

2022

## Exploring African American Experiences With Police in Cleveland, Ohio

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# Walden University

College of Health Sciences and Public Policy

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Hamza Abdullah Maliki Khabir

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Walden University  
2022

Abstract

Exploring African American Experiences With Police in Cleveland, Ohio

by

Hamza Abdullah Maliki Khabir

MPhil, Walden University, 2021

MPA, Columbia Southern University, 2018

BA, University of Maryland Global Campus, 2014

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration

Walden University

August 2022

## Abstract

According to previous research, African Americans in Cleveland, OH, reported having more negative experiences with the Cleveland Police Department (CPD) than any other demographic in the city. Furthermore, The U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, determined that the CPD had regularly engaged in excessive force by police officers. This study's purpose was to understand African Americans' experiences in Cleveland regarding the CPD. This study's research question focused on African Americans' experiences in Cleveland and their relationship with the Cleveland police. The study used a general qualitative design to conduct interviews with 10 African Americans between the ages of 18 and 39 who have lived in Cleveland for 5 years. African Americans have a history of negative police experiences. Therefore, punctuated equilibrium theory was used as the framework to understand this phenomenon. Participants' responses were coded, grouped into categories, and themes were created from the data that identified experiences with the Cleveland police. Overall, participants noted they had no positive relationships with the Cleveland police. Participants' experiences were negative due to favoritism, excessive force, indifference, and a general apprehension when dealing with the Cleveland police. The severe lack of trust in the Cleveland police formed the basis of the participants' negative experiences. The study's findings have the potential for positive social change by informing the public, police, and key decision-makers on policy recommendations.

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## Dedication

This study is dedicated to anyone learning to do right, seeking justice, and defending the oppressed.

## Acknowledgments

I want to acknowledge my committee chair, Dr. Gregory Campbell, for his mentorship and encouragement throughout this process, and committee member, Dr. Eliesh O. Lane, for her feedback and scholarship. I would like to acknowledge my accountability partner, Doctoral Candidate Linda Hester for keeping me on track and for her friendship. Additionally, I would like to thank Dr. Jeanette Wade for her inspiration and support during this process. Lastly, I would like to acknowledge my wife, Crystal, and daughter Zari. They have been encouraging me every step of this journey.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Many researchers in public policy have explored the relationship between the police and the African American community (Dingle, 2021; Hinton, 2020; Moore, 2019; Ra'oof, 2019). The topic of my study was discovering African Americans' experiences in Cleveland, OH, regarding their relationship with the police. This study needed to be conducted to better understand African Americans' experiences with the Cleveland police (see Gomez & Diaz, 2016). The U.S. Department of Justice (2015) determined significant problems with the Cleveland police. As a result, the DOJ established a consent decree that mandated biennial surveys of city residents (DOJ, 2015). Gomez and Diaz (2016) collected the most current data indicating a significant problem with how the African American community in Cleveland views the police regarding other racial demographics in the city.

Furthering Gomez and Diaz's (2016) research, this study aimed to understand African Americans' experiences in Cleveland, OH, regarding their relationship with the police. Law enforcement officers (LEOs) in America are under intense public scrutiny, with calls to "Defund the Police" (Jacobs et al., 2021). This movement has intensified due to police misconduct and lethal force altercations, primarily with African Americans.

The LEOs in Cleveland, OH, have not been exempt from this criticism (DOJ, 2015). Several high-profile "use of force" incidents have involved the Cleveland police and African American residents, most notably, the killing of 12-year-old Tamir Rice while playing in a park with a toy gun and the shooting deaths of Timothy Russell and Malissa Williams. Thirteen police officers fired at Russell and Williams 137 times (Bryan, 2020; Lawson, 2018). African American experiences with Cleveland police need

to be explored because, to date, no scholarly qualitative research has been undertaken on this community. The reason to explore this topic is to further the quantitative research of Gomez and Diaz (2016).

The phenomenon of interest is African Americans' experiences regarding their interactions with the Cleveland police. The study was needed because understanding experiences can lead to better outcomes between the police and the African American community. In addition, the potential social implications for this study will benefit African American residents of Cleveland, the police, and city leaders by providing a better understanding of policymakers on how to improve relationships.

Chapter 1 will explain the study's background and research problem and identify the problem statement, purpose, and research questions. Further, the theoretical and conceptual framework and the nature of the study to include definitions, assumptions, scope, and delimitations will be covered. Finally, the study's limitations and significance will be included with a summary of the chapter.

### **Background of the Study**

This study used the punctuated equilibrium theory (PET) to trace the history of policing policies regarding African Americans. African American residents have more negative perceptions regarding the Cleveland police than any other racial demographic in the city (Gomez & Diaz, 2016). Additionally, the research literature has indicated that African Americans have different experiences with law enforcement than other demographics in America (Alberton et al., 2018). The disparities in treatment stem from complaints of excessive use of force, leading to negative perceptions and unequal justice

(Jeffries & Jeffries, 2017). Using PET, the focus will be on equilibrium shifting events discussed in the literature review.

This study examined the history of policing in America regarding African Americans from the 13 Colonies to the present day. These periods were divided into pre-Civil War and post-Civil War policing as the methods and functions changed dramatically after the war. Black Codes and Jim Crow dominated southern policing following the Civil War, whereas northern law enforcement began a more contemporary development. However, the states of the North were not free of the poor policing of African Americans. The legal barriers to policing equality and extrajudicial enforcement play a critical role in trust between the police and African American communities.

Post WWI policing was fraught with new challenges as African Americans communities began to thrive. The police became a barrier force primarily between White and Black neighborhoods. The history of negative perceptions and stereotypes of African Americans continues to be an issue in understanding how they impact police officers' actions. The current use of force standard was established in the landmark Supreme Court case *Graham v Connor* (1989), and one of the components for using force is officers' perceptions. The Supreme Court decision in *Graham* is the benchmark for determining officers' perception amidst mounting evidence of racial bias in policing. I investigated the literature on the experiences of African Americans and the police. Lastly, the gap in the literature was the African Americans' experiences regarding their relationship with the Cleveland police. This study is needed to explain the disparity in African Americans' experiences with the Cleveland police.



### **Problem Statement**

The research problem addressed in my study is African Americans in Cleveland, OH, have more negative perceptions and experiences with the Cleveland Police Department than any other demographic in the city. Additional qualitative research is needed from the African American community to understand this phenomenon. The problem was identified in 2015 by the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ). The DOJ determined that the Cleveland Police Department “engaged in excessive force by police officers in violation of 42 U.S.C § 1414”. As a result, the DOJ established a 5-year consent decree. The consent decree mandated biennial surveys of Cleveland residents to monitor their experiences and perceptions regarding the Cleveland police. During the first survey, 1,400 people were sampled. Less than 18% of African Americans believed that the police use the appropriate amount of force, and 66% of them perceived unequal treatment (Gomez & Diaz, 2016). The survey further indicated that African American residents have more negative experiences with the Cleveland police than any other demographic in the city. The most recent survey asked many of the same questions to a similar audience (see Stryker & Nargundkar, 2018). This problem influences the formulation of negative police stereotypes and unequal justice (Jeffries & Jeffries, 2017).

There is scholarly and anecdotal information regarding the negative relationships between African Americans and the police. However, there is a gap in the literature on the African American population regarding their experiences with the Cleveland police (Gomez & Diaz, 2016). Researchers have indicated that African Americans, compared to other races, are more likely to view police negatively (Alberton & Gorey, 2018). Yet, no

qualitative research has focused on African Americans' experiences regarding the Cleveland police. This study conducted further research recommended by Gomez and Diaz (2016) by leveraging their quantitative data and findings to fill the literature gap with scholarly qualitative data and analysis.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This general qualitative study aimed to understand the experiences of the African American population in Cleveland, Ohio, regarding their relationship with Cleveland Ohio Police Department. The reason to explore this topic is to further the research of Gomez and Diaz (2016). The Cleveland police department is the second largest police department in Ohio, with more than 1,600 police officers (About the Cleveland Police, n.d.). The findings from my study may provide possible solutions to identify problems and strengthen the Cleveland Ohio Police Department's relationship and the African American population living in Cleveland.

### **Research Question**

What are the experiences of African Americans in Cleveland, Ohio, regarding their relationship with the Cleveland police?

### **Theoretical Framework for the Study**

The study used the punctuated equilibrium theory (PET) as the conceptual framework. Jones et al. (1993), founders of PET, analyzed several U.S. policymaking cases and various issue areas over time. They found (a) that policymaking both makes leaps and undergoes periods of near stasis as issues emerge on and recede from the public plan; (b) that this tendency toward punctuated American political institutions exacerbates equilibria, and (c) that policy images play a critical role in expanding issues beyond the

control of the specialists and special interests occupy what they termed "policy monopolies" (p. 61). PET seeks to explain a simple observation: political processes are generally characterized by stability and incrementalism, but occasionally they produce large-scale departures from the past. PET sketches a disjointed and abrupt policy change process, with long periods of stability separating the shifts. PET was born out of unhappiness with policy process models emphasizing stability, rules, incremental adjustment, and "grid-lock" (True et al., 1999).

The PET is suitable and logical for public policy and social change studies. PET has helped understand public policymaking more generally. PET focuses on the interaction of political institutions, interest mobilizations, and boundedly rational decision-making. Additionally, PET addresses the interplay among institutions, interests to advance democracies, and other policymaking venues (True et al., 1999). PET relates to the study approach and research questions as it explains how experiences can be changed and how public policy can be used to provide social change.

PET is linked to social change as reforming systems can take a long time without significant motivating factors. An excellent example is the Justice in Policing Act 2021, proposed in the wake of George Floyd's death. Mr. Floyd's death "punctuated" a swift change to a previously resistant system. Several high-profile issues with the Cleveland police have also created the impetus for "punctuated" change. The implications for positive social change include recommendations to law enforcement executives in Cleveland to utilize the insight gained through this study to understand how African Americans perceive them and strengthen outreach and collaboration efforts. Following

these recommendations may improve police-community relations, advancing public safety within the county and the African American community.

In 2022, the DOJ's consent decree is coming to an end. However, no substantial legislation or policy changes exist for the Cleveland police. There is currently a ballot initiative, Issue 24, in Cleveland to change how police misconduct is investigated. Issue 24 would remove the police from investigating their misconduct (Higgs, 2021). This would be considered a “punctuated equilibrium” event that would bring further accountability and transparency to misconduct. There is also a state-wide movement to end qualified immunity for police officers. The Fraternal Order of Police and police unions oppose these proposed policy changes. As key stakeholders, police unions have tremendous power to stifle any reform to bring more accountability for misconduct. African Americans have historically had little to no input in policing policies that directly impact them. The rationale behind this phenomenon is further discussed in the literature review.

### **Nature of the Study**

The specific research approach was a general qualitative methodology. This method of inquiry is necessary to further the quantitative research of Gomez and Diaz (2016). Purposeful sampling was used to identify and recruit 10 African American participants between 18-39 years old. Guest et al. (2006) proposes saturation often occurs around 10-12 participants in homogeneous groups. Interviews were conducted using a researcher-developed instrument, and data analysis was performed using thematic coding. Thematic coding involves recording or identifying passages of text or images linked by a common theme or idea, allowing the researcher to index the text into categories and

establish a “framework of thematic ideas about it” (Gibbs 2007, p. 1). The coding process permits the researchers to thoroughly explore humans' subjective qualities such as emotions, values, conflicts, and judgment (Saldaña, 2016).

### **Definitions**

*African Americans*: An official racial category of individuals who are members of an American ethnic group who have origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa.

*Black*: According to the United States Census Bureau, a Black or African American is "a person having origins in any Black racial groups of Africa" (United States Census Bureau, 2019). For this study, Black refers to those of American or African descent.

*Consent decree*: A consent decree is an agreement negotiated and entered as a court order enforced by the court (The U.S. Department of Justice, 2018). There are periodic assessments of compliance or noncompliance consultation of the parties involved (The U.S Department of Justice, 2018). If the defendant breaches the contract, the government may file a lawsuit to enforce the agreement (The U.S Department of Justice, 2018).

*Use of force*: The reasonable level of force used to control a situation. Law enforcement is trained in various degrees of force to subdue an individual with minimal injury to the suspect. There has been a blanket opinion that this term has no precise definition (National Institute of Justice, 2015).

### **Assumptions**

This study assumed that African Americans, who had lived in Cleveland for at least 5 years, would want to participate in this study and share their experiences with the

Cleveland police. Further, I assumed African Americans provide key insights into improving their relationship with the police. Due to the study's nature, responses were subjective and relative insofar as they pertain to the research, and all interactions with participants were for data collection only. I intended to understand, interpret, critique, and identify potential data responsive to the purpose. I assumed that the measures to ensure no participant's information were exposed allowed for candid and pertinent responses. I assumed that the basic qualitative research design was best suited for this inquiry. Based on the quantitative research of Gomez and Diaz, I assumed that the targeted population would have mostly negative experiences with the Cleveland police.

There are several assumptions about my use of PET. One assumption was that there had been stasis regarding the relationship between African Americans and the Cleveland police due to key decision-makers not addressing the concerns of African Americans in the city. I assumed that police misconduct was the most significant variable that has led to calls for police reform. According to Creswell (2007), qualitative researchers assume that “truth is both complex and dynamic and can be found only by studying persons as they interact with and within their sociohistorical settings” (p. 89). I assumed the findings from this study would be triangulated with the DOJ (2015) report on the Cleveland police, other scholarly research on African Americans and the police, and Gomez and Diaz’s (2016) qualitative survey of Cleveland residents. I assumed the findings were credible, reliable, dependable, and transferable.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

The study's scope was limited to African Americans living in Cleveland, OH. The rationale for 5 years of residency is the consent decree's length. This timeframe gives

participants enough time to have had interactions with the Cleveland police. Additionally, the recommendation came from Ra'oof's (2019) dissertation. Ra'oof's study had a similar research design and topic. However, he required participants to live in Prince George County for 10 years but noted in his recommendations that 5 years would have increased the potential participant pool. According to the latest census data, Cleveland has 383,781 people, and 179,000 identify as African American (U.S. Census, 2019). Until data saturation, the study consisted of 10 African Americans in Cleveland, OH. The minimum age of 18 and maximum age of 39 was used for the participants. These ages were selected to correlate with the survey ages of African American who had the most negative perceptions. Most residents 55 years and older give the Cleveland police a good or excellent rating of 62%, compared to 49% of residents 18 to 39 (Gomez & Diaz, 2016). Therefore, the scope and sample size will not represent all African Americans' experiences regarding their relationship with the police.

The study's boundary and findings were limited to Cleveland, OH, and African Americans' experiences outside Cleveland were not considered. The study excluded individuals who did not meet the criteria or data unrelated to African American experiences in Cleveland, OH, regarding the police and information not pertinent to the research question. Any experiences or answers from participants that were not directly related to the interview questions did not receive a code and were not analyzed into themes. Additionally, the participants were advised to limit all responses to their experience with the Cleveland police. Specific requirements of participants also included that no friends or family of mine participated in the study. This study's results can be

triangulated with similar research and transferred and generalized to settings and locations where African Americans reside with similar police problems.

### **Limitations**

There were several limitations to this study. In qualitative research, the researcher is an instrument and any data gathered is only as good as the interviewer. Interviewing can be difficult since the participants may not feel the need to answer the question or questions if it is a sensitive topic that relates to them directly. Also, as the researcher, it is necessary to stay neutral. Participants could pick up on my body language during the study and feel the need to change how they answer a question. Moustakas (1994) indicated that to produce an unbiased study, the researcher must eliminate any biases before conducting the research. Prior qualitative researchers have used reflexivity to eliminate biases on the researcher's side (Rudestam & Newton, 2015).

Reflexivity is the process of the researcher examining themselves as the researcher and their relationship to the research. Ensuring validity and reliability can be an issue as the reproduction of results can be duplicated. Bias was mitigated by following previous researchers' recommendations for conducting qualitative interviews, such as bracketing (O'Sullivan et al., 2017). There were no challenges in recruiting participants via social media, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Keeping all information confidential and not sharing participant data with the public helped eliminate ethical issues. I remained open-minded to information contrary to my own experiences and stayed neutral and nonjudgmental with any participants' views or thoughts. I did not interject my ideas into the data collection or analysis. All potential biases of the researcher are disclosed in this dissertation, and every effort was made to ensure accuracy. Additionally,



triangulation of the findings was conducted to ensure the internal and external validity of the study.

### **Significance**

There have been nationwide calls for police reform in the wake of the wanton murder of George Floyd by former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin. Mr. Floyd's death galvanized the entire nation and sparked worldwide protests. The significance of this study further comes from several high-profile Cleveland, OH, police officers using excessive force and mistreating African Americans, most notably, the killing of 12-year-old Tamir Rice while playing with a toy gun (Stone & Socia, 2019). The purpose of the DOJ consent decree was to prevent future misconduct and promote police integrity within the Cleveland Police Department (The U.S Department of Justice, 2015). The study identified what creates positive and negative perceptions of Cleveland police officers. The research may assist Cleveland Police Department and other law enforcement agencies experiencing similar negative perceptions by African Americans in formulating new policies to address racial disparities in policing. The findings from this study could potentially provide alternative strategies or initiatives.

Many researchers have studied African Americans and police interactions. However, PET has not been used as a framework to investigate this phenomenon. PET was significant for this study because it offered a different lens to examine this timely issue. The issues that African Americans in Cleveland, OH, are experiencing are similar to African Americans all over the country. Theories such as procedural justice, critical race, and social action have traditionally been used in studies with similar topics to explore this phenomenon. From the PET perspective, policymakers are the crucial

component, and other variables that can impact policymakers are vital to changing the status quo, so there can be positive social change.

### **Summary**

Chapter 1 outlined the social problem, research problem, and research question and further discussed the background and nature of the study. This study aimed to fill a gap in the research by interviewing African Americans in the city. The assumptions and limitations of the study were explained, and the significance of why the study should be conducted was detailed. The PET framework provided a unique lens to examine the interactions between African Americans and the police. Additionally, the scope and delimitation were discussed, and the significance of the study can lead to positive social change.

Much is unknown about the experiences of African Americans in Cleveland, OH, regarding the police. This study aimed to shed light on those experiences to create better outcomes for African Americans and the Cleveland police. The public policy paradigm in America works best when the community's experiences are considered. The study's framework was specifically chosen to provide me with the tools necessary for this discovery. Chapter 2 of this study includes a literature review that provides a historical foundation of the police relationships with African Americans, use-of-force standards, and reasons for unequal treatment. The literature review also covers experiences of African American relationships with the police. The literature provides important background information that allows me to address the specific question about African Americans and experiences with the Cleveland police and how they can be improved.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

Many researchers in public policy have explored the relationship between the police and the African American community (Dingle, 2021; Hinton, 2020; Moore, 2019; Ra'oof, 2019). The research problem for this study was the lack of scholarly information on the African American population's experiences in Cleveland, OH, with the Cleveland Police Department. This qualitative study aimed to explore the experiences of the African American population in Cleveland, Ohio, regarding their relationship with Cleveland Police Department and how, if possible, there can be an improvement in relation to other demographics in the city. This study needed to be conducted to understand African Americans' experiences with the Cleveland police (see Gomez & Diaz, 2016). The U.S. Department of Justice (2015) determined significant problems with the Cleveland police. As a result, it established a consent decree that mandated a biennial survey of city residents (DOJ, 2015). Gomez and Diaz (2016) collected the data indicating a significant problem with how the African American community views the police regarding other racial demographics in the city. Furthering Gomez and Diaz (2016) research, I aimed to better understand African Americans' experiences in Cleveland regarding their relationship with the police.

LEOs in America are under intense public scrutiny, with calls to "Defund the Police" (Jacobs et al., 2021). This movement has intensified due to police misconduct and lethal use of force altercations, primarily with African Americans. The LEOs in Cleveland, OH, have not been exempt from this criticism (DOJ, 2015). Several high-profile use of force incidents have involved the Cleveland police and African American residents. Most notably, the murder of 12-year-old Tamir Rice while playing in a park

with a toy gun and the shooting deaths of Timothy Russell and Malissa Williams. Thirteen police officers fired at Russell and Williams 137 times (Bryan, 2020; Lawson, 2018). African American experiences with Cleveland police need to be conducted because, to date, no scholarly qualitative research has been undertaken on this community. The reason to explore this topic was to further the research of Gomez and Diaz (2016).

The phenomenon of interest was the experiences of African Americans regarding their interactions with the Cleveland, OH, police. The study was needed because further information on experiences can lead to better outcomes between the police and the African American community. In addition, the potential social implications for this study are beneficial to African American residents of Cleveland, the police, and city leaders by providing a better understanding for policymakers on how to improve relationships.

### **Synopsis of the Current Literature**

The current literature established the relevance of African Americans' problem of having negative experiences with the police. However, African Americans' negative experiences with the police are not new (Chama, 2019). The incidents have ranged from excessive force, perceived unfair treatment, and guilt associated with skin color (Brunson, 2007; Geller & Fagan, 2019; Novich & Hunt, 2017). There are growing calls for police reform due to the high-profile murders of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and many others (Vermeer et al., 2020). Researchers have indicated that African Americans, compared to other races, are more likely to view police negatively (Alberton & Gorey, 2018). The literature on African Americans and police experiences has grown exponentially as more researchers have studied this phenomenon. The major sections of

Chapter 2 include a literature search strategy, theoretical and conceptual framework, literature review related to critical variables, and summary and conclusions.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

The keywords searched were *Cleveland, Ohio, police, law enforcement, perceptions, African American, lived experiences, use-of-force, training, community policing, race disparities, civilian police interactions, perceptions of black men, critical race theory, procedural justice theory, punctuated equilibrium theory, and qualitative methodology*. The Walden University Library, Google Scholar, Sage, ProQuest, JSTOR, and the Journal of Criminal Justice were searched for these terms.

For the literature review, I primarily focused on African American experience with law enforcement and factors that can lead to disparities in treatment. There was a lot of scholarly data responsive to the subject that was useful to search. After reviewing all the data sources, saturation occurred when I found no new or pertinent information. I combined search terms of *African Americans, police, perceptions, and law enforcement*. A lot of research has focused on policing in the last 5 years. However, the term policing is comprehensive, and the search terms were referenced and crossmatched with additional criteria to narrow the focus. The specific focus was on police in Cleveland, Ohio. The JSTOR database provided several scholarly articles that helped identify policing and added to my literature review. The Walden library provided further scholarly articles on use-of-force, and in general, all the key search terms were instrumental in identifying key literature for the review.

The ProQuest database had 10 dissertations to develop a scholarly framework for the past 5 years of dissertations and research. Most of the research I found used critical

race, procedural justice, social action, and social justice theories to explore the relationship between African Americans and the police. No studies in any databases used PET to explore the police relationship with the African American community. Apart from the DOJ study and research conducted by Gomez and Diaz (2016), no specific research dealt with the experiences of African Americans and the police in Cleveland, Ohio. The DOJ (2015) Investigation of the Cleveland Division of Police provided additional search terms of *training* and *use of force*. The DOJ investigation highlighted that the police needed more training, better accountability, have more of a stake in the communities they police. The investigation further identified different experiences with the police based on race and age.

### **Theoretical Foundation: Punctuated Equilibrium Theory**

The study used punctuated equilibrium theory (PET) as the theoretical foundation. The creators of PET are Baumgartner, Jones, and Talbert (1993). PET was designed to understand the change process in complex social systems. The approach studies the evolution of policy change. PET analyzed several U.S. policymaking cases over time and various issue areas. PET has three basic tenets: (a) that policymaking both makes leaps and undergoes periods of near stasis as issues emerge on and recede from the public agenda, (b) that this tendency toward punctuated American political institutions exacerbates equilibria, and (c) that policy images play a critical role in expanding issues beyond the control of the specialists and special interests occupy what they termed policy monopolies (Jones et al. 1993). PET has been used to investigate public policy issues from tobacco to education. However, PET has not been used to examine the relationship between the police and African Americans regarding policy development.

The logical connections between the PET framework and my study's nature include many scholars who have successfully used qualitative methods to answer research questions centered around experiences (Cole, 2020; Just-Bourgeois, 2019; Ra'oof, 2019). Therefore, the logical connection between this framework and my study was apparent and complimentary. PET was suitable for the field of public policy and social change. PET has helped understand public policymaking more generally. PET focuses on the interaction of political institutions, interest mobilizations, and boundedly rational decision-making. Additionally, PET addressed the interplay among institutions, interests to advance democracies, and other policymaking venues (True et al., 1999). PET is related to the study approach and research questions to explain how public policy can be used to provide positive social change.

### **Punctuated Equilibrium Theory and Tobacco Policy**

Seminal researchers related to PET argued that through punctuations, namely, policy inertia, adverse feedback effects, and drastic policy change, positive feedback effects create the conditions for policy changes (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993). Yet little has been done to test this claim empirically. Relying on a unique dataset of policy changes in tobacco taxation and regulation across multiple countries over the last decades tests the punctuation hypothesis in tobacco control (Vannoni, 2019). The process of how tobacco use and policy have changed in America exemplified the punctuated nature of the 'leaps' explained by the theory.

### **Punctuated Equilibrium Theory and Education**

PET has been used in literature and research-based analysis to understand how education policy has been applied (Carter, 2020). PET proposes that data processing is

unbalanced, and more weight and focus should be given to issues, not in equilibrium. For example, if reading scores are high but math scores are low, more emphasis should be placed on raising math proficiency. Policymaking in education is designed to resist change and mobilize only when necessary if established interests are overcome (Manna, 2006; Vannoni, 2019). Period of inertia can be explained without public support or better alternatives to the status quo. The rationale for using PET was its ability to explain the gap in policy and how systems that have been unchanged for extended periods are suddenly changed.

### **African Americans, Punctuated Equilibrium Theory, and Police**

PET relates to the present study and research question by building upon the existing theory. African Americans' existence in America has been punctuated with seminal events and policy changes. These changes are often marked by long periods of inertia and then drastic transition, the seminal claim of PET. From being enslaved to freedom, from the peonage system to Civil Rights. Also, PET addresses the roles that stakeholders have in policy changes. There are many stakeholders and critical decision-makers regarding policing and African Americans. The police unions' city leaders have tremendous power over the nature of policing. Historically, African Americans' inputs were not considered when policies directly impacting their rights and liberties were discussed and decided. In southern states, the non-inclusion of African Americans regarding policy took the form of denying voting rights, and repressive laws only applied to African Americans.

From a review of the literature, no scholarly research was found that used African Americans, PET, and police. The PET framework provided a unique perspective



regarding improving relationships or understanding how the experiences of African Americans can be used to change public policy. Despite African Americans' concerns regarding the police, there is still reliance in the African American community on the police (Zoorob, 2020). This study added to the literature for social change and furthered the research by applying PET to policing African American communities.

There are many challenges regarding African Americans and policing. The rise of the Black Lives Matter movement has thrust policing into the spotlight, and international attention has polarized the nation as protests have engulfed the country (Minteh, 2016). April. Across America, change is happening as millions call for police reform (Wade, 2017). These changes include eliminating qualified immunity for police, banning no-knock warrants, more federal oversight, and more accountability for police misconduct via legislation and judicial process (Lebron, 2017). The murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis that was caught on film had a galvanizing impact on the nation and led to the drafting of federal legislation to create more police oversight. Recently President Joe Biden signed an Executive Order that mandated policing policy changes. The conviction of officer Derrick Chauvin for the murder of Mr. Floyd was a seminal event that created a punctuated equilibrium (Dreyer et al., 2020).

Focusing on the public health issue of police killings as justifiable homicides due to high-profile cases from a public health perspective is a phenomenon that has led to the intersection of race and gender in understanding police behaviors. This research is essential to public health critical race praxis and develops a framework to understand better police nature and the use of force (Gilbert & Ray, 2016). In addition, PET can be

used to view the dynamics of policing from a perspective that can be useful for additional research and positive social change.

### **Literature Review Related to Key Variables**

#### **Historical Context: Slave Patrols**

The origins of policing African Americans must be examined, and each significant event changed the equilibrium to understand the relationship between African Americans and the police. In 1619, the first Africans were brought to North America via the transatlantic slave trade (Flemming, 2020). In the 13 Colonies, the condition of slavery became a lifetime of servitude. The bondage was passed on to their posterity through subsequent laws. As the slave population grew and began to outnumber white settlers, other laws were enacted to control every aspect of the enslaved people's lives (Alpert, 1970). In 1704, due to fears of slave revolts, the States of Virginia and the Carolinas formed their first regular official slave patrols (Hadden, 2001).

These slave patrols functioned as de facto law enforcement officers, and they had powers granted by the state to maintain good order and discipline among the enslaved population (Hadden, 2001). Few distinctions separated these patrols from contemporary law enforcement. The primary exception is that these patrols had the right to punish the enslaved for any violation or sometimes for no violation. The brutality of slave patrollers was harsh that enslavers would often complain to magistrates about lost productivity. However, their complaints were often dismissed, encouraging the patrollers (Hadden, 2001).

The slave patrols had a particular mission to provide peace of mind to the White population by ensuring they actively looked for unaccounted enslaved people to prevent

revolts (Reichel, 1988). All white males, with few exceptions, had to participate in the patrols. Often, more wealthy individuals would pay people to perform their patrol duties. The patrols were separate from the militia, separating each patrol into patrol districts. The patrollers had the right to enter the living quarters of enslaved people, and they would be looking for contraband, i.e., weapons, books, or anything that could aid escape, including extra food. These no-knock raids and searches are still practiced in America today and are primarily focused on African Americans (Hadden, 2001).

The enslaved had no legal protections or due process, and enslavers could not legally prevent these warrantless searches. Any enslaved person found outside of the plantation without a pass could face up to 30 lashes, and sexual assault was rampant upon these patrols, and there was little to enslave a person could do to resist. In some cases, any resistance could lead to death. In the most egregious cases, enslavers could be compensated for lost or damaged property (Hadden, 2001). Patrollers who swore an oath before performing patrol duties were issued badges similar to modern police badges. Figure 1 provides a picture of badges worn by slave patrols.

Slave patrols differed from slave catchers and bounty hunters, but the mission was similar. Patrollers could not leave their patrol areas without permission from magistrates' and when an enslaved person ran away, enslavers would usually hire a professional slave catcher to return them. The cost to locate and return a runaway slave would vary depending on several factors. i.e., age, skills, and value (Franklin & Schweninger 2000). Patrollers usually traveled in groups with one individual designated as patrol captain. According to Loewald et al. (1957), the slave patrol system was effective. Yet, there was a need for Southern states to create a national policy for dealing with the extradition of

escaped enslaved individuals (Amstutz, 1999). The U.S. Constitution was created for many reasons. However, it made a non-equilibrium for African Americans based on their bondage condition.

The City of New York implemented a policy of Stop & Frisk to deter crime. The tactics used by the police were similar to the method used by slave patrols. The stopped and frisked people were overwhelming African Americans, and less than 2% of the stops resulted in illegal items (Bellin, 2014). Being suspicious based on skin color is a well-documented phenomenon in scholarly literature and anecdotal experiences (Campos et al., 2020; White, 2015). The protections of the 4<sup>th</sup> Amendment of the Constitution are hotly contested regarding expanding police power.

### **Why Policing of African Americans Has Not Achieved Equilibrium**

Before ratifying the Constitution, no federal law enforcement agencies or individuals were authorized to cross state lines to return escaped enslaved individuals to their owners. Each Colony had its laws regarding the disposition of enslaved personnel once they reached the new Colony (Morris, 2001). Laws about fleeing slaves existed in America as early as 1643. The State of New York enacted a 1705 statute to prevent runaway slaves from escaping to Canada. Maryland and Virginia had measures offering cash rewards for enslaved people's capture and return (Franklin & Schweninger, 2000). During slavery, a Black person not on a plantation was considered suspicious (Hadden, 2001). The first significant national policy punctuation for African Americans came with the newly framed U.S. Constitution.

When the Constitutional Convention convened in 1787, many Northern states, including Vermont, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and Connecticut, had

ended the practice of enslaving Africans. Before ratification, Southern politicians feared states prohibiting slavery would eventually become a refuge for enslaved people and insisted the Constitution included a "Fugitive Slave Clause." The Clause was codified in Article 4, Section 2; Clause 3 stated that "no person held to service or labor" was free if they made it to a state that did not have slavery. The criminalization of African Americans' free movement is an issue that still exists in America. The first federal law to curtail the freedom of the enslaved was the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793 (Van Cleve, 2010).

### **The Fugitive Slave Act of 1793**

As the abolitionist movement grew in the Northern states, anti-slavery sentiments divided North and South further over slavery (Mayer, 2008). The Southern states relied on the labor of enslaved people to do fieldwork and domestic duties. The racial caste system in Southern states was perpetuated in all areas of life. As the enslaved population grew, additional measures were implemented to prevent escape (Hadden, 2001). Ultimately, these measures were not always successful, and enslaved people did make it to free states. However, some Northern states were reluctant to capture and recover fugitive slaves (Franklin & Schweninger, 2000). The enslaved African Americans who made it North had to guard against slave catchers continually. Slave-owning states supported legislation providing more tools for capturing and recovering their loss of property (Churchill, 2018).

Southern lawmakers wanted to add more protection to ensure their property was returned, and thus the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793 was enacted. The Act allowed owners of enslaved individuals and their associates to search for escapees within Northern states'

borders. Further, the law stated that captured or suspected runaway was to be brought before a judge. Evidence had to be presented showing proof of ownership; usually, a signed affidavit was sufficient (David, 1924). The owner or trusted agent would then be allowed to take custody and return the individual into bondage. The Fugitive Slave Act also imposed a fine on anyone providing safe harbor to fugitive slaves. Due to this Fugitive Slave Act, Northern States attempted to create equilibria by offering protections for previously enslaved individuals (Morris, 2001).

### **Personal Liberty Laws**

As a direct result of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793, some Northern states passed personal liberty laws to protect African Americans and the sovereignty of their state (Baker, 2017). Personal liberty laws did exist before the ratification of the U.S. Constitution. These laws were intended to provide safe harbor for enslaved individuals and discourage slave catchers from entering the state (Morris, 2001). These laws gave legal protections such as due process and, in some cases, jury trials before extraction. The personal liberty laws were some of the first legal protections given to enslaved people in America (Baker, 2017). The U.S. Supreme Court eventually settled these court challenges in the first landmark slavery case dealing with federal vs. state authority to enforce fugitive slave laws.

### **Prigg v. Pennsylvania, 41 U.S. 539 (1842)**

The U.S. Supreme Court had been relatively silent on the Fugitive Slave Law and Personal Liberty Laws. Both issues were addressed in the landmark case Prigg v. Pennsylvania (1842). In this case, Edward Prigg, a slave catcher, was hired to return a fugitive slave. However, Prigg was arrested and convicted of violating Pennsylvania's

Personal Liberty Laws. On appeal, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the conviction of Prigg. However, the court affirmed that state officials are not required to assist the federal government in enforcing the Fugitive Slave Act (Nogee, 1954). The Prigg decision reinforced the U.S. Constitution supremacy clause for the federal government to enforce fugitive slave laws. Maintaining the equilibrium over slavery defined the power dynamic between North and South, and the treatment of enslaved individuals became punctuated every time the policy shifted. As a result, Southerners wanted Northerners to do more in returning enslaved individuals, the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 resulted.

### **Fugitive Slave Act of 1850.**

The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 required all U.S. citizens to be engaged in returning enslaved individuals into bondage. The Law was met with scorn and anger in the Northern States, as many northerners believed it was an encroachment on their rights to force them to be complicit in helping return people to bondage. The Act further reinforced enslavers' property rights, but its effect diminished with distance to the North. Estimates suggest that prices in Northern slave states increased by up to 35 percent relative to Southern states because of the Act (Lennon, 2016). In addition, the law made it more challenging to find a solution between the North and South over slavery. The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 expanded the federal government's power and compelled citizens to become de facto slave catchers. The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 is also noted as one of the Civil War's primary contributing factors. However, when the Dred Scott case was decided, it made a legislative remedy for ending slavery impossible and ensured African Americans would have no legal recourse for freedom in America without bloodshed (Finkelman, 2007).

*Dred Scott v. Sandford*, 60 U.S. 393 (1857). Many legal experts consider *Dred Scott v. Sandford* (1857) unconstitutional and oppressive. This Supreme Court decision held that the U.S. Constitution was not intended to bestow any rights for the enslaved individual, regardless of their status, free or enslaved (Stempel, 2012). Dred Scott had sued for his freedom because he had no longer lived in a slave state. This case also overturned the Missouri Compromise and expanded slavery and enslavers' rights in America. The case negatively punctuated the equilibrium between North and South, and as a result, it would take Civil War in America to settle the question of slavery. The impact of the Civil War provided a new equilibrium for African Americans in America.

### **Post-Civil War Punctuated Equilibrium for African Americans**

The United States Civil War 1861-1865 punctuated a new equilibrium for previously enslaved African Americans. For the first time in American history, African Americans would not be considered enslaved by the condition of birth alone (Voros, 2017). The conflict over slavery had divided the country and provided many challenges regarding newly freed enslaved individuals' fate. The ablest males in the South were pressed into service, creating a void in policing African Americans. Southern states passed citizen arrest laws to augment slave patrols and control the Black population (Inscoc, 2011). The Union victory in the Civil War led to the emancipation of enslaved people in Confederate territories and the repeal of the Fugitive Slaves Acts. The aftermath led to the abolishment of slavery via the Thirteenth Amendment. However, freedom was not relief from bondage.



### **The Thirteenth Amendment and Slavery for Criminals**

The greatest punctuation to create equilibrium for African Americans in U.S. history was the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment. However, abolishing slavery created new challenges for the newly Freedmen (Bentley, 2017). There is a provision in the Amendment stating slavery could still be enforced as punishment for a crime. Some researchers have called this loophole slavery another name (Olaniyi, 2010; Shina, 2015). In the aftermath of the Civil War, the peonage system replaced slavery in Southern society. According to law professor Michelle Alexander, author of the bestseller *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (2010), more black men are in prison or jail, on probation or parole, than were enslaved in 1850. The primary mechanism for imposing the new equilibrium reality for African Americans was the Black Codes and a biased legal system (Wallestein, 2004).

### **Black Codes and Lack of Equilibria**

Despite gaining freedom, the equilibrium began to shift again towards bondage. As the name implies, Black Codes were designed to criminalize every aspect of African Americans' life (Graff, 2016). Laws such as loitering, trespassing, and vagrancy were just a few things that could lead to African Americans' return to slavery. The legacy and intent of these Black Codes are still in America today. However, now they apply to all citizens, yet they form the pretext for police interactions with African Americans at higher rates for minor offenses like jaywalking (Carbado, 2015; Wallenstein, 2004). The idea was that unless an African was employed on a plantation, they were considered suspicious by law enforcement. Eventually, most of these Black Codes were overturned.

However, they paved the way for racial segregation and discrimination known as Jim Crow (Graff, 2016).

### ***Jim Crow and African Americans***

During the Jim Crow era of U.S. history, one of the primary roles of the police regarding African Americans was enforcing segregation laws (Roth, 2020). The relationship between the police and African American community has always been contentious, but Jim Crow laws gave police legal authority and protections from accountability (Harold, 2021). The powers are given to the police to enforce segregation of African Americans and maintain the second-class citizen statutes, directly resulting in the lack of equilibrium. Police encounters under lawful pretexts create the police's root causes for unlawful behavior (Levine, 2017; Peyton, 2019). Police were used to stop African Americans from voting in violation of the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment and to brutalize peaceful protestors (Harold, 2021). African Americans protested against Jim Crow laws in violation of the 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment.

Although *Brown v Board of Education* (1954) set the framework for ending Jim Crow Laws, the ruling did not directly impact African American policing (Warren, 1954). The traditional role of the police has been to protect and serve. The contentious nature between African American and the police have been chronicled by many researchers (George, 1979). There has been a great stride to create equilibrium, and the Civil Rights Movement is one of the most significant post-Civil War punctuations. However, researchers have indicated that people are more likely to be adversarial with the police when they are not respected (Nagin, 2017). The disparity in treatment

experienced by African Americans to other demographics significantly contrasts with the lack of equilibria (Buehler, 2017).

African Americans are more likely to receive much harsher treatment from the police because whites view blacks differently regarding pain management and attribute higher pain tolerance to blacks (Hoffman et al., 2016). The research on the disparities in pain tolerance has provided insight into one of the causes of excessive force by police on African Americans. In addition, if someone is bigger in an altercation, less empathy is shown by the smaller person (Waytz et al., 2015). The findings are significant because under use-of-force guidelines, what an officer perceives in one of the metrics used to determine if the force applied was lawful.

### **Use of Force and African Americans**

The guidance for police on the constitutional use of force comes from the landmark case *Graham v. Connor*, 490 U.S. 386 (1989). This case established the “objectionable reasonableness” standard for using force. The court determined that hindsight should not be used in deciding if the force was reasonable but deferred to officers’ perceptions of events depending upon the subjects’ actions. Police training can improve use-of-force decision-making (Andersen & Gustafsberg, 2016). Researchers have identified that police need additional training in how to de-escalate situations. The challenge with the Graham decision is that even if an officer violates agency policy, their conduct could still be considered reasonable by the legal system. Accountability starts with organizational leadership, and investment in people and ethical decision-making training will benefit (Andersen & Gustafsberg 2016).

The first real legal test of the Graham decision came in 1992 when the officer who beat Rodney was acquitted. The case received national attention and created an equilibrium in policing brutality caught on camera. However, it is challenging for policymakers to make guidelines for the police if “objectional reasonableness” is standard (Logel, 2018). The standard for prosecuting a police officer is exceptionally high, even when policies are not followed. Logel (2018) identified how to craft instructions for police that will not put police in danger and protect the public. There is always a balancing that needs to be done to create equilibrium. Still, the default position by the courts and policymakers has been to defer to police power over the public protection of African Americans and very little accountability for misconduct (Levine, 2016).

### **The Ferguson Effect**

The 2014 killing of Michael Brown by police officer Darren Wilson in Ferguson, Missouri, gave rise to the Black Lives Matter movement and created a phenomenon known as the Ferguson effect. The Ferguson Effect can be summed up as a rise in crime due to police reluctance to proactively police (Pyrooz et al., 2016). Researchers who have measured the Ferguson Effect have mixed results (Minteh, 2016; Wolfe & Nix, 2016). Some researchers confirm the effect while others have not (Fields, 2019; Pyrooz et al., 2016). The events in Ferguson led to massive protests and created punctuating events regarding policing in America (Wade, 2017). The current data on policing of African Americans will be discussed.

In the aftermath of the protests in Ferguson, the Department of Justice (DOJ) investigated the Ferguson Police Department and found systemic misconduct and

constitutional violations primarily among African Americans (Shaw, 2015). The investigation revealed that police dogs were only used on African Americans and that police dogs had been used on African Americans when it was not warranted. Using dogs on African Americans can be traced directly back to slavery. Since 1997, there have been 20 DOJ investigations into police departments across America, and the common element among them is a pattern and practice of unconstitutional policing (Muhammad, 2010). The lack of procedural justice hinders the police and African Americans (Nagin, 2017). Therefore, policymakers and key stakeholders must find solutions to prevent further deterioration.

### **Current Experiences of African Americans and the Police**

Researchers have collected qualitative data on African Americans and their relationship with the police ranging from lived experiences and perceptions to improving relationships. African American males between 18 and 39 reported the highest dissatisfaction with the police (Brooks, 2016; Browne, 2018; Brunson, 2007). However, all the studies are not negative Ra'oof (2019) conducted a study of African American males' perception of Prince George County, Maryland police. Ra'oof (2019) discovered that most participants believed Prince Georges County police were doing a good job, but they still had concerns. The media plays a vital role in shaping perceptions of the police, as most African Americans have not personally experienced police brutality or excessive force (Franklin, et al., 2019).

The profession of policing is under intense scrutiny due to many high-profile killings of African Americans. However, this is not a new phenomenon. What is new is public engagement and video evidence documenting what many have already known.

The nature of policing requires officers to engage with the public (Martinez, 2016). Still, researchers have discovered that when people engage with the police of their own volition, they are more likely to have positive police perceptions (Novich & Hunt, 2017; Sytsma & Piza, 2018;). When the police are the ones who initiate the contact, perceptions are more pessimistic. African Americans have reported being afraid and anxious when interacting with the police (Ra'oof, 2019; Weitzer, 2015). The perception of some African Americans is they will not be treated fairly when interacting with the police (Nagin & 2017).

Researchers Jeffries and Jeffries (2017) found that in the cases of police brutality, the brutality is more likely to be justified if the dominant group in society agrees or feels the police action is warranted given the nature of the interaction. These findings are significant because African Americans are a small percentage of the population (U.S. Census 2019). Menifield (2019) explored if race was a factor in officers targeting minority suspects. The problem of police killing African Americans is not just because the police officers are white and are explicitly targeting minorities. Menifield (2019) noted his research could not dispel misconceptions about using force based solely on race.

### **Cleveland, Ohio Police and African Americans**

The DOJ investigated the Cleveland Police Department and found unnecessary and excessive use of deadly force, including shootings and head strikes with impact weapons. The extreme, unreasonable, or retaliatory use of less-lethal force, including tasers, chemical spray, and fists. Excessive force against mentally ill persons or in crisis, including cases where the officers were called exclusively for a welfare check. The

employment of poor and dangerous tactics that place officers in situations where avoidable force becomes inevitable and places officers and civilians at unnecessary risk established a consent decree. It was found that the department violated 42 U.S.C § 1414 The (U.S Department of Justice, 2015).

Gomez and Diaz (2016) found that African American residents have more negative experiences with the Cleveland police than any other demographic. Only 43% of African Americans believe the police are doing an excellent job than 72% of White people. The disparity in these percentages shows a difference and a need for equilibrium (Gomez & Diaz, 2016). Police have lawful authority to interact with people. However, police have much discretion in many cases on who they interact with and its purposes. In Cleveland, police interact with Cleveland African American residents twice as much as White residents. (Gomez & Diaz, 2016). Many African Americans have felt they are being targeted by police and profiled because of their race (Brooks et al., 2016).

The nature of policing requires police to be firm and unbiased. However, there isn't an agency designed to protect people from the police in many instances. Police are trusted agents. When police conduct violates the law, it erodes public trust (Grabiner, 2016). Negative impacts are created by treating people like they are suspicious based on their race. It can damage feelings of safety and create paranoia and anxiety (Lyle & Esmail, 2016; Miller & Vittrup, 2020).

### **Summary and Conclusions**

After reviewing the literature on policing and African Americans, there is much information to process and synthesis. The history of policing and each substantial punctuation that either created equilibrium or detracted from equilibrium was discussed.

The relationship between the police and African Americans has a historical context that must be understood to address the current dynamic. It is not an indictment of current law enforcement officers for the historical injustices done to African Americans. However, the past can be a good starting point for improving relationships. The PET framework is critical to understanding inertia in policy, key decision-makers, and policy changes over time. However, there can be singular moments and events that create punctuation.

Social protest and the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement create a demand for equilibrium. Following the Murder of George Floyd, the U.S. Congress is debating federal legislation aimed at accountability for police. According to PET, equilibrium does not have a long or drawn-out process. However, the history of policing and African Americans has been filled with many counterweights. The list of equilibrium-creating events was not exhaustive, and only the events of most significance were chosen. Providing information on every occasion that made a PET movement is beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, all selected events can be viewed through the lens of PET.

The United States Constitution, Fugitive Slave Acts, Personal Liberty laws, and the two landmark Supreme Court cases were the pre-Civil War events that did not create equilibrium for African Americans. The Civil War, 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment, Black Codes, and Jim Crow laws bring the relationship between African Americans and Police to the current era. The Use of Force standards, the Ferguson Effect, African Americans, and the police experiences were discussed for context and background for the current problem. Lastly, the relationship between the Cleveland police and African Americans was discussed to give pretextual information in the study.



The research data indicated that African Americans receive different treatment from the police, creating negative perceptions of African Americans who have not personally experienced police misconduct (Graziano & Gauthier, 2019; Owusu-Bempah, 2017). Although most African Americans have not personally experienced excessive force or brutality from the police, some fear they could be next (Graham et al., 2020; Ra'oof, 2019). The data was collected via survey and questions in Cleveland, and there was no additional follow-up (Gomez & Diaz, 2106). Therefore, exploring the survey questions using qualitative inquiry with African American residents is necessary.

A quantitative approach was conducted by Gomez and Diaz (2016), and African Americans were surveyed regarding their perceptions of the Cleveland police. Yet, no qualitative research has focused on African Americans' experiences regarding the Cleveland, OH police. Thus, chapter 3 provided an overview of the methodology and research questions to add to the extant literature.

### Chapter 3: Research Method

The phenomenon of interest is African Americans' experiences regarding their interactions with the Cleveland police. The reason to explore this topic is to further the research of Gomez and Diaz (2016). The Cleveland Police Department is the second largest police department in Ohio, with more than 1,600 police officers (About the Cleveland Police, n.d.). The findings of my study may provide possible solutions to identify problems and improve the Cleveland Police Department's relationship with the African American population living in Cleveland.

The significant sections of Chapter 3 are the research design and rationale for the study. The role of the researcher is discussed, and any potential biases are identified. Additionally, the selected methodology used is examined, and the instrumentation explained. The trustworthiness issues are explored to provide internal and external validity. Lastly, the chapter is summarized.

#### **Research Design and Rationale**

The research question for this study was: What are the experiences of the African Americans in Cleveland, Ohio, regarding their relationship with the Cleveland Police?

This general qualitative research study aimed to further Gomez and Diaz's quantitative research (2016) and explore the experiences of African Americans in Cleveland, OH, by expanding on several survey questions asked of African American residents during the DOJ mandated consent decree. The phenomenon is the experiences of African American residents and their relationship with the Cleveland Police Department. Traditionally, studies of this nature have used a qualitative approach (Ra'oof, 2019).

Due to the nature of the study and research question, a quantitative study would not be adequate. Conversely, qualitative studies are used when the data being sought can only be ascertained by talking to people or document analysis. Qualitative research is designed for studies requiring the phenomena to be investigated in natural settings (Hayes et al., 2015). The mixed-methods design was considered, but it was determined that it would be unnecessary and overly burdensome to the study.

The study's approach allowed further exploration of the individuals' responses, experiences, and issues that arose during the interviews by searching the experiences of African Americans in Cleveland, OH, in relationship with the police (Moran, 2002). The qualitative approach of this study increased the scope of narratives and experiences of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2016). No qualitative research has been conducted on African Americans in Cleveland, OH, regarding their experiences with the police. The general qualitative approach allowed me to explore the survey questions of Gomez and Diaz (2016) with specificity by asking follow-up questions.

### **Role of the Researcher**

In qualitative research, the researcher is also a participant. As the researcher, I coordinated the gathering and analysis of the data. I had no personal or professional relationship with any of the participants. There was no supervisory or instructor relationship involving power over the participants. Peer checking was done to help manage bias. Despite realizing that total objectivity is neither achievable nor desirable in qualitative research, researchers must put aside assumptions so that respondents' true experiences are reflected in the analysis and reporting of research (Ahern, 1999). Ethical issues were addressed, including conflicts of interest and potential perceived power

differentials; no incentives were used during this study. I did not allow my experiences or biases to interfere with data collection or analysis.

I grew up in Cleveland, OH, and I know the area well. When I graduated high school, I joined the United States Air Force, and for the past 22 years, I have been working in a law enforcement capacity. I started a nonprofit organization called Law Enforcement Equality Reform (LEER). LEER was developed after George Floyd was killed in Minneapolis. LEER is an advocacy organization dedicated to ending discriminatory practices in law enforcement. The ideas behind the organization come from my experience in military law enforcement experience. I've spent 15 of the last 22 years overseas working with police in Germany, Japan, and Saudi Arabia. I retired from the military on August 31, 2021, and I returned to the Cleveland area. As a former police officer, I understand the necessity of a strong relationship between the police and the people they protect.

### **Methodology**

This general qualitative study sampled African Americans residing in Cleveland, OH. Purposeful sampling is widely used in qualitative research to identify and select information-rich participants directly impacted by the phenomena (Palinkas et al., 2015). Guest et al. (2006) proposes saturation often occurs around 10-12 participants in homogeneous groups. I used purposeful sampling to identify and recruit 10 African American participants until data saturation. All participants were between 18-39 years old. Participants were screened via a criteria questionnaire before interviews to ensure they had lived in Cleveland for at least 5 years. Individuals were identified, contacted, and recruited via Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

Social media postings included the criteria for participating in the study. The advertisement postings also provided my email and telephone contact information, the purpose of the study, and a statement stating this study is entirely voluntary. Their identities were not shared in any part of this study nor on any social media platforms. Also, the advertisement required a valid form of identification displaying a Cleveland address to participate. Saturation occurs when no new information is disclosed, and the sample size is determined by the populations being examined. The relationship between saturation and sample size can be challenging. However, sample sizes in qualitative studies are usually not as large as quantitative due to the nature of the inquiry. Saturation is pivotal for the confidence and validity of the findings (Boddy, 2016; Mason, 2010).

### **Instrumentation**

The study used and modified 10 of the 45 survey questions Gomez and Diaz (2016) used in their published research. The survey questions with participant data were omitted. The 10 questions were selected as they were most responsive to the research question. The study of Gomez and Diaz assessed the Cleveland community's trust and confidence in the Cleveland Division of Police regarding the police overall and perceptions of racial profiling and the use of excessive force. Specifically, the survey addressed: (a) community perceptions of the police overall; (b) residents' experiences with the police; (c) community perceptions of the policy concerning the use of force; (d) citywide perceptions of police on other issues, including neighborhood service, responsiveness, effectiveness and general public safety; (e) specific measurements of police/community interactions, particularly the quality of police interactions based on personal interactions or based on what has been heard from a third party; (f) how these

interactions have played out, including approval/disapproval of how the police handled situations; and, (g) how the experiences of others influences community perceptions.

The Department of Justice Consent Decree between the Cleveland Police required a reliable, comprehensive, and representative survey of members of the Cleveland community regarding their experiences with and perceptions of the Cleveland police. The firm Interviewing Service of America (ISA) conducted the initial scientific community survey. Gomez and Diaz (2016) work for ISA and are the only users of the survey. The ISA survey was the instrument used in this study to further the initial data collected by Gomez and Diaz. The data derived from the ISA survey is sufficient to answer my research question because my research question is based on the findings of the ISA study. There was no demographic information from the ISA research used in my research. I have found no other researchers or research who used the ISA-developed survey or participant groups before or after 2016. The ISA study is appropriate because it forms the basis for my research question and interview questions. Some of the survey questions need to be slightly modified to make them open-ended interview questions. Appendix A shows the survey questions used by Gomez and Diaz and the dissertation interview questions.

### **Data Collection Plan**

The data was collected from selected individuals who met the criteria and agreed to participate. The researcher collected the data during the interviews with the 10 participants. Interviews will be scheduled for 45 minutes to 1 hour. Data was recorded using a portable recording device, and copious notes were taken during the interviews. Recruitment was conducted via social media and snowball sampling by asking

participants if they knew anyone interested in participating in the study. Once interviews were complete, participants were thanked for their participation. If no further information or clarification is needed, they were debriefed.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

According to Vais-Moradi et al.'s study (2013), there are many similarities between qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis, for instance, cutting across data, philosophical background, attention to both description and interpretation in data analysis, consideration of the context of data, and searching for themes. A thematic analysis was used to analyse this general qualitative study. I used the Braun and Clarke (2006) six-step guide to complete the thematic analysis. In Step one, I listened to and transcribed the audio recording from the interviews and created a separate Microsoft Word document for each participant. Then, I read the transcripts twice to understand the information and ensure no missed data. The second step was coding the data. I reviewed each line of the Microsoft Word transcripts, hand-coding and assigning codes to relevant data.

I underlined keywords and phrases and made notes about the codes. In the third step, I identified patterns and emerging themes. I reviewed data for similarities in the codes between participants found in the transcripts relevant to the research questions. The themes were transcribed on an additional Microsoft Word document. In the fourth step, I reviewed the initial themes, continued refining themes, and identified connections within the themes related to the research questions. I checked the thematic information two more times during the fourth phase. The fifth step in the thematic data analysis plan was defining the themes and determining the number of final themes. I continued to examine

the relationships between each theme and the research question and finalized the themes. In the last step, I extracted examples relating the analysis to the research question and produced a chart to diagram the analysis.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

All scholarly research must be able to withstand challenges to validity and trustworthiness. However, qualitative research has some unique, trustworthy issues that must be discussed. In qualitative research, the researcher must establish credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

#### **Credibility**

Credibility is defined as how closely the research matches the real world (Merriam & Tisdall, 2016). Credibility was established by investigator triangulation, member checks, data saturation, peer review, and working with my committee. The findings aligned with the assumptions made in chapter 1 and Gomez and Diaz's research (2016). For a study to be credible, it must be believable and biases identified. The findings and participants' responses were in concert with the Chapter 2 literature review and my conclusions. When participants did not provide an answer that I thought was responsive to the questions, I would ask them to clarify or expand on their responses.

#### **Transferability**

Transferability deals with the internal and external validity of the study. This study provided a lot of valuable data. Transferability can be achieved by other researchers replicating the study. The researcher must provide sufficient descriptive data to make transferability possible (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The descriptive data from this study can be transferable because meticulous detail that was put into the data analysis. Due to



this study furthering previously published research, the source data from Gomez and Diaz (2016) can be used to provide additional descriptive data. Also, the DOJ (2015) report and additional validity to the finding of this study. However, due to this qualitative study furthering a quantitative survey. The question of why African Americans have more negative experiences with the Cleveland police can now be answered with more specificity. The data I collected was original. However, there will always be some subjectivity in qualitative studies. Therefore, transferability is essential to any findings.

### **Dependability**

Dependability focuses on if the study can be replicated (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The finding of this study can be replicated. The nature of the study was straightforward, consistency was followed all the way through, and all interviews were structured, so they began and ended the same way to safeguard dependability. Further, all transcribed data was matched to the tape recordings and notes taken at each interview. None of the selected participants had access to any questions or discussions before their interview. Nor did I know the experiences of any participants in Cleveland, Ohio, regarding the Cleveland police. None of the questions were altered to suit to influence the results of this study. After the first interview, I had to tell participants that this study was only on experiences with the Cleveland police. Some of the questions had the potential to lead to other incidents outside of Cleveland. The Braun and Clarke (2006) six-step guide for analyzing qualitative data was followed. However, there are many ways to analyze qualitative data, and I found this method very reliable.

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability is the objectivity of qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Objectivity is required for scholarly research. The researcher must be open-minded and only go where the research and data lead. Preconceived ideas, biases, and faulty logic hinder the ability to be objective. Despite realizing that total objectivity is neither achievable nor desirable in qualitative research, researchers must put aside assumptions so that respondents' true experiences are reflected in the analysis and reporting of research (Ahern, 1999). Reflexivity was used to confirm the results of the study. Other researchers can also examine the data and findings of the research to eliminate separate form conclusions. It is impossible to eliminate all bias. However, my biases were explained, and mitigation measures were implemented to avoid the pitfalls. Confirmability was addressed by auditing the tape recording and notes taken during each interview. Also, all the participants will be asked the same questions in the same order. The findings of my study were also confirmed by Gomez and Diaz (2016) study and the DOJ's (2015) report on the Cleveland police.

### **Ethical Procedures**

Following ethical guidelines is the hallmark of scholarly research. Unethical research can jeopardize the integrity of the research and call into question the finding and conclusions of data. Therefore, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines and criteria were strictly followed, and a completed IRB application was submitted for approval to collect data. Participation in this study was purely voluntary, and there was no significant harm associated with this study.

All participants received a consent form before participating in the study. All human subjects were treated ethically, and no vulnerable populations were contacted for this study. All collected data is stored confidentially in a locked safe to which only the researcher has access, and any participant's names or personal information is kept confidential. As the IRB determines, nothing was disclosed to anyone who does not need to know. The researcher will mitigate ethical concerns by working closely with his committee members to ensure that each step in the process is ethical and in line with scholarly research criteria. The researcher had zero power or professional influence over any participants, nor did any participants have a close relationship with the researchers.

Participants were selected based on meeting all the mentioned criteria. No one was allowed to participate in the study if they were not residents of Cleveland. Information about the study was not disclosed until IRB approval was received. Once recruitment information was online, I shared with the potential participant the criteria for the study. No one had advanced knowledge, and participants were asked not to share interview questions or discussions about the interview. Participants were told that if questions were considered too sensitive, they were not required to answer, and the questioning would be terminated. Participants could have chosen to withdraw from partaking in the study. If the interviewer noticed that participants felt discomfort or trepidation, the interview would have been stopped and asked if they wished to continue. Any identifiable information was removed from the files before the datasets were released for validation.

## Summary

Chapter 3 focused on the research methodology and the design and methodology best suited for this study. As the researcher, I was pivotal in ensuring that the collected and analyzed data was free from biases and that all ethical safeguards were followed. The 10-question instrumentation used for this study was derived from the Gomez and Diaz (2016) quantitative study of Cleveland residents. Ethical standards exist so the study can withstand scrutiny from additional researchers, and internal and external validity are met. There are a lot of different approaches to qualitative findings that can be analyzed to formulate conclusions. I used Braun and Clarke (2006) six-step guide to complete the thematic analysis.

Further, I discussed the study's credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These ensure that the scholarly standard or research is met and make it easier for the study to be tested validly and reproduced by additional scholars. The process allowed the study to withstand the critics and detractors. Chapter 4 addressed the findings of the study.

## Chapter 4: Results

This general qualitative study aimed to understand the experiences of the African American population in Cleveland, Ohio, regarding their relationship with Cleveland Police Department. The reason to explore this topic is to further the research of Gomez and Diaz (2016). The police department in Cleveland, Ohio, is the second-largest police department in Ohio, with more than 1,600 police officers (About the Cleveland Police, n.d.). The findings from this study provided a better understanding of African Americans' experiences regarding the Cleveland police.

### **Research Question**

What are the experiences of African Americans in Cleveland, Ohio, regarding their relationship with the Cleveland police?

### **Setting**

IRB approval (#12-08-21-1018691) was received on December 8, 2021. I started recruitment on December 10, 2021, following the recruitment procedures outlined in Chapter 3. However, due to COVID-19 protocols, the IRB authorized data collection via telephone. Originally, interviews were going to be in-person at the Cleveland public library. Participants were informed that the interview would be recorded via phone. Phone interviews were more convenient and easier to coordinate and allowed me to collect data much quicker than I had expected. The first interview went longer than the rest because I had to redirect the participant back to the questions. This was alleviated by telling the remaining participants that the questions were only about their experiences with the Cleveland police. The 10 questions were all asked in the same order, and when I

received the participant's answers, I summarized their answers before moving to the following questions.

### **Demographics**

The 10 participants for this study were between 18 and 39 (see Table 1) and have resided in Cleveland, OH, for 5 years. The participants lived in all parts of the city. All participants were either born and raised in Cleveland or had moved to Cleveland with their parents before they were 18. Cleveland is divided into police districts, and the participants came from several communities representing various districts. The east side of Cleveland has a higher density of African Americans residents. Only two participants lived on the city's west side, with a much higher density of White non-Hispanic and White Hispanic residents. The Gomez and Diaz (2016) study indicated that “residents in the Far West and Mid-West areas give the Cleveland Police higher ratings serving the City overall compared to residents from the Mid-East, South-East, and North-East areas” (p.7).

All participants had experiences and encounters with the Cleveland police and were forthcoming and candid with their answers to the interview questions. Three participants had significant encounters with the Cleveland police, where they contacted the Cleveland police for service, and two of the three had a positive encounter with the Cleveland police officers. The other seven participants did not initiate their encounter with the Cleveland police. This was significant because it confirmed and validated the findings of Gomez and Diaz (2016) that African Americans are contacted by the Cleveland police more than any other demographic in the city.

**Table 1***Demographics of Participants*

Participant	Sex	Age
1	Male	30
2	Male	34
3	Male	28
4	Female	27
5	Female	28
6	Male	24
7	Female	38
8	Male	25
9	Male	37
10	Female	29

**Data Collection**

Initially, I had no replies to the social media ads in the first week. However, through purposeful sampling and snowballing, I identified 15 potential participants. Two were eliminated due to age. One could not participate because they had not lived in Cleveland for 5 years, and two participants did not return the signed consent form. Data collection was conducted from December 2021 through April 2022. Interviews were conducted with the 10 participants over the phone, and each participant was contacted via phone. The interviews averaged 25 minutes and were audio-recorded, and notes were taken during the interview. Microsoft Word was used to create a transcript of the

recorded data. Data saturation occurred after the 10<sup>th</sup> interview as I got no new data. Initially, I thought interviews would take 45 – minutes to 1 hour, but the interviews did not take as long as I expected. I allocated more time just in case it was needed. Initially, I allotted 45-minutes to 1 hour based on similar qualitative studies I researched. Once data was collected, I emailed a transcript via Microsoft Word so participants could conduct member checks on their responses. Data and tables were presented to represent findings, and direct quotes from participants were included. Discrepant cases and nonconforming data were addressed in the results.

### **Data Analysis**

I used thematic coding to apply qualitative data analysis (Saldana, 2016). I followed the Six-step guide of Braun and Clarke (2006) to complete the thematic analysis. Coding requires searching for common themes and concepts. These themes or concepts were labeled or coded to represent the collective ideas of participants. This process is known as open or initial coding because the label, or code, is obtained straight from the data I received during the interviews (Saldana, 2016). Due to the small sample size, I used no software program to assist in coding the data. Step 1 of Braun and Clarke's (2006) guide is to become familiar with the data. After listening to the audio recordings twice, I reviewed my notes from the interviews and coded the data by hand. I coded each participant's interview question separately and then compared it to others for similar ideas and differences (Saldana, 2016). Each interview question was coded independently. However, due to the uniform nature of the answers, there was a slight variation from one participant to another. The participants had similar experiences with the Cleveland police, and after Interview 5, I noticed that the coding became very



uniform. Then I grouped these codes into themes (Creswell, 2012; Saldana, 2016; Yin, 2018). I coded and created themes from the data through the lens of an analytic researcher to avoid bias and misinterpretations (Saldana, 2016).

Due to my close relationship with the topic and my law enforcement background, I needed to avoid bias and remain neutral to ensure the validity of the results. To remain unbiased, I summarized the answers using participants' original context and restated answers to ensure there was no confusion. I consulted with my committee chair for guidance and feedback. One question asked of me on Facebook by a potential participant was whether I was requesting people who specifically had negative interactions with the Cleveland police. In designing this study, I explicitly chose not to solicit people who had negative interactions directly, though it is not unethical to do so if they met the study's criteria. However, I did not want to sway the data. My goal was only to understand African Americans' experiences, as reported during the interviews. I identified common codes and themes by analyzing the collected data using the processes mentioned. When participants asked for clarification on a question, I ensured I provided the same information. For Question 1, some participants wanted to know how they should rate the police, for example, with a scale of 1-10 or with words like good or bad. I explained that there were no wrong answers. I told each participant who asked that question to answer the best they could. I made sure not to lead them one way or the other.

After the first step of listening to the audio and transcribing it verbatim, Step 2 of Braun and Clarke's (2006) analysis guidelines is to generate initial codes. This phase step involves the production of initial codes from the extracted data. The coding identified valuable information on African American experiences regarding the Cleveland police.

Information that could not be classified as an experience was not coded. I assessed codes from the 10 interview questions. The following 14 codes were identified from the data with corresponding statements from the participants and the frequency that they were coded (Table 2). The discrepant cases and nonconforming data are addressed in Step 4 of Braun and Clarke's (2006) Six-step procedure.

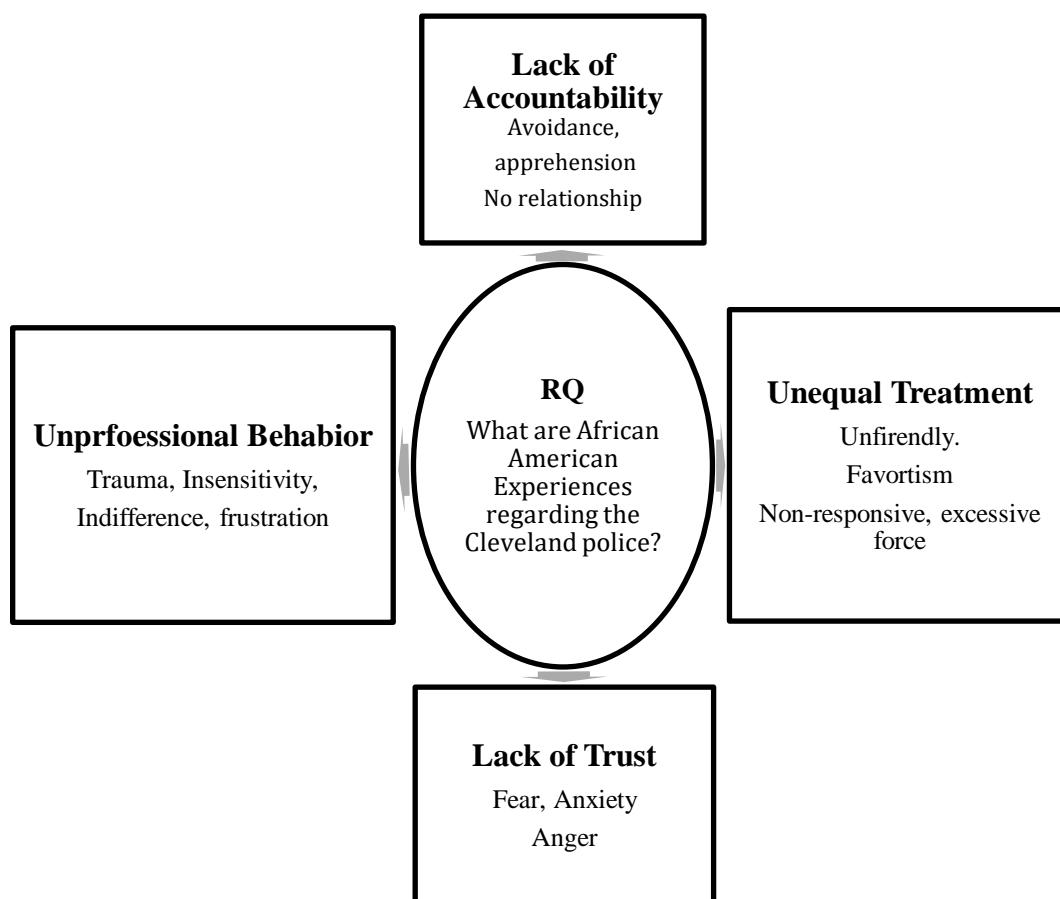
**Table 2***Participants' Data Extract, Codes, and Frequency*

Data extract	Code	Frequency
The Cleveland police have a tiered system for responding to calls for service participants noted that depending on the issue, the police may never come.	Nonresponsive	6
Participants noted that the Cleveland police's mere presence created concerns because of uncertain outcomes. "Don't know what kind of day they are having," or "based on what I've witnessed, I don't want that to happen."	Fear	5
Seeing the police makes participants nervous/panic because they don't associate the police with being helpful, thinking the police can only worsen the situation.	Anxiety	6
Some participants mentioned that they could care less about the police one way or other. They are not concerned about what the police do as long as they are not messed with.	Indifference	6
The participant did not want to be seen with the police or associated with them.	Avoidance	6
Participants were upset when they saw Cleveland police misconduct and felt like it was "us against them." The anger was not directed toward the police more than it is allowed to happen, and they can get away with it	Anger	7
Cleveland police do not take the time to understand participants' points of view and make comments that do not show empathy. There was a range of emotions among participants.	Insensitive	6
Participants are reluctant to reach out to the police. Some stated only if necessary. Other participants said they could solve their problems with police involvement.	Apprehension	8
Participants stated that the Cleveland police treat non-African Americans better than them. Some participants said it is because of racism or bias.	Favoritism	8
Participants are concerned that the Cleveland police will not change, and it creates a feeling of resentment at the entire system of policing.	Frustration	6
The goes to interview question #1 participant stated the Cleveland police are not polite and gave an overall poor rating.	Unfriendly	8
Participants noted the Cleveland police do not use the appropriate amount of force when dealing with African Americans. However, no participant stated they were victims of excessive force.	Excessive Force	9
Participants stated the police are doing nothing to establish a relationship with them or their community.	No Relationship	9
Participants noted that Cleveland police actions they experienced or witnessed caused them distress and made them not want to interact with the police anymore.	Trauma	6

In Step 3 of Braun and Clarke's (2006) analysis procedure, initial codes were sorted into categories called candidate themes. This step focused the analysis on the broader level of themes. Codes were considered and combined to form overarching themes. There were four candidate themes identified: (a) lack of trust, (b) unprofessional behavior, (c) unequal treatment, and (d) lack of accountability. A visual representation of the process is depicted (Figure 1).

**Figure 1**

*Codes, Categories, Candidate Themes*



Step 4 of Braun and Clarke's (2006) guide was conducted once themes were identified. This phase involved two levels of reviewing and refining the themes. The first level required reviewing the coded data. The discrepant and nonconforming data was not factored into creating themes because additional codes from other participants did not support the data.

**Table 3**

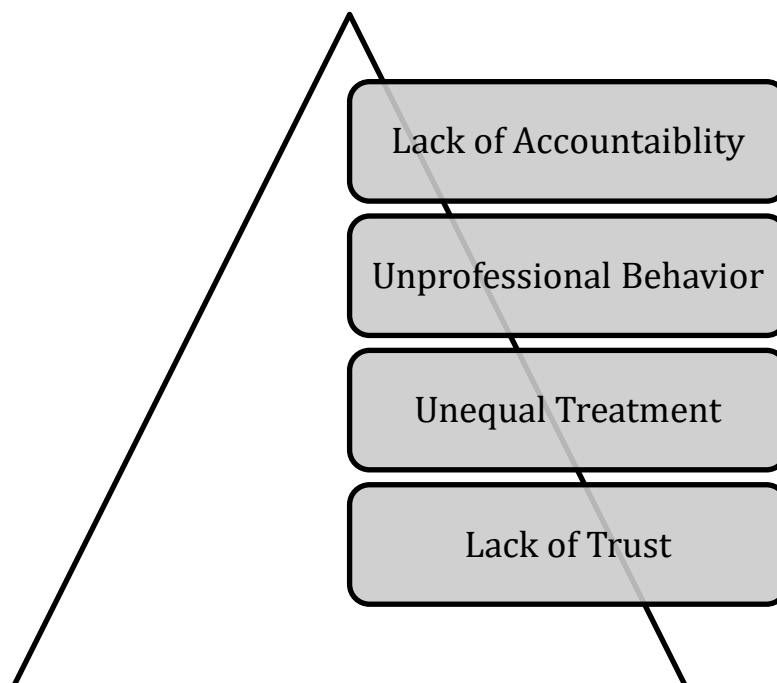
*Discrepant and Nonconforming Data*

Data extract	Code	Frequency
Participant 4 stated, "the relationship with Cleveland police was satisfactory" and gave the Cleveland police a 7 out of 10 and said the relationship with the Cleveland police was "improving."	Satisfactory	1
Participant 3 stated, "the Cleveland police use the appropriate amount of force to get the job done."	No excessive force	1
Participant 4 said, "Cleveland police know some of the individuals in the neighborhood by name, but most interactions have to be initiated by the residents, and the Cleveland police in Ward 4 created a community engagement office consisting of 2-3 officers willing to connect with residents and build relationships".	Progress	1
Participants 7 and 10 stated, "they are unaware of how the Cleveland police treat all ethnic groups."	Unknown	2
Participants 3, 5, and 9 stated the Cleveland police treat people with dignity and respect once they determine no threat.	Respectful	3
Participants 4 and 6 said they did not know if the Cleveland police treated people with dignity and respect.	Unknown	2

The second level is determining if the themes do not fit and considering if the theme is appropriate. I provided a review of the coding “Fear” there was some overlap, and fear could be classified as a stand-alone theme. However, the fear was difficult to measure to make a theme from the interview data. The fear took the form of avoiding and anxiety, which both fell under the theme of lack of trust. I reasoned that there would be little to no fear if there were no lack of trust. A participant stated, “I do not want to interact with the police.” Without ascribing a motive, when I asked why, the participant said, “there is nothing the police can do for me.” The data led me more to the theme of a lack of trust than it was just fear. The ‘thematic map’ visual displays themes from least to most supported by the data (Figure 2).

**Figure 2**

*Finalized themes*



Step 5 of Braun and Clarke's (2006) guide describes the themes and overall story the analysis expresses, generating clear classifications and labels for each theme. I also triangulated the themes I identified with Gomez and Diaz's (2016) survey and the DOJ investigation of the Cleveland Police Department. The data tells a clear and straightforward story about the experiences of African Americans in Cleveland regarding the Cleveland police. Although there was enough data to support a "Lack of Accountability" as a theme, there was some overlap with the other themes. Lack of Accountability was kept as a standalone theme due to participant data and its impact on experiences. However, no participants had any direct interactions with the Cleveland police that led to them personally stating it was a problem. The theme of unprofessional behavior was based on personal experiences. The theme of unequal treatment combined personal experiences and what participants heard from others. The final theme of lack of trust was the foundation for most codes, and each participant acknowledged some form of not trusting the Cleveland police.

The final analysis is the sixth and last step of Braun and Clarke's (2006) guide. The final analysis selected extracts relating to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly analysis report. The study identified four major themes from coding the participant responses. These themes were compiled based on the personal experiences of African Americans in Cleveland, OH, with the Cleveland police. The participant's responses were grouped into reoccurring statements found throughout each question. These themes are not all-inclusive but represent most participant responses, and match themes triangulated from Gomez and Diaz's (2016) survey and the Department of Justice Civil Right Division (2014) report on the Cleveland police.

## **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

### **Credibility**

Credibility is defined as how closely the research matches the real world (Merriam & Tisdall, 2016). Credibility was established by investigator triangulation, member checks, data saturation, peer review, and working with my committee. The findings aligned with the assumptions made in chapter 1 and Gomez and Diaz's research (2016). For a study to be credible, it must be believable and biases identified. The findings and participants' responses were in concert with the Chapter 2 literature review and my conclusions. When participants did not provide an answer that I thought was responsive to the questions, I would ask them to clarify or expand on their responses.

### **Transferability**

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**Dependability**

Dependability focuses on if the study can be replicated (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The finding of this study can be replicated. The nature of the study was straightforward, consistency was followed all the way through, and all interviews were structured, so they began and ended the same way to safeguard dependability. Further, all transcribed data was matched to the tape recordings and notes taken at each interview. None of the selected participants had access to any questions or discussions before their interview. Nor did I know the experiences of any participants in Cleveland, Ohio, regarding the Cleveland police. None of the questions were altered to suit to influence the results of this study. After the first interview, I had to tell participants that this study was only on experiences with the Cleveland police. Some of the questions had the potential to lead to other incidents outside of Cleveland. The Braun and Clarke (2006) six-step guide for analyzing qualitative data was followed. However, there are many ways to analyze qualitative data, and I found this method very reliable.

**Confirmability**

Confirmability is the objectivity of qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Objectivity is required for scholarly research. The researcher must be open-minded and only go where the research and data lead. Preconceived ideas, biases, and faulty logic hinder the ability to be objective. Despite realizing that total objectivity is neither achievable nor desirable in qualitative research, researchers must put aside assumptions so that respondents' true experiences are reflected in the analysis and reporting of research (Ahern, 1999). Reflexivity was used to confirm the results of the study. Other researchers can also examine the data and findings of the research to

eliminate separate form conclusions. It is impossible to eliminate all bias. However, my biases were explained, and mitigation measures were implemented to avoid the pitfalls. Confirmability was addressed by auditing the tape recording and notes taken during each interview. Also, all the participants will be asked the same questions in the same order. The findings of my study were also confirmed by Gomez and Diaz (2016) study and the DOJ's (2015) report on the Cleveland police.

### **Results**

The research question has been successfully answered, and the study results are conclusive and resounding. The experiences of African Americans in Cleveland, OH, regarding the Cleveland police are overwhelmingly negative. These negative experiences were based on several factors. The primary reason is a lack of trust, which creates other issues. For the most part, participants have just accepted the relationship between them and the police. The thought process is just, "it is what it is." In their way, each participant has learned what to do to avoid interactions with the police or keep interactions as limited as possible. The findings confirm Gomez and Diaz's (2016) survey and the Department of Justice investigation of the Cleveland Police Department (2015). This study did not focus on how the relationship could be improved. Still, from what I gathered, it would take serious reform for the participants to regain their trust in the police and have better experiences. The data extracts that supported the themes are conclusive.

#### **Lack of Accountability**

This experience was attributed to high-profile cases in Cleveland involving the police and African Americans, namely the shooting of Tamir Rice, Timothy Russell, and Malissa Williams incidents that came to mind from participants. And two participants

stated they were “unaware” if police are held accountable for misconduct. Accountability takes many forms often when it comes to the police. African Americans either are unaware or think it does not exist. This erodes trust and creates an above-the-law feeling. The police are afforded more legal protections than the regular citizen, but in an environment where the Police are initiating most of the interactions with African Americans, the mantra of "just comply" sounds good, but what happens when you are being told to comply with something unlawful? There is a fear created by having an unbalanced power differential. The DOJ noted “inadequate accountability systems to Cleveland police and failure to embrace and incorporate the concepts of community policing at all levels” (p.29). The participants were almost uniform in this assessment. According to Gomez and Diaz’s (2016) survey, “When misconduct does occur, the majority of Cleveland residents (55%) believe officers are held accountable “only some of the time” or “almost never” (p.22).

### **Unprofessional Behavior**

The police are supposed to be consistently professional even when using force. Gomez and Diaz’s (2016) reported that most people surveyed believed the police acted professionally, but Black people reported higher levels of unprofessional behavior. However, the targeted age group 18-39 reported the highest levels. My research also supported these findings. Several participants stated that unprofessionalism is the primary reason they do not like interacting with the police. The experience of African Americans is they do not receive professional behavior until they are professional or polite first. The idea that police professionalism is based on the actions of how African Americans have generally been accepted. There are times when people are upset, and the Police should be

de-escalating, but instead, they can make matters worse by being insensitive or only showing up to apprehend someone. The DOJ noted Cleveland police behavior as “unprofessional” and could lead to bad outcomes for all involved parties.

### **Unequal Treatment**

African Americans' experiences with the police are unequal compared to what they witness in the police interactions with non-African Americans in Cleveland. Gomez and Diaz (2016) found that two-thirds of black residents (66%) believe they are treated worse than other community members. The findings of my study further support that conclusion. The identified factors were a lack of neighborhood patrolling and residents knowing the people supposed to protect and serve them. The relationship has become adversarial as no participant acknowledges equal treatment. There is a sense that when police encounters will be a negative experience regardless of the situation. There is an us against them mentality: the idea that African Americans cannot receive fair, professional treatment at an encounter. Due to unequal treatment, two participants stated “they would not contact the police under any circumstances.” No participants said that the Cleveland police do anything to personally engage with them or their neighborhood that the citizens do not first initiate. This theme is in sync with DOJ finding that “African Americans reported that they believe CDP officers are verbally and physically aggressive toward them because of their race” (p.50).

### **Lack of Trust**

The lack of trust resonated with all participants, yet the reasons varied as different experiences led to this conclusion. Participant 1 stated, “I would never contact the police if he were in trouble.” He further said, “Police can only bring problems. Police have not

been helpful.” This was the general sentiment of the participants. Exemplifying this theme, only two of the 10 participants stated, “They would contact the police if required by law,” such as a vehicle accident.

According to Gomez and Diaz’s (2016) research, Black residents are far less likely to believe that police use the appropriate amount of force. The data reported less than 18% believed the police use the appropriate amount of force “almost always” compared to 46% of white residents. Several participants cited this “distrust” as the primary reason they did not feel comfortable relying on the police for assistance. These findings were directly correlated to the results of this study. There is a severe lack of trust between African Americans aged 18-39 and the Police. African Americans are reluctant to engage with the Police as their experiences led them to believe no good can come from police involvement, even with the minor issue. The DOJ stated,

Instead of working with Cleveland’s communities to understand their needs and concerns and to set crime-fighting priorities and strategies consistent with those needs, CDP too often polices in a way that contributes to community distrust and a lack of respect for officers – even the many officers who are doing their jobs effectively” (p.7).

### **Summary**

In Chapter 4, I provided the findings of my research study. I offered a description of the setting, the research procedures, and participant data. I explained the data collection processes and presented the findings of my research analysis, including coding and the formulation of themes, reviewed the data provided in the research interviews, and looked for discrepant data. The trustworthiness of this study was explained, and how

internal and external validity was conducted. I showed how I constructed the key findings based on the data in this study. In Chapter 5, I present an interpretation of my study's results as they relate to my literature review in Chapter 2. I also discuss the results of my findings in the context of my theoretical framework. Lastly, Chapter 5 includes the study's limitations, recommendations for further research studies, and the implications for positive social change.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of the study was to better understand African Americans' experiences with the Cleveland police. The nature of the study was qualitative as it was the most effective method of finding out about African Americans' experiences with the Cleveland police. This study was conducted to further understand the Gomez and Diaz (2016) survey findings. To date, no scholarly qualitative research has examined the experiences of African Americans in Cleveland, OH, regarding their relationship with the Cleveland police. Gomez and Diaz (2016) survey findings stated,

Results indicated that residents are more likely to form negative opinions about the police based on what they hear from others, rather than their own personal experience, suggesting that a single interaction has an “echo” effect that shapes the perceptions of many people. Future research, whether through follow-up surveys or focus groups, might explore what makes interactions positive. (p.10)

In the Gomez and Diaz (2016) study, African Americans between the ages of 18 and 39 in Cleveland, Ohio, reported having the most negative experiences with the Cleveland police, so I interviewed individuals in the age group more likely to have had a negative experience to understand the negative experiences better. My study's findings substantiate and provide details on why this phenomenon exists. While Gomez and Diaz (2016) found that African Americans have more negative experiences with the Cleveland police, the research literature indicated there are many similarities between African Americans in Cleveland and African Americans in other parts of America. The key findings from this study are African Americans between the ages of 18 and 39 experienced a lack of trust, unequal treatment, unprofessional behavior, and a lack of

accountability from the Cleveland police. As a result of these experiences, there has been a deterioration in the relationship between the Cleveland police and African Americans.

Further, there is more of an adversarial relationship based on their experiences and what they have witnessed from other demographics in the city. Also, there are disparities and inequality in treatment, as witnessed by many participants in this study. Lastly, very few of the Cleveland police officers try to establish relationships with African Americans or the communities where they live. Most community interactions with the Cleveland police are tokenism or mere presence patrols where they are not engaging personally with African Americans.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

The findings confirm and extend the knowledge in the discipline as they are directly correlated to the peer-reviewed literature in Chapter 2. It is well-known and widely accepted that African Americans have more negative experiences with the police (Hinton, 2018; Lloyd, 2020; Nather, 2021). However, what is paramount to scholars is precisely why this issue persists. This study adds to the literature that seeks to understand why African Americans have such bad experiences with police beyond the quantitative constructs and anecdotal assumptions. This study also confirms African Americans' experiences with the police in Cleveland are directly related to other communities with large African American populations (see Ra'oof, 2019). Also, the findings and interview data did not have much variance from participants, and most had shared experiences regarding the Cleveland police.

The nature of policing and African Americans has been contentious for many reasons. During slavery, the safest place for African Americans in the south was on a



plantation or densely populated areas with other African Americans. After slavery, the safest place for African Americans was still the plantation and densely populated areas. The primary purpose of policing was to ensure that African Americans remained in those two places and never crossed into predominantly white spaces. The end of legalized Jim Crow created a problem for police because African Americans were allowed to move freely throughout the country. The police became the primary agency combating white fears of the so-called "super predators" (Barthé, 2019). Enslavers provided the greatest protection for African Americans during slavery. There was a vested interest in protecting their property from the abuse of the patty rollers and slave patrols who functioned as what is now considered modern-day police. The challenge with creating punctuated equilibrium is that the nation's lawmakers have never had African Americans' best interests in mind when crafting policy to address these structural inequities. It was not until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century that the federal government addressed the ongoing inequality related to the treatment of African Americans.

### **Punctuated Equilibrium Theory and Racists' Ideas Impacting Policy**

The finding of this study fit comfortably within the framework of PET. The third tenet of PET deals with policy images or how an issue is understood and discussed as a policy problem. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the "Negro Problem" was America's most studied social science and public policy problem (Shaler, 2017). The Negro problem can be summarized as what was to be done with the nearly four million formerly enslaved people. It is important to note that slavery in America was not just an economic and legal system. Slavery was also a social system underpinned by the ideology that African

Americans were subhuman and thus inferior to White people, as exemplified by the landmark case of *Dred Scott v. Sandford* in 1856). One scholar noted,

U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice Roger B. Taney stated [African Americans] had for more than a century before been regarded as beings of an inferior order, and altogether unfit to associate with the white race, either in social or political relations; and so far inferior, that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect; and that the negro might justly and lawfully be reduced to slavery for his benefit. He was bought and sold and treated as an ordinary article of merchandise and traffic whenever a profit could be made by it. (Hueber, 2010)

PET identifies why policies go through long periods of stasis until reaching equilibrium. Before policy can be changed, the underlying ideas and behaviors that support those policies must be examined and changed. The question then becomes: When did African Americans lose their inferior subhuman status in the minds of White Americans? A rhetorical question, African Americans' inferior status was codified with ongoing legislation and judicial decisions that reinforced racial biases that led to further injustices to African Americans. However, the argument that African Americans were genetically inferior to White people could no longer be supported by scientific evidence by the mid-1950s. Therefore, to avoid cognitive dissonance, the new argument became that African American culture was the reason for racial disparities and unequal treatment. This is an argument that many people in America still accept as valid (Muhammad, 2010).

Post-Civil War ideas about African Americans began to focus on social inequality. The landmark case *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 1896, has had the most damaging

impact on race relations in America. The U.S. Supreme Court upheld the separate but equal doctrine. The difficulty of obtaining social equity for African Americans can be traced to Associate Justice Henry Brown, who sustained the constitutionality of Louisiana's Jim Crow law. In part, he said:

Legislation is powerless to eradicate racial instincts or to abolish distinctions based upon physical differences, and the attempt to do so can only result in accentuating the difficulties of the present situation. If the civil and political rights of both races be equal, one cannot be inferior to the other civilly or politically. If one race be inferior to the other socially, the Constitution of the United States cannot put them upon the same plane. (Brown, 1896)

To date, U.S. Supreme Court has not reversed or challenged the assumptions made in Plessy about overcoming "inferior social" status. According to PET, this long period of inertia has created a policy monopoly with tremendous power to maintain the status quo. The Plessy case reinforced the ideas of Black inferiority and allowed racists, bigots, and prejudiced individuals to have safe spaces in society to create policies detrimental to African Americans. The ruling also hindered the socialization of Black and White people into one shared reality based on equality for all. W.E.B DuBois's (2014[1935]) analysis of the abolition of slavery noted that the comprehensive abolition of slavery was not achieved because new, truly democratic institutions aimed at incorporating black people into the social order were not created to occupy the space it left. As a result, new forms of slavery emerged to fill the void—most notably the prison system (2014[1935]). As defined by PET, the notion that social inequality cannot be remedied by law creates long periods of stasis. Therefore, the burden fell on African

Americans to assimilate into society amongst constant terrorism from organizations like the Ku Klux Klan (KKK).

### **Punctuated Equilibrium Theory and the Media**

The news and entertainment industries are one of the largest policy monopolies needed to sustain long periods of policy stasis. Both can and have been used to reinforce negative stereotypes of African Americans. The impact of controlling a narrative and suppressing counter-narratives is the most powerful propaganda tool to maintain the status quo. The American silent epic drama film *The Birth of a Nation*, originally called *The Clansman*, led to a resurgence of the KKK primarily to protect the virtue of white women from the animalistic Blackman, who in the film is portrayed as a savage beast who ravages White women and can only be controlled by posse justice that often took the form of lynching. In February 1915, upon viewing the film at a special White House screening, President Woodrow Wilson reportedly remarked, "It's like writing history with lightning. My only regret is that it is all so terribly true" (Benbow, 2010).

A rarely unchallenged idea and philosophy have endured in America regarding African Americans and the police: the pseudo-scientific notion that African Americans are more criminal and violent than other members of society. And as a result, police are empowered by law and their perceptions to be harsher toward African Americans. Therefore, when police violate the constitutional rights of African Americans, most of the society is either indifferent or minimalizes the intrusion that they would not tolerate themselves (Sanders & Ramasubramanian, 2012). The literate review revealed how African Americans had been viewed as a monolith regarding public policy changes from a PET perspective.

## **Punctuated Equilibrium Theory and Crime**

PET confronts the argument that there are just a few bad apples in policing. The false dichotomy is used to minimize any system-wide examination or changes and to keep stasis. However, apples grow in orchards, not in isolation. Hence the policy monopoly controls the orchard. The policy monopoly can obfuscate conceding a single apple is bad to prohibit any real diagnosis that will address the problem. This type of indifferent thinking is one of the most significant barriers to creating punctuated equilibrium for African Americans in policing. Similar nonsensical arguments tend to be made by people who make policy knowing the chances of them experiencing the so-called bad apples in policing are slim to none. The war on drugs is an excellent example. In a 1994 interview, Mr. John Ehrlichman, President Richard Nixon's domestic policy chief, said,

The Nixon campaign in 1968 had two enemies: the antiwar left and Black people. You understand what I'm saying? We knew we couldn't make it illegal to be either against the war or Black, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and Blacks with heroin, and then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities. We could arrest their leaders, raid their homes, break up their meetings, and vilify them night after night on the evening news. Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course, we did." (Harrod & Friedman, 2016)

President Nixon's creation of a war on drugs to criminalize Black people amplified the presumption of guilt assigned to Black people, leading to mass incarceration in America that disproportionately impacted African Americans. However, there has been a

different response to the opioid crisis where public policy makers treat it as a public health problem instead of a criminal justice problem. The opioid crisis has highlighted a different policy approach for dealing with drug users and abusers (Hart & Hart, 2019). Nationwide, Black people are over-represent for drug offenses in state and federal prisons. In seven states, black people constitute between 80 and 90 percent of people sent to prison on drug charges. Black men are incarcerated at 9.6 times the rate of white men. In eleven states, they are incarcerated at 12 to 26 times greater rates than white men (Sawyer et al.).

### **Punctuated Equilibrium Theory and the Cleveland Police**

Cleveland and the Cleveland police have many punctuated equilibrium events with the African American community. Namely, two landmark Supreme Court cases focusing on the limits of police power and African Americans (Mapp v. Ohio, 1963) and (Terry v. Ohio, 1968). Both cases happened in Cleveland, OH, and have impacted national policing policy in America. The Mapp case determined that evidence obtained without a warrant can be excluded at trial. The case established what is known as the "exclusionary rule." However, Mapp only addressed the evidence and not the Police who collected the evidence in violation of the law. The fact that police officers can violate the rights of people and can claim qualified immunity further prevents punctuated equilibrium. The Mapp case was a positive equilibrium as the practice of seizing evidence unlawfully harms everyone. Evidence illegally seized harms African Americans as knowledge of the law and proper legal representation make it difficult for them to challenge unlawful police actions in court.

The Terry case is arguably noted as providing the most extensive use of police power in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. U.S. Supreme Court Associate Justice William Davis was the

only dissenting vote in his dissenting opinion. He wrote, "We hold today that the Police have greater authority to make a seizure and conduct a search that a judge has to authorize such action. To give police greater power than a magistrate is to take a long step down the totalitarian path". The words of Justice Davis still ring true today, as unchecked police power has led many African Americans to experience the totalitarian power of the police. This is also concerning for non-African Americans. The terrorist events on January 6, 2021, at the U.S. Capitol, are the logical conclusion of unpunctuated equilibriums. In her book *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide*, Dr. Carol Anderson addresses what supports racial division and resentment in America. Perhaps the most profound lesson of history is severe inequality and lack of equilibrium lead to political violence and civil war.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The study identified several limitations. In qualitative research, the researcher is an instrument and any data gathered is only as reliable as the interviewer. Interviewing started difficult as participants felt the need to address issues that were not being asked and expound on questions outside the scope of the research topic. There was a sensitive topic related to Participant 5, and I recommended that counselling would be beneficial. Reflexivity is the process of the researcher examining themselves as the researcher and the research relationship. Also, as the researcher, I made every attempt to stay neutral. However, it was more challenging than I expected. However, participants could not pick up on my body language during the study as they were conducted via the phone. No participant felt the need to change how they answered a question. Yet, I did need to ask participants to clarify their answers when they were not responsive to the

question. Moustakas (1994) indicated that seeking clarification is necessary to produce an unbiased study.

The researcher must eliminate any biases toward the study before conducting the research. Prior qualitative researchers have used reflexivity to eliminate biases on the researcher's side (Rudestam & Newton, 2015). Ensuring validity and reliability was not an issue because results can be duplicated. Bias was mitigated by following previous researchers' recommendations for conducting qualitative interviews, such as bracketing (O'Sullivan. et al., 2017). I did not encounter any challenges recruiting participants via social media, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. All information was kept confidential, and no participant data was shared with the public to help eliminate ethical issues. There were no challenges in communicating with and screening potential participants.

To ensure reasonable measures to address limitations, objectivity and reliability were central tenets of the study. The researcher remained open-minded to information contrary to their own experiences and was neutral and nonjudgmental with participants' views or thoughts. I did not interject my ideas into the data collection or analysis. All potential biases of the researcher were disclosed, and every effort was made to ensure the accuracy of internal validity. Additionally, triangulation of the findings was provided for the study's external validity. This study's findings should not be used to generalize all African Americans in Cleveland, OH, experiences regarding the Cleveland police. The sample size did not include a large enough portion of African American population to make a broad assertion. The study focused on the age group (18-39) who reported the most negative responses to the Gomez and Diaz (2016) survey. Bias can hinder the trustworthiness of scholarly research, primarily when the topic challenges firmly held



ideas and beliefs. More research is needed to form broader conclusions beyond this study's scope.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of my study, and after comparing those findings to the studies included in my literature review, the first recommendation is to conduct additional research to understand African Americans' perceptions regarding the Cleveland police. A phenomenology inquiry would be beneficial to understand the essence of how individuals experience a specific phenomenon. Phenomenology has the potential to reveal the essence of why African Americans are feeling the way they are towards the Cleveland police. I anticipate that African Americans would share similar feelings and experiences across the country in other cities. If researchers can get at the essence of those experiences, there is the potential for meaningful change. Additionally, quantitative studies that focus specifically on African Americans could be beneficial. Often, data can be misleading or be under-reported when used in aggregate. I recommend my study be replicated using Gomez and Diaz's (2016) survey to confirm the findings and expand to participant demographics not covered by this study. The duration of time African Americans have lived in Cleveland should be reduced to 1 year as this will expand the pool of potential participants and add additional external validity. However, given how policing policy is shaped at the national level, few local city-level recommendations will impact policing.

I recommend that several U.S. Supreme Court cases be overturned (Terry v Ohio, 1968), which formed the basis of policies like "stop and frisk. Additionally, (Pennsylvania v. Mimms, 1977) includes the basis of unconstitutional vehicle searches.

Lastly, the current standard for using force (*Graham v. Connor*, 1989) makes it nearly impossible for a police officer to be charged and less like to be convicted for excessive force. All these cases deal with an African American defendant's previously protected 4<sup>th</sup> Amendment rights being violated in the name of officer safety. The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that the police can use deceptive tactics when dealing with people suspected of a crime (*Frazier v. Cupp*, 1969), and police have no duty to protect anyone unless they are in custody (*Warren v. District of Columbia*, 1981). These rulings remove almost all liability from the police and further erode the public trust.

I recommend that the wording of the 4<sup>th</sup> Amendment be used before the police conduct a search or seize. The 4<sup>th</sup> Amendment states,

The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no Warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by Oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized. (Legal Information Institute, (n.d.).

The term “officer safety” is not mentioned in this amendment and rings hollow as the officer’s safety argument was not considered until African Americans began to be integrated into society. Policies need to be created that determine how, when, or if the police can interact with any community member—leaving it officer discretion has not worked. A police officer needs reasonable articulate suspicion that a crime is about to be committed, committed, or was committed. Having a uniform standard would remove personal bias and create accountability. Many inappropriate uses of force result from officers thinking, “I can’t back down; I need to win at all costs.” But that’s not smart

policing or effective tactics. We need to do a better job of training officers to control their adrenaline and try to defuse physical confrontations (Police Use of Force, 2018). Many police officers perceive themselves as usual, moral, and believers in equality, which discredits beliefs of discrimination or prejudice (Miller, 2020). However, the belief in this ideology only reinforces and revives modern systemic racial inequality by denying its existence (Bonilla-Silva, 2014).

The police have a monopoly on public safety, and there will be few significant changes until there is an alternative or competition for providing public safety. I recommend that some Cleveland police funding be reallocated to subsidize some of these alternatives. Groups like New Era Cleveland have initiated a “Streets is Watching” program that provides armed patrols for inner-city neighborhoods. Also, the Cleveland police should consider having nonarmed patrols that respond to nonemergency calls for service, similar CAHOOTS model in Seattle (Fryer, 2022). These officers or civilians should be trained in dealing with people who have mental health issues. The Cleveland police have been reluctant to embrace policies that will change the culture of policing. People or groups with power over others tend not to want to relinquish that power. The words of Martin Luther King Jr. still ring true today. Martin Luther King Jr famously said, "Freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed." I hope that change comes before African American residents in Cleveland, OH, stop peacefully asking.

In Cleveland, the police disproportionately initiate interactions with African Americans (Gomez & Diaz, 2016). I recommend that police in Cleveland be trained in critical race theory, cultural competency, and Emotional Intelligence. Often, the focus is

on racism within policing and not policing culture itself. However, racism is a problem in policing. The F.B.I. has reported that White supremacists are infiltrating police departments. I recommend that more intense screening is used when police officers apply to root out any potential candidates with nefarious motives. The police have been the primary force used to enforce public policy created to sustain and maintain racial hegemony in America. There can be no punctuated equilibrium until African Americans have a more significant stake in how they are policed. The policing of African Americans is not an isolated issue in Cleveland, OH. Policing in America goes to a larger problem beyond the scope of this study. The police do not make the policies they are charged with enforcing. The primary issues with policing and African Americans rest with lawmakers and judges. Often, police are scapegoats for misguided and discriminatory public policy.

### **Implications**

The DOJ is currently monitoring the city of Cleveland for compliance with a consent decree. However, this study has implications for social change by furthering a dialogue about public safety for all residents of Cleveland, OH, and providing feedback to key decision-makers in the city. On an individual level, several participants mentioned that they felt no one was concerned about their experiences and were encouraged by the study. The mentality that things are just the way they are must be challenged, and a new mantra established that problems can't be fixed until they are faced with social change demands facing complex issues. There are many issues regarding African Americans and the Police. In the City of Cleveland, 56% of the budget is spent on public safety (Patton, 2021). Social change requires that budgets and resource allocation be used to provide public safety for all residents. Creating consensus on social change issues is difficult

given the polarization and additional scrutiny police face. That is why the punctuated equilibrium framework is paramount to understanding how to create coalitions for social change. Social change will ultimately take many factors, but it must start with more scholarly quantitative and qualitative data.

### **Conclusion**

This study was not designed to be an indictment on individual Cleveland police officers. Its goal was to understand the experiences of African Americans in Cleveland, OH, regarding the Cleveland police. Knowing that those experiences are negative is only part of the problem. However, the reason they are negative provides an avenue for positive social change. Unfortunately, there are no panaceas to fix all the issues with policing. The data from this research is just one of many steps needed to ensure African Americans in Cleveland have better experiences with the police. The history of policing in America is problematic as the vast majority of U.S. history; it was the law enforcers who were the instruments of maintaining and sustaining the inequality that African Americans experienced (Williams & Murphy, 1990). Structural changes to policing are outside of the scope of this research. Still, the researcher and literature review indicate that there will be more chaos and lawlessness without equilibrium.

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## Appendix A: Interview Questions

<b>Gomez and Diaz survey questions</b>	<b>Dissertation interview questions</b>
I would like to ask you some questions about services provided by the City of Cleveland and how good of a job you think they are doing.	Can you explain your thoughts on how good a job the Cleveland Police are doing in your own words?
How often do you think Cleveland Police use the appropriate level of force when they stop, question, or arrest someone? Would you say...	How often do you think Cleveland Police use the appropriate level of force when they stop, question, or arrest someone? Explain
Overall, how would you describe the relationship between the Cleveland Division of Police and the neighborhood where you live?	Can you explain the relationship between the Cleveland Division of Police and the neighborhood where you live?
Do you think the Cleveland Police have developed relationships with people like you?	Explain what you think the Cleveland police have done to develop relationship with African Americans.
Do you think the Cleveland Police treat all racial and ethnic groups equally? Would you say...	In reference to equality, what would you say about how the Cleveland Police treat all racial and ethnic groups?

<p>I'm going to ask you to recall your most significant interaction with the Cleveland Police in the last 12 months. First, was that encounter initiated you or by the police?</p>	<p>I will ask you to recall your most significant interaction with the Cleveland Police in the last 12 months. First, was that encounter initiated you or by the police?</p>
<p>Do you think Cleveland Police officers treat people with dignity and respect?</p>	<p>Do you think Cleveland Police officers treat people with dignity and respect? Explain</p>
<p>How likely would you be to ask a Cleveland Police officer for help if you were in trouble?</p>	<p>If you were in trouble, would you ask a Cleveland Police officer for help? Explain</p>
<p>How concerned are you that a family member, a friend, or you will be a victim of excessive force by the Cleveland Police?</p>	<p>How concerned are you that a family member, a friend, or you will be a victim of excessive force by the Cleveland Police?</p>
<p>Are Cleveland Police hold officers accountable when misconduct occurs?</p>	<p>When misconduct occurs with the Cleveland Police, do you think they are held accountable? Explain</p>