2022

Perspectives of African American Police Officers Post-Ferguson

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Abstract

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Abstract

As attention to racially charged events and subsequent social activism rhetoric increases, researchers and professionals express a growing interest in understanding the influence of such events on police officers' psyche. Researchers have demonstrated that since the 2014 death of Michael Brown, in Ferguson, Missouri, widespread media attention of police violence has negatively impacted police officer behavior, attitudes, and self-legitimacy levels. Yet, underrepresented within these empirical studies are the perspectives and experiences of African American police officers. This qualitative phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of five African American male police officers employed in North Carolina during the post-Ferguson era through semi structured interviews. This study used the social identity approach to explore participants' professional and personal identities, confidence, and policing behavior following the multiple high-profile fatal police interactions with persons of color in the last decade. Interview data from the five officers were thematically sorted using interpretative phenomenological analysis. Findings yielded four overarching themes as the most telling and most consistent among the participants' experiences: (a) recognition of a larger problem, (b) understanding the purpose of policing, (c) awareness of duality, and (d) beaten not broken. Acknowledging and appreciating how African American officers experience and process racially charged police interactions can create positive social change in the work environment of policing, vital to African American officers' wellbeing.

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Dedication

This dissertation and doctoral degree are dedicated to my father and grandfather, whom I lost during this journey. Though you two were not physically present for part of this ride, I am grateful and at peace knowing you guys watched over and guided me the rest of the way. I told you both that I would do this, and you all had nothing but genuine love and support for me. I know you both are looking down on me proud, with a smile on your faces, clapping, that despite everything I was dealt over the last few years, I never lost sight of the end goal. I love you, Daddy, and I love you, Grandpa. Thank you!

Acknowledgments

Thank you, God, for keeping me and my family close and helping me through the most difficult time in my life, and giving me strength to press on despite the circumstance.

To my mom and brother, my biggest cheerleaders, thank you for your endless love and support throughout this entire process, though I know it hasn't been easy. But we did it.

To my extended family and friends who supported me along this journey, thank you for all your positive energy and willingness to assist with anything I may have needed along the way. Also, to all of my Angels in Heaven, thank you! Thank you, to my committee chair Dr. Goldstein, committee member Dr. McPhaul, and URR, Dr. Latifses, for all your leadership, advice, and expertise along the way.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

In the wake of Michael Brown's 2014 death in Ferguson, Missouri, there has been a considerable rise in public discourse regarding the legitimacy of police officers and their racially disparaged use of force in the United States (Wolfe & Nix 2016; Fridell, 2017; Torres et al., 2018). Since then, various other hostile and fatal police interactions with unarmed Black individuals continue to be broadcast, increasing public attention towards racial injustices. As American society grappled and adjusted to the change in normalcy global pandemic Covid-19 curated, the African American community was also reeling from immense viral footage and coverage of slayings of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd. Though America's historic racially divisive roots were proven to still be strong by these tragedies, the implications of being Black in America continued to be underscored (Brown, 2020).

On February 23, 2020, Ahmaud Arbery became the victim of racial hate and vigilante justice, as he was “hunted” and fatally shot by two White men while jogging (Brown, 2020). Less than two weeks later, on March 13, 2020, 26-year-old Breonna Taylor was shot and killed in her home by police during a botched drug-dealing operation in Louisville, Kentucky (Brown, 2020). Months into the grieving the death of Taylor and Arbery, viral bystander footage of the death of George Floyd sent shockwaves throughout the Black community, yet again. In Minneapolis, Minnesota, on May 25, 2020, George Floyd was murdered by then-police officer Derek Chauvin (Brown, 2020). Not only was George Floyd another African American individual publicly and violently killed by

police, but how his death occurred was horrendous. For nine minutes and 29 seconds, Derek Chauvin kneeled on the neck of a handcuffed Floyd as three other officers assisted and prevented any health aid intervention. Floyd's health visibly declined within the almost 10 minutes of fatal and unnecessary use of force, yet Chauvin still refused to remove his knee from the pleading restrained Floyd. Milliseconds before the halfway mark of 9 minutes, paramedics arrived, and Derek Chauvin finally relieved the pressure from George Floyd's neck, but this was nonbeneficial. Floyd was pronounced dead at the scene.

The deaths of Arbery, Taylor, and Floyd added fuel to the already blazing national outrage of racial injustices and subsequent local and federal police reform initiatives and demonstrations that resulted from similar police-involved killings of unarmed Black individuals. Their deaths echoed parallel treatment and phrases "I can't breathe" seen and heard during the 2014 deaths of Michael Brown and Eric Gardner, which ignited the initial spark in discourse. However, these similarities also highlight the minimal progress made in how African Americans are treated by most institutions in America (Brown, 2020). Since 2013, American society has responded with heightened emotion to the murders of unarmed Black individuals and many are frustrated with the lack of change. Individuals are caught at an “inflection point” of societal priorities and forced to choose between pro-police and pro-Black lives; wedged in the middle of this debate are African American police officers.

As attention to the widespread divisive discourse of negating and creating mutually exclusive political and social issues of justice, equity, equality, over pro-police

and pro-Black lives rights and protections, the perceived expectations of African American officers potentially curate distress. During increased public cynicism toward police, African American officers are expected to perform their professional front-line duties and stand in solidarity with their fellow officers. Though, they are still and can be a victim of the law by these same "brothers in blue," off duty and face rejection of the African American community (Paul & Birzer, 2017). The overarching demands, expectations, and vulnerability of the African American police officer since Michael Brown's death contribute to the development of role strain and overload as they overlook the implications of race and professional role responsibilities.

Existing research indicates highly publicized volatile police interactions with persons of color or mega-threats produce negative emotional responses and future work behavior and self-concept changes in African Americans (Leigh & Melwani, 2019). As a result, double consciousness and marginality experiences among African American officers intensify (Dukes, 2018; Kochel, 2020; Rapasky et al., 2020; Wilson & Wilson, 2014). Yet, very little empirical literature has paid attention to these public service employee experiences during this time. Therefore, this qualitative study aimed to examine the lived experiences of African American police officers during the post-Ferguson era, informing police organizations and scholarly academia. Thus, positive change in the work environment for African American officers may result.

This chapter introduces a brief background on the importance of hostile and fatal interactions with persons of color and why this study is needed. The chapter also includes a statement of the research problem, its purpose and guiding research questions, and an

overview of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks explored in greater detail in Chapter 2. The nature of the study, specific definitions, assumptions, scope, and design, in addition to limitations and delimitations, and its potential significance will also be discussed.

Background

Scholars suggest the death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, is a pivotal pinpoint in time for police, as the profession has experienced a tremendous amount of public scrutiny (Deuchar et al., 2019). Brown's death sparked countless local and national demonstrations that accompanied criticisms and fallacies of law enforcement personnel and practices and reform petitions by social activism campaigns such as "The Black Lives Matter" movement. The ability to record police behavior in real-time has ultimately allowed society to hold police accountable. As a result, police officers have become more mindful of bystanders. Researchers contend the coverage of Michael Brown and various highly publicized interactions have led to change in police officer psyche and community interaction behaviors (Torres et al., 2018). More so, some police believe a “war on cops” has developed (Nix et al., 2018). Thus, officers have begun to display self-preservation, avoidant behavior, and purposeful racialized depolicing practices in African American communities, out of fear or to cope with the stress (Nix et al., 2018; Shjarback et al., 2017). This behavior change has come to be defined by scholars as the “Ferguson Effect” (Hosko, 2018; Torres et al., 2018; Wolfe & Nix, 2016). Although the events in Ferguson serve as an essential pinpoint for police research, various other high-profile hostile and fatal police interactions with unarmed Black individuals have contributed to the straining

of police-minority relations since. These post-Ferguson events containing "visible evidence" of brutal minority-police interactions, researchers contend, underscore an "inflection point in the modern civil rights movement" (Dixon & Dundes, 2020, p.1). Thus, academia should examine this era.

Amid the global pandemic of COVID-19, the death of George Floyd concluded a short-spanned trilogy of high-profile profile deaths (e.g., Ahmaud Arbery & Breonna Taylor). Thus, Floyd's death is an emotional tipping point for the African American community (Dixon & Dundes, 2020). Though a tragedy, researchers propose Floyd's death prompted a much-needed discussion concerning the ability to separate the actions of a rogue officer from the collective identity of the police profession (Dixon & Dundes, 2020). However, given the historic nature of the development of the police profession, this capability is seemingly complex for some populations, especially members of African American community.

As popular media and social media outlets catalyze the death of Black individuals and subsequent social activism rhetoric, it is crucial to understand how all parties involved are affected, especially those who find belonging in both groups. Yet, the literature is very narrow regarding the experiences of this population of police officers in general and their perspectives of the hostile and fatal police interaction with persons of color. According to Dukes (2018), existing historical literature regarding African American police primarily focuses on "marginality and discrimination experiences, and African Americans involved in policing. Scholars have also focused on the interaction and comparison of attitudinal/behavioral patterns between White and African American

officers" (Dukes, 2018, p.3). More so, theoretical research circumvents exploration of the African American police officer population.

Prior scholars have centered discourse on the historical spillover of police-minority relations and its implications for future behavior and interactions using the frameworks of social identity and self-categorization theories (Hornsey, 2008; Murphy et al., 2018, Murphy et al., 2015). Identity conflict theorists have also begun to refocus theoretical policing research discussion to female police officer experience (Veldman et al., 2017) and organizational behavior consequences for African American employees. For example, scholars have examined high-profile police-minority interaction's impact on organizational behavior for public service employees. Findings suggest propaganda influences public perception of public service job responsibilities (e.g., police and firefighters; Mourtgos & Adams, 2019; Patil & Lebel, 2019). As a result, these employees are less willing to engage in proactive job initiatives (Mourtgos & Adams, 2019; Patil & Lebel, 2019).

In general, the African American community is impacted explicitly by fatal and hostile police interactions with persons of color, taking up to seven mental health days per person per year following these events (Bor et al., 2018). However, research regarding the impact of such events on African American individuals in public service roles is limited. Examining the perspectives of African American police officers is essential, as it underscores the psychological implications overlooked social issues are causing.

Existing sparse studies regarding African American police officers and their relationship with recent fatal and hostile police interactions have used anomie theory and double consciousness and representative bureaucracy (e.g., Dukes, 2018; Kochel, 2020) as theoretical bases to understand experiences. Researchers suggest African American officers empathize with racial and social justice protests following hostile and fatal police encounters but experience rejection from the African American community and the policing organization (Dukes, 2018; Conti & Doreian, 2014; Morin et al., 2017; McCarty et al., 2019). Consequently, these experiences lead to feelings of double marginality (Dukes, 2018). African American officers are not accepted by either party, potentially leading to periods of isolation or feelings of displacement. Given the void in focus, a gap in understanding the severity of double marginality experiences for African American police officers arises. Acknowledging and appreciating how African American officers experience and process racially charged police interactions can assist in understanding the complexity and flexibility of the African American police officer identity found inside and outside the police profession.

Problem Statement

African American police officers often struggle to balance and fulfill the responsibilities ascribed to their professional and race/ethnic role associations (Kochel, 2020). For instance, given the history and treatment of African Americans by police, African American police officers endure strong negative sentiments from the Black community. Often, the African American community perceives Black cops as “Sell Outs”, “Uncle Toms”, traitors, or symbols of structural oppression (Wilson & Wilson,

2014; Wilson & Henderson, 2014). At the same time, policing organizations curate and instill a collective elitist mentality through paramilitary training and discrete psychological warfare tactics (Conti & Doreian, 2014; Doreian & Conti, 2017; Dukes, 2018; Manjarrez, 2019). As a result, fellow "brothers in blue" expect African American officers to prove their devotion to the values of solidarity, loyalty, and protection while on the force, despite adverse public perceptions (Kochel, 2020). This dilemma becomes even more challenging as the public view various propaganda regarding hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color and popular media's attention to subsequent social justice movements like *Black Lives Matter* and the various *#JusticeFor* campaigns and protests increase.

Since 2014, media outlets have become inundated with images and videos of the various hostile and fatal police-minority interactions, curating various individual-level issues for African American officers. As attention to the widespread divisive discourse of negating and mutually exclusive political and social issues of justice, equity, equality, over pro police and pro Black lives rights and protections, the perceived expectations of African American officers potentially curate distress. It is within this time of increased public cynicism toward police African American officers are expected to perform their professional front line duties officers and show devotion to "fraternal bonds" by standing in solidarity against the rejection of the African American community (Kochel, 2020; Langford & Speight, 2015; Marier & Moule, 2018). However, how can an African American Officer show their loyalty to fellow “brothers in blue” and enforce the law

during these times while still being a victim of the law by these same brothers in blue off duty (Paul & Birzer, 2017)?

Until recently, prior research regarding the police profession primarily focused on everyday stressors and related health issues such as organizational and societal demands and expectations (Nisar et al., 2018; Stogner et al., 2020; Violenti et al., 2017). Following the viral and immense coverage of the police-involved death of Michael Brown in 2014, academia has begun to examine new triggers of stress that American officers may endure because of the intersection of race and law enforcement duties in respect to racially charged crises. The overarching demands, expectations, and vulnerability of the African American police officer since Michael Brown's death contribute to the development of role strain and overload as they overlook the implications of race and professional role responsibilities. Leigh and Melwani (2019) suggest highly publicized volatile police interactions with persons of color, or "mega threats," can produce negative emotional responses and future work behavior and self-concept changes in African Americans. More so, these events intensify double consciousness experiences in African American officers (Dukes, 2018; Kochel, 2020; Rapasky et al., 2020, p. 171; Wilson & Wilson, 2014).

American society's increased attention to police violence against persons of color and subsequent perpetuation of hostile rhetoric has affected officer behavior and attitudes (Hosko, 2018; Wolfe & Nix, 2016). This hypothesized cause and effect relationship is known as the "Ferguson Effect" (Wolfe, & Nix, 2016). Proponents of the “Ferguson Effect” propose this phenomenon best explains the decrease in motivation, self-

legitimacy, and willingness to engage with specific communities by asserting that the increased recording and dissemination of controversial police interactions have created a fear of being labeled and accused of racial profiling or excessive force (Shjarback et al., 2017; Deuchar et al., 2019; Nix & Wolfe, 2017; Torres et al., 2018; Wolfe & Nix, 2016). However, current literature's understanding of this new phenomenon has plateaued, as there is a lack of scientific examination of the "Ferguson Effect" (Deuchar et al., 2019; Wolfe & Nix, 2016).

This newly developed hypothesized term “Ferguson Effect" has been criticized for its lack of systematic exploration and its grounded foundation of anecdotal evidence and guesswork to partially explain the uptake in crime rates and social activist movements since 2014 (Gross & Mann, 2017; Nix & Wolfe, 2017). Additionally, previous studies have neglected to examine the Ferguson Effect's operationalization and its relationship to potential changes in officer motivation and attitudes (Rosenfeld, 2015; Wolfe & Nix, 2016). Another gap in literature understanding is the absent perspective of minority public service employee narratives. Scholars have only understood Police officers' lived experiences on a limited basis, as studies use White officers as control points. Vaguely found in empirical studies are African American police, military veterans, and servicemember experiences and perspectives (Hall et al., 2020; Gau & Paoline, 2017; Wilson & Wilson, 2014). Thus, researchers urge new studies to include more representation of smaller southern, rural African American police officer experiences (Wilson & Wilson, 2014). Therefore, this study examined the lived experiences of African American police officers during the post-Ferguson era by

addressing individual officers' perspectives of racially charged events while highlighting a population that existing police literature has neglected (Kochel, 2020; Torres et al., 2018; Nix & Wolfe, 2016, 2017; Nix & Pickett, 2017).

Purpose of Study

This qualitative phenomenology study aimed to capture African American male police officers' lived experiences during the post-Ferguson era. Specifically, this study sought to understand how African American Police officers experience racially charged events and how these lived experiences contribute to understanding professional and self-identities. This study also explored how African American police officers describe their confidence and policing behavior following increased public attention to racially charged events.

Research Questions

The research questions that guide this study are as follows:

Research Question 1 (RQ 1): How does the African American Officer perceive hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color, and what meaning do these events contribute to understanding their ascribed race and professional identities?

Research Question 2 (RQ 2): How do hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color create, perpetuate, or challenge the concept of Identity conflict among African American Police officers?

Research Question 3 (RQ 3): How do African American Police officers describe their confidence and policing behavior following heightened public attention to hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color?

Conceptual Framework

This study utilized the social identity approach and identity conflict as a guide to the interview protocol and analysis. As it relates to this study's research questions, this integrated approach explains the multiple personas African American police officers may have and how racially charged events create, perpetuate or challenge conflict between racial and organizational identities. Tajfel and Turner's social identity theory (1979) posits that one's sense of self develops through the process of categorization, identification, and differentiation (Hirsh & Kang, 2015). This theory asserts that individuals hold group/role membership statuses essential to their understanding of who they are and how they behave. The membership's self-perceived importance and salience allow the individual to adopt the ascribed group/role behavioral norm. However, because individuals can simultaneously possess and operate within multiple social roles and group identities, individuals may find themselves having to sort through their various identities based on their environment or situation (Melton & Cunningham, 2014; Hirsh & Kang, 2015).

This study sought to understand the lived experiences of African American police officers during the post-Ferguson era. Using the premise of social identity theory and identity conflict, one can maintain that African American police officers experience mental distress based on their membership statuses. The social identity theory was used as a lens to deepen the understanding and description of the African American police officers' multiple identities. African American police officers are members of the African American community, subjected to the external stressors of being Black in America. In

addition, African American police officers are members of the police organization, which expresses the need to honor the unwritten code and remain loyal to their brothers and sisters in blue, regardless of criminality or severity of the crime (Kochel, 2020; Langford & Speight, 2015; Marier and Moule, 2018). Thus, the social identity theory was used as a lens to examine the contribution of situational cues like police interactions with persons of color to provide African American officers' understanding of their professional and self-identities. Chapter 2 discusses this more thoroughly.

The identity conflict concept deepens the conceptual understanding of the psychological impact situational cues like police interactions with persons of color have on African American police officers as they occupy multiple salient identities (group or role). The identity conflict concept posits social identities have differing rules, expectations, and norms that guide behavior. A situational cue may provoke the appearance of multiple salient identities in a given social context, curating distress due to conflicting behavior standards (Hirsh & Kang, 2015). Thus, this study used the conceptual framework of identity conflict to develop interview questions and conduct theme development in data analysis. Chapter 2 has a more detailed explanation of the social identity theory and identity conflict.

Nature of the Study

This study used an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to increase academia's understanding of male African American police officers' lived experiences in North Carolina during the post-Ferguson era. This study aimed to describe how African American police officers experience racially charged events and how these lived

experiences provide an understanding of professional and personal identities, confidence, and policing behavior. Thus, a qualitative, IPA methodology was appropriate. Qualitative research is most applicable when the goal is to obtain an in-depth understanding of the human experience of a phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Gill, 2014). It also provides researchers with a first-hand participant interpretation of the social world (Erickson, 2011; Ravitch, 2016, as cited in Wheeldon & Faubert, 2009). As Gill (2014) explained, IPA aims to explore in detail how participants make sense of their personal and social world, and the meanings particular experiences or events hold for participants (p.126). Thus, through an interpretive phenomenological design, unique and raw African American police officer lived experiences can be told, coded into themes, and examined for meaning (see Valentine et al., 2018).

This study utilized purposeful homogeneous snowball sampling to recruit five English-speaking, African American male police officers, who work in North Carolina to participate in recorded individual semistructured interviews, ranging from 60 to 90 minutes. This data collection method allows participants to speak freely within the parameters of the researcher-developed interview questions, resulting in the ability to examine and interpret linguistics and observed behavior to create “meaning units” or themes (Alase, 2017). Consequently, I gained an in-depth understanding of converging and diverging lived experiences of African American police officers during the post-Ferguson era and develop empirical knowledge regarding contributions hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color provide.

Definitions

The following definitions were used in this study:

African American: For this study, African American is defined as anyone whose ethnic identity is Black and lives in the United States of America (United States Census Bureau, 2018).

Bracketing/ epoche´: For this study, Bracketing is defined as the process of removing researcher ideologies of a phenomenon to lessen potential influence on interpretation. Bracketing and epoche´ terms are used interchangeably (Valentine et al., 2018).

Post-Ferguson Era: For this study, Post-Ferguson Era is defined as the elapsed time since Michael Brown's death on August 9, 2014 (Deuchar et al., 2017).

Police officer: For this study, a Police officer is defined as law enforcement personnel with regular patrols, responds to emergency and non-emergency calls, and observes people and activities to ensure order and safety; this includes sheriff's deputies (Bureau of Labor Statistics, n.d).

Lived experiences: For this study, lived experiences are defined as events that are actually lived through by the person or group (Burkholder et al., 2016).

Hermeneutics: For this study, hermeneutics is defined as the interpretation of lived experiences using the language of the participants (Burkholder et al., 2016).

Assumptions

This study assumed study participants were representative of African American male police officers; in addition, the assumption was made that participants provided

nondeceptive responses. Participants self-identify based on inclusion criteria; therefore, the belief was that this information is factual, as confirmation of this information is unattainable due to the confidential nature of participant identifiers. Another assumption was that study participants have variant experiences with hostile and fatal police interactions; thus, it was believed that this phenomenon can be studied from multiple perspectives. According to Creswell and Poth (2016), truth in qualitative studies is subjective; thus, the reality is not fixed, rather, represents the intertwining of participant and researcher realities (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). There was also the belief that semistructured interviews were an effective method that would elicit richer participant responses based on lived experiences than an anonymous survey would. The assumption was that by utilizing this data collection method, participants would be able to recall firsthand experiences with hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color without pressure. Doing so would allow an etic view and articulation of participant lived experiences, translating into a better understanding of an overlooked population and the ability to answer research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study was limited to active, African American, male police officers located in the southern region of the United States. This study was specific to patrol police officers. Patrol officers interact with the public daily in various situational environments; thus, these experiences may provide detailed descriptions of homogeneous lived experiences needed to support accomplishing the aims of this study. Therefore, this study did not involve all other police occupations as the daily work environment posits

heterogeneous experiences. This study excluded lived experiences of participants under the age of 20, as persons must be at least 21 years old, per North Carolina guidelines, for employment as a police officer. According to Alase (2017) participants should match the phenomenon's characteristics to enhance and ensure the transferability of phenomenological study results.

This study did not explore the lived experience of police officers outside of the state of North Carolina. The southern region was selected due to the historical significance regarding the adverse treatment of African American individuals in this geographical location. This study also did not include the lived experiences of nonactive officers, as their experiences may have differed from active officers based on their service time. Female lived experiences were excluded from this study, as the focus is on male perspectives, and female experiences may have differed from males for several reasons.

Limitations

One possible limitation of this study is that this research is exploratory and based on narratives; thus, the findings only represent the African American male police officers in this study. More so, this study's results are nongeneralizable to the experiences of more prominent African American police officers' populations. Thus, if this study were to occur in another geographical location, such as Northern or Western regions, outcomes may differ. Additionally, the data collection method for this study is semistructured interviews. Participants were asked to set aside a 60–90-minute window for a private interview. Given the nature of the policing career, off-time availability may be scarce,

creating a challenge in the data collection. More so, the sensitive nature of the research topic, participants may have been skeptical about going on record and being recorded. In qualitative research, the study's findings are to be consistent and repeatable. This is imperative and ensures that the results' interpretations are not figments of the inquirer's imagination but derived from the data. Thus, the qualitative methodology requires the use of multiple validation strategies to achieve credibility, such as member-checking, triangulation, and quality and verification of data (Alase, 2017).

Additionally, researchers suggest that the transferability and creditably of the research are rooted in its research design and planning and researcher bias acknowledgment (Alase, 2017). Given the disclosure of potential researcher biases and the use of the coding cycle and the thematic analysis, this study utilized the dissertation committee to review the processes of collection, analysis, and conclusions drawn. As the researcher, I am an African American female, a subgroup of this study's target population. Therefore, the ability to remain objective and nonjudgmental was challenged. More so, being a female, concluding the male identity may have presented implicit biases as well. To address study limitations participants reviewed data analysis results as a part of member-checking to control researcher bias.

To enhance transferability, this study included detailed descriptions of participant responses, based on reviewed and approved open-ended question guide, in the final publication (Amankwaa, 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), as well as provided detailed descriptions of the research process, as this also constituted dependability (Korstenjens & Moser, 2018). Throughout the entire research process, an audit trail detailed the data

collection process and rationale, which is also represented through illustrations, including tables of the categorization and subsequent subordinate theme schema.

Significance

This research will add to the existing studies concerning the policing profession by examining the meaning-making and lived experiences of current issues of hostile and fatal interactions with persons of color. More so, the scope of this study can open the discussion of the experiences of an under-investigated population. By conducting an in-depth examination of African American police officer's perspectives and experiences with hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color, findings can add to the limited understanding of the complexity and flexibility of the African American police officer identity. Acknowledging and appreciating how African American officers experience and process racially charged police interactions can inform future stress management and coping programming for police organizations specific to African American officers. This research could create positive social change in the work environment of policing, which is vital to African American officers' wellbeing and developing or enhancing retention and resiliency strategies to increase motivation among African American law enforcement officers.

Summary

This chapter presented information on a societal problem that has influenced member's African American community and the policing organization. African American police officers experience distress levels following high-profile hostile and fatal police interactions involving persons of color because of media propaganda or the foundational

cores of the policing organization. Since Michael Brown's death, police have become more conscious of the public and the possible consequences following interactions with the African American community. Thus, they are hesitant and less confident in the post-Ferguson era; however, these findings are more representative of the lived experiences of non-Black officers (Torres et al., 2018; Nix et al., 2018; Shjarback et al., 2017). African American police, military veterans, and service members lived experiences and perspectives are understudied (Hall et al., 2020; Gau & Paoline, 2017; Wilson & Wilson, 2014). This study attempted to fill in the current gap in scholarly research regarding African American police lived experiences and their perceptions of the recent hostile and fatal police interactions involving persons of color. Using theoretical and conceptual frameworks such as the social identity and identity conflict and the interpretative phenomenological approach (IPA) , this study aimed to understand and describe how African American police officers experience racially charged events during the post-Ferguson era. Moreover, this study sought to address how these lived experiences contribute to understanding professional and self-identities and how African American police officers describe their confidence and policing behavior following increased public attention to racially charged events.

In the next chapter, a review of existing literature regarding African American police officers occurs. Chapter 2 includes an in-depth examination of the existing research and strategies that support the concepts from Chapter 1. Chapter 2 consists of the literature search strategy used, the theoretical foundation, and a literature review related to African American police officer experiences.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative, interpretive phenomenological study is to explore the lived experiences of African American male police officers during the post-Ferguson era. Relevant scholarly literature regarding African American police officers is limited, outdated, and narrowly focused. According to Dukes (2018), existing literature primarily focuses on "marginality and discrimination, the historical development of African Americans involvement in policing, and the interaction and comparison of attitudinal/behavioral patterns between White and African American officers" (p.3). More recent scholarship discusses the parallel historical and current police-minority relationship implications for future criminal behavior and police perceptions within the African American community. Thus far, the search of previously conducted research has revealed only two studies (e.g., Dukes, 2018; Kochel, 2020) that examine African American police officer perspectives. Consequently, a problem arises because scholars have only understood police officers' lived experiences from a non-African American viewpoint. Therefore, this literature review focuses on various major vital concepts that have been a focal point of existing literature regarding African American males and policing.

This chapter describes the literature search strategy, followed by a discussion of the theoretical and conceptual framework. Then a historical debrief of African Americans in America, and the evolution of the African American male image is provided, with a synopsis of the transition of the African American males' role to that of a policing

orientation. Finally, this chapter concludes with a discussion of present-day implications for African American males in policing.

Literature Search Strategy

The literature review includes peer-reviewed articles within 2016-2021 from Walden University library databases, internet resources, and books. This study was conducted using PubMed, SocINDEX with FULL TEXT, PsychINFO, Google Scholar, Sage, Scholarworks, ProQuest, and PsycArticles research databases. The base keywords such as *African Americans* and *police*, along with other keywords interchangeably such as *race, male, perception* or *perceptions, history, Ferguson Effect, law enforcement, African American* or *Black, African American community,* or *Black community,* to simplify findings were used; in addition to search terms like *policing behavior, de-policing, Identity, stress, experience* or *experiences, double consciousness,* and *double marginality*. Lastly, specific terms such as *Michael Brown, George Floyd, Breonna Taylor* were used to further focus research studies. Findings produced a variety of results depending on the combination. The majority of the search results addressed the general police profession, police stress sources, crime rates, police-minority relationship implications for future criminal behavior, and police perceptions within the African American community. Unrepresented in these literature results were articles specifically focused on African American police officers. Therefore, these study's reference list within the available articles and used the "as cited by" link to find more aligned research studies. However, these studies often fell outside of the five-year timeframe. Thus, these

were used as historical references and support for super-ordinate themes found in existing literature regarding African American males and their involvement in policing.

Theoretical Framework

The social identity approach will be the framework for this dissertation, consisting of the social identity theory (SIT; Tajfel &Turner, 1979) and the conceptual framework of identity conflict. The most poignant assumption of the social identity approach is that to understand identity, researchers must acknowledge innate cognitive categorization processes, which regulate feelings of belonging and meaning in the world (Jetten et al., 2017). This framework posits that how individuals view themselves and behave in various situations or contexts is a direct result of their perceived social group membership(s), which may be simultaneously possessed and operated based on perceived personal importance. These multiple identities may have inconsistent behavior and attitude norms, causing individuals to potentially experience mental anguish due to a situational cue or stressor that activates these multiple salient identities (Hirsh & Kang, 2015). In this research study, the social identity approach was used to understand the African American police officer identity development. The social identity approach addresses how situational cues within the police profession may psychologically impact these individuals as they occupy multiple salient identities with differing rules, expectations, and norms that guide behavior (Hirsh & Kang, 2015).

Social Identity Theory (SIT)

Sheepers and Ellemers (2019) explain the SIT derives from the early work of Henry Tajfel's (1970) study of minimal group formation and in-group favoritism. As

described by Sheepers and Ellemers (2019), in Tajfel's minimal group study, participants were psychologically assigned to a specific anonymous group, Klee or Kandinsky, to allocate money to each group. Participants were unaware of any other participants in or outside their group; however, participants still favored their ascribed group to positively differentiate from the other. Thus, the findings of Tajfel's experiment implied group membership to be an essential element to self-identity, in addition to a social identity.

Developed by Henri Tajfel, SIT addresses the psychological processes that entail how individuals view themselves and impact future behavior and attitudes (Hughes et al., 2015). According to the SIT, a social identity is an individual's belief that he or she is a member of a particular social group and developed through the cognitive process of self-categorization, social identification, and social comparison (Hughes et al. 2015; Mangum & Block, 2017). Thus, group membership is imperative as it enables organizing, defining, and positioning individuals in society.

Self-Categorization

Researchers explain the process of self-categorization is the innate compartmentalizing of idiosyncrasies between oneself and others based on "self-relevant" in-group and out-group affiliations (Murphy et al., 2018; Sheepers & Ellemers, 2019; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Group affiliation or social group (i.e., gender, religion) refers to a collection of individuals who "share the same emotional involvement in the common definition of themselves and achieve some degree of social consensus about the evaluation of their group and their membership in it" (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, p.15). In-groups (us) are social groups individuals believe they are members of, and outgroups

(them) are groups individuals believe they don't belong to (Murphy et al., 2018). For example, a male football coach may identify as a member of various social groups (e.g., male sex, football team).

Social-Identification

Based on self-categorization processes, individuals find meaning in belonging to a particular social group; form a psychological attachment; and then take on the identification as a group member by synchronizing to the behavior norms of the collective group (Hirsh & Kang, 2016; Jetten et al., 2017; Karelaia & Guillén, 2014; Mangum & Block, 2017; Trepte & Loy, 2017). Thus, the male football coach will behave in a way society has ascribed a football coach's behavior (e.g., tough, loud). However, this assimilation is proposed only to occur if being a football coach is essential to the gentleman's self-image (Hirsh & Kang, 2016; Trepte & Loy, 2017).

Social Comparison

According to the social identity theory, in-group membership is critical to individual self-esteem. Therefore, when membership is deemed necessary to an individual's sense of self, individuals will compare it to similar outgroups to maintain a positive perception of their membership status. Naturally, individuals will negatively view outgroups (outgroup denigration) while viewing in-groups favorably (i.e., in-group favoritism). By doing so, a positive line of marginality (i.e., positive distinctiveness) between groups is formed (Mangum & Block, 2018; Murphy et al., 2018; Tajfel & Turner, 1979); This can also constitute why discrimination occurs (Murphy et al., 2018). Therefore, if the male perceives being a football coach as essential to his self-image, he

will perceive himself and his team more favorably than another football coach and the team at another location. Thus, he may compare records, uniforms, or player and coaching skills to ensure his team is better positioned than the other team, constituting positive distinctiveness.

Assumptions of SIT

According to Tajfel (1979), the theoretical assumptions of SIT are: (1) individuals want to keep a positive view of their in-group memberships to constitute a positive Social Identity; (2) in-group memberships should be positively differentiated from relevant outgroups; and (3) if evaluation of in-group membership is deemed negative, individuals will strategically strive to achieve positive outlooks (p.16). Thus, individuals choose strategies such as group disassociation, redefining group status, or direct competition (Tajfel, 1979, p. 19-20).

Conceptual Framework

Identity Conflict

Developed by Baumeister and colleagues (1985; 1986, as cited in Leong & Ward, 2000), the Identity conflict conceptual paradigm asserts that occupying multiple group memberships may curate issues with fulfilling the behaviors ascribed. As aforementioned, how a person views themselves is grounded in perceived salient in-group memberships, which prompts individual behavior regulation suppression and replaces it with the ascribed normative standards of the group. Although scholars argue assimilation is only to occur based on perceived salience (i.e., importance), displayed behavioral patterns are also driven by situational cues or appropriateness (Hirsh & Kang

2016; Trepte & Loy, 2017). Baumeister (1986, as cited in Leong & Ward, 2000) contends that situational cues curate distress for individuals, as it may provoke the appearance of conflicting identities. For example, how a male football coach expects to act as a football coach in the social context of sports, such as on the football field.

Some individuals may find belonging in multiple social groups, which may have different behavioral expectations (Hirsh & Kang, 2016; Melton & Cunningham, 2014; Murphy et al., 2018; Trepte et al., 2017). Consequently, these individuals may experience distress as multiple identities may be overbearing (Karelaia & Guillén, 2014, p. 206). Thus, the individual feels "torn apart" in an impossible situation. Therefore, to resolve this crisis, one may be forced to betray one or more existing identities (Baumeister, 1986, as cited in Leong & Ward, 2000). For example, the football coach may be a father, husband, or both. Although the expectation is that he is to behave like a football coach on the football field, he cannot continue to display these behavioral patterns at home with his family.

However, if he encounters a setting that triggers the performance of or attention to incongruent identities and context (e.g., father, husband, and football coach), he may experience anguish due to pressure and identity threats (Karelaia & Guillén, 2014; Veldman et al. 2017). Discomfort could also result if the gentleman's child plays for a rival football team against his own, presenting an identity conflict as he finds importance in being a father to his son and a coach to his team. Veldman et al (2017) support this possible experience by positing that social context may influence individuals' perceived external expectations and conformity pressures. For example, suppose the football coach

is presented with a game situation. His child is on the opposing team. In that case, he may experience uneasiness. He may be triggered to perceive his identity as a member of fatherhood, as a target for either positive or negative public or peer perceptions of his ability to handle his team successfully. Moreover, this could also explain stereotyping or prejudicial behavior among individuals.

Prior Application of SIT and Identity Conflict

Researchers have used a similar approach in previous studies discussing police-community relations, primarily using social identity theory albeit without identity conflict. Historically, social identity theory and self-categorization theory have been used together to explain stereotyping behavior, crowd violence and rioting, social influence, conformity, and power (Hornsey, 2008). However, more recent studies have isolated social identity to partially explain minority-police relationships, such as cooperation behavior (e.g., Murphy et al. 2018, Murphy et al., 2015). Scholars have also used the social identity theory to understand the public's responses to police brutality and perceptions of violent interactions (e.g. Johnson & Lecci, 2020, Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2017).

Hughes et al (2015) conducted a quantitative study on the relationship between the racial identity of African Americans and their self-esteem and overall well-being, using the social identity theory and the internalize racism perspective. Their study indicated, members of minority racial groups have difficulty maintaining a positive view of their group, based on the historical racial structure of American Society. However, for African Americans, attaining positive distinctiveness from other racial groups can be

attributed to social creativity, a strategy in which individuals attempt to underscore positive attributes of membership (Hughes et al., 2015). Hughes and colleagues' (2015) study also revealed that group membership and identification for African Americans is vital for their cognitive well-being. Group memberships influence how individuals perceive bias and interpret ambiguous events (Murphy et al., 2018). For example, African American officers have more positive and empathetic views of the public's reaction and behavior following Ferguson events than White officers due to their racial group identification (Kochel, 2020). Researchers assume individuals who perceive their ethnic identity as necessary to their self-image, such as African Americans, are more sensitive to prejudicial discrimination experiences (Murphy et al., 2018).

In contrast, identity conflict has been used to explain irregular activity in behavioral inhibition system and multicultural individuals, gender-role issues, and female police officer experiences, (e.g. Karelaia & Guillén, 2014, Hirsh & Kang, 2016, Veldman et al., 2017). Hence, the limited use of this conceptual framework within police research warrants further exploration. Existing research on identity conflict and social identity theory as a framework in similar dissertations has gleamed one study. Leigh and Melwani (2019) utilize these frameworks; however, their study only examined organizational behavior consequences for African American employees. Among the scarce studies regarding African American police officers, researchers have used anomie theory and double consciousness and representative bureaucracy (e.g., Dukes, 2018, Kochel, 2020) as theoretical bases. More aligned with the subject of this study, Veldman and colleagues (2017) found female police officers were more likely to experience gender-work Identity

conflict, as their gender identification stood out more in the policing organization. Thus, female officers felt officers doubted their performance abilities because of their gender identity. This study could use this example similarly to examine the lived experiences of African American officers, as they are ethnic-dissimilar to the police culture (Dukes, 2018). Haider-Markel and Joslyn (2017) further contributes identity conflict experiences are rooted in historical backdrops associated with specific groups.

Applying SIT and Identity Conflict to African American Police Officers

Prior research indicates that individuals belonging to a minority lower-status or stigmatized group are likely to evaluate their social group negatively (Hughes et al., 2015; Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019). According to the social identity theory, these individuals will be anxious to gain a positive distinction of their group memberships to establish a positive self-image and increase self-esteem (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019). However, because of the historic racial hierarchy in American society, some of those who belong to "non-dominant racial groups" or “devalued” groups, such as African Americans police officers, may be more difficult. That is, individuals who acknowledge their social identity or group memberships are more likely to pay attention to "us and them" relationships (Jetten et al., 2017).

Kochel (2020) posits that African American police officers view themselves as belonging to a minority racial group and a minority member of the police organization's family. Thus, the most efficient way for African Americans in general to achieve positive distinctiveness is through social creativity, or the redefining of how the group is perceived (i.e., black is beautiful; (Hughes et al., 2015, p.28). For example, to change the

narrative in how the police view African Americans and police officers, social activist campaigns such as *"Black Lives Matter"* and *"Blue Lives Matter"* has arisen to change respective groups' perceptions.

Furthermore, Kochel (2020) asserts that the dual social group membership African American police officers possess has conflicting standards for how they govern themselves, creating tension and double marginality experiences. Double Marginality is the feeling of being unaccepted by the Black community or family and by white police colleagues, due to conflicting expectations (Alex, 1969, as cited in Kochel, 2020, p. 8; Dukes, 2018). Therefore, in addition to implementing strategies to increase self-esteem levels, African American police officers may also utilize strategies to cope with the distress of conflicting identity responsibilities (Brewer, 2001, as cited in Mangum & Block, 2017). African American officers may choose to combine similar identities to make one dominant identity; structure the various identities and select a dominant identity; or elect one central identity (i.e., an African American or police officer) while making any additional identity secondary (e.g., an African American who is a police officer vs. a police officer who is African American; Brewer, 2001, as cited in Mangum & Block, 2017). Consequently, the latter identity would support the perceived dominant identity (Brewer, 2001 cited by Mangum & Block, 2017).

The current study attempts to add empirically based knowledge to policing literature by using the social identity theory and identity conflict as a lens to understand the development and maintenance of the African American police officer's self-image. In

doing so, the conceptualization of the implications current and historical events has on African American male officers' ability to sustain a positive identity can be enhanced.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

This literature review relates to key concepts associated with developing the African American male police officer identity. As aforementioned, existing scholarly literature regarding African American Police officers is scarce (Kochel, 2020). Dukes (2018) describes prior studies to explicate African American police officer experience based on the adverse treatment in the policing organization. More recent scholarship discusses the parallel historical and current police-minority relationship implications for future criminal behavior and police perceptions within the African American community. More specifically, current scholarship related to the police profession and specific police perspectives is rooted in the quantitative methodology and survey data collections. Researchers have only examined police officer perspectives through statistical analysis; thus, current publication has only been able to establish a self- legitimacy issue among police officers during the post-Ferguson era (Deuchar et al., 2019; Dukes, 2018; Hosko, 2018; Nix & Wolfe, 2017; Nix & Wolfe, 2016; Nix et al., 2018; Torres et al., 2018; Tankebe, 2019; Trinkner et al., 2019; Shjarback et al., 2017; White et al., 2020; Wolfe & Nix, 2016). Yet, although existing scholars have found phenomena police officers are thought to be experiencing, findings represent white and non-diverse police departments (Deuchar et al., 2019; Wolfe & Nix, 2016). Thus far, the search of previously conducted research has revealed only two studies (e.g., Dukes, 2018; Kochel, 2020) that examine African American police officer perspectives. Though Kochel (2020) uses both surveys

and in-depth interviews to collect participant responses, Kochel's work is the only recent study that explores the perspective of African American police officers during the post-Ferguson era. Kochel's study begins to pivot away from prior studies in which scholars have only focused on White police officers' lived experiences. Nevertheless, still highly absent from literature are African American police officer perspectives. According to Kochel (2020), the weakness of existing literature is its inability to explicate officer experiences nor specifically examine the impacts of African American officers' disposition to racially charged events. Thus, this literature review first uses the framework of Social Identity theory as a lens to explicate the African American male identity development throughout American history. Then, the presumptions of the identity conflict concept are used to examine the evolved Social Identity of both the African American male and the police officer.

Brief Historical Overview of African Americans in America

The police-minority relationship is historically situated within race privileges encompassing the access to control, power, and resources, as the oppressive undertones manifest themselves modern-day (Eastman, 2015; Feinstein 2015; Owusu-Bempah, 2017; Moore et al., 2017). We can see the earliest operationalization of these privileges during the slavery era, in which the treatment of African Americans underscored society's White hegemonic racial backdrop. During this time, darker-skinned individuals were treated less than human and considered inherently inferior to Europeans and chattel property, while whiteness encompassed benefits, including respect, superiority, and humanistic treatment (Hill & Lee 2015; Owusu-Bempah, 2017; Moore et al., 2017). For example, to protect

slave owners' financial wealth, the first publicly funded police force in the United States called slave patrols or "patty rollers" was established (Durr, 2015; Hadden, 2003, as cited in Hinton, 2020; Robinson., 2017). Slave patrols controlled the movements of enslaved and free African Americans and reinforced society's power hierarchy by allowing the dominant majority “free reign” to harass, abuse, or kill African Americans suspected to have escaped (Robinson, 2017; Hasbrouck, 2020). Thus, slave patrols constituted the origins of criminalizing African American individuals' behavior.

After the ratification of the 13th amendment dissolving slavery and subsequent slave patrols, the once observable inherited race privileges and the purposeful allocation of unequal rights and dispersion of power transitioned into more overt methods through structural and institutional measures such as Black Codes (1865-1866) and Jim Crow Laws (1865-1866). Black and Jim Crow Laws protected Whites' material wealth and power stature, while the self-governing powers of newly free African Americans were still systemically and systematically controlled (Hasbrouck, 2020; Robinson, 2017). Although explicit racist and discriminatory legislation is nonexistent modern-day, researchers argue that police organizations are still implicitly entrenched in these ideologies. For example, criminal andpolicing policies like *Get Tough on Crime*, and *Stop and Frisk*, disproportionately targeted and incarcerated minorities. These policies utilized similar discriminatory police practices (e.g., over-policing, use of force, and racial profiling) found in the historical treatment of African Americans. That is, historical legal practices explicitly protected philosophies of White dominance and promoted the inferiority of Black skin (Darden & Godsay, 2018; Durr, 2015; Feinstein, 2015;

Hasbrouck, 2020; Owusu-Bempah, 2017; Robinson, 2017; Smiley & Fakunle, 2016). Consequently, the African American male self-concept development is impacted.

Evolution of the African American Male Image

An African American male's self-concept is fundamentally embedded within American history's notable use of criminalizing gendered racial oppressive stereotypes, media caricatures of African American culture, and systemic discriminatory practices (Bonilla-Silva, 2019; Buckley, 2018; Unnever & Chouch, 2020, p.3). The African American male body has inherently dehumanized and reduced to objectified subjects during the slavery era. For example, the African American male was historically depicted by popular media as the "African American Buck," an inherently dangerous, highly sexual animal who needed to be controlled (Bonilla-Silva, 2019; Curry, 2017; Jefferies & Jefferies, 2017; Rembert et al., 2016; Smiley & Fakunle, 2016; Unnever and Chouch, 2019). This negative depiction laid the foundation for the societal perception of African American males.

During the Reconstruction Era (1865-1877), the African American male image became vilified due to African American mobility opportunities that challenged the White supremacy structure. Thus, "intimidation and violence" tactics were used to rebalance and reaffirm the racial caste system. That is, African American men were criminalized by poplar media as rapists, savages, and innate threats to White women and children (i.e., "Brute") (Moore et al., 2018; Smiley & Fakunle, 2016). This historic macro-aggressive language and behavior are still present today through the micro-aggressive criminal justice and legal practices (Buckley, 2018; Smiley & Fakunle, 2016;

Unnever & Chouch, 2020). Modern-day African American males are found to display paralleled behavior. In recent studies by Unnever and Chouch (2020) and Buckley (2018), the African American male image is impulsively violent because of the intertwining of historic racial ideologies and disparaging media portrayals of a hyper-masculine criminal offender. Notable riots and federal policies further support this depiction during the 1960s "War on Crime" era, which disproportionally targeted and incarcerated African Americans, transcending the African American image to "thug" (Hinton, 2020; Smiley & Fakunle, 2016). Consequently, the intertwining of historical racial ideology and disparaging portrayals of African American male image in society may have profound implications for working on a police force.

African American Males in Policing

Understanding the origins and reasons for African American male police force involvement is vital in conceptualizing the idea of double marginality experiences. It provides a critical historical backdrop for marginality between the African American community and African American officers.

Role Evolution

The first image of a non-dominant majority member in a “policing” role was a helper to govern slave movements. According to historian W. M. Dulaney (1996), "free men of color" were used alongside slave patrols to suppress and control enslaved African Americans. The problematic nature of slave patrols is that these non-sanctioned “police” groups provided the foundation for the criminalization and incarceration of African Americans (Hinton, 2020). However, it was not until the early 1800s that the first

documented African American male was involved in policing (Gardiner & Hickman, 2017). Gardiner and Hickman (2017) posit that the African American individuals were able to find plight in the police organization during the 1800s, occupying various positions such as Commissioner, before all African Americans were removed from the force in 1910, due to racial tension in the south. Following uptake in insurrections during the mid-20th century, public leaders called for police reform by restructuring and diversifying law enforcement agencies. By hiring more African American officers, a better representation of respective minority communities would be created, leading to more positive perceptions and police interactions within these neighborhoods, soothing the historical tension between police and communities of color (Herrera, 2019; Shjarback et al., 2016).

When African Americans reintegrated into the police force during the mid-20th century, the previously ascribed image of African American police officers changed. Instead of African American police officers being viewed as oppression assistors, they now were perceived as "guardians of the African American community" (Forman 2017, as cited in Carbado & Richard 2018; Hilton, 2020; Dulaney, 1996); and tokens (Gardiner & Hickman, 2017). More so, Forman 2017 (as cited in Carbado & Richard, 2018) argues the push for African American officers by the Black community was "(1) to end discrimination in the police force and (2) to curb police brutality against the African American community" (p.4). However, research finds African American involvement in policing was not based on what members of the Black community initially thought.

Research demonstrates that African Americans were systematically forced into the policing profession due to the socioeconomic climate during the Civil Rights era. Therefore, gainful steady employment and promotional opportunities positioned African American officers' primary focus and attitudes for joining the force (Carbado & Richard, 2018). Additionally, the racial tension during this time also controlled the ability of African American individuals to accomplish the latter part of the Black communities' goals for police representation. Instead of African American officers being able to carry out the "guardian" image, these individuals were contributors to the oppressing of the Black community as naïve political pawns as they adopted similar divisive behavior which White officers had previously done. As Horace and Harris (2018) state, the power of African American officers was strictly restricted and purposefully placed into non-white neighborhoods, curating dissonance not only between themselves and fellow officers but with their Black community. African American officers and leadership officials attempted to address social problems experienced by African Americans by leveraging their social position, but this resulted in a deleterious effect (Forman, 2017 as cited in Carbado & Richard, 2018). The critical decisions while in office by African American leaders through the "Marshall Plan," which "...illuminated the dangers of failing to attend to power and structure" (Fortner, 2015; Bartilow, 2019 as cited in Hinton, 2020, p.11-12). Consequently, African American leaders assisted in the fostering of a "culture of intrusion", engaging in ill intentional "punishment binge" on the African American community (Carbado & Richard, 2018; Forman, 2017 as cited in Carbado & Richard 2018, Gardiner & Hickman; 2017; Horace & Harris, 2018). Legal policies and

police practices such as broken windows, tough-on-crime, strict drug enforcement, and mandatory minimums for crimes involving guns were enacted, increasing the criminalization and violence in African American neighborhoods (Forman, 2017 as cited in Carbado & Richard 2018). Therefore, the public perception of the African American officer reverted to the earlier image of an agent of oppression. Thus, African American officers further separated themselves from the perceived goal of reducing police violence against African American communities

Hiring and Recruitment

Diversifying law enforcement agencies was thought to be a remedy that would promote change in police relations with the African American community. Public leaders believed that having a symbolic representation of minority communities would impact officer performance, trust, and minority community's willingness to comply because African American individuals respond more favorably toward the police when more African American officers are on the force (Riccucci et al., 2018). Historically and currently, African American officers were viewed as a symbolic model for African American communities, and therefore are perceived to be advocates and "heroic" figures with the ability to elicit change in the treatment of African Americans within the criminal justice system (Kochel, 2020). By adding more minority representation, the unspoken expectation is that these officers will act as "neutralizing elements" that can combat prejudicial police tactics and poor decision-making in minority neighborhoods' ability to empathize with this particular population (Shajarback et al., 2016). In a study of Criminal Justice majors, Todak et al (2018) found that minority college students perceived their

similarity to minority communities as a leverage in creating positive interactions. Minority students also viewed their status and professional title "officer" as beneficial in advocating for minority communities to produce favorable outcomes (Herrera, 2019).

However, this perception and potential outcome are highly debated because of the intertwined racial tension and backdrop in which American policing and societal interactions are built. Researchers argue that adding African American officers to the policing field makes these individuals vulnerable to the subculture's discriminatory and biased practices. Scholars assert African American officers are contributors to the abuse in African American communities, instead of advocating for the protection, due to a more significant internal issue within the culture and focus of police organizations (Dukes, 2018; Herrera, 2019; Jacobs & Carmichael, 2002, as cited in Ozkan et al., 2016; Nicholson-Crotty et al., 2017).

In the groundbreaking study of representative bureaucracy in policing, Wilkins and Williams (2008) concluded that a higher percentage of African American police officers within police districts led to increased racial profiling during traffic stops of African American citizens. African American officers are also found to "overcompensate for peers and promote organizational goals to a higher standard" and disengage in problem-solving behavior in the Black community (as cited in Coppock, 2020, pg. 7; Shjarback et al., 2017; Ozkan et al., 2016). More so, Ozkan et al (2016) argue that although the representation bureaucracy theory has been historically tested in several facets such as its impacts on officer complaints (see Smith & Holmes, 2003, Hickman & Piquero, 2009); aggressive behavior towards police (see Jacobs & Carmichael, 2002 and

Kaminski & Stucky, 2009); and aggressive behavior by police (Smith, 2003); results are inconsistent and highly unsupportive of soothing police-minority relations. In their study, Ozan and colleagues could not definitively conclude that having a police minority presence impacted police-minority interactions.

Researchers further contend that the police subculture fosters an esprit de corps that overpowers other sources of social identity, resulting in both white and minority officers becoming blind to their aggressive responses to citizens of color (Herrera, 2019, p.6; Chappell & Lanza-Kaduce, 2010). The socialization processes found within the policing organization teach officers to "turn Blue" and adopt the controversial normative career behavior while passively dismissing African American officers, leading to their double-consciousness experience (Dukes, 2018).

Subculture Implications for Experiences

For African American police officers, navigating the policing organization can be difficult. According to Dukes (2018), policing organizations maintain and routinely utilize socialization processes that target stripping an individual's identity and replacing the former with police identity. For instance, when prospective police officers enter the academy, socialization processes ensue, in which individuals' mindsets and behaviors are changed to fit a collective elitist mentality of law enforcement through paramilitary training and discrete psychological warfare tactics (Conti & Doreian, 2014; Doreian & Conti, 2017; Manjarrez, 2019). For African American officers adapting to these subcultures' values is challenging. In Dukes' (2018) quantitative study of 84 African American law enforcement members, African American officers experienced periodic

levels of strain because of the intersection of racial identity and the policing subculture. In the White hegemonic policing context, African American officers withdraw from the policing subculture by utilizing occupational adaption strategies such as ritual retreat or rebellion to alleviate discomfort; or avoid conforming all together (Dukes 2018; Silver et al., 2017). In another study, at the end of 21-week police training, researchers asked 70 recruits from a Midwestern American police department about their awareness of other recruits and potential developed friendships (Conti & Doreian, 2014). Findings revealed that even though the academy utilized varied group activities, White police recruits were less attentive and friendly with their fellow police recruits, especially towards the end of the training, than African Americans and Latinos. Additionally, even though researchers found African American recruits scored low on social knowledge and friendship, they had a higher degree of social knowledge (Conti & Doreian, 2014).

Kochel (2020) advances Dukes' (2018) study results by examining the organizational culture of policing and racially charged events' impact on African American officers. In her study, Kochel conducted a mixed-method study of 45 police personnel who policed the Ferguson protest. Kochel's 2020 study results supported earlier scholars' notions of double marginality in African American officers. Yet, unlike Dukes (2018), Kochel argues that whom findings suggested African American officers experience anomic outcomes, African Americans are more psychologically resilient during and after racially charged events such as the Ferguson protest, even when targeted by the African American community. These findings align with the historical findings of Dulaney (1996), who contended African American officers withstand from sharing

racial-charged police experiences between police and minorities, given the possible conflict with the policing subculture (Coppock, 2020).

Existing literature posits that African American officers' lived experiences such as neighborhood familiarity, organization support, empathetic attitudes toward the African American community, and background and motivation may explain their psychological resiliency (Kochel, 2020). However, these lived experiences of African American officers may have adverse effects on their work behavior. In their studies, Conti & Doreians (2014) and Dukes (2018) posit that the policing subculture encompasses bad outcomes for African American officers, such as isolation from non-similar ethnic officers. Thus, Nicholson-Crotty et al (2017) speculate that even if a critical mass of minority representation is reached within police organizations, the tension between police and minorities may never fully ease. Therefore, we could theorize that reaching a critical mass number may only be psychologically beneficial to African American officers, especially during a time in American society where the Law Enforcement profession is highly scrutinized.

Role of Post-Ferguson Media and Police Officer Performance

Although still highly under-researched, existing literature argues that current American society's increased attention to police violence and media perpetuation of hostile rhetoric regarding police practices has negatively impacted the police profession (Hosko, 2018). Media's dispersion of police-minority interactions that have ended in severe harm or death continues to inflate the negative relationship and impact work behavior. As seen in a study of police officers and firefighters, when the public lacks an

understanding of police and firefighters' job nature and subsequent duties, these employees are less willing to engage in proactive job initiatives (Mourtgos & Adams, 2019; Patil & Lebel, 2019). Police officers blame media's negative coverage of these incidents for increasing invalid public perceptions of their job responsibilities, leading to enlarged stress (Saunders et al., 2019). Police officers are also reported to experience changes in community interaction. For example, six-months following intense media coverage of police-involved incidents in Dallas and Baton Rouge, 650,000 Police officers' cynicism, motivation, and apprehensiveness to interact with specific neighborhoods were affected (Torres et al.; 2018).

Additionally, Torres and Reling (2020) evidenced 887 unranked White, and nonwhite patrol officer patrol officers purposefully changed their interactions with minorities out of fear. Shjarback et al (2017) and Morgan and Pally (2016) produced similar results following the highly publicized police-involved deaths of Freddie Gray and Michael Brown. These results echo that of the proposed "Ferguson Effect" which suggests the decrease in motivation, self-legitimacy, and willingness to engage with specific communities is a direct result of officer fears of being labeled and accused of racial profiling or excessive force (Shjarback et al., 2017; Deuchar et al., 2019; Hosko, 2018; Nix & Wolfe, 2017; Torres et al., 2018; Wolfe & Nix, 2016).

African American Police officers

Following incidents in Ferguson, Missouri, Black Officers were found to experience rejection from the African American community and supported racial and social justice protests following hostile and fatal police encounters (Morin et al., 2017;

McCarty et al., 2019). However, Kochel (2020) argues that these results only reflect officers not working within these racially charged events. Heavy media attention to large-scale hostile events can be characterized as Mega-threats, which pose threats to work behaviors of employees who identify with agents involved in these events (Leigh & Melwani, 2019). The African American community is cognitively impacted by fatal and hostile police interactions with persons of color. In the workplace, African Americans take one to seven additional poor mental health days per person per year following these events (Bor et al., 2018). As Leigh and Melwani (2019) denote after examining highly publicized police brutality events with persons of color, African American employees are impacted by mega-events involving persons of color. They also conclude that Mega-events act as a stressor, or situational cue, causing both organizational and personal identities to be salient at work. Thus, minority employees experience an identity fusion between work and personal identities. Therefore, this fusion could be relevant to the experiences of African American males in policing.

Summary

The review of existing literature provided an overview of numerous studies that addressed the African American male's image evolution and police involvement and hostile and fatal police interactions' impact on the police performance. Collectively, scholars posit that the historic police-minority relationship influences why and how Police officers perform their law enforcement duties. Increased police violence against persons of color propaganda has affected officer behavior, motivation, and attitudes. However, existing literature establishes a need for a broader understanding of police

officer experiences. Therefore, this study is expected to provide a new perspective and increase understanding of the African American Police officer population and how hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color contribute to these experiences by collecting detailed descriptions through in-depth interviews. Chapter 3 will discuss the research methodology and design that will be used to understand this phenomenon.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore African American police officers' lived experiences with hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color. As aforementioned, existing scholarly literature lacks the representation of minority law enforcement perspectives and experiences; thus, further research is needed (Gau & Paoline, 2017; Hall et al., 2020; Wilson & Wilson, 2014). An interpretative phenomenological design will be used is to produce a deeper understanding of individual-centered accounts of a phenomenon (Smith, 2011, as cited in Rajasinghe, 2020; Smith & Osborn, 2015). The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the appropriateness of this research methodology and design, target population, instrumentation, data collection, and conclude with the analysis plan.

Research Questions

The research questions that guide this study are as follows:

Research Question 1 : How does the African American officer perceive hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color, and what meaning do these events contribute to understanding their ascribed race and professional identities?

Research Question 2: How do hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color create, perpetuate, or challenge the concept of identity conflict among African American police officers?

Research Question 3: How do African American police officers describe their confidence and policing behavior following heightened public attention to hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color?

Research Design and Rationale

Research Tradition

This study sought to understand how hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color contribute to the lived experiences of African American male police officers during the post-Ferguson era. Therefore, a qualitative methodology emerged as a natural fit. Qualitative research relies heavily on incorporating human subject observation and provides a first-hand participant interpretation of the social world.(Erickson, 2011; Ravitch, 2016; as cited in Wheeldon & Faubert, 2009). According to scholars, a qualitative approach is most applicable when obtaining an in-depth understanding of participant experience with a particular phenomenon without reasoning (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Gill, 2014). Qualitative research focuses on "how" and not "why" persons experience a specific event.

A qualitative approach is also used when researchers want to uplift participant voices and understand context implications for a specific phenomenological issue (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Obtaining an in-depth conceptualization of this population's experience, which is already overlooked in academia, is challenging to capture through statistical analysis (Gau & Paoline, 2017; Hall et al., 2020; Wilson & Wilson, 2014). The qualitative methodology allows the researcher to be sensitive to research participants' unique experiences that numerical data may not explicitly articulate (Creswell & Poth,

2016). A qualitative research methodology offers a more interpersonal way to accomplish the goals mentioned earlier in this research than a quantitative methodology.

Research Design

This study applied an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) research design. Burkholder et al (2016) and Creswell and Poth (2016) explain a phenomenology research design, in general, thoroughly describes and interprets how individuals ascribe meaning to phenomena based on their lived experiences. Unlike other qualitative strategies such as grounded theory research, ethnography, narrative research, and case study, phenomenology strategies focus on first-hand experiences and perceptions (Burkholder et al., 2016). More so, in phenomenology, the researcher seeks to gather a composite description of participants' lived experiences to understand their reality.

The phenomenological inquiry has two traditions: transcendental and interpretive. In these two approaches, participant responses depicting their experiences are transcribed in detail, appraised, and then thematically analyzed for meaning (Burkholder et al., 2016; Creswell & Poth 2016; Gill, 2014). While transcendental phenomenology is concerned with commonalities among participants who described the lived experiences, interpretative phenomenology is concerned with understanding why these lived experiences occurred (Burkholder et al., 2016). Pioneered by Edmund Husserl, transcendental phenomenology suggests a process called epoche' (i.e., bracket) reduces researchers' influence to discover a phenomenon's essence (Gill, 2014). In this research design, researchers acknowledge and distance themselves from their prior experiences, thoughts, and ideas regarding the phenomenon under study to analyze interview data with

a fresh perspective. Additionally, transcendental phenomenology looks at the purity of participant experience without exploring it in depth (van Manen, 2017). However, Martin Heidegger (1988) argues the impossibility of understanding human experience without in-depth exploration (Gill, 2014). Heidegger contends that human experience and subsequent understanding are positioned within context; thus, “access” to participants' real-life world is impossible without the influence of the researcher's predisposition (Clark, 2009; Gill, 2014; Rajasinghe, 2020).

Established by Johnathan Smith (1996), IPA is rooted in phenomenological, hermeneutic, ideography, and symbolic interactionism principles (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Shinebourne, 2011; Smith et al., 2013, as cited in Callary et al., 2015). Derived from the underpinnings of Heidegger's phenomenology framework, IPA seeks to capture a descriptive and detailed view of participants' experiences by using an inductive analysis of study data (Callary et al., 2015; Gill, 2014; Smith et al., 1999). Thus, IPA is concerned with not only what participants experience but the meaning these experiences provide (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) state that IPA studies explicate individual experiences by providing detailed, in-depth descriptions of participants' experiences and making sense of them (; Callary et al., 2015; Gill, 2014; Smith & Shinebourne, 2012;).

IPA's sense-making nature lends itself widespread among the psychology discipline, as IPA stands firm in understanding the "chain connection" between participants' experiences and how they describe them (Smith & Osborn, 2003; Shinebourne, 2011). In IPA studies, as explained by Smith and Osborn (2003), Callary

and colleagues (2015), Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014), researchers play an active role in the dynamic approach by gathering in-depth participant accounts and then interpreting these perspectives. Aligned with Heidegger's beliefs, IPA researchers posit that proper understanding of the lived experiences of research participants involves interpretation. In IPA studies, researchers gain a detailed understanding of participant experiences through an iterative double hermeneutic or “hermeneutic circle” approach (Callary, et al., 2015; Gill, 2014; Noon, 2018, p.75). Double hermeneutic refers to "the researcher is interpreting the experience of the participant, who is, in turn, interpreting their experiences" (Smith & Osborn, 2003, as cited in Gill, 2015, p. 15; Smith & Osborn, 2015, p.41). As a result, researchers can come close to “standing in the shoes” of their participants (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014, p 8; Noon, 2018).

IPA does not have a strict data analysis plan and allows researchers to understand participant experiences authentically. However, IPA studies follow the same layered, multi-step data analysis process and procedures and use semi-structured interviews (Callary et al., 2015; Gill, 2014; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith et al., 2009, as cited in Rajasinghe, 2020). The central aim of IPA is to produce a deeper understanding of individual-centered accounts of a phenomenon (Smith, 2011, as cited in Rajasinghe, 2020; Smith & Osborn, 2015). More so, because of the idiographic focus of IPA studies, to conceptualize participant experiences, the researcher continuously transitions between emic to etic views (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Reid et al., 2005, as cited in Gill, 2014). Thus, researchers can interpret participant experiences without "psychological or psychiatric reductionism" (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). More so, the idiographic nature

of IPA allows researchers to focus on each participant's experience whole-heartedly to capture a detailed synopsis of their unique experiences (Noon, 2018; Shinebourne, 2011). This study is concerned with male African American Police officers' lived experiences and the meaning these experiences provide for personal identity and behavior; thus, an IPA is appropriate, allowing researchers to explicate individual experiences by providing rich, in-depth descriptions of participants' experiences, informed by empathetic understandings of sense-making processes.

Role of Researcher

Creswell and Creswell (2017) and Denzin and Lincoln (2003) explained that the researcher within qualitative research is the critical human instrument. In qualitative research studies, the researcher creates and administers interview instruments, transcription, analysis, verification, and reporting of the concepts and themes (Sanjari et al., 2014). More so, the purpose of qualitative studies is to "transform the data to live the experience" through coding, categorization, and theme curation (Sanjari et al., 2014, p.3). This study aimed to capture and understand participant perspectives and the meaning of their lived experience. Thus, I am the primary investigator, responsible for the development of the data collection tools and collect and interpret participant data. In IPA studies, the researcher is considered an active participant through the engagement of double hermeneutic or two-stage interpretation to examine and detail participant experiences (Peat et al., 2019). As such, it is my responsibility to ensure participants are ethically protected and their information is safeguarded (Sutton & Austin, 2017), in

addition to ensuring personal pre-connotations do not hinder interpretation (Peat et al., 2019).

I shared cultural beliefs, historical background with participants as I am an African American living in North Carolina. Being an African American individual, I understand and experience the demands and challenges black individuals experience in society related to law enforcement. I have firsthand knowledge and understanding of the perceptions and attitudes towards police in the Black community and the impact of hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color on African Americans. More so, living in North Carolina, I understand the historical racial underpinnings found within this southern state and how they relate to the attitudes toward law enforcement. I have an extensive educational and research background focused on the criminal justice system and human interaction, particularly interested in minority-police relationships. I have researched the effects of social media on minority-police relationships in terms of diverse racial narratives of interactions with police and how these impacted how the African American community perceives police. Cassidy et al (2011) suggest IPA researchers should take a "sensitive and responsive" approach when researching by acknowledging their relation or prior experiences to the research topic. Researchers can not completely bracket this predisposition when trying to understand participant experiences. Thus, I recognized the risk of bias that may develop due to the shared cultural beliefs and historical background; thus, I kept a reflexive journal to notate my thoughts and opinion along the way.

I collected data from previously unknown participants, who were not friends, family, or professional colleagues, who also verified the accuracy of their transcribed interview. Sanjari et al (2014) further suggests that given the sensitive nature of the study, the researcher's role is to mitigate the harmful impacts of questioning on participants. In addition, the researcher refrains from utilizing questions outside the study's scope or cross privacy boundaries (Sutton & Austin, 2015). I am not a law enforcement officer, nor do I work in criminal justice; thus, no power relationships were expected to be developed or needed to be managed. This study had no financial interest attached to this study and did not offer an incentive to participate.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

This study utilized a small homogenous group of five African American Police officers (Alase, 2017). Essential to phenomenological studies is to use a homogenous sample to capture a detailed "true" understanding of a phenomenon by "convergence and divergence" of lived experiences of similar individuals (Alase, 2017 p.13). Thus, the study's inclusion criteria were: (a) identify as male, (b) identify as African American/Black, (c) have an active job status, (d) are a police officer or sheriff, (e) work in North Carolina, and (f) speak English. A small sample size allowed micro-level reading, better gauge, and a “better understanding of the participants” account (Smith & Osborn, 2015; Alase, 2017). All participants in the study were previously unknown to the researcher. Phenomenology studies are not seeking to curate generalizability; therefore, an adequate sample size should be kept small, ranging between one and 25 (Alase, 2017;

Clark, 2009; Gill, 2014); with most studies using eight to twelve participants (Alase, 2017). More so, sample saturation is dependent upon the specific type of IPA applied. In this study, Smith and Osborne's IPA (2003) guidelines were utilized, which was in accordance with psychology scholars, specifically organizational identity research (Alase, 2017; Gill, 2014). However, Smith and Osborne do not define a saturation point, as their approach seeks to explicate individual experience (Gill, 2014). Due to the time restrictions for this capstone study, five participants were adequate to gain enough knowledge of unique experiences.

Recruitment Process

Participants were purposively sampled to ensure a homogenous African American police officer sample. I posted a recruitment flyer to Instagram and Facebook; interested individuals were required to contact me by email to ensure privacy and consent documentation. The recruitment flyer was generic, and detailed the purpose of the study, the data collection process (i.e., interview, member-checking), criteria for participants, and email contact information (Appendix A). In addition, the snowball method was used to garner more participants. Professional networks at North Carolina precincts and interested participants were asked to forward the recruitment flyer to individuals who matched study inclusion protocols. Once a confirmed sample size was reached the recruitment flyer was taken down. Prospective participants self-identified as meeting the above inclusion criteria and were sent an inclusion criteria questionnaire to confirm eligibility; once confirmed, an Informed Consent form was sent. Prospective participants read and affirmed the informed consent statement by emailing "I Consent" and were

provided with a copy before any interviews began. As participants scheduled a 60- 90-minute interview time, they were provided an interview guide (Appendix B) along with a pseudonym (e.g., Officer 1, Officer 2) and a list of resources to assist with any emotional needs. At this point, participants were also assured they could withdraw from the study at any point. Instrumentation

I used a researcher-developed participant questionnaire form to screen eligible participants, as well as a researcher-developed interview protocol based on the guidelines provided for IPA studies described by Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) and Smith and Shinebourne (2012). The interview guide utilized a funneling technique of open-ended questions to answer the guiding research questions. Using the example of perceptions of government policies, specifically welfare, Smith and Shinebourne expressed the need to focus on the general subject before addressing the specific issue. By funneling the questioning regime, potential researcher bias is reduced. It also allows the ability to guide the conversation based on interviewee concerns rather than the reverse (i.e., leading) (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). In an interpretative phenomenology study of athletes, Callary and colleagues (2015) used the funneling method in their interview questions to garner an in-depth understanding of lived experiences. In their IPA study of veteran Educators, Noon (2018) also posited that funneling aided memory recall.

The open-ended questions within the interview guide concentrated on exploring sensory perceptions, thoughts or memories, and individual interpretations of experiences with the hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Aside from recording the participant interviews, researcher-developed field notes

were used to collect observed behavioral data, such as body language and moments of silence. This instrumentation was not rigidly structured, as these are researcher notes. I used a reflexive journal to capture my thoughts and opinions and maintain biases. This study also used the computer software services of Zoom, Otter.ai, and NVivo. Zoom is a free online web-conferencing global service with audio and video capabilities and a recording feature; thus, research interviews took place on this platform. As a backup, a handheld tape-recorder was used to record. Otter.ai is a transcription service compatible with Zoom that allows for real-time transcription to occur. NVivo is a qualitative data management and analysis software that allows individuals to upload audio files and transcribed data in an organized manner to help with digital analysis processes.

Data Sources

Data sources for this interpretive phenomenological research were researched-developed semi-structured interviews and interview field notes. Interviews allow raw, unfiltered participant responses about participant lived experiences. IPA studies aim to garner a detailed recount and meaning of participants' lived experiences. Thus, semi-structured interviews were used because it provided the most flexibility for interviewees to feel comfortable and navigate the conversation, resulting in rich data (Alase, 2017; Clarke, 2009; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). Semi-structured interviews also allow for original and unexpected topics to come forth (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). More so, Alase (2017) and Burkholder et al (2016) also suggest phenomenology studies utilize notetaking and journals to organize thoughts and note observations.

Data Collection

Interviews

This study conducted separate in-depth semi-structured virtual face-to-face interviews. Given the current state of public health during the global pandemic COVID-19, face-to-face and telephone interviews took place via Zoom web-conferencing software. Interviews took place via Zoom in a private room, in which only the participant and I were able to join, enabling me to ensure that no one else could see or hear the interview. Participants were asked to interview in a quiet, comfortable area of their choice, away from the public, allowing confidentiality and participant comfortability. I was in a closed-off home office, away from the public and any interference. All interview questions were developed by me and each interview utilized the same open-ended questions and response prompt protocol to garner more participant details based on responses. Interviews were audio-recorded using Zoom and a tape recorder. Recordings did not begin until I established a rapport with the interviewee and the participant was ready to start with the questions on the interview guide.

To begin the interview, participants were reread the informed consent form to reaffirm their participant rights and confidentiality and were provided an opportunity to ask any questions regarding the study if needed. Participants were also given a list of low-cost resources, they may utilize if emotionally or physiologically triggered during the interview. Participants were reminded that they could stop the interview at any time and for any reason. During the interview, I kept interruptions and comments at a minimum to ensure participants spoke freely. Interviews were allotted 90 minutes, with interviews

lasting at least 60 minutes. Participants were allowed to take a 5 to 10-minute break if needed.

After the interview, participants were able to ask any questions they liked. They were also debriefed on what to expect next, such as where this study is at (i.e., how many more participants), and when to expect to hear back, in addition to being reminded of low-cost resources, if needed. They also were notified of an approximate timeframe of when they would receive a copy of their transcribed interview via email. Transcription service were provided by Otter.ai, an automated transcription computer software. To enhance the study's credibility, all participants were asked to verify the accuracy of the transcribed text. After they received their emailed transcript, participants were to verify the accuracy of the transcribed text or make corrections, as well as elaborate further on their lived experiences, if needed, via a scheduled 10-minute member-checking session. Once verified, I moved on to the next participant and repeated the process. When all interviews were completed and transcripts are verified, I began to analyze them using NVivo qualitative software.

Field Notes

Sutton and Austin (2015) assert field notes enable the researcher to capture elements of the interview that audio recordings may not and alleviate memory bias. I took field notes in conjunction with the interviews to record observations. These notes pertained to the emotion, body language, environmental contexts, and tone of participants during the interview. Field notes were hand-written in a notebook and secured in a locked cabinet. Along with recorded interviews, field notes were transcribed using Otter.ai and

saved in the same folder as the transcribed interview. Once completed and checked for accuracy, the field notes were destroyed by shredding.

Data Analysis Plan

The purpose of this study was to gather personal, raw individualistic perspectives of African American Police officers' lived experiences. Before the data was analyzed, all interviews, observations, and journal entries were transcribed via Otter.ai software to personalized password-protected Microsoft Word files for each participant on my computer. Once each audio recording was transcribed and verified, it was destroyed. Transcribed interviews were member-checked by participants, and if any discrepancies arise, participants were contacted for a brief follow-up interview. I used qualitative software, NVivo (March 2020 release), and a hand method for data management and analysis. I also used another copy of the interview transcript to manually analyze, using the document's side margins for notetaking and theme construction as a backup and a self-checking measure (Smith et al., 1999). To address the research questions of this study, data analysis followed Smith and Osborne's (2003) IPA guidelines, commonly described among Smith et al (1999), Smith and Osborne (2008, as cited in Gill, 2014), Smith et al (2009), Smith and Shinebourne (2012), and Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014). The following section delineates the process used.

Coding Process

First Coding Cycle – Notation

After interview transcriptions were completed, transcripts were read for errors and overall sense of the data (Gill, 2014). The audio recording was listened to for comparison

to transcription. Graneheim and Lundman (2004, as cited in Alase, 2017) suggested interview transcripts be read at least three times to garner the “essence” of participants' lived experiences. I explored the interview data line-by-line for elements that stuck out. Interview transcripts were examined for salient descriptive statements about recounted experiences. Salient content was participant statements that were emotionally loaded or words or phrases (Alase, 2017; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). This included content striking issues such as contradictions or connecting comments, metaphors, symbols, repetitions, pauses, context, and initial interpretative comments (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014, p.7; Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). Once found, the comments and passages were highlighted and denoted by hand and digitally in NVivo software.

Second Coding Cycle - Developing Emerging Themes

After initially examining interview transcripts and identifying salient content, I condensed salient content into fewer words. This condensing process began to underscore the linguistic meaning within emotionally loaded statements, repeated words, or phrases to capture the true “gist” (or “core essence”) of participant responses (Alase, 2017; Gill, 2014; Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). I deduced salient content to theoretical or psychological terminology. As a result, preliminary categories or emergent themes were developed.

Third Coding Cycle - Seeking Relationships and Clustering Themes

In this stage, emergent themes were examined for “oneness”, and conceptual similarities of themes (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). Thus, overarching themes about the essence of the participants' experiences were developed. Based on these "clusters" and

conceptual similarity, a label representing an overarching theme was made (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith, Jarmon & Osborn, 1999; Smith & Osborne, 2003; Smith & Shinebourne, 2012).

Developing Master List of Themes

Individual interview theme tables were compared for convergence or divergence and consolidated to a master table (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012; Smith et al.,1999). The final master table only included themes that I prioritized or deemed essential to understanding the lived experiences of African American police.

Issues of Trustworthiness

The core aspect of a quality qualitative research study is ensuring trustworthiness, including credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Credibility refers to the "truth" of study findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Credibility

To ensure credibility, study data was collected from multiple sources, including participant interviews, participant inclusion verification form, and field notes; and then triangulated with one another to ensure consistency (Alase, 2017; Amankwaa, 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). After collecting interview data, participants were sent a copy of their transcribed interview and asked to verify the accuracy. Additionally, participants were provided an opportunity to review interpretations following data analysis before writing my findings. This aided in decreasing the presents of misinterpretations while increasing the credibility of research findings. Lincoln and Guba (1985) also suggested using prolonged engagement with the research population to ensure creditability. By

utilizing a 60–90-minute interview, participants provided in-depth information regarding their experiences. The IPA approach encompasses an incredibly detailed analysis process that garners persistent observation. Thus, data was continuously assessed for relevant and reliable concepts (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Transferability

Transferability refers to the applicability of the findings (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The best way to ensure transferability is to provide thick, rich descriptions of data procedures and detailed descriptions of participant responses based on reviewed and approved open-ended question guides (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Amankwaa, 2016). This study accomplishes transferability by including a thorough discussion of research design, methodology, sampling procedures, data collection, and analysis plan with a complete rationale.

Dependability and Confirmability

In qualitative research, the ability for a study's findings to be consistent and repeatable is imperative. Thus, transparency of research steps is imperative, as it constitutes dependability and confirmability (Korstenjens & Moser, 2018). Throughout the entire research process, I used an audit trail to detail the data collection process and rationale; this is also be represented by tables of the categorization and subsequent sub-ordinate theme schema. However, if others were to conduct this study similarly, results may be different, based on the researcher's thought process, as interpretation is subjective.

Ethical Considerations

Per human rights protection and the ethical obligations set forth by Walden Institutional Review, this study gained IRB approval before commencing. This study utilized an emailed version of Walden University's Informed consent template, delineating risks and allowing interested individuals to make an informed decision. Participants may have been triggered by disclosing suppressed emotions regarding emotionally heightened/ sensitive events causing mild distress. This study may have inadvertently led to the disclosure of legal violations during the interview, as questions were geared toward witnessing or participating in individuals' unfair treatment. Participants were asked to discuss stances/perceptions of instances that could damage the participant's position, professional reputation, promotion, or employability if there were to be an unintentional breach of confidentiality. Participants were informed that even though the expectation is to divulge detailed descriptions of experiences, they were not required to share information they did not feel comfortable sharing and were able to take breaks as needed. Additionally, participants were provided with low-cost resources to experience any distress during or after their interview.

Participants were provided with clear documentation within the informed consent form to minimize potential risk. Specifically, the form outlined the procedures to data collection, inclusion/exclusion of data, and professional limits to confidentiality (i.e., duty to report). When asking officers to participate in this study, I provided documentation to advise that no personal information will be kept or shared outside of the immediate nature of degree requirements. Thus, the only person who would know and

would be able to link interview information to them is me; de-identifiers such as pseudonyms were used to identify the participant. I informed participants of the rationale for the study, the risks and benefits of participation, the confidential nature of the study, and the right to withdraw participation at any time. The data is accessible only to the Walden IRB, the research committee, and me. A summary of the results has been sent to participants.

Additionally, participants were made aware of interview data security. According to Walden University's guidelines, pseudonyms coded interview data, including field notes, are secured, and locked for five years (Walden University, 2019). After completing and obtaining final study approval, digital voice recordings were destroyed via file and computer trash bin deletion, and tape recorder audio were erased from the system.

Summary

This chapter provided a detailed justification for the intended research design and methodology and the procedures that will be followed to answer the guiding research questions. This chapter also discussed the qualitative methodology that will be used for this interpretative phenomenological analysis approach study including the research design and rationale, role of the researcher, participant selection logic, instrumentation, procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection, data analysis plan, issues of trustworthiness, and ethical considerations. To gain a deeper understanding of African American Police officers' experience of hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color, a qualitative, IPA research design was used. A small sample of five African American Police officers who: (a) identify as male, (b) identify as African

American/Black, (c) active job status (d) is a police officer or sheriff, (e) work in North Carolina, and (f) speak English, were recruited via a social media research study flyer and using snowballing. Through 60–90-minute recorded virtual semistructured interviews and field notes, I was able to capture raw, detailed data about the lived experiences of African American police officers. Raw data was then transcribed and analyzed using Smith and Osborne's (2003) IPA guidelines. The next chapter will provide an in-depth review of the conducted study and its subsequent results.

Chapter 4: Study Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to capture African American Male police officers' lived experiences during the post-Ferguson era and understand how they experience racially charged events. In addition, this study sought to explore how these lived experiences contribute to understanding professional and self-identities in African American police officers and their confidence and policing behavior following increased public attention to racially charged events. The research questions that guided this study were:

Research Question 1: How does the African American Officer perceive hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color, and what meaning do these events contribute to understanding their ascribed race and professional identities?

Research Question 2: How do hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color create, perpetuate, or challenge the concept of identity conflict among African American police officers?

Research Question 3: How do African American police officers describe their confidence and policing behavior following heightened public attention to hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color?

Chapter 4 provides a detailed overview of the data collection process, including the research setting, participant demographics, the methods used to analyze the data, the study's relationships, themes, and findings. The conclusion includes a discussion of issues

related to the study's credibility, quality control, identified themes, answers to each of the research questions, and a chapter summary.

Setting

This study was conducted shortly after the trial of Derek Chauvin, a Minneapolis police officer who was convicted and sentenced for the second-degree murder of George Floyd, a North Carolina native. Additionally, interviews took place remotely due to the heightened peak of the global pandemic COVID-19. There were no partner organizations, hence study participants were at random.

Participant Demographics

This study utilized a small purposefully selected homogenous group of five English-speaking, active North Carolina police officers or sheriffs who self-identified as African American/Black males, as shown in Table 1. All participants in the study were previously unknown to the researcher. As indicated in Table 1, all participants worked for police organizations and ranged from 6 months to 31 years of experience.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant ID	Position	Years of Experience
Officer 1	Police	1 Year
Officer 2	Police	6 months
Officer 3	Police	28 years
Officer 4	Police	31 years
Officer 5	Police	17 years

Data Collection

After receiving Walden University Institutional Review Board approval (08-04-21-0973398), participants were solicited via a social media recruitment flyer. Interested individuals then contacted me, where eligibility was verified via an emailed inclusion criteria questionnaire. All eligible prospective participants received an informed consent form via email for their electronic signature. Upon return of consent, I contacted participants via email to determine a suitable time and date to be interviewed based on participants' availability. Semistructured interviews enabled the most flexibility for interviewees to feel comfortable and navigate the conversation, resulting in rich data and original and unexpected topics to come forth (Alase, 2017; Clarke, 2009; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). Five individuals were selected and participated in these interviews. Table 2 shows the questions that supplied the data for the study organized by research question. The open-ended questions within the interview guide concentrated on exploring sensory perceptions, thoughts or memories, and individual interpretations of experiences with the hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

No variations in data collection or unusual circumstances occurred from the plan presented in Chapter 3. Aside from recording the participant interviews, researcher-developed field notes were used to collect observed behavioral data, such as body language and moments of silence. Given the current state of public health during the global pandemic COVID-19, recorded face-to-face interviews took place via Zoom web-conferencing software. Zoom provided the ability to create a private room, which allowed

confidentiality as only the participant and I were in attendance. Interviews were allotted 90 minutes, but most interviews lasted 65 minutes.

Interviews began with participants being re-read the informed consent form to reaffirm their rights and confidentiality and be provided an opportunity to ask any questions regarding the study if needed. Participants were also given a list of low-cost resources they could utilize if emotionally or physiologically triggered during the interview. Additionally, the voluntary nature of participation was emphasized. Participants were allowed the option to answer a question or stop participation at any time without any penalty to them. Once the preliminary information was given, participants were asked if they were ready to begin, wherein the external recording device began. Interviews were transcribed individually using the transcription service provided by Otter.ai, an automated transcription computer software. Once transcription was completed, each transcript was reviewed three times by replaying each audiotape and cross-referencing text. To enhance the study's credibility, copies of the transcribed text were sent to participants via email to make corrections and elaborate further on their lived experiences, if needed via a scheduled 10-minute member-checking session. All participants could verify their transcripts and did not request to add or make any additional changes or clarifications.

Data Analysis

Analysis of interview data was conducted through qualitative software NVivo (March 2020 release) and by hand with aid from Microsoft Excel for notetaking and theme construction for organization and to ensure credibility. Following the multi-step

coding process defined by Smith and Osborne's (2003) IPA guidelines and outlined in detail in Chapter 3, initial codes were derived via thorough and repeated review and noting of salient descriptive statements within each participant's transcripts. Once all accounts had been analyzed, patterns were investigated, broken down into theoretical or psychological terminology categories, and examined for conceptual similarities about the shared essence of participant experiences, creating superordinate themes. (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith, Jarmon & Osborn, 1999; Smith & Osborne, 2003; Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). Four overarching themes (recognition of a larger problem, understanding purpose of policing, awareness of duality, beaten not broken) were identified as the most telling of the participant's experiences and the most consistent across the five participants (see Table 2). Discrepant superordinate themes were not found. Each superordinate theme incorporates multiple subthemes that provide greater detail to support the analysis. These sections highlight the officers' unique experiences while demonstrating how recognizing a larger problem, understanding the purpose of policing, awareness of duality, and being beaten, not broken, were common experiences despite their unique circumstances.

Table 2

Master Table of Superordinate Themes

Subordinate Themes	Superordinate Theme	Sample of Salient Text
Department Systemic Issues Systemic Racism	Recognition of a Larger Problem	"Identified a larger problem" "Always existed" "Mishap on the Police "History of this country" "Oppression"
Self-Concept Job Responsibility	Understanding Purpose of Policing	"Police must be police" "Have to inform people "Not really enforcing" "More mentoring"
Psychologically Perplexing/ Cognitive Process Victimization/ Marginalization Experiences Tropes Personal Attachment	Awareness of Duality	"It's conflicting" "Bullseye on our back" "Still viewed as threats" "I have a personal problem" "Torn between the two" "Hard to differentiate" "Job to do" "Pulled in two directions" "Blackness, Blueness"
Retention Issue Outlook Continuum Dejected Optimistic	Beaten Not Broken	Retire, you probably should," "Hate the profession" "Don't want to" "Tweaked" "Still have trust" "I can fix this"

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

Credibility was obtained by collecting data from multiple sources, including participant interviews, participant inclusion verification forms, field notes, and triangulation.

Transferability

The research gained external validity or transferability by including a thorough discussion of research design, methodology, sampling procedures, data collection, and analysis plan with a complete rationale.

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability or reliability was ensured through the audit trials and triangulation. I used different sources of data to achieve dependability or reliability. Through documentation of the data analysis and a detailed audit trail, I was able to track the qualitative research process, so that future researchers might be able to replicate the study. I also provided illustrations, including figures and tables of the categorization and subsequent sub-ordinate theme schema. I had a reflexive and objective look at the data to overcome research bias by using NVivo software to code and analyze the data. I was continuously thinking about the potential impact of my practical experience in police administration. However, if others were to conduct this study similarly, results may differ, based on the researchers' thought process, as interpretation is subjective.

Results

Analysis of the data and its subsequent theme development produced four overarching themes relating to this study's guiding research questions and the focus areas within this study following the interpretative analysis of the five transcribed interviews. These four themes are below.

1. Recognition of a Larger Problem
2. Understanding Purpose of Policing
3. Awareness of Duality
4. Beaten not Broken

The following describes the thematic findings based on Smith and Osborne's (2003) IPA guidelines for interviews. Using direct quotes from participants' experiences will be highlighted to support each described theme.

Theme 1: Recognition of a Larger Problem

Recognition of a larger problem, derived from how participants described how they perceive hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color, and the meaning these events contributed to understanding ascribed race and professional identities. Even though participants worked in various geographical locations and the specific role of the officers differed, the commonality expressed by participants was that these events curated several cognitive processes. They all described experiencing compounded cognitive functions due to their proximity to these events, professionally and personally. When asked to talk about their view of hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color, participants often began speaking from a negative space, explicitly pointing out

best practice standards and department loopholes. As conversations continued, participant focus began to centralize on their attachment to these systemic issues within the profession, as many explained, typically impacted African American individuals the most.

Systemic Department Issues

When Officer 5 reflected on his perception of hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color, he described these events as a part of existing internal issues that have “slipped through the crack” of the profession's dark cover due to the technological advancements in society. He stated:

> It kind of identified a larger problem that always existed. People have gotten away in law enforcement with so much corruption. But now it's been exposed with the advent of cameras and smartphones, and people learn how to use that stuff. A lot of the stuff that we're seeing now has been going on for a long time. Now you're seeing what's on the other side of that thin blue line; you can actually see through it now. (Officer 4, Personal Interview, 2021)

Officer 4 expressed feeling disappointed and frustrated following these events because of the profession’s “stain.” Reflecting on his afforded opportunity to carry George Floyd’s casket, he commented:

> That was a tough time. You hope that you instill in your people your thought process and your mentality. But everybody not cut out to be a police officer. The guy that put his knee on his neck, I can't recall his name. I wish they gave him life

> in prison. He damaged policing to a point where it's going to be years before we ever recover. If we ever recover today, it still has a bad taste.

Best Practice Strategies and Training

Some participants described feeling like these incidents and subsequent events, such as protests, could have been prevented if not for departmental standards and training. Officer 2 expressed his view of hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color as “Tragic.” More so, he said, “they should have never happened. It is a mishap on the Police Department.” Others reflected on fallacies in best practice strategies. For instance, Officer 3 expressed, “Indefensible, unnecessary, a lot of it comes down to lack of training.”

Similarly, Officers 1 and 2 discussed the poor department training they noticed within the George Floyd case. Officer 2 expressed, “not one time during my entire time in the Police Academy is that how they trained me, to put my knee on somebody's neck. Not acceptable, that is not a way to subdue." Likewise, Officer 1 detailed:

> It is unacceptable because I was trained; when you put some on the ground, you pick them up, roll them into a position where they can breathe. ---When you have your gun in your hand, it's not just a mistake, that's a fatal mistake; we're trained.

Officer 4 explained how he saw the errors in department standards play out following the death of Michael Brown:

> Where they messed up is the military-style policing that they did. And when the country saw that, that's really what turned everything around ---- that young man, left in the street for hours. You don't do that. And then their response to the

> protest was this military, like a third world country right here in the United States. It messed me up. And I said, Man, throughout my career directing my police Department, we had that military type of equipment, but it looks as if what they did, they used it on their own people. And that is a big no, no. That's really when I started seeing the paradigm change. (Officer 4, Personal Interview, 2021)

Vetting and Personnel Issues

While some participants pinpointed the lackluster department best practice standards as attributes of how they perceived hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color, others called out departmental vetting issues and personnel. When Officer 5 reflected on his perception of these events, he expressed these incidences to result from uncommitted officers still on the job and being overlooked. He stated:

> You take an oath to do it, like in the military, you take an oath to uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States, but it doesn't end there. A lot of people have missed that when they don't take that seriously. So, there's no loyalty to that, which sets the standard of how law enforcement people should behave right? Not all officers are bad, but there are a lot of them out there that really shouldn't be. (Officer 4, Personal Interview, 2021)

Conveying similar feelings to Officer 5, Officer 3 and Officer 4 described their views of these incidences as results of mediocre fitness for duty and performance evaluations within departments. When they reflected on these events, both officers described feeling police administrations are partly to blame. Officer 3 expressed, “sociopaths and some psychopaths are even going to sneak into the profession, but how

can we better vet these individuals? What early warning systems do these departments have in place to identify these individuals before something bad happens?" Similarly, Officer 4 described feeling uneasy knowing that only a few hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color incidents are caught on video. More so, because of departments' inadequate vetting and evaluation, troubled officers involved in these types of situations or even those who have multiple complaints still have a police shield. As Officer 4 put it:

> When I look back at some of the stuff that officers have done throughout the years, we just happen to see that. What have we missed? We just react to what we see on video. Yeah, George Floyd is one because it was captured on video. But there are so many that weren't. And we hear the stories. I know without a doubt, we have got officers that kill folks, and I believe this. From the bottom of my heart, I know for a fact that some officers have gotten away with murder, and they still police today. (Officer 4, Personal Interview, 2021)

In addition, some officers spoke about the lack of human dimension and attitude officers in these situations possess; if performance evaluations were in place, hostile and fatal police interactions could be prevented. As Officer 1 and Officer 4 explained, these incidents occurred because officers were too consumed in their career and the measurable outcomes. Officer 1 felt police officers involved in these incidents were too prideful. He expressed, "some people take this job to heart and forget how to be a person or a human. It is more of a robotic feel."

Consequently, these officers lose sight of the magnitude of their position. He further reflected on the power and control in these situations, "[you] just got a badge, [you] can legally take the person to jail, [you] can take their life, but we can go about this a different way." Similarly, Officer 4 expressed sometimes officers lack compassion for the individuals they interact with. He cited, "you can't forget that person is a human being, not a stat, not a violator, not a criminal; they're a person that just made one bad choice, you just happen to be the person there to enforce that." (Officer 4, Personal Interview, 2021)

Systemic Racism

Through participant responses and their uses of "us" and "we," it became clear that their interpretation of hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color was compounded with their attachments to these events. Participants expressed feelings of hyper-sensitivity given the proximity these events have to negative historical treatment of African Americans. Thus, officers described feeling victimized/marginalized following these events. For example, in the following quote, Officer 3 reflected that history repeats itself within hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color.

> This country, you know, the history of this country is marred with just the oppression of people of color. More specifically, Black people. It regresses us in some, you know, in some way when we continue to see these incidences happen and, you know, Black people on the other end of them, and it gets scary. It lets me know that we, in 2021, have a bullseye on our back, and we are still viewed as threats that we are still not viewed as equal. We are viewed as being violent,

> reviewed as being dangerous, and people tried to justify our treatment or their treatment of us by saying, 'I was in fear of my life. I was this. I was scared'. (Officer 3, Personal Interview, 2021)

Also acknowledging the historical oppression of African Americans, Officer 2 expressed, "I'm tired, African Americans we've been treated like **** from slavery to the 80s, 70s, even to this day by police officers." Likewise, Officer 5 described having a personal issue with these events because they continue to perpetuate unequal treatment of African Americans by police officers. He stated,

> I see African Americans get treated differently. We get sent to prison more often than anybody else. It seems like we get issued more tickets and citations. It's almost like officers target certain groups or certain people in specific communities (Officer 4, Personal Interview, 2021)

In addition to the parallel historical treatment of African Americans by Police, officers felt systematic barriers also played into their perceptions of hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color. Here, Officer 4 illustrated how these barriers are evident today:

> Sometimes when I go out and about community, I just see sadness. And it's the same poverty cycle, and it's just like a revolving door keeps repeating. It is unfortunate that we have been through so much, and the prisons are overrun. A lot of things have been designed. We can't control our circumstances on how we come up and where we came from. As a young Black male surrounded by poverty, failing schools ---you got all these factors going against you, you got a

> hard hill to climb, and watching some of the things that have happened; it just seems like it's always us. (Officer 4, Personal Interview, 2021)

Theme 2: Understanding Purpose of Policing

When participants were asked to describe how they viewed themselves professionally following hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color, officers expressed these events reinforced why they became officers. For example, Officer 3 stated:

> The thing about these incidents is they kind of reinforce why I do what I do and why I chose the profession and those incidents when they happen. I use them to make me a better person, a better police officer, and try to get a better understanding. But there's also some responsibility to try to help people understand where I am and why I feel like I feel about it. (Officer 3, Personal Interview, 2021)

Likewise, participants expressed experiencing a similar shift in role focus. Acknowledging that they still have a duty to protect and serve, officers emphasized being public educators now more than anything. Officer 5 asserted, “I still thought I had a good job to do, but I also have to inform people.” He further illustrated this by providing an account of a time when he had to educate an individual on his role and the need to not collectively label Law Enforcement. He cited:

> On Saturday morning, I saw this young lady from New York on 95 traveling south and going at some outrageous speed. So, I pulled over, went to the car, and she had three small kids. If I remember the age, it was eight, seven, and five. She

> was like, [speaking to children] 'hands up, get your hands up.' I said, no, that's not necessary. That's not what we do. She said, 'have you seen?' I say, yes, I have, but that's not what we do. So, you put your hands down and stop conditioning little kids. That's not what we do now. You are going really fast; I am going to write you a ticket. However, all of that's unnecessary because what one bad Officer has done or is doing is not a reflection on me. (Officer 5, Personal Interview, 2021)

Similarly, Officer 4 provided an example of how hostile and fatal police interactions sparked his responsibility for educating the African American community about their rights. Speaking of his effort to prevent deadly shootings and harmful interactions due to individual negligence of the law, he stated:

> One thing that I do, and I taught this to our community, is to Know your Rights. I want our people to know what they can and cannot do when they end up with the police. So, I had my officers go out to different community meetings, different community events to teach people their rights. I want them to know when they can be searched when they can't be searched. (Officer 4, Personal Interview, 2021)

He also described feeling his responsibility is to ensure everyone is provided with the same treatment and police are held accountable. The way he puts it, "Police must be policed; they must be held accountable for the things that they do when you don't hold them accountable." Furthermore, he commented:

> Since the events have occurred, I do everything that I could possibly do to ensure that everybody was being policed fairly. I ensure that they are treated fairly if they

> went through the process, didn't try to jam them up, didn't try to get them to meet anything that wasn't there. I always just make sure that they were provided the due process of law and awarded the rights the Constitution provides all of us. (Officer 4, Personal Interview, 2021)

Echoing similar sentiments, Officer 1 stated that since these events, he stresses getting everyone somewhere safe, being humble, and practicing patience and fairness when interacting with community members. He reflected, “my goal every day is to get everybody home, breathing, in a safe place, whether it's home, a jail cell or wherever just make sure everybody gets to a safe place.”

In addition to educating the public and being an agent of fairness, participants reflected on the chance to be a voice for African Americans within the profession hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color provided. Participants mentioned feeling as if they were filling the void of African Americans due to a lack of representation and understanding of these events. Officer 3 reflected on his experience having to speak up for members of this community, stating:

> One of the driving forces behind me coming into law enforcement was to always try to be that voice, that face of that representation of the African American community and even to my peers. Because I look back at over 28 years, I've had times where I've had to explain to non-African American officers how things happen or why things happen and had those hard conversations because individuals don't understand, don't grow up, and haven't had the Black experience. (Officer 3, Personal Interview, 2021)

Officer 3's account speaks to, in short, how African American police officers' duality spills over into the policing profession, which many of the participants expressed similarly as interviews continued.

Theme 3: Awareness of Duality

As officers spoke about hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color, it became evident that these events were psychologically perplexing for them. Participants recurringly expressed viewing these events from two lenses. As officer 1 put it,

> I feel that we have bad apples on both sides of the fence. There are African Americans who do stupid things, as well as there are cops that do stupid things, not trying to be one-sided in this whole thing. I look at it from both sides, like if the cops stopped me, how would that interaction go? What is he wondering? And then I put myself as a cop; what is this person wondering right now? But my biggest thing is, to be honest, I understand the fear that some people have when cops stop them. Now I really do. I truly do because it's a scary thing. It is with everything going on. (Officer 1, Personal Interview, 2021)

Having a Badge Doesn't Guarantee Protection

Awareness of how officers view themselves professionally and personally compared to the perceived expectations others have of them fuels the psychologically perplexing nature of hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color. Consequently, participants described experiencing impacts in navigating their daily personal, professional lives. All the participants expressed feelings of vulnerability and

experiencing a level of safety uncertainty when off-duty, in or around unfamiliar areas or people, or when their officer status was not easily identifiable. Participants cited feeling extremely apprehensive while traveling and during traffic stops and even carrying their police paraphernalia as a safety and credibility measure. Officer 1 stated, “I carry my badge everywhere I go, badge and gun, and my biggest thing is I always wonder if I'm in another state.” He further reflected on his anxiety associated with non-local officers not knowing his law enforcement status; he indicated, "If I get stopped, to them, they really don't know, I'm a cop. And with me being of my stature, my size, my demeanor, I might be taken as a threat. it makes me wonder how it would go?” (Officer 3, Personal Interview, 2021)

Similarly, Officer 5 expressed understanding that he still is African American with or without a badge; thus, there is always a risk of danger. He reflected, “I see myself, and I still do as I'm African American. If I should ever get pulled over, I need to be very aware that any sudden movements could be misconstrued as a hostile act by a police officer.” Correspondingly, Officer 4 expressed being more vigilant for himself and his family. He stated, "it made me more vigilant to make sure my son does what the police say. I tell him, don't play with the officers. You know, a lot of them don't play with them when they are working. Drawing on the historical treatment of African Americans airplane travel during the late 80s and early 90s, Officer 3 explained his increase in awareness traveling following hostile and fatal interactions with persons of color, citing:

> When I travel, when I'm driving, when I'm on the road, I'm very vigilant. Things can happen and be explained away over a dead body. And that's the scary thing. It

> makes me very vigilant when I travel, whether it be the plane, train, or automobile. And I never want that to happen for me to be a dead body and somebody else explains in my story. (Officer 3, Personal Interview, 2021)

Though Officer 3 admits these events have affected him mentally, he describes these events as not being too overbearing in his daily life; rather, these events have the same impact on him as any other Black man. He expressed:

> We've gone through periods in this country where we were unfairly and improperly targeted. And these incidents come in waves, and then it settles down for a while. So, incidents like this make my life just as difficult as the next Black man. (Officer 3, Personal Interview, 2021)

Giving a more in-depth response, Officer 2 illustrated how the viral hostile police interaction with Army Lieutenant, Caron Nazario, drove his psychological disturbance due to his similarities and contextual variables. He explained:

> When that Lieutenant got pulled over right, he got tasered and pepper spray, and it went viral. That same day I was traveling back from Drill. I was in my uniform [Army]. I was in a dark-tinted vehicle [non-law enforcement] just like he was in a dark tenant vehicle, and I'm driving through areas that, you know, the cops aren't normally---They don't only see people like us or deal with vehicles like that. You know, I'm saying, so we fit this description of a potential criminal. And I wonder if that was me, what if I got pulled over. (Officer 2, Personal Interview, 2021)

Officer 2’s account speaks to how hostile and fatal interactions with persons of color heighten the awareness of various individual contextual factors that may influence

feelings of being uncomfortable, concerned, and vulnerable to possible victimization or unwarranted police interactions.

I'm Still Viewed as a Threat

Participants discussed understanding the negative racial labels ascribed to African American males, such as “Threat” or “Criminal," do not subside while wearing the police uniform. Many of them validated their feelings by sharing their experiences as on or off-duty officers. For example, Officer 1 shared his experience navigating racial stereotypes within the policing profession. Talking about his state of perplexity, regarding how his stunning appearance within his department is viewed and possible outcomes, Officer 1 stated:

> I've been told several times people in my department, hey, man, I'm glad you're on my side because they're like, if you get upset, I don't know what I do, or I don't know how we would handle that. Most people look at me and say, yeah, we're not fighting with you. It's going to take about six officers, maybe four officers. And I'm like, for what? Nine times out of ten, I'm just going to comply. If I wasn't on this side, I would just comply. It's not a big deal, but I just feel like me being an African American male, especially being as large as I am, people outside of even police officers, as well as the citizens looking at me as a threat. It's one of those things I laugh it off. You don't really think about it, but when you sit and actually think about it like, dang, what would they do if I wasn’t on this site? (Officer 1, Personal Interview, 2021)

After discussing his bewildering experience navigating racial stereotypes and expectations centered around his stunning appearance within his department, Officer 1 gave an account of the adjustments he tries to make to distance himself from these perceptions, though unsuccessful:

> Literally, on my first day as a police officer, I was looking at my training coach, at how he is standing, just relaxed. I call it a relaxed on-guard stance. His hands were down by his side, in his pocket----It was kind of like in the vicinity of how to reach, if he needs to address something, he can reach everywhere he needed to on his body down----- just by his side, not in his side pockets, but the cargo pockets on the side. He's looking at me, and I'm moving my arms and my hands around. He's like, "what are you doing?" I was like, Well, I'm trying to look less threatening or less intimidating. And he flat out was like, "I'm just being honest, no matter how you're standing, you're going to be intimidating because of your size." (Officer 1, Personal Interview, 2021)

Understanding these negative perceptions will not go away despite making conscious efforts, he expressed, "I've accepted that I'm going to be just a threat to people who don't know me." (Officer 1, Personal Interview, 2021)

Likewise, Officer 5 recalled an unwarranted interaction off-duty in his residential neighborhood with a fellow officer because of his appearance. Recognizing he was being profiled, Officer 5 explained he felt he had to "disarm" or make the Officer comfortable to ensure an unwarranted interaction did not escalate. He states:

> I see an officer drive through my neighborhood, and he stops to talk to me. I'm thinking, why is this guy stopping me, wanting to talk to me? Because I'm Black? Is it because I'm wearing a hoodie? It's cold. And the guy literally stopped his patrol car. I'm thinking, why is this guy stopping me wanting to talk to me and I'm just a regular dude just walking. I kind of felt like he wanted to ask me some other questions, so I had to go ahead and put him at ease. I said, oh, yeah, by the way, how long have you been at the police department. He said, 'I've been there for a little, I said yeah, me too, brother. and his whole attitude changed. (Officer 5, Personal Interview, 2021)

Not only did Officer 5 express having to be preemptively defensive during this unwarranted interaction was concerning, but he also explained he had to exhibit this behavior because he understood what could happen just because he is a Black man. Officer 5 further revealed his uncomfortable feeling knowing that his law enforcement status helped, he stated:

> His whole mindset was somewhere else because I was a Black guy walking down a sidewalk while walking my dog. But when I disarmed him, it was a totally different conversation. That's not what his first mindset was. I find that with me being an African American, had I not been law enforcement had I not disarmed him, what would he have done? I could have been on the bad end of something. (Officer 5, Personal Interview, 2021)

Black or Blue

Each participant spoke about having an awareness of self as African American male police officers following hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color. As they expressed, their awareness is due to political and racial propaganda surrounding supporting Black and "Blue" lives. Consequently, some participants expressed sentiments of being caught in the middle due to feeling "forced" to choose a side. In one account, Officer 3 shared how hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color have made him feel "torn." As he put it:

> It pulls me in two different directions. Being Black and being a police officer, I always tell people this, Blueness, I can take off, but my Blackness, I can't nor would I ever. You can stand in my shoes as a police officer, whether you're white, black, green, purple because that's the profession. But you can never stand in my shoes as a Black man. So, you can't understand how I feel torn between the two. (Officer 3, Personal Interview, 2021)

In addition, to feeling pitted between the two identities, Officer 3 expressed experiencing "internal conflict" because of subsequent rhetoric from divisive, flame fanning media tactics and the personal attachments to these events. He illustrated this by reflecting on his experience following the death of George Floyd. Speaking on the backlash and exclusion from fellow members of the African American community, he stated:

> It just made me mad because my people [African Americans] looked at me even worse. They're like, "you're a cop" I'm like, okay, I'm not Derek Chauvin, So, I

> understand how you feel, I understand both sides, I'm Black, and I'm a cop. I'm not agreeing with what Derek Chauvin did. I condemn what he did because it was no reason for it. But even with saying that Black people will still be like, what, "you're still a cop." (Officer 3, Personal Interview, 2021)

While discussing the exclusionary response from the African American Community, Officer 3 reflected on the adverse reaction he received from his fellow officers for his expression of allyship. He further reflected:

> I wanted to go out and riot because I feel your pain -----I should say I wanted to go out and protest because, in some regards, I had the ability to do that because being a member of the greatest fraternity, we actually had a big role around this country and being vocal about not only Derek Chauvin, but most of these incidences. So, it allowed me to be able to march, be able to protest peacefully. And that was kind of detrimental to me because White officers in my department tried to turn that, tried to turn that, and say, "oh, well, he's out here protesting" when that happened, It really kind of put the icing on the cake that, yeah, this is really being trapped in the middle. (Officer 3, Personal Interview, 2021)

Officer 2 stated, "It's hard as **** being a Black officer mentally," as he described his experiences of psychological conflict between being an African American and being "Blue." He further explained his dilemma stems from the imposed primary identity of a police officer in uniform, though he disagrees. He expressed, "I put on this uniform, I'm blue, right? That's what they say I'm blue. All they see is blue and **** that, no, it's not true. That's ******** I'm an African American male." Furthermore, he stated:

> I can't sit there and say, yeah, I'm blue, I'm for this uniform----I don’t have any back the police paraphernalia because I don't support everything saying back the police, what we need backing for? I back the African American male. (Officer 2, Personal Interview, 2021)

Furthermore, Officer 2 expresses how hostile and fatal police interactions enhance this dissension. He explains:

> To see the **** that's going on happen to my people, and I really can't do nothing about it. It's hard. It's hardest to differentiate between being a Black man and being a police officer, it's conflicting as F. I have a job to do as a police officer, which is to protect everyone, but as a Black man, I need to protect my people from getting in trouble. I think it's ******** man like I feel like as a Black officer, seeing people constantly be the ones that are in handcuffs and constantly the ones that are portrayed as the thugs, the gangsters, the problems, the issues that we see on the news or whatever. (Officer 2, Personal Interview, 2021)

As he finished giving an account of his cognitive processing following hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color, Officer 2 summarized his feelings by saying, “It's tiresome, it's tiring, it's mind-boggling, it's stressful.”

Contrary to other participants' reflections, Officer 4 expressed that institutional trapping associated with the so-called "Thin Blue Line" has caused internal and political conflict in addition to confusion. He cited:

> You've seen that thin blue line sticker sticking on the back of these officers’ cars. There's no blue. There's no black. We are one. Whenever I saw them, --- I can't

> tell them what to put on their car as long as it's nothing racial---but, when we get to the point where we start identifying as one group, that one color, that thin blue line, that hurt me so bad to see so many officers “this is the thin blue line, the thin blue line.” What are you all a different race? It's a community. We are a community. We're one. Quit selling this thin blue line. And that's where the confusion is coming in. (Officer 4, Personal Interview, 2021)

Furthermore, he understands he has an identity as a police officer and a Black male but does not see a conflict because he does not see race in the profession. Addressing the need for the focus to shift back to officers getting back to the purpose of policing and doing what’s right, he states:

> I'm a Black male. I'm a Police Chief. But I'm a Black male. I'm not the Black Police Chief. I'm not the White Police Chief. I'm the Police Chief, but I'm identified as a Black male. And I'm here for all people. I just got to ensure that everybody is treated the same. Yeah, we got some young black male officers asking, "what do I do?" It's simple. Do what's right, period. Do what's right? Black, White. There shouldn't be any conflict. I'm sure some officers say it's a conflict, but it should not conflict to do what's right, period. Nothing else. Nothing more. It was right. (Officer 4, Personal Interview, 2021)

Theme 4: Beaten not Broken

Several participants described having a dispirited but optimistic perspective of the policing profession after hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color. When asked how they viewed their career after these incidents, some officers expressed feeling

dejected initially but understood that they still have an opportunity to elicit change. Participants attributed this attitude to the challenges of hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color poised toward accomplishing their original goal of becoming police officers. For example, during the interview with Officer 1, he described his aspirations for becoming a police officer as wanting to change the perception of the police and build community trust. However, since these events, he expresses that he has developed a fear and concern about the progress being erased, affecting his view of his career choice. He stated:

> Honestly, I will say there have been times I seconded guessed it --- I don't want to work so hard and do something and build something, and then it all just gets knocked down, and I got to start right back over. I'm working so hard to build that community engagement piece, that community leadership piece. I wonder, will that affect me moving forward? It just makes me think, will I have the same support in the community, or will I have the same trust? Will the community still have the same trust in me after this incident? (Officer 1, Personal Interview, 2021)

Officer 2 expressed his similar experiences and reflected on his complex view of the profession, following hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color. He cited:

> Sometimes I wonder if I'm in the right profession. I sometimes wonder whether this is my sign that God wants me to be here. It puts me in a headspace of constantly trying to figure out my every day. Am I doing the right thing? My feelings go from man F this job. I don't want to deal with it. I hate feeling this

> way, to **** if I don't do this, you know who's going to protect? Who's going to protect, you know, TJ, from ******* going to jail because he might have ******* pushed his baby mom or something. (Officer 2, Personal Interview, 2021)

Unlike the previous two officers, the three remaining participants, veteran officers, expressed slightly different experiences. Some of these individuals explained their dismal views of the policing profession following hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color stemmed from a culmination of mental exhaustion and their length of time in the uniform. Officer 3 commented:

> Probably in the last two years, I started to hate my profession somewhat. When George Floyd happened, I was pissed. I was just like, this is a mess, man. I think it was a combination of my already having over 20 years of policing. And it was just like, man, I'm tired. I know. I worked my behind off for the last 20 plus years, and this stuff is still happening. And I think it was just a level of frustration that I was just like, you know what? I can go do something else at this point. (Officer 3, Personal Interview, 2021)

Comparably, Officer 5 further illustrated how hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color impacted career longevity. Describing what he believed was the most significant impact on officer retention due to the visceral effects media, Officer cited:

> Liability and a lot of officers feel this way now; when you reach that point where you can retire, you probably should because of the liability concerns that come

> out of doing this job now, it's not like it used to be. I could be doing my job just as good and smiling. And then the next thing you know, I am in a bad situation that turned worse, and I had to do something I didn't want to do to somebody. So now the media is being their indictments. If I hurt somebody or did something against the policy, although I did what I needed to do, it's still against policy. So now I get sued by the state, the city, the people, you know, you distance yourself away from that. Because if you can survive a long, good law enforcement career as one of the good guys, it's time to go because you're blessed to get that far. (Officer 5, Personal Interview, 2021)

However, Officer 4 stated he did not experience wanting to retire following these events:

> I knew I was there for the right reason, and that is to make the police Department better make the department accountable to our citizens. Yeah, it is stressful, but as long as you're there for the right reason and you're trying to do the right thing, I just think that all set any personal feelings that I may have had at the time. (Officer 4, Personal Interview, 2021)

Though it was apparent hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color tweaked some officers' perception of the career, participants made it a point to ensure these feelings “embed and flowed”, and they were still optimistic. Many of these officers felt that there was more work to be done, and with perseverance, they could push through and create things. All participants described minor changes in self-efficacy and described favorable confidence rates simultaneously as their negative emotions. Officer 3 illustrated

this by comparing his “burnout” experience by comparing it to staying in a troubled relationship, stating, "you know it's not changing or evolving in a positive way. But it's still that innate thing that says you can still do some good in this thing. It's still some good left to do. Further, he expresses that he remains encouraged even though he feels the police profession has been set back due to these events. He reflected,

> I still love it because I love what I do. I know that I have a role as a leader. I know that I can fix what I can fix this in my immediate area, and I'm just the type of person I just want to stop trying until it gets better. (Officer 3, Personal Interview, 2021)

To the same end, Officer 1 described that although his perception of the career is tweaked, he still hopes to have a successful career. Equating hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color to football, Officer 1 expressed, "If you make a bad play, you can't dwell on that play. You got to keep going, moving forward, get better. You got to learn from that play". More so, he states that despite these events, he still has a good relationship with the community, “I feel that I still have that trust from the community, and they look forward to when I'm at work. So, it makes me want to say that I do feel like I'll have a good career here.”

Participants communicated their confidence change experience following hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color, resulting from adjustments in how they interacted with the community and changes in their overall mindset. Though, when asked to speak about his confidence, Officer 5 was adamant that he did not experience any change in his confidence level due to his upbringing. He stated, " I know me. I know how

I was raised, and all those things will always be the same. you practice stuff in private that bleeds in their daily lives". Despite this perspective, social and political rhetoric surrounding hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color may have impacted officers' confidence level and how they perform their jobs, especially young officers. For example, Officer 3 described the fear young officers have following these events, impacting their behavior:

> The vibe that I'm getting from officers here makes many feel handicapped because when they're trying to do the right thing, it seems like society is against them. They don't want to be on the other end of a video camera where people only see a snippet of what happened instead of seeing the entirety. And that's often what happens. (Officer 3, Personal Interview, 2021)

In addition to describing young officers' perceptions, Officer 3 also reflected on various other patrol officers' sentiments, citing:

> A lot of cops that I talked to, they're like, man, I don't even pull cars over anymore. I don't even stop cars for traffic violations anymore because I don't even want it to go south. And then I'm looking crazy on a video, right? (Officer 3, Personal Interview, 2021)

In contrast, other officers spoke to proactive versus reactive strategies, increased transparency, and built community trust, thus increasing their confidence. Officer 1 expressed, during this time, he finds being physically present in the community has changed how the African American community views him.

> This job is 90% talking. That is what I do. I don't sit in my car and ride around all night. I literally would pull my car off the road and get out and just have a conversation or walk into a store. I spend most of my time educating people on stuff. So just a simple conversation literally leads me into people saying, you know what? He ain't so bad. (Officer 1, Personal Interview, 2021)

In addition, Officers 4 and 5 described feeling confident because of their increased transparency with the African American community following hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color. Officer 5 reflected:

> It's got to be transparency, transparency within the department. Officers have to be transparent about what they're doing and doing the right thing when they're supposed to and being able to go out and communicate with the people in the community that they serve and kind of remind them, hey, I'm such and such, this just happened to be my job. I have to pay my bills, too. This is the way I choose to pay for them. They have to show a dimensional human side to themselves because we're not robots. Yeah, your police officers go there to enforce, but you are by no means the final authority on anything. (Officer 4, Personal Interview, 2021)

Further, Officer 4 reflected on the importance of transparency about internal issues involving officers to hold police accountable within the African American community to build rapport, individual trust, and understanding. Here, he detailed a time following an officer-involved shooting wherein he was transparent with outside organizations.

> Any good police department, they're going to implement all these early warning systems --is what I call them--- to try to weed out those that don't need to be there, Police the Police. You must police the police to make sure they're not violating anybody's constitutional rights. I had an officer-involved shooting this year. I got calls from NAACP, different groups here, and the Black Action Committee. I spoke with everyone, showing them whatever they wanted to see, videos, whatever it took, and let them know that I took it seriously and that we would investigate. That transparency part is key; Once you quit being transparent and lose the trust, that will be a tall hill to climb. (Officer 4, Personal Interview, 2021)

Answering the Research Questions

Research Question 1: How does the African American Officer perceive hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color, and what meaning do these events contribute to understanding their ascribed race and professional identities?

African American officers perceive hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color due to long-existing systemic and systematic issues within American society and police departments. Participants further describe these events as emotionally triggering due to proximity to the historical treatment of African Americans. Consequently, officers express these events reaffirm racial stereotypes and expectations and reshape their perception of the purpose of their job. African American officers find these events to illuminate feelings of potential victimization/marginalization. These events also curate participants' desire to protect and educate the African American Community while in and out of uniform.

Research Question 2: How do hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color create, perpetuate, or challenge the concept of identity conflict among African American police officers?

Participants' attachment to the African American identity and the corresponding political rhetoric following hostile and fatal police interactions curate a feeling of being pitted between the African American and police officer identities. Participants expressed acknowledgment of duality; however, the victimization experiences witnessed and personally experienced reinforced harmful tropes ascribed to African American males fueled feelings that they could be next if not vigilant, even though they are Law Enforcement.

Research Question 3: How do African American police officers describe their confidence and policing behavior following heightened public attention to hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color?

Participants express having a slightly jaded view of the profession, though describing experiencing minor confidence changes following hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color. Participants describe increasing self-efficacy levels due to understanding and resonating with the citizens. Since these events, officers cited making purposeful changes in how they interact with the community, focusing on using proactive police strategies, such as being more present, increasing transparency, communication, and accountability; further increasing confidence due to the increased community trust and rapport.

Summary

This chapter provided a detailed discussion of the thematic findings developed due to the data collection and analysis process of the responses from the five African American police officer participants as outlined in Chapter 3. In addition, this chapter revealed participants' semi-structured interviews produced the following four themes: recognition of a larger problem, understanding purpose of policing, awareness of duality, and beaten not broken. Each of the themes was supported by excerpts from the participants' data material.

The next chapter, Chapter 5, provides a discussion of the findings related to the research questions, the theoretical framework, and the existing literature connected to the topic in response to this study's findings, recommendations for African American Male police officers. Chapter 5 will also discuss suggested directions for future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This study sought to capture African American male police officers' lived experiences during the post-Ferguson era. Specifically, this study aimed to understand how African American officers experienced hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color and how these experiences contributed to understanding professional and self-identities. It also explored their confidence and policing behavior following increased public attention to racially charged events. The study used a qualitative research method and an IPA research design. A total of five male African American police officers participated in the study. Through the analysis of data, four superordinate theme findings were yielded: (a) recognition of a larger problem, (b) understanding purpose of policing, (c) awareness of duality, and (d) beaten not broken. The findings of this study both confirmed and extended empirical knowledge about African American police officers' lived experiences during the post-Ferguson era. Further, these findings contribute to the first detailed interpretative phenomenological account of such incidents. Thus, the sparse existing literature only supports some themes articulated by the results.

This chapter discusses the key findings, compares the results to the literature review in Chapter 2, application of the guiding theoretical/conceptual framework discusses the study's limitations, and provides recommendations. Discussion of the positive social change implications, and recommendations for future research, followed by a study conclusion, are also included.

Interpretation of Findings

Long-existing systemic and systematic issues within American society and the policing profession facilitate how African American police officers perceive hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color. Study participants describe these events' juxtaposition to the historical treatment of African Americans as psychologically and emotionally triggering. Moreover, participants perceive these events as a reflection of historical victimization experiences that affirm racial stereotypes and expectations. This understanding aligns with the findings from a Pew Research Center poll of 8,000 U.S. police officers referenced in Kochel's (2020) article. Though this research poll focused on Ferguson protests, Black officers still perceived these events as deeply rooted in historical systemic behavior within police departments and society (Kochel, 2020).

Participants also found hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color to provide meaning to their occupational role. Officers stated that the reason for becoming an officer was to be a helper/change agent and a protector within their community and revitalize the profession's culture. These feelings, defending and educating the African American community, were intensified following these events. This finding expands academia's knowledge of the African American police officers' perception of their occupational identity, wherein existing literature has primarily focused on the evolution of their responsibilities but not explicated their interpretations. Though participant sentiments are congruent to how researchers described the African Americans police officers felt during the mid-20th century (Dulaney, 1996; Forman, 2017 as cited in Carbado & Richard 2018; Hilton, 2020). More so, this finding aligns with a previous

quantitative study on Officers of color in the West Palm Beach, Florida Police Department (WPBPD), which revealed these officers have a genuine desire to help victims and a noncynical perspective of the public (Gau & Paoline, 2017). However, this study only explains how minority officers viewed their occupational role and attitude toward the public in general. Nevertheless, Gau and Paoline's (2017) finding supports this study's results and expand the understanding of the relationship between racially charged events and occupational role outlooks for African American male officers.

Anxiousness is a critical and unanimous sentiment among participants expressed following hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color. Previous research conducted by Carbado and Richard (2018) indicated that because of the harmful tropes assigned to African Americans, Black individuals, in general, develop anxiousness surrounding police interactions out of fear of police brutality, igniting feelings of hyper-vigilance. Participants offered consistent experiences, though they cited their law enforcement status mediated their anxiousness and incited a state of perplexity. Several participants stated they found themselves asking, "what if I wasn't a police officer," when speaking about the hostile and fatal interactions with persons of color or recounting individual experiences. Participants noted that either they mentioned their law enforcement status or carried their police paraphernalia around as a "security blanket," like Campbell (2017) found in their study of Black officers in New Jersey. In both cases, officers recognized they too are subjected to the same treatment nonlaw enforcement African American individuals face. Thus, African American police officers acknowledge

that having a police badge does not guarantee fair treatment nor negate deeply seeded racial stereotypes attached to African Americans.

Only two out of the five officers in this study expressed feeling conflicted or experiencing strain due to the perceived role expectations of African American and police identities. Thus, it is plausible to state that hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color have negative psychological consequences on some African American police officers; however, future research will need to conduct more extensive research to confirm. The remaining three participants expressed understanding of their duality, though they did not express strain. The lack of or increased years of experience and subsequent resiliency, department support, or geographical location of duty station could explain these findings. More so, this finding mirrors Kochel's study results, which indicated that African American officers did not experience significant psychological effects during or after the Ferguson protests, despite adverse reactions from the African American Community. As researchers explained, officers' ability to dissociate themselves from the negative public sentiments toward the profession, as well as their ability to view themselves separate from the problem, increased their ability to deflect and avoid internalizing harsh rhetoric (Kochel, 2020, p. 23). In this study, this well-articulated skill set could explain why participants did not consistently experience strain. Two of the three participants who expressed experiencing no conflict were veteran officers. Though both officers expressed their disdain for the divisive political rhetoric, both expressed focusing on making positive changes in the community, being fair, and concentrating on their perceived occupational role. Thus, these participants may have successfully disassociated

themselves from the external discussions, enabling them the ability to circumvent strain development, unlike newcomer officers, who may not have had enough time or experience to build such skills.

Two participants cited that media exacerbated police interactions, creating more divisiveness with the African American community. Thus, some participants felt rejected from the African American community, hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color at a point in time. Previous research posits, this rejection results in strain and reduce confidence to fulfill job duties (Carter,1995; Gau & Paoline III, 2019, as cited in Kochel, 2020). Study findings, however, did not support this perspective. Participants expressed a slightly jaded view of the profession initially following hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color. However, these feelings did not overshadow officers' optimistic outlook on their careers. It is important to note that job satisfaction appeared as a continuum based on years of experience; as the experience increased, participants' career perception decreased. Yet, participants attributed these views to departmental support and overall changes in the profession and perceived potential challenges to accomplishing internal goals, not community reaction. Future research should investigate racially charged events' impact on policy development and changes within police departments and officer retention.

Participants described experiencing increased self-efficacy levels due to understanding and resonating with the citizens since these events. Officers cited making purposeful changes in interacting with the community and using proactive policy strategies such as being more present and increasing transparency, communication, and

police accountability efforts. Consequently, Officers felt they built community trust and rapport, leading to increased confidence. Previous research found related results, indicating African American officers during the post-Ferguson era, are not impacted by the Ferguson Effect because of cultural understanding, familial and professional support, neighborhood familiarity (Kochel, 2020). However, participants in this study explained their changes in how they interacted with the public following hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color were due to the refocusing on the reasons they got into the profession.

Applying Social Identity Approach

The guiding theoretical framework, SIT, may also explain study findings. A Social Identity is an individual's belief that they are members of a particular social group. Throughout the interview process, participants extensively utilized the pronouns "us" and "we" when speaking about the African American community, insinuating an "in-group" membership, and "them" or "they" when talking about police officers, an "out-group," acknowledging their social identity as African American (Jetten et al., 2017). Additionally, given the expressed hyper-sensitivity to unequal treatment towards African Americans, it is evident that participants perceived their ethnic identity as important to their self-image (Murphy et al., 2018). Very seldom did participants refer to themselves as “us” or “we” when speaking about policing; therefore, though recognized as belonging, this group membership is not dominant over participants' African American identity.

Previous research posited African American officers struggle with identity conflict due to belonging to multiple social groups and conflicting expectations. However, the findings of this study challenge this conceptual framework. As stated earlier in this section, participants acknowledged membership in both the African American and Policing social groups; however, it is evident African American officers' structure their various identities and select a dominant identity (Brewer, 2001, as cited in Mangum & Block, 2017). For participants, their African American identity is dominant, and the police identity is secondary; thus, they identify as an African American, who is a police officer. It is assumed this is as a coping mechanism to the strain accompanying identity conflict (Brewer, 2001, as cited in Mangum & Block, 2017). This ideology is not particularly true regarding this study, as only two participants expressed experiencing conflict. African American officers perceive their membership within the policing social group as secondary to their self-concept. Thus, it is inconclusive that hostile and fatal interactions with people of color are situational cues that trigger this sorting.

Limitations of the Study

This research is exploratory and based on participant narratives; thus, the findings only represent the African American male police officers in this study. This study was also geographically restricted. More so, this study's results are non-generalizable to the experiences of more prominent African American police officers' populations. Given the sensitive nature of the research topic, participants were skeptical about going on record and being recorded. There were several interested individuals; however, many were not cooperative due to apprehensiveness.

Recommendations

Due to the small representative population, incorporating a more sizable sample to include a wider geographical reach, such as other states or entire regions, is recommended. This study placed no restrictions on participants' years of service; thus, a vast gap in experience was evident. While replicating this study, it may be beneficial to conduct it with specific demographics. Additionally, data analysis revealed a potential relationship between years of service and overall perceptions of hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color. Though participants' ages for this study were not among the data collected, a quantitative research study would be helpful to see whether an actual correlation exists between participant age, years of service, and perceptions, as this study revealed preliminary patterns between years of service and perceptions. Academia is limited in understanding female police officer perspectives and their views of racially charged events are non-existent. Thus, future research should collect and compare results to this study's findings, to develop more robust and inclusive departmental training.

Implications

The results of this study provide policing professions and academia, firsthand knowledge of the lived experiences of an under-investigated population. Elevating the voices of African American officers regarding their lived experiences during racially charged police interactions provides wide-ranging implications for positive social change. Study findings posited inconsistencies and lackluster department standards, wherein officers felt there are gaping holes within performance evaluations and disciplinary

procedures that allow troubled behavior to continue and spread. Thus, there is an opportunity to develop more robust evaluation methods and behavior tracking procedures. In addition, patterns were observed among rookies and veteran officers that evidenced a generational shift in the profession. Knowing this, police departments should update department policies and procedures that reflect both the mission and vision of the department and the mindset of the newer generation to recruit and retain current and future officers.

Additionally, though study findings did not conclusively indicate hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color impact African American police officers, stress management and coping programming would still be beneficial. Rookie officers may still be impressionable and vulnerable, unlike veteran officers; thus, programming should be targeted toward resiliency building and potential mentoring tracks.

Conclusion

This study was designed to explore the lived experiences of African American police officers during the post-Ferguson era, widening academia's narrow focus on this subject matter. Study findings revealed that African American officers viewed hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color as psychologically disturbing due to the juxtaposition to the historical treatment of African Americans and illumination of victimization experiences and reinforcement of negative stereotypes ascribed to African Americans. Consequently, African American officers have a slightly jaded view of the profession, though they did not experience the "Ferguson Effect." Though it is plausible to state that hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color have negative

psychological consequences on some African American police officers, future studies will need to conduct more extensive research to confirm the gravity of these events. Experience and subsequent resiliency, department support, geographical location are areas of concern that future studies should investigate further. Nevertheless, elevating the voices of African American officers regarding their lived experiences during racially charged police interactions provides an opportunity for the development of more robust department policies and procedures and training regimes.

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Appendix A. Interview Guide

1. Can you talk about what made you want to become a Police officer?
2. Could you describe to me what it is like to be a Police officer?
3. How would you describe being an African American Police officer?
4. If you had to describe what various hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color, mean to you, what would you say?
5. Can you tell me about a particular hostile and fatal police interaction with a person of color that has stood out to you?
6. Could you describe for me how you see yourself since these hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color? Prompts:
    a. What about as a Police officer?
    b. What about as an African American?
    c. What about as an African American Male?
7. Can you talk about your everyday life following hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color? Prompt: Emotionally, mentally, physically?
8. How would you describe your view your career?
9. Could you describe for me your confidence and policing behavior since these hostile and fatal police interactions with persons of color?