbold & Schulz, 2012). In 1964, these women and a small number of others took and passed a court-ordered exam. The women who brought the suit, Shpritzer and Schimmel, were the first two women promoted. In 1967, after additional litigation and a make-up review, they became the first two female lieutenants (Archbold & Schulz, 2012; Rabe-Hemp, 2017).

A similar lawsuit regarding promotion occurred in 1973 in California. Officer Fanchon Blake joined the LAPD after serving in the U.S. Army during World War II (Archbold & Schulz, 2012). Women took on many distinct roles during the war, as it was during a time of global conflict on an unprecedented scale. Blake perceived that military service would be advantageous in police work and sought to develop and expand her career. Blake openly objected to policies that prevented women from rising above the rank of sergeant (Gallardo, 2018). After the suit was settled in favor of Blake, the changes at LAPD included instituting policies for hiring more women into the department (Archbold & Schulz, 2012; Stiehm, 2020). Other suits followed Blake's in Los Angeles as well as in other areas of the country (Felker-Kantor, 2020).

In 1969, the Washington, DC police force announced the end of distinct entry requirements for male and female officers (Felker-Kantor, 2020). By late 1971,

Washington, DC's female police officers were on uniformed patrol. Following these events, female police officers were also on patrol in Miami, FL (Archbold & Schulz, 2012; Schulz, 2017). Other LAPD policewomen joined Blake in another class-action suit, and in June 1977, the U.S. Attorney General sued the City of Los Angeles and the LAPD, alleging employment discrimination based on sex, race, and national origin by the LAPD when hiring and employing sworn officers. During the pending federal action, the LAPD lost Law Enforcement Administration Agency funding (Felker-Kantor, 2020; Stiehm, 2020).

In addition to these lawsuits, legislation passed in the 1960s and 1970s supported women's demands to end sex-based distinctions in work titles and assignments and allow full participation in policing by women. Among these laws was the Equal Pay Act of 1963, which prohibited unequal pay for women for equal work. Although this Act could eventually benefit women police officers, its initial impact was small because policewomen worked under a distinct civil service title and had different duties than patrolmen (Archbold & Schulz, 2012). Therefore, their work was not deemed equal by police departments (Rabe-Hemp, 2017).

Women police could not be a part of any hierarchy, except within their segregated unit. Women could not hold positions of leadership and coveted positions such as detectives, bicycle patrol, Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT), and other specialized fields (Graue et al., 2016; Silvestri, 2018a). The overwhelming majority of women could not participate in policing in the same capacity as their male counterparts. Finally, and most damagingly, the women had no opportunities to demonstrate their overall value to

the organization; they were not permitted to perform essential patrol duties (Rabe-Hemp, 2017; Schulz, 2017). Women were not eligible to receive promotions within their bureaus because their police superiors perceived that they had not had the full "police experience" on general street patrol (Ffrench & Waugh, 2017; Schulz, 2017). However, these male police administrators refused to assign women to general patrol, blocking women from obtaining the required experience (Rabe-Hemp, 2017; Schulz, 2017). Ironically, women hired as matrons had to meet a higher standard for employment than men in police officer roles and received lower wages (Archbold & Schulz, 2012).

The Civil Rights Act (1964) had little impact on civil servants until 1972 when its provisions were extended to government agencies. In 1969, women were aided by President Nixon's Executive Order 11478, which prohibited discrimination in federal employment because of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, handicap, and age. (Yu, 2020). Before 1971, there was an executive order banning women from owning a handgun. The U.S. Civil Service Commission canceled the firearms exception, allowing women to enter law enforcement and hold commissioned positions (Schulz, 2017; Yu, 2020). The effect of the ban's cancelation was immediate; for example, the U.S. Secret Service and the U.S. Postal Inspection Service began swearing-in women as special agents. Soon after, the Federal Bureau of Investigation also swore-in its first female agents (Yu, 2020). Another significant impetus for change involved federal funds for law enforcement agencies. The Crime Control Act (1973) specified those grantees would be ineligible for funds if their employment practices were discriminatory. These changes resulted in more women working with their male colleagues undertaking sensitive and

often dangerous investigations and assignments. The number of sworn female officers increased from 1.4% in 1971 to 5.0 % in 1980 (Yu, 2020); an increase likely supported in part by Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, which sought to eliminate gender discrimination in the workplace (Gossett, 2019; Schulz, 2017; Seklecki & Paynich, 2007). A similar gain occurred in the following decade, with representation increasing to 8.6% in 1990 (Yu, 2020).

The legal challenges to the traditional police hierarchy escalated during the 1970s and through the 1990s. Several legislative changes from 1972 to 1996 aimed at providing women the same opportunities as men led to increased numbers of women serving as police officers. Significantly, in 1985, the first woman, Penny Harrington, took the role of police chief in Portland, Oregon (Kooi, 2021; Silvestri, 2018b). Harrington was ahead of her time in working toward ending gender bias, but ironically, her tenure was short due to those same factors—she was chief for 17 months before her resignation was forced. Notably, Harrington was at the forefront of community policing and working with racial tensions between minority communities and the police department (Kooi, 2021). In the 2000s, policing culture turned away from crime-fighting by emphasizing community policing, allowing women a more significant opportunity to serve (Kooi, 2021; Schuck, 2017).

As women entered the traditionally male-dominated field of policing, a female police officer's role changed, shifting from social work to full police responsibilities. These changes included laws requiring equal opportunity in hiring, recruiting, promotions, and working conditions, such as responding to violent situations and

domestic violence (Seklecki & Paynich, 2007). According to the BLS (2014), after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, the number of women in law enforcement increased to 11.0%. The increase in female law enforcement officers slowed after this growth spurt, reaching 11.7% by 2009. Large departments contributed more to this increase than smaller departments. From 1990 to 2000, the rate of sworn female officers used by large city police departments rose from 10.1% to 14.3%. Despite these gains, most agencies remain overwhelmingly male, with less than 13% nationally in 2019 (Duffin, 2021; National Institute of Justice, 2019). Although these statistics demonstrate expanding opportunities for women in policing, the percentage of women in policing compared to their male counterparts is still relatively low. Despite the growth of women in policing during the early part of the 21st century, their roles remain limited. Today, women in policing continue to face hostility and harassment. There is an underrepresentation of women in law enforcement, and only a few have advanced to command and supervisory positions (Rabe-Hemp, 2017; Schulz, 2017).

Police Culture

Policing appears to conform to hegemonic masculinity, described as gender practices conforming to the patriarchy, i.e., which confirm men's dominant position and the subordination of women and legitimize heterosexist behavior (Graue et al., 2016; Tomsen, 2017). Police forces maintain hegemonic masculinity through displays of authority, homophobia, excessive force, and the subordination of women (Graue et al., 2016; Kurtz & Upton, 2018; Rabe-Hemp, 2017; Shelley et al., 2011); these practices include overt harassment, such as beratement and name-calling (Rief, & Clinkinbeard,

2020; Somvadee & Morash, 2008). Rabe-Hemp (2017) and Murray (2021) suggested that those practices profoundly impact men and women police officers' work because male police officers attempt to isolate women by making them feel inferior by creating hostile work environments (Graue et al., 2016; Rief & Clinkinbeard, 2020; Silvestri, 2017).

Police culture is hyper-masculine, reproducing traditional gender roles and stereotypes to maintain male dominance, leaving women at a distinct disadvantage (T. Brown et al., 2020; J. Brown et al., 2019; Kurtz & Upton, 2018; Rabe-Hemp, 2008; Seklecki & Paynich, 2007; Silvestri, 2017). However, women in policing sometimes accept and conform to the traditional roles considered feminine in this environment (T. Brown et al., 2020; Haake, 2018; Rabe-Hemp, 2017; Rabe-Hemp & Miller, 2018; Rief & Clinkinbeard, 2020; Somvadee & Morash, 2008).

More recently, as gender roles have continued to change in society, male officers have more significant challenges accepting these evolving roles for themselves and women (Dirbaz, 2014; du Plessis et al., 2021). Police culture has a “blue wall of silence,” a brotherhood bond based on a distinct set of values that includes unacceptable norms in a modern workplace and society. This culture enables the men to feel as if they are members of an elite group that does not report on a colleague's errors, misconducts, or crime (T. Brown et al., 2020; Kurtz & Upton, 2018; Murray, 2021; Rabe-Hemp, 2017; Silvestri, 2017, 2018a); by extension, women are not included in this group and have their errors or misconduct more frequently reported (Gaub, 2020; Ouellet et al., 2019).

Police culture fosters a man versus woman attitude that embraces traditional masculine qualities such as physical strength, stoicism, chauvinism, and anger (T. Brown

et al., 2020; Dirbaz, 2014; Kurtz & Upton, 2018; Murray, 2021). The cultural ideal is the crime-fighting police hero, and anything outside of this ideal is weak, ineffective, and a threat. Female officers are labeled with traditional stereotypical traits and behaviors, such as nurturers, rapport builders, and emotional (Rabe-Hemp, 2017; Rief & Clinkinbeard, 2020; Silvestri, 2018a). These traits and behaviors are not found in the crime-fighting police hero archetype perpetuated by this culture (Rabe-Hemp, 2017; Silvestri, 2018a). Male officers surveyed were unanimous when asked if they felt allowing women in law enforcement raised the question of public safety and the safety of fellow officers (Schuck, 2017; Schuck & Rabe-Hemp, 2005). The crime-fighting police hero stereotype encompasses physical force, and male officers believe that criminals are not less compliant with women (Kurtz & Upton, 2018; Silvestri, 2017, 2018a). Less recent evidence showed that male officers surveyed were unanimous when asked if they felt allowing women in law enforcement raised the question of public safety and the safety of fellow officers (Martin & Jurik, 2006). Martin and Jurik (2006) found that male officers believed that female officers working alone might provoke an attack, whereas criminals are less likely to attack men. However, other more recent findings supported that women are no more likely to suffer attacks due to lack of physical capability than men and that they often avoided physical encounters and use of force through communication and mediation (Ffrench & Waugh, 2017).

Moreover, male officers do not respect women and have continued to consider women physically incapable, insufficiently aggressive, too emotional, mentally weak, and naïve (Kurtz & Upton, 2018; Rief & Clinkinbeard, 2020). These feelings create

tension as male officers lack confidence in women's ability to effectively perform complex patrol tasks (T. Brown et al., 2020; Schulze, 2012). Men tend to believe that affirmative action hiring practices are unneeded in police departments because women with no field experience could take jobs from male officers with far more experience (Nowacki et al., 2021; Rabe-Hemp, 2017; Watkins et al., 2019; Yilmaz & Sürgevil Dalkılıç, 2020). Male officers believed law enforcement is associated with masculinity, accompanied by traits only males produce (T. Brown et al., 2020; Silvestri, 2017, 2018a). Recruits at the training academy learn this police culture of incongruence (Copple, 2017; Rief & Clinkinbeard, 2020). The cultural indoctrination continues through training and the department's informal policies (Jolicoeur & Grant, 2018; Kringen, 2019; Seklecki & Paynich, 2007; Shelley et al., 2011).

Police departments and academies use a “hidden curriculum” to teach male officers to segregate female officers from the dominant group (Kringen, 2019). A hidden curriculum is an informal explanation of the values and norms in a subculture and is an essential concept for this research because its subtlety makes it hard to prove and combat (Kurtz et al., 2012; Seklecki & Paynich, 2007). For example, there is an emphasis on physical ability, and male officers make jokes of sexual nature and innuendo concerning female officers, often stressing policewomen's lack of physical strength (Kurtz & Upton, 2018; Rief & Clinkinbeard, 2020; Schulze, 2012). The academy has different physical fitness standards for women and men (Lagestad & Van den Tillaar, 2014), and regardless of the standards, women tend to perform as well as men on patrol and in the field (Ffrench & Waugh, 2017). The learning and training culture reinforces that women are

not equally competent in law enforcement (Jolicoeur & Grant, 2018; Kurtz & Upton, 2018; Rabe-Hemp, 2017).

Gender Inequity and Barriers

Since 1900, women's labor force participation rate has increased by 200 percent. However, women remain in less powerful occupational positions, earn less than male colleagues, and have minimal promotions (Silvestri, 2018b). According to employment law, state and federal laws prohibit discrimination requiring police departments to hire citizens without regard to race or gender. However, after the passage of the Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1972, women have still had challenges that prohibited or limited their roles in policing. More currently, policing is often described as a highly gendered profession, typically reserved for men where the percentage of female employees is far below the national labor force (Rief & Clinkinbeard, 2020; Shelley et al., 2011). Policewomen have remained a marginalized unaccepted minority (J. Brown et al., 2019; Kringen, 2019; Kurtz & Upton, 2018; Rabe-Hemp, 2017; Seklecki & Paynich, 2007).

Gender integration and the opportunity for women to form police policy have been strongly resisted (T. Brown et al., 2020; Nowacki et al., 2021; Rice & Barth, 2017; Watkins et al., 2019). Formal departmental policies and informal practices on gender in police work serve to disadvantage women officers. These disadvantageous processes begin with recruitment and selection (Jolicoeur & Grant, 2018; Kringen, 2019; Rice & Barth, 2017). Reinforcing the processes are training and assignments and encounters with citizens because women are less likely to use excessive force and improve police-

community relations (Dirbaz, 2014; Ffrench & Waugh, 2017; Koski, 2021; Ouellet et al., 2019). The opinions create barriers that lead to sexual harassment, tokenism, gender discrimination, and a glass ceiling (Rabe-Hemp, 2017; Yilmaz & Sürgevil Dalkılıç, 2020). Some have suggested that a root cause is culture and practices that lack mentoring, leadership, and promotional opportunities for women in policing (Green, 2019; Helfgott et al., 2018; Rossler et al., 2020). Some women have reported that mentors and role models have been crucial to their success (Helfgott et al., 2018; Morabito & Shelley, 2018).

Sexual Harassment

Many men in law enforcement label female officers when attempting to maintain their position of power within the organization. These men limit women in their job functions and create a challenging work environment for them (T. Brown et al., 2020; J. Brown et al., 2019; Rief & Clinkinbeard, 2020; Rossler et al., 2020). Men control the hierarchy in law enforcement; thus, women are often treated as lesser employees and are not allowed to rise through the ranks (T. Brown et al., 2020; J. Brown et al., 2019; Rabe-Hemp, 2017; Rief & Clinkinbeard, 2020; Schulz, 2017; Silvestri, 2017; Yilmaz & Sürgevil Dalkılıç, 2020).

Sexual harassment in law enforcement decreases organizational productivity and significantly impacts the health of a work environment. Therefore, the Department of Justice sought to eliminate sexual harassment by automatically holding the employer liable for harassment. The U.S Equal Employment Opportunity and Commission (EEOC, 2021) stated that harassment is “unlawful where 1) enduring the offensive conduct

becomes a condition of continued employment, or 2) the conduct is severe or pervasive enough to create a work environment that a reasonable person would consider intimidating, hostile, or abusive" (para. 2). In addition to sexual harassment, EEOC (2021) also protects against harassment based on pregnancy, childbirth, or other medical conditions. The EEOC has determined that law enforcement agencies, particularly small and medium-sized agencies, are grappling with the challenges of increasing diversity. The EEOC found police-specific court cases, which described inappropriate behaviors, the departments' lack of liability, and the impact of the sexual harassment on the law enforcement agency. Although the list was not exhaustive, the most encountered examples of sexual harassment in the cases were as follows:

- degrading or sexual comments about a person's body or other sexually explicit communications or jokes;
- unwelcome sexual remarks or acts;
- threatened or actual retaliation;
- exhibiting sexually suggestive images, objects, or gestures;
- unwanted contact or suggestive looks; and
- denial of promotions based on gender or unwillingness to engage in sexual favors.

Despite federal policy and laws, previous studies have demonstrated continued high levels of sexual harassment in police departments. Rief and Clinkinbeard (2020) found that female law enforcement officers reported sexual harassment more often than other forms of harassment. Those women who reported higher levels of sexual

harassment also reported lower job satisfaction (Todak, 2017; White et al., 2010). Therefore, sexual harassment is associated with low job satisfaction (Haake, 2018; Helfgott et al., 2018; Rabe-Hemp, 2009, 2017; Somvadee & Morash, 2008). In contrast, Graue et al. (2016) reported that female officers have high job satisfaction regardless of harassment; the women in this study used the harassment as a motivator to prove their competence. However, Graue et al. contended that most literature indicated women suffered some loss of satisfaction when faced with harassment. For example, Todak (2017) and Seklecki and Paynich (2007), and Rossler et al. (2020) surveyed or interviewed female officers and found they perceive that experiencing sexual harassment affects female officers' retention. Not only are female law enforcement officers experiencing harassment at a higher rate than male law enforcement officers are, but it also has adverse effects on job satisfaction, retention, mental health, and physical health of female police officers (Bourassa Rabichuk, 2021; Rabe-Hemp, 2017; Todak, 2017; Todak et al., 2021). Rabe-Hemp (2017) interviewed women in law enforcement and found that all the participants had experienced some form of harassment during their careers. Many times, harassment occurred towards the beginning of their career and tapered off. An interesting finding by Rabe-Hemp (2017) was that women who changed departments experienced harassment again at their new department.

Gender Discrimination

The court rulings and legislation were aimed to end gender discrimination in police agencies. Following these legislative changes, class action suits, including the well-known *Fanchon Blake v. The city of Los Angeles,* overwhelmed the judicial system

(Archbold & Schulz, 2012; Felker-Kantor, 2020). Although the revision and amendment of employment discrimination law supported equality for racial minorities and women in law enforcement, the provisions did not eradicate the persistence of harmful stereotypes, attitudes, behaviors, and ideologies that adversely disadvantage policewomen within departments (Fingerhut, 2017). In 2011, in Branch, Texas, a detective filed a lawsuit claiming the department promotion process resembles a college fraternity. In this department, an officer cannot receive a promotion unless male superiors vote for it. These superior officers are also those who judge discrimination and harassment against women.

The examples demonstrated above present the problem of departments receiving complaints of gender discrimination but then failing to remedy the issue effectively. Police organizations have been described as sites of hegemonic masculinity, as evidenced by the division of labor relegating policewomen to women's issues (Kurtz et al., 2012; Matusiak & Matusiak, 2018; Murray, 2021). Toxic masculinity in policing is maintained through authority, heterosexism, displays of force, and women's subordination (T. Brown et al., 2020; Graue et al., 2016; Harrington, 2021; Kurtz & Upton, 2018). Some have suggested that women who accept the "women's work" mentality in policing reinforce law enforcement hegemonic masculinity (Kurtz et al., 2012; Murray, 2021; Rabe-Hemp, 2017). However, those women who challenge policing roles become objects of isolation and harassment (Murray, 2021; Rief & Clinkinbeard, 2020) and are disrespected by their male partners (T. Brown et al., 2020; Haake, 2018; Rabe-Hemp, 2009; Rabe-Hemp & Miller, 2018; Rief & Clinkinbeard, 2020; Somvadee & Morash, 2008).

Summary

This chapter begins with historical perspectives of women in law enforcement from World War I, the interwar years and after World War II, and the modern 1980s. Each era contained examples of discrimination toward women in policing, including career delays, gender demarcated and limited roles in law enforcement, and women patrol officers' promotion to higher ranks. Although there were variations in those phases, there is one familiar pattern: a period of omission, followed by limited succession, the forming of separate women's departments, and some jurisdictions' movement towards full integration. However, there is limited evidence to show that women have fully integrated into police organizations at the time of this study. Several issues emerged from the history which pointed to significant themes in the review. These included the legal, cultural, and social factors that underlie the more current police culture. The recent cultural environment for women in policing has not changed significantly for women from the past. A major theme of the review is police culture and its impacts on women. Much of the review contains research concerning discrimination and harassment as barriers for women. The literature reflects the perseverance of women but it continues to reflect the barriers enforced by hegemonic masculinity and gender bias that lead to discrimination toward women. These findings in the review are paralleled by the findings in chapter 4 and discussion in chapter 5. The aim in data collection and analysis was to examine the women's views of their experiences and much of their experiences did include how their male colleagues perceived them.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of female police officers, recruits, and applicants living in southeastern Texas and their perceptions of challenges and barriers for women. There were a few reliability and validity concerns while addressing possible obstacles for female applicants, recruits, and officers. Before administering the questionnaire and interview, women were vocal about their reluctance to participate because of fear of internal retaliation. On several occasions, the "blue code" was mentioned. The "blue code" is an agreement for male officers' to protect other male officers, even if it requires hiding misconduct. Respondents were also afraid of speaking out, even with offering complete confidentiality. Female participants did not want to face any more ostracism than they have had previously. Several respondents claimed that if they shared their stories, officers at their agency would discover their identity and no longer be a part of "the line blue" family. The potential respondents' were not necessarily concerned with the association. Still, again, fear retaliation, transferring to a shift or position- which makes taking care of their personal needs more complex, verbal or written reprimands, and potential insubordination.

I contacted the local Sheriff's department, City Police, Municipality Police, Office of Inspector General, University Police, Constable Officers, Game Wardens, and Independent School Resource Officers. I could locate approximately 40 potential female respondents out of 2,203 male officers, totaling 0.01 females in Law Enforcement. Of those 40, seven respondents agreed to participate - totaling less than one percent of

participants. Therefore, this study is limited but aims to understand the obstacles for female officers and better comprehend perceived challenges for female applicants, recruits, and police officers. Chapter 3 contains descriptions of the research methods, research design, participants, instruments, and rationale for using the qualitative approach.

Research Design and Methods

The methods and design for this study were qualitative using phenomenology to explore the experiences of female officers. The following research questions were addressed using the methodology and procedures described below.

RQ1: What factors do policewomen believe contribute to the lack of women in law enforcement?

RQ2: What do policewomen perceive as barriers in the field of law enforcement?

RQ3: Did the barriers affect the policewomen's desire to stay in law enforcement?

RQ4: What experiences at the academy affected the females' ability to complete the academy?

RQ5: What were the female officers' perceptions of the hiring process?

RQ6: What were female officers' experiences with the hiring process?

Research Methods

This qualitative study included understanding future and current female police officers' perceptions of law enforcement using interviews and demographic

questionnaires as the data collection methods. Within the qualitative framework, semistructured face-to-face interviews were useful for exploring female police officers' experiences from their subjective perspectives. This approach allows the interviewer flexibility to gain a more in-depth understanding of the participant's views and experiences (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). I modified Archbold and Hassell's (2009) instrument and developed semistructured interview questions (Appendix A; demographic questions and qualitative written questions, Appendix B). I examined the lack of women's presence in law enforcement and sought an understanding of the participants' explanations of the phenomenon. This study focused on the phenomenon of the culture of the institution and the barriers experienced by female officers and candidates.

Research Design

An effective way to explore the problem in this study was to use a phenomenological approach because it allows insight into participants' lived experiences—in this case, those of female police officers. In a phenomenological approach, it is essential that participants share common characteristics (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). This design includes understanding the participants' experiences by incorporating a narrative inquiry within the context of an issue. Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding the informants' experiences by social interaction between the researcher and participants. Phenomenology is a narrative inquiry focusing on the essence of the participants' lived experiences (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). Another critical issue is the relationships between the researcher and participant(s) and the researcher and the study. Through attending to the dimensions, narrative inquirers can study the complexity of the

relational composition of people's lived experiences both inside and outside of an inquiry and imagine the future possibilities of these lives.

Phenomenological studies require interviews of informants as a primary data source, designed to reveal the participants' essential lived experiences. Brinkmann and Kvale (2018) described in-depth interviewing as being effective for understanding the lived experience by exploring participants' reactions and experiences regarding the phenomenon of interest. Qualitative research was the essence of the proposed research study: to tell the stories of female police officers, recruits, and applicants as they perceived their experiences and identify common attributes in their individual stories.

Because the study's aims were to examine a deliberate population, purposeful sampling was used for this research study. A type of purposeful sampling is criterion sampling, which fills the need to select individuals who can inform the issue under exploration and further specify these respondents' characteristics (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Creswell and Poth (2018) indicated that it is appropriate for participants involved in purposeful sampling to share their lived experiences related to the question under investigation. Criterion sampling is a form of purposeful sampling preferred for phenomenological designs because it includes predefined participant characteristics before the investigator begins recruiting and selecting participants. Consistent with a phenomenological approach, criterion sampling delivers participants with similar access and experiences with the phenomenon (Moser & Korstjens, 2018).

Participants

Past, present, and potential female officers were selected as participants if their personnel file was available for review. Female law enforcement officers, potential academy graduates, and recruits in Southeast Texas were eligible for participation. The participants were informed that the results could lead to insight into the gender-related challenges for female police officers. These participants met the study criteria: (a) female; (b) living and working in a specified region; (c) previously sought, held, or was currently a full-time police officer, (d) aged 21 to 50 years old, and (e) interested in law enforcement.

Instrumentation

Archbold and Hassell's (2009) interview questions were modified to develop semistructured interview questions for this study (Appendix A). Demographic questions and qualitative written questions were also developed by me (Appendix B). All participants in the study completed a questionnaire to begin the study. The questionnaire contained demographic questions, including age, race, family status, education level, and years of experience (Appendix B). The written questionnaire included three open-ended questions, which pertained to the participant's experiences in law enforcement. After they completed the initial questionnaire, each recruit or policewoman was scheduled for an individual interview.

The interview questions and qualitative questionnaire included requests for the participants to explain in detail their lived experiences. Each policewoman was interviewed using a semistructured interview guide utilizing open-ended questions. The

interview allowed the participants to meet me and potentially build a rapport to feel more comfortable answering sensitive and challenging questions, such as the following: Why did you choose to enter law enforcement? What problems do you believe women officers face in the field of law enforcement? This question is a two-part question. The women who are active in law enforcement described a problem that they had faced.

Data Collection and Recruitment

Data collection began after receiving Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (Appendix C). The first step in data collection started with a scheduled meeting at the DA's office with the presiding DA. When meeting with the DA, I introduced myself and the purpose of the study. I explained the study's overall aim and what was necessary from their office to assist me in conducting the study. The primary purpose of involving the DA was to gather prospective information from the police department on their past, present, and potential female officers. The DA agreed and signed a consent to facilitate research. The permission and participation of the DA's office were documented in letters (Appendix D, E)

The DA and the agencies have an unusually close collaboration, and therefore, the DA has access to police department records to gain information on female police officers, recruits, or potential applicants. The DA works daily with law enforcement agencies and is the higher structure in the criminal justice system. Therefore, these women participants potentially were more comfortable knowing that the DA rather than a police chief provided the information. The DA did not serve in a gatekeeper role but contributed to gaining formal access to participants. Allowing the DA to collect the contact information

could reduce bias, as the chief of police might omit information. Reducing bias is essential because it affects the validity and reliability of findings. The nature of the DA's job is to work closely with the police, without intimidation, but the DA assumes the role of a superior to officers. The DA builds relationships with officers through trust and cooperation when reviewing and examining evidence or preparing for trial in criminal cases. Although the DA and officers often have rapport, the participants were instructed to directly contact me, not the DA, because participants might feel obligated or pressured to answer more favorably if the DA or department administrators had direct access to the research.

The review of officers' personnel records was conducted in part to locate email addresses to contact potential participants. However, because there are few female police officers working in southeastern Texas, any information from personal files on past, present, and female officers was recorded, and these potential participants were contacted. The selected participants met the required criteria for the study, as outlined above.

Participants were invited to participate by email (Appendix F) and were given 3 weeks to respond to the email invitation. Recruiting emails were sent out to 20 potential participants, and seven who met the study criteria were available and selected for the study. Thus, the sampling frame consisted of seven female police officers. I expected that most participants had similarities in their perceptions of gender barriers and the implied strategies needed to succeed in their role. I chose to examine discrimination perceptions

without comparing these among distinct groups that might perceive discrimination differently.

Participants were briefed with my background and my experiences in law enforcement. I informed the participants that the study's aim was to discover challenges that female police officers face apart from those of male counterparts and how the research was aimed to fill a gap in the literature. After interested participants returned their responses, a consent form for participation and for permission to audio record, along with the

questionnaire (Appendix B), were sent by email. The respondents were reminded after 2 weeks to complete and return the information. The respondents were reminded that their chief had no access to their information per the disclaimer on the top and bottom of the email. This disclaimer reduced the obligation or pressure to answer more favorably to questions. The email allowed respondents the convenience to complete the questionnaire without time constraints. The email allowed the participants to feel free to record their responses openly with privacy.

After the participants reviewed the questionnaire, they received an email asking to schedule an interview. The interview occurred at a location of the participant's choice to ensure comfortability and confidentiality. I reviewed the respondents' returned questionnaires to better plan and develop follow-on questions for the interviews. Data collection continued for approximately 30 weeks.

Data Analysis

I uploaded the audio recordings into NVivo 11. The interview transcriptions were initially entered into NVivo software, but I eventually chose to analyze the data without the software. I read each transcript multiple times and used inductive analysis. This approach required immersion in the data details to discover essential codes, subthemes, and themes (Saldaña, 2021). After reviewing the transcripts, I found that specific words, sentences, and paragraphs stood out, and I assigned them to single or multiple codes to derive themes from the questionnaires, interviews, and field notes (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Saldaña, 2021). Field notes compiled in the notepad during the meeting proved useful, as they allowed me to observe key ideas and repetitive terms.

After reviewing the notes and initial codes, I listened carefully to each audiotape, playing the tapes several times to guarantee accuracy in the coding process and the details of the transcripts (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Saldaña, 2021). Then, a final review of the audio was done to analyze the participants' tone and compare it to the field notes on participants' body language, as written down during the interview.

Limitations of the Study

The limited number of female police officers, recruits, or potential applicants made it difficult to draw meaningful conclusions. I aimed to collect female police officers' perceptions and experiences working in law enforcement. The small number of women participants for this research did not represent all female police officers, recruits, or potential applicants nationwide. The study examined police officers in a specific region in Texas; it did not provide information about how female officers distinguish

women's role in policing in the other parts of the United States. Another limitation is known as a phenomenological challenge. This challenge is not "that we know too little about the phenomenon we wish to investigate, but that we know too much" (van Manen, 1990, p. 46). As a former law enforcement official, I built a strong bond with the respondents. However, van Manen argued that with particular phenomena, the researcher can carry predispositions and opinions about the context of the phenomena. Although these predispositions are not necessarily incorrect, they might obscure an understanding of the phenomenon's essence. I worked to remain open to the lived experiences of the study participants, which may have differed from my own. I made notes during the data collection phase on the same notepad to minimize researcher bias during the interviews. The notepad included a record of all relevant information about the study during the data collection phase. After the research concluded, I properly disposed of the journal.

Ethical Issues

An application was approved by the IRB. The IRB was critical in the research as the board assumes responsibility for ensuring that the research complies with the university's ethical standards and federal regulations. A copy of the approval letter is provided (Appendix C). Participants were asked to complete an informed consent form stating that they agreed to participate in this study. The consent form contains an explanation of participants' involvement, the potential risk, steps taken for confidentiality, and my contact information. The participants signed the informed consent letter before I began data collection. The questionnaires were sent to each participants' email to support privacy and provide constrained time and less pressure to complete the questions in my

presence. Every possible precaution was practiced to protect the participants' identities and locations, as research involving human participants must protect the respondents. However, complete anonymity could not be assured to the participants because they are known to me; nonetheless, necessary steps to ensure participant confidentiality and privacy were taken. I did not collect identifying data to assure participants of privacy and confidentiality. The identifying information was written on a notepad but not used when recording the data. The only information to be recorded in the findings section was their shared experiences, any information containing participants' identifiers was kept in the primary investigator's possession, and anonymization was used in the study.

All participants' information was locked in a filing cabinet located in an independent office space. Each participant was assigned a number identifier, and the locations of the interview were disguised, allowing participants to feel safe in their responses. The participants completed the interview at an off-duty location of the participants' choosing, which protects the participants' confidentiality and privacy, and supports that the participants were comfortable communicating freely. The participants chose a location and time for interviews, and I documented this information. All interviews lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes, depending on the participation of the respondent. Before the interview, participants were notified of their right to withdraw from the study and the possibility of being recontacted in the future. Lastly, permission was obtained from each participant to audiotape the interview sessions. The participants were assured of confidentiality because I transcribed the audio. An electronic copy of the respondents' transcript was sent to the respondents' email immediately after the interview

was transcribed to ensure their thoughts and ideas were captured accurately. After receiving the responses, all audiotapes of police officers' interviews will be destroyed at the appropriate time. Each participant was reminded of the confidentiality measures before and after each interview. The respondents should be aware of the lack of women in police agencies and understand the potential importance of the study results. Therefore, no incentives were offered to the respondents, but a reminder was offered that their opinions and thoughts could help change the apparent shortage of women represented in law enforcement.

However, I removed participants' names, locations, and other identifying information or withheld it to protect privacy and preserve confidentiality. I aimed to prevent edits from influencing substantive content. I noted instances where a participant's non-verbal communication might suggest discomfort. These observations were a part of assuring that participants were comfortable to proceed during the interview. Confidentiality is essential in the research as the participants are trying to share something intimate; therefore, their body language may reflect their intended message. To safeguard the participants, a copy of the findings was be sent via email, allowing the participant to provide additional clarification.

This research includes potentially sensitive questions for participants, and instinctively knowing to watch for signs that the participants are uncomfortable with the conversation can be helpful. Body language alone assists in understanding how someone is feeling (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Saldaña, 2021).

Summary

Chapter 3 contains a description of the design and methods used to perform the research study. The study method was qualitative and the research design was phenomenology. The study explored the phenomenon of female law enforcement officers' experiences by conducting interviews and questionnaires. The data collection proceeded after consulting with the DA's office and gaining permission to review female officers' personnel files. Invitation to participate were sent by email as were the questionnaires and consent forms after the recruits agreed to participate. The analysis and interpretation of data included coding and theming of the information. The potential limitations of the study were outlined and included the few potential participants for the study and the difficulty of using phenomenology to assess a little known phenomena of individuals' experiences in the context of this study. Ethical considerations are outlined and follow the Belmont report. Chapter 4 includes the findings from this study.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of female police officers, recruits, and applicants living in southeastern Texas and their perceptions of the challenges and barriers for women. An aim was to understand how these obstacles contribute to the low percentage of female police officers. This chapter includes the findings from a purposeful sample of female police officers who offered their lived experiences. The objective was to understand the participants' backgrounds and understand their experiences in their career development. The narrative of each participant's perceptions described how gender identities, social norms, and leaders adversely affected them.

Chapter 4 begins with the presentation of a demographic profile of the participants and a summary of the participant interviews. The demographic profiles include information about ethnicity, marital status, and age. The participants provided information to assist me in analyzing the participants' experience from the context of my background.

Demographic Profile

The study included seven participants from different law enforcement agencies, including three municipal police departments, one applicant applying to a municipal agency, and one county department (Table 1). The women reported their ages as 25 to 45 years and police work experience from 0 to 12 years. Marital status was another demographic analyzed, with two participants married, one divorced, and four single. The

group average of total years in law enforcement was 4.8. In terms of educational background, one participant had a graduate degree, four held bachelor's degrees, one had an associate's degree, and one had a high school diploma. One participant was a correctional officer who had been unable to obtain employment in law enforcement. Three participants were patrol officers, and one was a probationary patrol officer. The other participants were a school resource officer and a community service officer. None of the participants held a leadership position; however, one participant held a senior officer title (Table 1).

Table 1

Profile of Participants

No.	Age	Race	Agency type	Rank	Yrs.	Yrs. w/ dept.	Ed. level	Role	Marital status	Child
1	26	W	State	N/A	0	0	Bach.	Corrections	S	0
2	34	W	Mun.	Off	8	1	Master's	Sch res. Off	M	0
3	45	B	Mun.	Sr Off	12	3	Bach.	Community service off	D	2
4	25	H	Co.	Off	2	1	Assoc.	Patrol off	S	1
5	29	W	Co.	Off	3	2	HS	Patrol off	S	0
6	38	W	Mun.	Off	8	2	Bach.	Patrol off	M	2
7	23	B	Mun.	Off	< 1	1	Bach.	Probationary patrol off	S	0

Note. No. = participant number; W = White, B = Black, H = Hispanic; Mun. = municipal, Co. = county; Off = officer, Sr. off = senior officer; Yrs. = number of years of service; Yrs w/ dept. = the number of years with current department or agency; Ed. level = the level of diploma earned, Bach = bachelor's degree, Master's = master's degree, Assoc. = associate's degree, HS = high school diploma; Role = job assignment, Child = number of children, Corrections = corrections officer, Sch. res. off. = school resource officer; S = single, M = married, D = divorced; Child = number of children.

Data Collection

The data were collected using interviews and a questionnaire. All seven women completed the questionnaire and participated in face-to-face and one-on-one interviews. I interviewed each participant using the same questionnaires and interview questions. All interviews were in depth and lasted from 30 to 45 minutes. I analyzed the transcripts for common themes and recurring statements from the participants. Each participant used their words to tell their story, and I made a concerted effort to avoid leading the participants' responses. Quotes from the participants are useful for exemplifying experiences among the group and gaining an in-depth understanding of the participants' barriers; however, few quotes were included to reduce the chance that participants would be identified and to ensure confidentiality.

Data Analysis

After reviewing the data returned by participants and transcribing the written and audio data from the interviews, I analyzed the data using coding and theming procedures. I included a synopsis of the participant's interview to support my assertion, observed and recorded the themes, and included those themes in each case study's results. The analysis of the questionnaire and interview responses included comparing the emerging themes across all the participants. The themes from participants' data converged on similar overall themes for the findings.

The study's objective was to understand the participants' backgrounds and explore women officers' perceptions. The following themes emerged from the data analysis: gender discrimination, sexual harassment and assault, family and personal

factors, and leadership. The findings in this chapter represent the overarching themes that emerged from the questionnaires and interviews.

Some themes emerged during the interview, and others were found while listening to the audio and reviewing the transcriptions, field notes, and questionnaires. Saturation was reached as related themes emerged from the questionnaires and interviews, and eventually, no new information appeared. In the second part of the investigation, I noted when participants returned to content related to a theme that appeared. The codes and phrases related to themes were organized, and the excerpts of content were noted accordingly in my notes. The final stage of analysis involved coding the commonalities and differences between the participants. I coded phrases, themes, or sentences concerning each issue. This method allows a researcher to discover narratives within the content and assists with experiencing the events in question. I constructed a table for each of the four themes. The categories associated with the themes are listed and classified according to each participant's represented theme. The narrative of each participant's perceptions described how gender identities, social norms, and leaders adversely affected them.

The analysis of the interview data revealed four distinct categories in the participants' perceptions of gender discrimination. First, a category was developed concerning participants' views that law enforcement agencies created distinct values, understandings, and assumptions for men and women. These distinctions led to restrictions or barriers for women. The second category was male resistance to gender integration. A third was gender norms within a society, the fourth was place women as

the minority, and the fifth category was limited opportunities for advancement and training. As a part of the theme of sexual harassment, the following categories emerged: quid pro quo, practical jokes, verbal and physical assault, unwanted comments, and name-calling. Within the theme of family and personal factors, the following attributes formed the categories: pregnancy, breastfeeding, and stress. Finally, within the theme of leadership, the following three codes emerged: impeding women's advancement from lack of training, the good ole boy system, and harsh and unreasonable treatment. Through analysis, I determined these factors as significant components when analyzing barriers that impede recruitment and retention for women in law enforcement.

I included a synopsis of the participant's interview to support my assertion, observed and recorded the themes, and included those themes in each case study's results. The analysis of the questionnaire and interview responses included comparing the emerging themes across all the participants. The themes from participants' data converged on similar overall themes for the findings.

Participant Interviews

This section includes the presentation of each participant's responses in narrative form and the interview selections. To ensure confidentiality and protect the participants' privacy, I assigned numbers to represent the participants' identities to avoid revealing their identities during the analysis and conceal them in the final documentation and write-up of the results.

Participant 1

This participant applied for a police officer position at five law enforcement departments within a 100-mile radius of the southeastern region in Texas. At three locations, the participant passed the required written, physical, handgun, and psychological exams. After receiving positive remarks and completing the history and background checks, she was disqualified from the hiring process at two locations. Participant 1 had received little or no information about these disqualifications; she did not understand why she was disqualified. When Participant 1 inquired about not being considered a candidate for these departments, she received uninformative responses that lacked specificity. When she completed the personal history statements, Participant 1 was told that her signature on a form indicated an understanding that the department did not share the background findings with her under any circumstances. Therefore, the agencies could not discuss the matter anymore. This participant passed the background check for an agency and moved to the interview phase. The interview phase is a standard practice in hiring. The participant was asked several gender-related questions, including how she might combat with a 6’ 2” male suspect, whether she believed that gender was a disadvantage, and whether she could handle working without a partner. The participant believed that she answered with confidence and reassurance that she could tackle patrol responsibilities. After each interview, the participant received no direct response initiated by the county agencies and often wondered if the job had been filled. The participant never held a position as full-time police. However, she has applied for the Texas Department of Corrections and passed the written test, physical test, and oral interview.

The participant expressed that she was unfairly treated due to her size; she stands at 5’ 3” and weighs 135 pounds. Although she passed her physical requirements, she faced a considerable obstacle with upper body strength during the testing. During the pull-ups portion of the test, she heard a male voice remark, “I shit more than she weighs.” The participant could not see who commented, but the sergeant laughed while administering the test. The participant informed me of an article that she read by the National Center for Women and Policing. The report addressed the inherent physiological differences between men and women and acknowledged that upper body strength tests adversely impact women’s candidacy, meaning that men perform disproportionately better than women on such physically demanding exams. The participant does not believe that physical strength is a predictor of an officer’s ability to deal with dangerous situations. She suggested that testing should focus on the applicant’s ability to defuse violent situations and maintain calm. The participant recalled having a sense while growing up that she would become a law enforcement officer. The participant believed that she was fully able to perform as an officer, but men in law enforcement were not open to having women as officers. As a result, the participant lost hope of obtaining a position as a police officer and is satisfied working within the criminal justice system.

Participant 2

This participant had 8 years of experience working in a police department. She is one of five women in this department. Participant 2 graduated with a bachelor’s degree in criminal justice and earned a graduate degree in victim studies. Participant 2 has dreamed of becoming a special victims’ detective since she was 11 years old. Participant 2

reported no issues during academy training and was prepared for the uniformed patrol division, which included walking a beat and dealing with street criminals. Participant 2 became alarmed when she perceived more respect from the civilians whom she encountered on patrol than from her male colleagues. In addition, her supervisor sexually harassed her both physically and verbally.

This participant reported that the supervisor made derogatory comments about her appearance. The sergeant sent sexually suggestive text messages and invited her to a conference, where he would have a hotel room. The participant recalled a moment on shift when the sergeant urinated in front of her patrol car. She said he instructed her "to come over here and hold it for him." The participant was unsure how to respond but refused the advances. After the participant responded to the supervisor, she became an outcast from the men on the night shift. She believed the sergeant told these male officers to purposely intimidate and push her to quit, although she could not prove her conclusions. The participant did not report the inappropriate behavior to anyone, not even to the sergeants' supervisor. The participant stated that she feared mentioning these events, and after another position opened, she transitioned to the job of school resource officer. Participant 2 enjoys working with students and is actively building rapport with disadvantaged teens. Participant 2 no longer deals with colleagues who attempt to harass or embarrass. However, she reported that colleagues appeared to think less of her, and she hears rumors about how they do not believe the school resource officers provide a valuable service.

Participant 3

Participant 3 has been on patrol for 12 years and has been employed by three different agencies. In the first agency, she was one of 16 female officers; this department was the largest of the three, employing 142 officers. In the second agency, she was one of six women, and in the third, she was one of four. Participant 3 had similar experiences with all three agencies; the male colleagues were inhospitable. Participant 3 found a mentor at the first agency, a female civilian employee employed for 17 years. Her mentor described the pressures and resistance to women working in law enforcement. Participant 3 asked if this mentor had received negative comments, such as “dear,” “woman,” “just another set of tits,” and “something nice to look after a long shift.” The mentor received different treatment, but it was probably due to her age. According to the mentor, the men treated her as a mother figure, but she had heard these men verbalize their feelings about other women in policing. These men expressed that policing is a man’s world. Participant 3 realized that she had to fight to prove herself, and the mentor pushed Participant 3 to stand up for herself. In all three agencies, Participant 3 perceived that men viewed women as weak. Male officers from all three departments proceeded to push her "buttons," she said; for example, they attempted to upset her, pushed her to resign, and competed to make the funniest offensive statement to her.

Participant 3 recalled her mentor stating that she should never cower and say nothing in response to the men’s comments. Participant 3’s mentor made it possible to ignore these offensive comments. The mentor encouraged Participant 3 concerning her performance as an officer and constantly reminded her that she inspires other women.

Although Participant 3 wanted to defend herself, she chose the high road and continued a law enforcement career path. Participant 3 expressed determination to be promoted. She had gone through a promotion board three times, and despite scoring above other candidates, her department chose not to promote her. She described that becoming a sergeant at her agency is entirely up to the chief's discretion, and she perceives a deep-rooted "good ole boy" system. Participant 3 recognized a need for better leadership and described her police chief as a retired marine with the mindset that women belong at home in the kitchen.

Participant 4

This participant has 2 years of experience with a sheriff's office. Participant 4 stated that after 2 weeks of on-field training, she realized that she had to develop a thick skin because male colleagues were making the work more challenging every day. She pushed through the challenges by showing awareness of the colleagues' behavior and intentions; for example, she once said, "I will be documenting that." Participant 4 described the comment as in response to a male officer refusing to cover her. She made it clear to the department that she was there to train and work hard. However, she did not perceive that these colleagues respected her. She mentioned sharing a bond with two male colleagues, both of whom attended the academy with her. She noted that they supported her even when the others did not.

Participant 4 shared frustrations with the two supportive male colleagues who had the same qualifications as she did but were placed above in rank. She often must remind herself that these officers are not at fault and leadership is to blame for unequal treatment.

Even though she scored 2 points higher on her firearm qualification in the academy than these colleagues did, leaders allowed these men to take the lead on a hostage negotiation and placed her on the perimeter. The lieutenant stated bluntly that her placement was because “she was female.” This incident was not the only occasion when agency personnel passed her over for special assignments or made snide comments about gender. The participant expressed no difficulty with avoiding becoming irritated at the command. She remembered not to show frustration or disagreement with decisions because she might be found insubordinate and disciplined. She expressed wanting an opportunity to demonstrate how she could be a valuable department member in dangerous situations. She perceives that volatile conditions can be de-escalated by talking with suspects and negotiating. Participant 4 noted that when male colleagues address dangerous situations, their demeanor often escalates the circumstances to a physical level. She believes that women have inherently excellent verbal skills. These abilities allow women to work differently with suspects. The participant also believes that women do possess the physical skills needed to succeed in law enforcement. Participant 4 does not know if she wants to stay with a department that assigns her to the least desirable placements. She suggested that the “old school good old boy” system is tiring to deal with every day.

Participant 5

Participant 5 has 3 years of experience with two different departments. She left the first department after 6 months because she faced frequent sexual harassment from her male colleagues. New hires in this department were required to have a picture taken in full uniform. The image was used for multiple purposes, such as the officers' picture

ID and social media, introducing the community to the department's newest member. Participant 5 was shocked to find that some of the community members discussed her appearance, and the comments included that she should wear the uniform on a porn website, and she could take the male officers to jail anytime. However, more disturbing to the participant was that her picture was in the men's restroom and had been defaced with drawings of breasts and other sexually degrading depictions. At the time, participant 5 worked the night shift, and she waited until all the male officers were engaged in a call before acting on the situation. Then, she went to the department, entered the men's restroom, and removed the picture. The participant finished the shift, and after returning home, she cried over the comments written on the image. She recalled one, "Tag team," and another said, "let's donkey punch." Participant 5 never addressed the bullying with management out of fear of retaliation. After the picture incident, participant 5 never came to work wearing makeup because she feared the men judged on appearance rather than her competence and abilities.

Participant 5 left the agency as soon as possible due to a lack of support for women. She was angered over the double standard for men’s professional conduct in law enforcement when interacting with female officers. Participant 5 recognized her need to leave the department when she began having stomach pain and headaches and was not sleeping or eating properly.

The participant had an excellent field training officer in the second department. He instructed her to take command and not allow others to talk down to her. He always reminded her that she passed her training with excellence and is a hard worker. He

ensured that the men in the department were exposed to the notion that women working in law enforcement were acceptable. He explained that male officers with negative attitudes were dangerous and women working with professional attitudes in their environment were not. Participant 5 enjoys working in the second department but is not motivated to expand her experience or seek promotion. Participant 5 has adopted the belief that life is more comfortable as a woman who stays out of the spotlight without drawing attention.

Participant 6

Participant 6 has been employed for 8 years as a law enforcement officer. She began her career as a military police officer for the National Guard. Therefore, she had become accustomed to being in a minority group. Being one of the few women was something she expected when choosing a career in the military and policing. However, after 8 years on the job, she did not anticipate the discrimination she would encounter after becoming pregnant. The participant was one of two women on a 60-officer police force. Her department had no experience with pregnant officers and no policy to accommodate her. Participant 6 shared the news with her commander, and he reacted unexpectedly. The commander immediately showed signs of stress and tried to reassign her. He stated she would face pressure due to the department's culture, and she did not understand until her male co-workers expressed unhappiness with working with a pregnant woman. She quoted a male co-worker as stating, “It was not fair women could be in law enforcement and get pregnant, that it is a waste of a valid spot.” The participant did not complain about this discrimination because she did not want to be labeled. She

attempted to continue working on patrol, and although her pregnancy was not affecting her ability to perform her patrol duties or endangering the baby, male colleagues, or community members, she was forced into administrative work. Her duties consisted of interviewing witnesses, writing reports, and issuing permits. The participant stated that if she becomes pregnant again, she will hide the pregnancy to avoid working behind a desk and risk losing her job. While she was pregnant and under duress at work due to colleague attitudes, she experienced physical symptoms not experienced previously, such as headaches, stress, upset stomach, and depression. The participant exhausted all accrued paid sick, vacation, and personal time, forcing her to return to work earlier than anticipated.

The participants' family suggested she file a complaint against the department because they violated the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Pregnancy Discrimination Act. However, she fears others might retaliate, and she could be terminated. If terminated, she would be without a source of income and fighting with city officials. She perceives that speaking out on discrimination regarding pregnancy and childcare could prevent her from living out her dream career. This participant has worked extremely hard on the job, and even with the experiences of discrimination, she wants to continue in law enforcement.

Participant 7

Participant 7 has been in law enforcement for 3 months. At the time of the study, she was in the field training process. A field training officer (FTO) helped translate the information she learned at the academy such that it was consistent with the department's

policy and expectations on street performance. The participant perceives the FTO is failing in his duties by subjecting her to discrimination and harassing behavior. Before her first shift, she was in the debriefing room when the FTO approached and stated that training her was a punishment for a complaint a citizen had filed against him. Her FTO compared training a female officer to appointments at a colonoscopy; she quoted him as saying, “Colonoscopies are less painful than spending 3 weeks with an incompetent law enforcement officer.” The participant expressed concerns that FTOs were inadequately screened for the role. She perceives the FTOs at the agency as having marginal skills concerning diversity, and they held her to a higher standard than the male recruits. When she reflected on her academy training, she mentioned that the absence of female instructors should have been an indicator of what was to come. The participant said she is deprived of positive female role models, i.e., no women are in positions of authority. No women at the agency serve as defensive tactics or firearms instructors, creating the impression that the agency supports the notion that women cannot perform these functions. Although the experience with this FTO exposed her to male colleagues’ negative attitudes toward women, the participant planned to continue working with the FTO and strive to become one. She wants to expose the agency to gender equality and reinforce women as valuable members of the department.

Findings

This section contains the results obtained from data analysis. The following themes were developed from the questionnaire data and interview transcripts to obtain personal experiences and examine possible challenges that affect the recruitment and

retention of female police officers, recruits, and applicants in southeastern Texas. Data from the questionnaires and interviews were organized by codes and analyzed further to modify the codes into a list of categories. Critical elements within the categories assisted in identifying preliminary themes.

The following section is organized by the four primary themes that emerged during the data analysis process. The findings contain an understanding of each theme's significance as it relates to the research question. The research questions were based on identified gaps in the literature. Although the sample size is small, saturation is apparent because all women experienced some aspects of each major theme.

Theme 1: Gender Discrimination

Perceptions of covert forms of discrimination by participants dominated these findings. Most participants described gender discrimination, particularly mentioning they often faced sexism and the existence of a “good old boy's network.” The participants described that in this male-dominated career field, discrimination limited opportunities for female officers to excel. All these women reported disparaging treatment. All the participants experienced offensive remarks regarding their gender. For example, some reported coworkers and superiors as condescending by referring to women as the weaker sex and unable to dominate. Five of the participants suggested that toxic masculinity infused their departments from its founding. All participants alluded to covert discrimination as a concern for retaining female police officers. One participant remarked that the male officers would not take a suggestion or direction from her. She clarified that her role was not to order the male officers, but they would not accept a comment or

suggestion while working. For example, a suggestion, such as “go around to take cover on the back, and I will cover the side,” was often ignored. Another participant suggested that this theme exemplifies an overall attitude among colleagues. For example, a participant explained that she received specific calls because she is a woman. All seven participants reported feeling competent in their abilities as officers, despite the differences in physical strength between men and women.

Theme 2: Sexual Harassment and Assault

The participants raised sexual harassment and sexual assault as the most critical concerns. Most comments were associated with harassment, particularly unwanted sexual advances, and gender-related jokes. Participants do not perceive that police leadership is taking steps to address sexual harassment and assault. Only one of the participants reported being touched in a way that made her feel uncomfortable. Five participants reported a coworker or superior pursuing a date or sexual relationship, and one of them reported a supervisor who solicited sex so that the woman could receive or maintain job-related perks. All the participants reported sexual jokes, sometimes directed towards them. Four of the participants reported attending sexual harassment training when they were first hired. However, the training was “one and done.” All the participants stated that agencies should have annual refresher training for sexual harassment policies and protocols.

In a profession where women are significantly outnumbered, all the participants sought to fit in with their departments. Six of the participants expressed the need for officers who observe sexually harassing conduct to report it. However, these six

participants described male officers as having witnessed events of sexual harassment and did not report it. The one participant who reported unwanted touching alleged her male colleague slapped her buttocks in front of other officers. However, none of the male officers stopped their behavior. All the participants reported feeling uncomfortable at least once while seeking employment or after they were employed. Nearly all the participants reported that the little acceptance they received had not come easy, and they labeled negativity as "butch," "pansy," or "dikes," and “weak” by other officers.

Theme 3: Family and Personal Factors

The participants voluntarily indicated that family or other personal matters were critical influencers in their turnover decisions. The participants were explicitly asked about the influence of personal and family issues on their decisions to leave organizations. Common themes included children, pregnancy, breastfeeding, spouses, and other issues related to officers' personal lives.

Two of the participants recounted problems that departments created concerning pregnancies. When the participants became pregnant, they experienced negative comments, judgment, criticism, and negative performance evaluations. These participants reported that the commanding staff did not offer any choices when reassigning their position. Both recalled being told that only police who have on-the-job injuries are entitled to accommodations. One participant was not forced to take unpaid leave, but the department denied her accommodations for properly fitting gear such as a bulletproof vest and duty belts. The department where she worked routinely provides officers’ equipment, and when male officers outgrow their uniforms, these departments promptly

fill the requests. The participant learned that the departments did not plan to provide uniforms and equipment due to costs because pregnant women would not wear them again. The participant received instructions to take a uniform out of the equipment closet. These agency uniforms return to the department if an officer leaves or is terminated and are then kept in the equipment closet unless discarded. The closest fit for a uniform was men's extra-large shirts and a large pair of dress pants. The uniform did not fit correctly, and she wore suspenders to align the pants. Both participants consulted a family member and an attorney but refused to report the discrimination.

When asked about parental leave or childcare issues, all the participants expressed fear in telling a supervisor about her situation because they heard how the men talk about officers who are mothers. One participant reported no interest in becoming pregnant because the department might treat her worse than before. The participant stated, “law enforcement is relentless.” She explained that pregnancy is against the cultural norm and career suicide.

Theme 4: Leadership

Participants specified deficient or toxic leadership influenced their decision regarding joining, staying, or leaving law enforcement. Key subthemes discussed on this topic included the importance of leadership, female role models, and mentoring. Within this theme, the comments focused on the extent to which the administration created a hostile work environment and reduced job satisfaction, motivation, and interest in staying in law enforcement. None of the women who participated in the study were in a

supervisory position. These results indicate an inadequate representation of women in ranks.

The lack of women in department leadership contributes to discrimination and a lack of mentors for women who could help them overcome bias. For example, two participants worked for smaller departments with few women and mostly male leaders, leaving no one to help them navigate the difficulties of being a woman in law enforcement. Three participants reported double standards for men and women. One recounted an instance in which she received a reprimand for being late to a community function, but a male officer arrived later than she did and received no reprimand. Two participants stated their organization does not give women any opportunities to seek promotion, which they indicated affects their work ethic due to lack of support. All the participants perceived that law enforcement professionals do not address the barriers that prohibit women from successfully navigating a male-dominated profession.

The findings for the first three themes discussed the significant results and how they supported the themes. The themes emerged from the participants' narratives regarding experiences with gender discrimination. The fourth theme emerged from how the participants felt about their agency, given the cultural dynamics.

Findings by Research Question

The remainder of this chapter presents the findings associated with the research questions.

RQ1: What Factors Do Policewomen Believe Contribute to the Lack of Women in Law Enforcement?

When entering law enforcement, the participants were aware of their minority status; however, 5 of 7 participants were undeterred and had a long-term interest in working in law enforcement. All participants had similar beliefs about the obstacles to hiring and retaining more women in law enforcement. Those obstacles included no mentoring, presence of sexual and gender harassment, good ole boy mentalities, difficulty with male officers, and no direction or communication by superior officers. Although all the participants had some deviating responses, they reported wanting acceptance from male colleagues; i.e., they sought credibility to help people and make a difference.

RQ2: What Do Policewomen Perceive as Barriers in the Field of Law Enforcement?

All the participants stated that being a woman was the number one barrier that hindered women's opportunities in law enforcement. The stereotypes aimed at women were the top barrier throughout the participants' careers. Five of the seven participants perceived they had to prove themselves as equal to the male officers. Male officers were not expected to prove competence to be considered as adequate officers. Men do not have to overcome stereotypes, such as weak, emotional, ditzy, and irrational. Six of the seven participants with experience in law enforcement stated that stereotypes are the second barrier to overcome. Other obstacles noted from most participants were the lack of trust and loyalty male officers often gave to other male officers but typically not to female officers. Four of the seven participants stated, the more they tried to earn respect, the more isolated they became in the department.

RQ3: Did Those Barriers Affect Your Desire to Stay in Law Enforcement?

All participants reported that gender disparities affected their motivation to stay in law enforcement. They perceived that gender disparity in police forces is not unique to the southeast region. These women struggled daily to maintain positivity on the job due to recruitment and retention issues, barriers to promotion, police culture toward women, department politics, and caring for their children while working. Three participants described the good ole boys club as the number one issue affecting their motivation to stay in law enforcement. The negative attitudes towards them and the impossibility of building relationships were the most significant obstacles. The hardest part of overcoming these obstacles is failing to break through the political ramifications of speaking up about the system. Four participants described the lack of mentors and role models hindering their personal development and damping their eagerness to continue working in law enforcement. Five participants reported that ostracism, isolation, sexual harassment, and discrimination make them feel insecure and incompetent, leading them to change careers. All participants felt adequate training and effective policies could affect the male officers' attitudes, and they could learn how to navigate and adjust in light of the diversity and aims for equity in the contemporary work environment. Three participants indicated that having a family while working in law enforcement affects female officers more than males. They perceived that having children and pregnancy complications hurt their careers in law enforcement.

RQ4: What Experiences at the Academy Affected the Female's Ability to Complete the Academy?

Regardless of marital status or number of children, all the participants reported that the academy was challenging physically and mentally. Three participants entered the academy in excellent condition and prepared themselves mentally for what they expected to endure. However, they experienced the instructors criticizing them and reassuring their male counterparts; thus, reinforcing that women were not capable as police officers. As a result, the participants lost self-confidence and the ability to perform duties. Six participants were directly challenged because they were women, and four reported being singled out and hazed as women. Some observed that the academy instructors participated, condoned, and ignored discrimination directed toward them, including harassment and retaliation.

RQ5: What Was the Potential Females' Perception of the Hiring Process?

One participant recommended that in the contemporary environment, policing should move toward community-oriented patrol work. She felt agencies would benefit from hiring women because of their communication skills and valuable negotiating ability. She also felt agencies that recruit women find a decreased use of excessive force. This participant expressed that gender dynamics would remain in policing, but she believed agencies had voluntarily hired women, and affirmative action policies supported increasing law enforcement women.

RQ6: What Were the Participants' Experiences During their Hiring Process?

One participant sought employment at several agencies and reported that the testing and selection system unfairly biased against women. Specifically, she reported bias in the interview process. She was asked gender-specific questions, such as, "given your size, how would you handle this situation?" The participant was in the interview process with other applicants, and a man who was approximately her size was not asked that question. She perceived the interviewers were biased against women serving as law enforcement officers, which led to inadequate evaluations for women candidates. Despite difficulty with the physical requirements, the participant passed, but the department's physical requirements were designed to exclude women; she reported the requirements were outdated and not job-related. The hiring and selection process adversely affects women candidates because they tend to drop out during the hiring process. All the study participants reported that agencies overlooked female applicants and remembered being singled out during their application. Six participants stated the agency sought reasons to disqualify candidates but did not hold similar standards for the male officers as they did for women. The agencies requested that applicants have experience in related services such as military or investigative skills. For example, examining female applicants' credit scores was more in-depth than their male counterparts, and the department took exception if relatives had a criminal history.

Chapter 5 includes an introduction and summary of the findings. The following section is the interpretation of the findings. The potential for social change and the

implications for actions follow the findings. Finally, future recommendations for research are described, and the chapter ends with conclusions.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

In this study, participants explored their experiences and challenges during their recruitment and related to female police officers' retention in southeastern Texas. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of female police officers, recruits, and applicants living in southeastern Texas and their perceptions of the challenges and barriers for women. Seven female police officers, recruits, and applicants in southeastern Texas provided their experiences and perceptions during data collection via interviews and questionnaires. Analysis of the female participants' responses produced details and examples of these perceived barriers and the meanings of these experiences for the participants. Overall, the current participants' perspectives or experiences revealed four themes: gender discrimination, sexual harassment and assault, leadership, and family and personal family factors. Based on the findings of this study, and as supported by the literature, several conclusions were drawn regarding the lived experiences of the participating female police officers, recruits, and applicants.

Interpretation of Findings

Although women have been part of police departments for decades, the findings of the study concur with much of the prior literature showing that women still face significant hurdles to success in law enforcement (T. Brown et al., 2020; Rabe-Hemp, 2017; Rossler et al., 2020). Most participants reported their perceptions that women had not made much progress as police officers because men continued to resist their inclusion. A major theme from this study, gender discrimination, was well supported by

the participants as the foremost barrier that policewomen faced. Many studies are consistent with current findings that gender discrimination underlies the lack of progress that women have experienced in law enforcement (J. Brown et al., 2019; Kurtz & Upton, 2018; Murray, 2021; Rabe-Hemp, 2017; Schulz, 2017). Women in policing have faced persistent discrimination in law enforcement despite the social change that has led to advancement in other career fields (Rabe-Hemp, 2017; Rossler et al., 2020); however, through motivation and relentless determination, some women have upheld progress, and some experience job satisfaction (Helfgott et al., 2018; Morabito & Shelley, 2018).

Barriers in the form of discrimination remain due to the police culture that reflects male dominance (T. Brown et al., 2020; Helfgott et al., 2018; Morabito & Shelley, 2018; Rabe-Hemp, 2017; Schulz, 2017). In describing the discrimination, three participants stated that they had not been accepted as officers, despite the fact that some had been employed on a force for several years. They indicated that the department was so hostile that it was easier to interact with criminals than with their male counterparts. As found in the literature, these study participants reported feeling unaccepted by male colleagues, and they were labeled negatively by name-calling and derogatory jokes (Rief & Clinkinbeard, 2020). The sometimes-harsh treatment that the participants in this study received reflects the experiences described in other studies, where women were labeled by male officers using the most offensive terms. These results were expected when considering labeling and conflict theories. Policing is considered a highly gendered profession (Silvestri, 2017), and negative labeling of women is a part of men's dominance and behavior associated with holding power (Graue et al., 2016). Conflict

theory includes understanding how men control leadership by degrading women in policing (Kurtz & Upton, 2018; Murray, 2021; Rief & Clinkinbeard, 2020). Women participating in the current study described that their challenges remained similar over their careers and did not appear to wane over time. The consistency in women's experiences is consistent with findings from Rabe-Hemp (2017) showing that harassment followed women who changed employment locations. For example, several participants indicated discrimination started during the hiring process. Findings from the literature also support the study participants' experiences before and during the hiring process. Most participants expected adverse treatment before seeking a job and described how they had been mistreated when entering the profession and after they began their careers. Some evidence supports that women are less interested in law enforcement as a career because they perceive the potential for mistreatment and negative experiences with colleagues (Cambareri & Kuhns, 2018). Researchers have supported that women have faced discrimination during recruitment, hiring, and training (Jolicoeur & Grant, 2018; Kringen, 2019; Rice & Barth, 2017). Moreover, after obtaining a position, they are often viewed as inferior (T. Brown et al., 2020; Kurtz & Upton, 2018; Rabe-Hemp, 2017; Rief & Clinkinbeard, 2020; Schulze, 2012) and as tokens (Nowacki et al., 2021; Todak, 2017; Watkins et al., 2019). For example, historically, an area of policing where women have been excluded is patrol (Rabe-Hemp, 2017; Schulz, 2017); without experience, women cannot rise through the ranks to achieve leadership. As reviewed in Chapters 1 and 2, the statistics concerning women in policing, whether on patrol or in leadership, bear these conclusions out as well.

The barriers to promoting women in policing are embedded in the male-dominated police culture (Rabe-Hemp, 2017). Thus, the theme of leadership derived in this study concerned the lack of access that women have to leadership roles, and relatedly, the lack of leader support from men in command and the absence of female mentors. The control that men exert in the form of overt behaviors and sanctioned policies alienates women in their workplaces and creates a barrier to promotion (T. Brown et al., 2020; Rabe-Hemp, 2017; Rief & Clinkinbeard, 2020; Schulz, 2017; Silvestri, 2017). Regardless of their determination, these participants could not feel as if they were fully integrated into the police culture. This finding is similar to those of other studies in which women reported lacking attachment and identity with police culture (T. Brown et al., 2020; Rabe-Hemp, 2017; Rossler et al., 2020). The few examples from the study participants suggested that even little support from male superiors could make a difference for women to acclimate and feel part of a department.

Additionally, those participants who described mentoring experiences with women in law enforcement indicated that they benefitted from the support. This finding is consistent with the literature showing that female mentors helped prepare women for the police culture and gave strategies for coping (Green, 2019; Helfgott et al., 2018; Morabito & Shelley, 2018; Rossler et al., 2020). All the participants found that a lack of leadership perpetuated discrimination against female officers. Nearly all the participants found that leaders were biased toward men and that the male-dominated culture was ingrained such that a hidden curriculum or agenda was set. Other results suggested that the agenda is enforced to message that women are not welcome (Kringen, 2019; Kurtz et

al., 2012; Seklecki & Paynich, 2007). The participants reported that leaders fuel the masculine persona associated with policing, and they expected not to have the same promotion opportunities as men because the process favored male officers with connections to other male officers.

As the fallout from a leadership vacuum, all participants indicated that they felt continual pressure to prove themselves worthy and equal to men, whereas the men did not have to compete directly with women. Consistent with the labeling that they experienced, these participants also noted that the stereotypes that male colleagues perpetuate motivated them to show their value to their departments. Other results similarly showed that female officers often respond to pressure with motivation to excel and exceed the expectations of male officers (Graue et al., 2016; Helfgott et al., 2018; Morabito & Shelley, 2018). However, researchers have reported that some women respond to stereotyping with hyper-feminine behavior that often does not support their efforts to prove themselves (Haake, 2018; Helfgott et al., 2018; Rabe-Hemp, 2009, 2017; Somvadee & Morash, 2008). None of the participants reported the need to adopt this hyper-feminine behavior in response to pressure to show their worth. Some participants indicated that they believe that working to show their abilities is a preferable way to address the labeling and stereotyping on the job, and they perceive that they can overcome these situations better if they take the high road. Recent results have also shown that women perceive they can overcome the challenges and barriers associated with stereotyping and the expectations that they must demonstrate their competence (Helfgott et al., 2018; Morabito & Shelley, 2018; Shelley et al., 2011). The stereotype of

women as less able and competent in law enforcement persists despite much available evidence supporting that women are as capable as men in these roles (Ffrench & Waugh, 2017; Kurtz & Upton, 2018; Lagestad & Van den Tillaar, 2014; Schulze, 2012; Williams & McShane, 2018).

Another major theme from the study concerned sexual harassment and assault. The labeling described by the participants and in the literature underlies discrimination and is a form of harassment; however, the harassment described by female officers can take severe forms when the labeling contains sexual content and becomes physical. All the participants reported experiencing unwanted sexual attention from male law enforcement personnel using verbal and nonverbal behavior. The participants found these advances offensive, undesirable, and unreciprocated. All the participants reported blatant sexual remarks and experienced sexist hostility and discrimination; the participants agreed that male officers had a prejudicial attitude that defined them as sexual objects. Most participants reported that coworkers had attempted to establish a sexual relationship, and even supervisors had engaged in unwelcome gender and sexually related hazing. All the participants stated that their agency's leadership tolerated sexual harassment. The participants indicated no interest in filing formal complaints of harassment because they perceived that the complaints could set back their careers. Some participants described the toll that remaining silent has taken on their health and lives. Researchers have reported that female officers experience low job satisfaction and retention, and more significantly, they suffer from poor mental and physical health outcomes (Bourassa Rabichuk, 2021; Rabe-Hemp, 2017; Todak, 2017; Todak et al.,

2021). All participants reported that harassment caused adverse effects on their health from stress, frustration, and depression. Those who recalled crying said that these thoughts stemmed from their mistreatment by coworkers, field training officers, and supervisors.

The study participants were not inclined to report harassment partly due to their experiences with pregnancy and family considerations. The literature mirrors these reports by detailing the negative responses of departments to pregnant women (Shjarback & Todak, 2019) and the lack of family-sensitive policies (Boag-Munroe, 2019; Shjarback & Todak, 2019). Consistent with the current findings, Kingshott (2013) and Shelley et al. (2011) found problems for female officers who are pregnant and child-rearing. The barrier for these female officers is supported by inadequate policies concerning pregnancy, family leave, and lack of flexibility in work schedules (Boag-Munroe, 2019; Kingshott, 2013; Shelley et al., 2011). Again, the policies are founded on stereotypical attitudes of male police; men assume that women cannot perform their duties when pregnant and cannot perform their jobs adequately if they have children (Boag-Munroe, 2019; T. Brown et al., 2020; Kurtz & Upton, 2018). The participants in this study reported similar experiences, and some remarked that a need to support their families was a part of their reluctance to report harassment.

The participants in this study sought the same law enforcement opportunities as men and believed that agencies could cultivate equitable prospects for women to become successful if proactive steps were taken. Some participants indicated that joining law enforcement had been a dream since childhood, and others reported knowing that they

were interested as they entered adulthood. Other researchers have found that young women who pursue policing as a career had developed an interest at a young age (Clinkinbeard et al., 2021). Participants supported implementing training and education for all department personnel to demonstrate that women also do possess the qualities of strength, courage, independence, and assertiveness. Some researchers on diversity have suggested similar tactics to address bias and change law enforcement culture (Gibbs, 2019; Haake, 2018). Also, departments could benefit immensely by enlisting human rights groups committed to gender equality. The participants mentioned that officers with negative views toward women would resist and oppose the training. As reported by Nowacki et al. (2021), some male officers perceive that hiring women and other members of minority groups leads to the loss of jobs for men.

To encourage male officers to participate in the training, common misconceptions about inclusion and diversity should be directly addressed with facts (Gibbs, 2019; Rice & Barth, 2017). First, leaders should be educated about women's strengths and abilities in law enforcement to change the culture before mandating educational programs for front-line leaders and officers. A participant suggested that departments use racially diverse panels to implement educational programs (i.e., panels whose members are screened for gender bias and include civilian and sworn law enforcement employees in the hiring and promotional process). The civilians should view each applicant’s folder, be a part of the interview selection, and see the qualifications that each applicant offers. Allowing civilians on the panel provides much-needed perspectives concerning community needs (Gibbs, 2019).

Participants provided insight into what police agencies should do specifically concerning harassment. Some suggested implementing a zero-tolerance policy on discrimination and harassment, detailing potential consequences for those engaging in discriminatory behavior and describing unacceptable behavior in all departments. Five participants cited that leadership must be consistent when reducing harassment. The leadership at law enforcement agencies should establish a culture that does not tolerate sexual harassment by developing a policy and providing training. For behaviors associated with sexual harassment, the participants suggested that the policies should clearly define sexual harassment, the expected standards, the reporting requirements, and disciplinary actions for not reporting and engaging in sexual harassment. Participants stated that a training exercise could benefit their agencies because the training could reinforce that sexual harassment is unacceptable, the expectations for appropriate behaviors by employees, and the potential consequences for those engaging in sexual harassment.

Based on the findings from this study and as supported by literature, one of the deterrents for women in law enforcement is the lack of mentors, especially female mentors. All participants cited the lack of mentorship as a significant influence on their development and career advancement. A participant who stated that a female mentor was substantial for understanding department culture and gave her inspiration suggested establishing female mentors for female officers at the beginning of their careers. The mentoring program aims to support retention over the long term. This participant committed that she was ready to take on mentoring for any female officer entering her

agency. Three of the seven participants stated that a mentor need not be a woman. The mentorship programs might be useful in an officer's life or career, as mentors provide career guidance, support, and work-life balance advice (Helfgott et al., 2018; Morabito & Shelley, 2018). However, agencies must consider personal and family factors for women joining law enforcement. Based on the findings from this study and as supported by the literature, individual factors such as pregnancy and parental leave are a primary concern for women in law enforcement, whether they are applicants, are beginners at the academy, have patrol experience, or are up for a promotional opportunity (Clinkinbeard, et al., 2021). All the participants reported this concern raised when applying and might pertain to recruiting women into law enforcement.

Three out of the seven participants noted that having and raising children significantly impacted their decision to stay in law enforcement while expressing frustrations and challenges with command staff as their expectation of job first and family second. Previous literature revealed that women, even recently, remain the primary caregiver in the home, and refusing or taking on any additional duties given by leadership hinders the women's chance of advancing. Another significant stress for women seeking a career in law enforcement was the lack of pregnancy and parental leave (Bourassa Rabichuk, 2021). Two participants described getting through a pregnancy without guidance or assistance as an obstacle and an added stress. One participant feared having another child while employed in law enforcement when considering future career advancement. The findings suggested that after policewomen have children, they might not put in the long hours required or travel for work; three participants expressed that

motherhood impeded promotions. The findings suggested the need for agencies to investigate these issues and create policy solutions, which would allow women choices and opportunities to join law enforcement and have a family.

Social Change

The most significant positive social change that could emerge from this study is increasing female officers' presence in the field. The increased representation of women can benefit the transforming climate within law enforcement agencies and reduce the prevalence of gender discrimination, under-utilization, and sexual harassment (Rabe-Hemp, 2017). Women in visible positions within communities are likely to promote community relationships with the police (Dirbaz, 2014; Ffrench & Waugh, 2017; Koski, 2021). Improvements made in law enforcement agencies would inevitably help both female and male employees within law enforcement. The findings could contribute to the existing literature focusing on the obstacles for women, including negative attitudes of male colleagues, gender discrimination, and sexual harassment. The participants who shared their experiences in this study revealed the need for additional research in this area. The results of this study could encourage legislators and police administrators to revise their current policies and standard operating procedures.

Implications for Actions

Several recommendations are proposed based on the lived experiences and perceptions of female police officers, recruits, and applicants. The results revealed implications for action that law enforcement stakeholders should consider to support women and reduce the challenges for law enforcement careers. A summary of the

findings demonstrated four significant themes. Based on the findings and conclusions from this study, law enforcement agencies should provide these opportunities for women:

- Law enforcement agencies should ensure women receive equal treatment during the application, recruiting, and field training. Male officers should receive training that encourages positive relationships with their female counterparts. Policies for disciplinary actions are necessary when a male officer refuses to build a working, friendly relationship with female officers because the community benefits from successful police relationships. The agencies should provide implicit bias training to all employees.
- Law enforcement agencies should ensure that all employees receive training in sexual harassment and workplace violence. In addition, all employees should know when to report sexual harassment and be aware of the consequences of failure to report it. Finally, agencies should consider forming a women's group, allowing women to network, mentor, and support one another.
- Agencies should establish a maternity policy, as well as a family impact policy. In addition, leadership should have policies for women and men with families, especially women with children, when requesting time off and provide notices of the required length of travel and first duty station assignment.
- Law enforcement agencies should assign mentors to female officers. After completing a basic patrol officer's application, these mentors should

encourage women to aspire and apply for police officer positions, such as SWAT, K-9, and leadership positions. The agencies should reconsider the hiring and promotional process to ensure the most qualified individuals are considered regardless of gender. Agencies should design a recruiting process tailored for women, where female officers are with female applicants through the entire process.

Future Research

Although this study provides valid, helpful information about seven female police officers' lived experiences, the small number of participants could limit the transferability of results. To fill this potential gap in research, the study should be duplicated with a comparable sample population in other geographic areas. A replication of this study could identify similarities and differences among results from various locations concerning participants' experiences with gender discrimination, sexual harassment, lack of leadership, and personal and family issues. Further research could benefit from analyzing female police officers' community perceptions of their contributions and representation in law enforcement. Previous findings showed that women rely less on physical force and more on their communication skills than men, which results in fewer potentially violent confrontations (Koski, 2021). They are also less likely to be involved in excessive force cases (Dirbaz, 2014; Ffrench & Waugh, 2017; Koski, 2021), and female victims of violence tend to feel more comfortable dealing with female officers than with male officers (Koski, 2021; Rabe-Hemp, 2017). Also, in a male-dominated

profession, women are shown to augment teamwork and effectiveness within an agency (Koski, 2021).

Additional research on the opinions of male officers could benefit all stakeholders. There are a disproportionately low number of women in law enforcement, and male participants could compare the men's and women's views of officer resistance, outdated standard operating procedures, sexual harassment, gender discrimination, and limited promotional opportunities. This study and others proposed could identify the reasons for the low representation of women in policing and the "alarmingly slow rate" at which women are entering the force.

Conclusions

This study sought to understand and describe the lived experiences of female police officers, recruits, and applicants in southeastern Texas. The researcher explored the participants' challenges to determine how they contributed to the retention of female police officers, applicants, and recruits.

The aims were to identify the barriers, which contribute to the underrepresentation of women in law enforcement. The participants' perspectives offer insight into the essence of this phenomenon. The literature review contains an exploration of the history and barriers for women in the law enforcement workforce. Through questionnaires, and in-depth interviews with seven female officers, recruits, and applicants, the researcher understood the lived experiences as well as the challenges. Results showed that each of these women had unique challenges but also had interconnected problems. These study outcomes can inspire stakeholders to make changes on behalf of women in law

enforcement. If policies evolve and recommendations such as those of this study are heeded, women can better succeed in law enforcement. If women in policing have positive experiences, they could serve as motivators and mentors for other women and open opportunities to increase their numbers in law enforcement.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

Please give a brief history of your experience.
Why did you decided to work in law enforcement?
What advantages do you think females bring to law enforcement?
a. Give examples of situations when being a female officer helped resolve a situation.
What challenges have you faced being a female in law enforcement?
a. Have you ever been in a situation/call that you were unable to handle because you were a female?
b. If so, how did you deal with this?
What are the positive, negative, and neutral stereotypes concerning female law enforcement officers?
What stressors do female law enforcement officers endure?
How difficult was it for you or your female co-workers to "infiltrate" into a predominantly male profession?
What is the advantages do female officers bring to the community?
What qualities and/or attributes make females equipped for working in law enforcement?
What perceptions do you believe your male colleagues toward females in policing?
a. Especially within your department?
b. Within other departments with which you have had contact?
What do you believe citizen's perceptions are towards female in policing?
a. Specifically within your department?
b. Within other departments with which you have had contact?
Have you or other female officers experienced being assigned gender specfic roles or excluded from specialized units"?
a. Specifically within your department?
b. Within other departments with which you liaisoned or contacted?
Have you or other female officers experienced gender discrimination in the law enforcement field?
a. In the application/hiring process?
b. In assignment placement?
c. In duty responsibilities?
Did you have any negative experiences during the hiring process? If so, what were those experiences?
Did you have difficulty achieving the physical fitness requirements? If so, which requirements?
Did you find it difficult to compete with male officers during the academy and FTO program?
How does your significant other and/or family feel about you being in law enforcement?
a. What were their initial concerns with your career choice?
b. Despite any concerns or issues, did they fully support your career choice?

What specific concerns, if any, did your spouse, family, and friends have with you joining law enforcement

a. Did their concerns change after successfully completing training?

How easy/difficult is it for females to promote to a position of rank within your department?

a. Has any female officer, to your knowledge, encountered any problems obtaining a position of rank?

b. If so, what were the problems?

Do you believe physical attributes of males and females affect their ways of approaching/handling a situation?

a. Has physical differences between male and female bodies affected you in your routine duties?

b. What, if any, issues in strength have you encountered?

c. Does defense tactics training discriminate against females?

d. Do academy standards accommodate the physical differences between males and females?

Which duties, if any, do female officers perform better than male officers?

What do you believe is the greatest pressures females in policing encounter?

a. Co-worker acceptance?

b. Community approval?

c. Do you believe your partner, peers, and/or community have trust issues with you because of your gender?

Are their situations in which female officer may be seen as less authoritarian/aggressive or too “sympathetic” and “emotional”?

Has motherhood, pregnancy, or other health issues affected your law enforcement career? If so, what were the effects?

Have you seen motherhood, pregnancy, or other health issues affect the law enforcement career of other female officers? If so, what were the effects?

How do you balance family life and shift work?

What has been your best memory as a police officer?

How has the Department assisted you in reaching your career goals?

What advice can you give to women who want to become police officers?

Appendix B: Qualitative Questionnaire

What is your age?

1. 25 or less
2. 26-30
3. 31-35
4. 36-40
5. 41 or older

What is your specific job title? (i.e.,: uniformed patrol officer, school resource officer, detective) _____

What is your rank? _____

How long have you been serving in your current position? _____ year(s) and _____ month(s)

Have you held any other positions in the law enforcement field? _____

If yes, what was the title of the position? (i.e.,: uniformed patrol officer, school resource officer, detective)_____

How long did you serve in that position? _____ year(s) and _____ month(s)

How long have you been serving in law enforcement? _____ year(s) and _____ month(s)

What is your race? (Mark only one)

1. Hispanic
2. Black
3. White
4. Other Pacific Islander

What is your highest completed level of education?

1. High school diploma or GED.
2. Associate's or other two year degree
3. Bachelor's degree
4. Graduate study or graduate degree

How many people (apart from yourself) are assigned to police your particular section or patrol area? _____

How many (including yourself) are female police officers? _____

What is your family status?

1. Single, no children
2. Married, no children
3. Single and never married, with children
4. Married, with children
5. Divorced or separated, no children
6. Divorced or separated, with children

If you are currently married, is your spouse

1. A law enforcement officer?
2. Active military duty or other para-military profession?
3. A civilian, but formerly in law enforcement or other para-military profession?
4. A civilian, never in law enforcement or military?
5. N/A I am single

If you are currently married does your spouse...

1. Work full-time?
2. Work part-time?
3. Stay home full-time?
4. N/A I am single

Are any of your family members in law enforcement or have prior law enforcement experience? (Circle all that apply)

a. Father
b. Mother
c. Brother(s)
d. Sister(s)
e. Son(s)
f. Daughter(s)
g. Other
h. None of my family are in law enforcement

If one or both of your parents were in law enforcement, which of the following are true? (circle all that apply)

a. Father retired law enforcement
b. Father 10-20 years law enforcement
c. Father 5-10 years law enforcement
d. Father 0-5 years law enforcement
e. Father still active law enforcement
f. Mother retired law enforcement
g. Mother 10-20 years law enforcement
h. Mother 5-10 years law enforcement
i. Mother 0-5 years law enforcement
j. Mother still active law enforcement
k. Neither of my parents served in law enforcement

Would you like to stay in law enforcement until retirement?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Not sure

Is there anything on the topic of women in law enforcement that you would feel uncomfortable saying in front of another female law enforcement officer, who is serving as the research interviewer?

1. Yes
2. No

If yes, which issues or opinions would you feel uncomfortable discussing. (i.e., gender discrimination, sexual harassment, glass ceiling)

_____

What do you consider are the two advantages (if any) of being a female police officer?
What do you consider two disadvantages (if any) of being a female police officer?
What changes could be made to improve things for women in policing?

Thank you for time in completing this survey. If there are, any other comments you would like to make or any other issues you would like to bring up, please feel free to write about them below. We can discuss the issues in further during our interview process.

Appendix C: Letter to the District Attorney

Dear District Attorney,

My name is Kimberly Eikenberg, a female law enforcement officer. I have dreamed of making a difference for the people around me, which started my law enforcement passion. Ensuring I had the best credentials and paper qualifications to land my dream job, I majored in Criminal Justice and minored in Psychology, and graduated from Sam Houston State University in 2011. Soon after completing that task, I began Graduate work, graduating in 2013 with a Master of Science in International Strategy and Security Studies. While enrolled in the Master's program, I applied and was accepted into a Houston, Texas Police Academy. After a long a grueling six months, I graduated from the TCOLE approved academy. Due to my dedication to learning everything possible about the criminal justice system, I decided to continue my education and am a doctoral student at Walden University.

I was thrilled when I was offered a position with a Police Department in 2013 and thought it was an excellent opportunity to dedicate my preparation, knowledge, and personal commitment to serve my community. After several months, I noticed that I was one of the few female officers in my department. Throughout my career, I continue to be the sole female in the department. As a female police officer, my journey and experience have allowed me to travel to surrounding agencies, where I noticed a lack of females in other departments. Therefore, I have decided to dedicate this study to analyze females' number in law enforcement agencies.

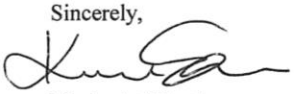
I am conducting a qualitative study titled "Examining Possible Challenges in the Recruitment and Retention of Female Police Officers in the southeast Texas region." The research explores whether female officers' experiences by evaluating perceptual challenges possibly associated with their gender.

I plan to administer a survey, questionnaires and interview at least ten female police officers in Texas's Southeast Region. I understand the District Attorney's Office has access to police personnel records and would be able to find contact information for previous or currently employed female police officers, former or current female recruits, and potential or past female applicants.

There are no risks involved for any of the participants of the study, they will not be compensated for their participation, and their participation is voluntary. I request your permission to release their information to study the disproportionately small number of females in law enforcement compared to the overall demographics of police officers. Receiving your office's information avoids publicizing the study by posting flyers or inquiring at the police departments, where male co-workers could overhear.

Once you grant permission in writing, my proposal will be forwarded to the International Review Board at Walden University. With their approval and yours, I will create consent forms and begin recruitment. If you so desire, I would be happy to share my findings with your office. Thank you in advance for your efforts on my behalf.

Sincerely,



Kimberly Eikenberg

Appendix D: Letter from the District Attorney

Mark A. Boernio
First Assistant
Todd Dillon
Assistant Criminal District Attorney
Amy McCorkle
Criminal Investigator

ROBERT H. TRAPP

San Jacinto County District Attorney

August 12, 2020

Kimberly Eikenberg

I have reviewed your request to receive previous or currently employed female police officers, former or current female recruits, and potential or past female applicants' contact information. I understand that this is part of your requirement to complete your doctorate. I also understand you will be working with your university's IRB department to ensure that the project aligns with all requirements outlined by university standards.

I admire any study that will enhance diversity in law enforcement. As the District Attorney, increasing diversity can improve relations between law enforcement and communities, making my job rewarding. Your research can create fair, legitimate, and accountable law enforcement agencies, and I see nothing in your request for information that will be controversial or troublesome to release.

You have permission from my office to move forward with your research. Again, it is my pleasure to cooperate with this study. I will be most interested in your results.

If you require additional information or have any questions, please feel free to contact our office.

Respectfully,

Appendix E: Letters to Participants Appendix E: Letters to Participants

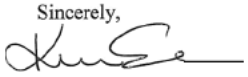
Dear Potential Participants,

My name is Kimberly Eikenberg, a fellow female law enforcement officer. I am in the process of completing my doctoral degree at Walden University. Currently, I am conducting a qualitative study titled "Examining Possible Challenges in the Recruitment and Retention of Female Police Officers in the southeast Texas region." The research seeks to understand the factors that affect the recruitment and retention of female police officers.

Participants who take part in the study will fill out a survey and questionnaire about their experience as a female police officer, recruit, or applicant. The participants will also be asked to partake in an interview. The interview's purpose is to explore the female officers' experiences and evaluate the perceptual challenges possibly associated with their gender.

If you are interested in helping detect the primary causes for the low percentages of women in law enforcement, I would appreciate the completion of the survey and question, as well as the opportunity to interview you. This research aims to overcome the male-dominant culture by attracting and hiring a sufficient number of women in law enforcement. All interviews, surveys, and questionnaires will be kept confidential. If you are interested in participating in the study, please contact me as soon as possible. I can be reached via email. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitateto contact me either.

Sincerely,



Kimberly Eikenberg