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Attitudes of African American Police Officers Towards Violent Police Encounters in an Urban Environment

Larry Ernest Jackson Jr
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Psychology and Community Services

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Walden University
2025

Abstract

Attitudes of African American Police Officers Towards Violent Police Encounters in an
Urban Environment

by

Larry E. Jackson Jr.

MS, Coppin State University, 1996

BS, Towson State University, 1994

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Criminal Justice

Walden University,

November 2025

Abstract

The research problem for this study is why confrontations between urban police and citizens are becoming increasingly violent. The purpose of this study was to examine the continued rise of violent police encounters between urban police and urban citizens. To provide a proper perspective on this phenomenon, the core research question was how African American officers born and raised in urban environments who have since become police officers in those same settings feel about the violence between these two groups. The theoretical framework used to understand the relationship between the two groups was the social learning theory. As part of the phenomenological study design, data were collected by conducting in-depth, semi-structured interviews with nine African American retired police officers who worked specifically in the Baltimore Metropolitan area. The data were analyzed for patterns and themes using inductive coding. Four themes emerged: race and policing, policing philosophy and practices, departmental culture and racism, and community perception/trauma. Community perception seemed to be the most significant point of contention between the two focal groups. This study's results may promote positive social change by identifying key strategic areas for police reform within the police organizations in the study area.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Catherine Thompson, and my grandmother, Johnnie Mae Thompson. You were both there for every awards ceremony, school achievement, and graduation. It is tough to know that you will not see this. Still, I know you are smiling down from heaven, appreciating my latest educational achievement, which I dedicate to my great-grandparents: Fred Wright, Arizona Thompson, Iva Thompson, and Essie Mae Wright Scott. You were all vital to my development as a child and an adult. Although educational opportunities were not always readily available, you conveyed to me the importance of education. Nevertheless, all of you still pushed me on this path because you had faith in me to carry the family torch. I am eternally grateful.

To my children, Lailah Monet Jackson, Larry Jackson, III, and Ashley Patt, I hope I have shown you all the determination and drive you need to succeed. Please use the example I have given you and achieve anything you want. You are the head of your destiny, and only you decide how high you will go.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The conflict between urban citizens and the police departments that serve their communities has been constant and consistent within major American cities. After carefully reviewing this nation's history, our societal culture has revealed a chronicle of strained relationships between urban police departments and urban communities. These confrontations are centered on and derived from racially motivated mistreatment of urban communities by metropolitan police departments (Deuchar et al., 2020). Jim Crow laws and social order in the Southern United States perpetuated discrimination against African Americans and enforced total segregation of European Americans and African Americans. By the late nineteenth century, "Jim Crow" referred to a series of state laws and codes of social conduct designed to racially segregate African Americans in all areas of life, including housing, education, and public places (Brown, 2020). As America endured that challenging period (Jim Crow), the need for more racial diversity within police departments became apparent.

In Southern states, the development of American policing followed a different path. The genesis of the modern police organization in the South was the "Slave Patrol" (Platt, 1982). Vigilante-style groups existed to enforce the rules of Jim Crow laws and the slave trade in the South. These systems (Slave patrols) set the structure for developing modern police forces. Positive public opinion fosters voluntary citizen cooperation with police directives and active citizen participation in public service, both of which are key to effectiveness and efficacy (Cao & Wu, 2019).

Terms like “police validity” and “police legitimacy” do not seem to hold the same weight in urban areas, as there is strong distrust for police departments and their officers. For decades, criminal justice experts have warned that warrior-like police tactics escalate conflict at protests instead of defusing it. Between 1967 and 1976, three federal commissions investigated protests and riots. All found that police wearing “riot gear” or deploying military-style weapons and tear gas led to the same kind of violence that police were supposed to prevent (Barker et al., 2021). The historical preceptors of urban African American citizens are that African Americans perceive themselves as being harassed, stopped, frisked, and detained more than any other racial demographic.

The purpose of this research is to provide a distinct perspective, which has largely gone unexamined, namely the voice of African American police officers who have not only worked in urban environments but also grown up in these same environments. This rarely examined perspective can shed light on the significant confrontations between urban residents and police departments. This group can provide a different and educational perspective since they can provide the lived experience of being a resident in this environment while having encounters with the police and now are working as police officers, having encounters with citizens in neighborhoods they have grown up in, or are like the neighborhoods the officer has grown up in. The confidence levels of African Americans and European Americans in the police vary in degree (Cao & Wu, 2019).

The degree of difference between European Americans and African Americans regarding their level of confidence and support for police exists due to the differences in the injustices each group experiences. This is the source of the great divide between

support from European Americans and the anger and hatred for the police commonly displayed by African Americans. First, central to improving minority confidence in the police is to treat people of all racial groups fairly and equitably. Second, the police and those being policed must come to terms with and believe in our democratic system and reform (Cao & Wu, 2019). Contemporary public policy suggests that police officers should be racially representative of the areas where they work, thereby promoting effective police-community relations (Weitzer, 2000).

This study focuses on current and retired police officers. A sample size of 8 to 10 officers will be selected. The sample population of retired police officers will be defined as those who have worked in an urban, inner-city environment and who, if active, must have at least 5 years of on-the-job experience. The criterion for current active police is necessary because an officer with 5 months on the street lacks the experience of an officer with 5 years of experience. Officers meeting the criteria have been on the job through the most recent increase in urban police-involved homicides of unarmed African Americans and the rise of civil uprisings within the United States since 2015. Those excluded will be any officers who were not on the job from 2015 to the present day. This specific time serves as a reference point, marking the beginning of the Black Lives Matter Movement and the current trends in these movements that we see today.

The results of this study can have a positive and strategic impact on social change in an area with a strained relationship between the police department and the citizens it serves. The primary metropolitan area for this study is the urban metro area of Baltimore, MD. Since the in-custody death of Freddie Gray in 2015, the Baltimore Police

Department has had to deal with a DOJ finding of a history of racial discrimination against the community, a mutually agreed upon Consent Decree installed in January 2017 (Baltimore Sun, 2017), police corruption where it was determined officers/supervisors participated in planting evidence on defendants, officers stealing kilograms of cocaine from seized evidence and giving it to drug dealers to sell on the street and splitting the profits, officers paying themselves overtime while on vacation out of the country, and an officer deemed to have killed himself because he was in fear of whistleblowing on corruption he viewed/participated in. Moreover, during the same period, two mayors have been federally charged with criminal acts and sentenced to federal prison terms for corruption while in office.

With the results of this study, urban police departments can develop new police reform strategies that move beyond the blueprints of outdated approaches. This study can help urban police departments develop bold, thought-provoking, and community-active strategies to engage with these impoverished communities. African American officers' experiences of growing up in these environments can help bridge the gaps in communication and engagement between their European American counterparts and the urban community. The hope is that urban communities, especially those in the Baltimore Metro area, will review the strategies from this study to aid in making progress with their Consent Decree. At the time of this writing, since the implementation of the Consent Decree, little progress has been made in changing the public perception of the BPD. Similarly, the relationship between the BPD and the community has not improved. The strong negative feelings of the police since the death of Freddie Gray are still prevalent.

Background

To understand the role of the African American police officer in improving relations with urban residents and the police that serve them, we must first examine how we arrived at this divisive time in history. While the origin of these issues is clear, the conflict between the police and urban citizens developed within the confines of slavery and original historical racism in this country (Platt, 1982). For this research, I will examine the modern progression of this same source of contention between these two groups. The current argument between urban communities and the police departments that serve them derives from Jim Crow in the South, the heroin epidemic of the 1970s, the crack epidemic of the 1980s, the Joe Biden-authored Crime Bill of 1994, the Obama Reformation of Crack Cocaine, and the increase in Officer-Involved Shootings. The evolution of African Americans infiltrating the ranks of urban police departments has not ended the historical racism created by these significant periods in American history. However, they have provided American culture with a clear-cut blueprint of areas where Americans can produce strategies to combat inequality in policing, exercise police powers, and make urban departments more diverse.

Jim Crow Laws of the U.S. South

Jim Crow Laws of the South catalyzed the setup of modern police departments and modern police structures (Brown, 2020). Jim Crow Laws, which regulated social, economic, and political relationships between European Americans and African Americans, existed principally to subordinate African Americans as a group to European Americans and to enforce rules favored by dominant European Americans on non-

conformists of both races (Kousser, 2003). Jim Crow laws initially enforced the rules of the slave trade, and out of this came the development and structure of organized vigilante units that enforced these laws. The evolution of the Jim Crow Laws, as they spread throughout the southern United States, became the structure under which the relationships between urban African Americans and urban police departments developed. Jim Crow Laws were written and made to keep a differentiation of socialization between African Americans and European Americans. This structure sets the tone for the contentiousness that we see today.

The 1970s Heroin Epidemic

The Vietnam War and the drafting of American soldiers into this war led to a phenomenon that would not only change America but also change urban neighborhoods. American soldiers exposed to heroin during the war, and the exportation of heroin from Asia, caused an explosion of opioid addiction in urban areas. This access to these purer forms of heroin led to the rise of African American drug dealers in the late 60s and 70s, like Frank Lucas, Leroy “Nicky” Barnes, The Council, and Melvin “Little Melvin” Williams in Baltimore (Lucas & King, 2011). These African American urban inhabitants set up international heroin pipelines that cut out intermediaries and allowed these dealers to obtain direct shipments from Asia (Lucas & King, 2011). The rise in heroin addiction skyrocketed within urban environments and created challenges between urban police and urban inhabitants. At that time, there was not an advanced medical understanding of opioid addiction, and the quick addiction to opioids led to African American drug dealers replacing the Italian mob as the source providers of narcotics in urban areas. The rise of

African American drug dealers and the flood of heroin into urban areas led to more confrontations with urban police departments.

The Crack Cocaine Epidemic of the 1980s

The influx of cocaine into the United States during the mid-1980s and early '90s caused an urban epidemic that created more friction between metropolitan police and urban inhabitants. During this period, cocaine entering the United States came from Colombia (White, 2019). During this vast surplus, suppliers had to find a way to market their cocaine to get rid of it faster, as this surplus was causing the individual price of cocaine to go down (White, 2019). The introduction of crack cocaine in US cities, like Los Angeles and New York, by the mid-eighties began an epidemic. Crack cocaine was a more robust, purer form of cocaine and was heavily addictive. Crack cocaine supplied short but intense “highs” for users, creating an addiction that caused users to purchase it frequently throughout the day (White, 2019). The sale of crack cocaine and the violence attributed to the crack cocaine drug trade caused constant friction between urban police and urban citizens (White, 2019). The local, state, and federal government response to the “Crack Epidemic” was elevated levels of incarceration, warrants, and raids. This epidemic also caused a significant increase in the deaths of African American men in urban environments because they took part in the proliferation of the crack cocaine drug market (White, 2019).

The Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994

Known as the Crime Bill Act of 1994, the introduction of this bill marked the beginning of a significant strain between urban police departments and urban

environments. The bill's highlights were a federal ban on assault weapons, stricter sentencing for crack cocaine convictions versus convictions for powder cocaine, enhancement in federal prison sentences to a three-strikes rule, the elimination of higher education for prisoners, and improvements to federal death penalty statutes. At the time of the authoring of the Crime Bill Act of 1994, the most pressing criminal justice issues the United States was facing were the crack cocaine epidemic, a lack of death penalty punishments for violent terrorists, non-homicidal narcotics offenses, civil-rights-related murders, drive-by shootings that end in death, and the use of weapons of mass destruction. The thought at the time was a “tough on crime” approach that would deter recidivism and repeated offenses by violent offenders. The unintended result was the mass incarceration of African American and Latino men and the flooding of federal prisons with urban inhabitants.

The Fair Sentencing Act of 2010

The primary objective of the Obama Fair Sentencing Act of 2010 was to rectify the unintended consequences of the 1994 Crime Bill Act. At the time of the initiation of the 1994 Crime Bill Act, Congress and other leaders believed that crack cocaine was a more potent and more dangerous version of cocaine. Therefore, the punishments for a crime involving crack cocaine should be harsher and stiffer upon conviction. This created situations where urban inhabitants were getting federal convictions and sentenced for having five grams of crack cocaine on a first offense. The result of the 1994 Crime Bill was the mass incarceration of urban inhabitants, which created more friction between urban law enforcement and urban citizens. Urban citizens called for the revocation of the

1994 Crime Bill as it appeared racially biased and aimed at incarcerating minorities in urban communities. The bill's enactment prompted a review of thousands of sentences, resulting in revisions and reliefs.

This study aims to address the knowledge gap regarding the lack of progress in the relationship between urban police and urban citizens. Police reform has become a heightened concern for urban inhabitants because of several high-profile in-custody deaths and the murders of urban citizens, many of whom were unarmed, that police officers have committed. However, gaining insight into African American officers' familiarity with the urban environment and urban police departments has not been a priority in research when examining this phenomenon.

This ethnographic examination of the experiences of African American urban police officers can be critical, as these officers can provide experiences and data that are rarely examined. It is seldom discussed because every viewer is aware of the experiences that happen to and with officers who walk the thin blue line. Many departments have rules and regulations prohibiting officers from speaking or discussing the issues or experiences they encounter daily. This study can offer unique insights into experiences that have been rarely examined or were previously unknown.

Problem Statement

The research problem is the consistent violence between urban police and urban citizens, which usually leads to the deaths of many African American urban citizens. At the time of this writing, from 2020 to 2023, 85 unarmed African Americans had been killed during police encounters (Wikipedia, 2023). There is a growing and increasing

tension in the United States when examining the relationship between police officers and citizens who serve in urban environments. The tensions between urban environments and urban police have escalated in the last several years with the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Daunte Wright, all unarmed African American citizens killed during police encounters. We are currently in a period where, thanks to the Black Lives Matter movement, the behavior of police officers towards minorities is under intense scrutiny (Baumgartner, 2017).

Earlier research has shown that officers' race is associated with differences in their approach to conducting their jobs and in establishing police legitimacy (fairness, equality) to the citizens they serve (Sun, 2003). While research (Cao & Wu, 2017; Sun, 2003) has documented substantial racial disparities across a variety of criminal justice outcomes, little is known about how African American law enforcement officers differ from European American officers and citizens in the way that they (African American officers) perceive the treatment of citizens of color during police encounters (LeCourt, 2017). The increased tension between the urban public and the urban police is evident. Over the last few years, there has been a series of high-profile, premeditated ambush attacks on police, concluding that there is a “war on cops.” (White, 2020).

This reduced faith in the criminal justice system comes from the strained relationship between European American police officers and African Americans living in urban environments throughout the country's history (Deuchar et al., 2020). The attitudes and roles of African American officers are crucial to fostering a positive relationship between urban citizens and the police. Officers have more discretion in traffic

enforcement than in any other job responsibilities. One way to control misuse of discretion is through minority representation (Nowacki & Spencer, 2019). Moreover, officers are not equally supportive of community policing with racial minorities despite its potential for improving police-citizen relationships (Kearns, 2017). A detailed and thorough literature review yielded few results on this phenomenon and little information on its effect.

As a result, we continue to run on the same hamster wheel as society. Urban African American citizens, many of whom are unarmed, keep dying at the hands of police officers. African American officers have a unique perspective and can provide valuable insight into why many of these encounters often have the same outcome. African American officers work in the same environment as other urban officers and can provide a more excellent mindset for these officers when they engage in these violent encounters. This information would be critical in addressing the “why” gaps in the literature.

African American police officers can offer valuable de-escalation tactics and strategies to help other officers better understand and interact with urban residents. Addressing the issue of the large number of deaths of urban African American citizens can lead to a more significant improvement in urban environments and provide a broader understanding for those who do not live in these environments and deal with the challenges these people face daily.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative ethnographic study is to examine the attitudes of African American police officers toward violent police encounters and the role African American officers play in reducing violence against minorities during these encounters. Large minority populations are subjectively perceived as threats and experience a higher incidence of police-caused violence than European Americans (Holmes et al., 2018). Phenotypic stereo typicality influences racial minorities' psychological experiences interacting with the police (Kahn et al., 2017).

This study aims to enhance the relationship between police officers working in urban environments and the citizens they serve. Positive feelings about the police, particularly concerning legitimacy, are not only crucial for fostering healthy police-community relationships but also for enhancing community safety (Henry & Franklin, 2019). Moreover, racialized police brutality is a common anticipated stressor in youth growing up in urban areas (Webb et al., 2022). Data collection will take place through interviews with current and former African American officers who work in urban environments and have seen violent police encounters. Moreover, the data results will provide valuable information for developing effective police reform policies and procedures. This project is unique in that it examines the prominent police-citizen relationship that is rarely discussed.

This study aims to educate both urban police officers and urban citizens on the rationale and basis for the way policing is conducted in these communities. Urban police officers must police differently from their previous counterparts. This paper documents and provides evidence of years of inequality in the treatment of urban citizens during

police encounters. To effectively police and have their actions accepted as valid, urban police environments must integrate themselves into the community, understanding that their behavior is critical to the success of the urban community. Therefore, new, creative, and inclusive strategies must be developed that make all participants equally viable.

Research Questions

RQ1. How does minority representation within urban police departments affect police legitimacy in that community?

RQ2. How do you feel about police violence against urban African American citizens during police encounters?

Theoretical Framework

The conceptualization of social learning theory embodies its four fundamental premises: differential association, definitions, differential reinforcement, and imitation (Akers & Sellers, 2004). Social learning theory (SLT) posits that deviant behavior is learned through the exact social mechanisms as any other behavior. This learning occurs through differential associations, definitions favorable to deviance, differential reinforcement, and imitation of behavior (Tolle, 2017). When diverse social influences produce correspondingly various behaviors, the inner cause implicated in the relationship cannot be less complex than its effects (Bandura, 1977).

From a historical perspective, the literature on interactions in an urban environment explains the issues between urban police and urban inhabitants. Currently, researchers are investigating the medical deficiencies resulting from these interactions. Proactive policing in the U.S. has broad, deleterious repercussions. This is arguably most

true for young people, particularly African American youth, who have been subjected to an increased police presence within their communities and schools in recent years (Webb et al., 2022). We will delve into this outlook further in Chapter 2.

The social learning theory (SLT) describes deviance as a learned behavior that is imitated and differentially reinforced. Law enforcement trains police officers through repetition and reinforcement as officers start their careers. Officers are then assigned to veteran officers after completing basic training to undergo field training. The rookie officer learns through repetition and reinforcement of the lessons taught by the veteran officer. Therefore, when ineffective strategies and techniques are introduced, they become established and accepted behavior without challenging the style or methodology. Multiply this repeatedly, and you can see how an army of officers is created who have a one-sided viewpoint and loyalty to their teachers, who reinforce previous practices through repetition. This research will address this process and its effects.

Nature of the Study

This qualitative ethnographic study aims to understand the attitudes of African American police officers working in an urban environment towards violent police encounters. Ethnographic inquiry assumes that any human group interacting together for a period will evolve a culture (Patton, 2015). There is a growing demand for social research to be “accountable,” in relatively narrow terms, regarding “demonstrable impact,” “engagement,” and “knowledge transfer,” among others (Hammersley, 2018). This ethnographic study will capture the lived experiences of officers working in this environment, which supplies reliable data.

The rationale for selecting this research design is that it allows African American officer to be forthcoming and open about their feelings when addressing the issues of police brutality that they have witnessed while on the job. They (African American officers) can speak freely without fear of being fired or facing disciplinary action if they hold different ideals and viewpoints than their colleagues. This qualitative study will employ in-depth interviews and focus groups for data collection and analysis. The in-depth interviews will be conducted in person or via modern digital technology if an in-person interview is not feasible.

Definitions

Police department: A structured organization appointed to conduct law enforcement in a defined area. The first publicly funded, organized police force with officers on duty full-time was created in Boston in 1838 (Waxman, 2017).

Police misconduct, also known as police deviance, refers to the inappropriate actions taken by police officers in connection with their official duties (Maher, 2015).

Police legitimacy: It depends on public satisfaction for it to be effective. The public must have faith in the police's ability to provide fair and impartial treatment while also accepting the police as the legitimate authority for enforcement. (Cao & Wu, 2019).

Slave patrols: The primary policing institutions in the South were slave patrols tasked with chasing down runaways and preventing slave revolts (Waxman, 2017).

Social learning theory (SLT) posits that learning occurs through differential associations, definitions favorable to deviance, differential reinforcement, and imitation of behavior (Tolle, 2017).

Assumptions

I had four identified assumptions when conducting this study. First, I assumed that the participants were actual current/retired police officers who had worked in specified urban environments. Second, I assumed that the participants would be willing to share their experiences as police officers in an urban environment. The third assumption I had was that the sample size of 10 officers would reflect the perceptions of officers who work in urban environments. Last, I assumed that the participants were believable, credible, and willing to be honest about their experiences as police officers.

Delimitations

A potential barrier to collecting primary data (interviews) is the challenge of recruiting participants. Another possible barrier is departmental permission for active-duty officers to participate in this research project. Departments have their own rules and regulations regarding the release of information to the media or researchers.

Limitations

The study's limitations refer to the characteristics of the design or method that affected or influenced the interpretation of the research findings. They are the constraints of generalizability, applications to practice, and utility of findings that are the result of how you initially chose to design the study; the method used to show internal and external validity, or the development of unanticipated challenges that appeared during the study (Price & Murnan, 2004).

Significance

The results of this study will provide urban police departments with valuable, yet rarely examined, information to inform the development of police reform policies and procedures. Police consent decrees have become a source of controversy, with some viewing them as restrictive and costly to the police. In contrast, others see them as promising for improving police accountability and performance (Jiao, 2021). Research on urban African American police officers has shown that they are significantly more likely than their non-African American counterparts to recognize community norms as influencing their decisions during police encounters (LaFrance et al., 2021). If a department has unaddressed issues with police misconduct in a community, it can be labeled as unjust or corrupt (Wu et al., 2013).

This study will provide insight into the rarely examined experiences of African American officers working in this environment. Recent high-profile use-of-force incidents that have fueled distrust of police, especially within minority communities, there is reason to expect that minority officers experience stress differently than their European American counterparts (Bishopp et al., 2020). This research will provide valuable insights for developing creative strategies that enable African American officers to play an integral role in fostering positive relationships between urban police departments and their communities. This, in turn, will help restore and repair the trust between urban police and citizens.

Summary

In this study, I sought to gain an understanding of how African American officers in the Baltimore Metropolitan Area felt about violent police encounters with their urban

police. In Chapter 1 of this study, I explained the purpose and theoretical framework of the study. In Chapter 2, I present the contemporary literature review of this phenomenon and provide background literature on factors influencing this relationship in this area. In Chapter 3, I explain the research design, methodology, sample selection and restrictions, data collection methods, data analysis instruments, and ethical considerations. In Chapter 4, I present the data collected, the data analysis, and the results. In Chapter 5, I explain and interpret the findings, discuss the study's limitations, suggest recommendations based on the results, and outline the social change implications derived from the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The literature review is not a compilation of facts and feelings but a coherent argument that leads to the description of a proposed study (Rudestam & Newton, 2015). Compiling a literature review provides an idea for completing the proposed study and highlights why this research is essential to addressing a gap in the literature. The researcher should avoid making statements based on shared knowledge during the development of the literature review. The review tries to convince the reader of the legitimacy of your assertions by supplying sufficient logical and empirical support. (Rudestam & Newton, 2015).

This study looks to examine the attitudes of African American police officers toward police violence and the role of the African American officer in resolving differences between urban citizens and the police departments that serve them. This qualitative ethnographic study will examine the lived experiences of urban police in the eastern United States to examine their feelings towards violent police encounters. Political or threatening explanations for the state's use of internal violence suggest that killings committed by police should be the greatest in stratified jurisdictions with more minorities (Jacobs & O'Brien, 1998). A Fall 2016 study by the Pew Research Center revealed that 75% of European Americans believed that the police "do an excellent or good job" in treating racial and ethnic minorities equally and holding officers accountable for misconduct, while only one-third of African Americans feel the same. (Moran, 2017). Moreover, in a (Pew, 2020) research study, most European American and Latino officers

felt fatal encounters between the police and African American suspects were minor, isolated incidents. Both demographics agree (72%) that these situations are isolated incidents. While 57% of African American police officers surveyed stated these incidents were signs. Because some African American police officers who work in urban environments were products of these environments, and African American inhabitants make up these environments, these groups will be the focus of this study. As previously stated, research from the Pew study indicates that European Americans typically hold a higher value and respect level for law enforcement and the way they conduct their jobs. The survey (Pew, 2020) also showed that African Americans have less respect for law enforcement, feel targeted the most, and have the most unbalanced police encounters. It is for this reason that these groups will be the focus of the study. Suppose the relationships between these groups and the variables are discovered. In that case, it may be possible to understand why there is such a dichotomy between the feelings of these groups, leading to more equitable policies and strategies.

The literature will be organized in the following order: (a) explain the application of the social learning theory to this research study, (b) explain the historical milestones in the history of this country between African Americans and the police that have shaped the attitudes of African Americans towards the police (c) explain how the modernization of policing and the advancement of technology has created more difficulties between urban inhabitants and police departments, and (d) the diversification of urban police environments, can only help to improve race relations between urban inhabitants and police departments. Now, to detail the literature search strategy.

Literature Search Strategy

While the police discuss race, there is still little empirical evidence on the role of race in citizens' evaluation of government performance (Kim et al., 2019). Bandura was a pioneer in social learning theory. His tenets of social learning theory were modified and revised in the late 1970s as Bandura shifted his approach to a more cognitive perspective on the postulations he made in his 1971 Stanford paper. The central tenets of Bandura's explanation of the social learning theory are as follows: (a) learning is a cognitive process that takes place in a social setting; (b) learning occurs from the observation of a particular behavior and observing the consequences of that behavior (vicarious reinforcement); (c) learning observations, extracting information from this observational learning, or modeling and, therefore, can occur without an observable change in behavior; and (d) reinforcement plays a role in learning, but is not entirely responsible for learning. In conducting the study, I was not a passive recipient of information. Cognition, environment, and behavior all mutually influence each other (reciprocal determinism; (Bandura, 1977),

Bandura's cognitive explanation of social learning theory supports the social interactions we observe today, particularly in the context of the rise of racial disharmony and conflict. The rise of White nationalism, Trumpism, extremism, and Black nationalism in this country displays the social learning that Bandura spoke of. According to an FBI study, 223 African Americans were shot and killed by police officers in 2017, which accounts for 23% of all fatal shootings, even though African Americans account for only 13.3% of the United States' general population (Mian, 2020). There is no

empirical data to suggest that an individual's race determines the behavior of a police officer or the actions taken by police officers when dealing with an issue during a police encounter. However, the research continues to show a clear and alarming gap between European Americans' views of the police and African Americans' views of the police. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze the differences in environmental learning methodologies between the two racial demographics to examine the underlying reasons why each group perceives the same situation so differently.

The search methods employed for this research project included books, peer-reviewed journal articles (obtained from Google Scholar, SAGE Journals, Thoreau, Pew Research Institute, DOJ, and ProQuest), and other online database search strategies to gather scholarly information for this research study. The use of these peer-reviewed articles provides me with significant and pertinent information to address the relationships between the two demographics used in this research. Moreover, incorporating this detailed and current literature into the research will help bridge gaps in the existing literature. This research will also aid in developing new and strategic criminal justice standards, policies, and procedures that will directly address the fractured relationships with the communities in this research.

Research material will be gathered and collected from internet websites, the Walden University Library, Google Scholar, and ProQuest searches. To conduct internet website searches for research information for this study, keywords such as *African Americans perceptions of the police, police relations in an urban environment, attitudes of African American police officers towards corruption, African American viewpoints of*

the police during police encounters, attitudes of African Americans towards police encounters, racial profiling, demographics on police encounters Caucasian v African American, police validity, policing urban environments, and any other keywords that could provide me with a corroboration between relationships in urban communities with police officers. While researching the attitudes of African American police officers working in urban environments, I found articles that addressed the gaps in the existing research.

This literature review's scholarly journal articles address four principal areas that this researcher believes provide the critical information necessary to address these gaps. First, the research will examine how the tenets of the social learning theory explain the training of police officers in their respective departments and how this learning model creates the interactions between police officers and citizens in an urban environment. Next, this study will examine the historical challenges between inhabitants and police in urban environments that have contributed to the rise of aggressive encounters between police and citizens in these settings. Next, this study will examine how the modernization of police departments and the expansion of technology have made relationships between urban police and urban inhabitants untenable. These relationships have created difficulty for African American officers and their desire to create change and equality. Lastly, this study will review the literature to illustrate how diversity within urban police departments can develop better relationships with urban communities.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used for this study is social learning theory. The social learning theory suggests that learned deviant behavior is an extension of the repetition and reinforcement of bad behavior. The conceptualization of social learning theory embodies its four fundamental premises, which include differential association, definitions, support, and imitation (Akers & Sellers, 2004). Unlike Skinner, Bandura believes humans are active information processors and think about the relationship between behavior and its consequences (McLeod, 2011). Bandura believed that combining these cognitive elements constitutes the entirety of how humans learn behavior through socialization (McLeod, 2011). The author of this research is a retired police officer who has had the distinction of completing a 26-week police academy, so this researcher is well-versed in the intricacies of a police academy. That experience provides the basis for my following informational assessment of the literature.

Let us examine the development of a police officer. Police departments are paramilitary organizations, which means they follow the principles and teachings of the military to obtain a level of uniformity. Police cadets spend a predetermined amount of time completing a police curriculum that includes physical activities (such as self-defense training, driving training, and shooting) and educational training (including laws, codes, ethics, and other relevant topics). In his definition of social learning, Bandura speaks about repetition and modeling as forms of social learning (McLeod, 2011).

Police officers train through repetition and modeling throughout their entry-level stages. In examining the Swedish police training model, these authors determined that their study could help identify and describe the tension fields that individual police

students and police officers must navigate (Karp & Stenmark, 2011). Police cadets across the nation, although each state's requirements differ, are taught similarly through scholarly retention, which involves socialization, modeling, and repetition, as described by Bandura. Drill sergeants, police trainers, or heads of academies, either way, the expectation is the socialization of police structure, and the repetition of these standard practices will instill in the officers a sense of structure and familiarity with their duties. Repetition is the catalyst that transforms an unseasoned officer into a confident, polished veteran. The gray area of all this police training lies within the confines of police discretion. The officer can decide on an event using their socialization.

For example, if an officer stops a suspect on a traffic violation in the state of Maryland and, after running their information, it is determined that this person's license is suspended, Maryland law gives the officer the discretion to write that person a citation, confiscate their license, and tow their vehicle (MD Transportation Article 16-303). The second option is that the officer can arrest the person, who will then appear before a judge or magistrate, issue a citation, confiscate the license, and impound the suspect's vehicle (MD Transportation Article 16-303). The last option is for the officer to allow the suspect to call someone to come and pick up the car, confiscate the license, and issue the citation without taking the person to jail or impounding the vehicle (MD Transportation Article 16-303). Selecting officers from different states will not ensure consistency in their choices of option 1, 2, or 3, due to their socialization as officers. Their group and environmental socialization will be the determining factors in which option they choose.

That is why this research aims to demonstrate the impact of social learning theory on police work.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and/or Concepts

Historical Implications of Confrontations Between African Americans and the Police

The racial differences between African Americans and European Americans, when examining each group's views on police throughout the literature, have shown a vast divide. As previously stated in earlier sections of this research, there is a difference in the feelings/perceptions of civilian European Americans and African Americans and police European Americans and African Americans. Pew Research reveals that 72% of European American officers felt police officers killing Black suspects was an isolated incident. In comparison, 57% of African American officers felt these killings were the signs of a more significant problem. In the same study, 92% of European American officers believed the country had made the necessary changes to give African Americans equal rights as European Americans, and 69% of African American officers stated that the country must continue to make changes for African Americans to have equal rights as European Americans. When the sample population for this study was changed to civilians, 57% of European American civilians felt the country had done enough, and 84% of African American civilians felt the government had more work to do (Pew, 2020).

With such great racial indifference in these recent statistics, it is fantastic that researchers keep utilizing race as a demographic in examining police validity and public

approval of the police, and the glaring differences continue to display themselves. The racial divide in the attitudes of African Americans versus European Americans, when it comes to viewpoints of the police, has been consistent over the history of this country. This is despite researchers not providing empirical data to support the notion that race is a factor.

Jim Crow in the South

The literature review highlights five significant periods spanning the previous six decades that contributed to the racial divide in this country, from the 1960s to the 2010s. The racial divide and equal treatment have always been challenging when discussing the interactions between urban police and urban inhabitants. Samuel Walker briefly noted that eighteenth and nineteenth-century southern cities had developed elaborate police patrol systems to control the slave population. Walker even suggested that these slave patrols were precursors to the police (Reichel, 1988). The literature suggests that these historical inequalities are the basis for which police departments around the country developed their policies and procedures.

Common sense suggests that these original practices were not illegal or unethical, as they were passed down through time. African American citizens are murdered by a police officer, security guard, or vigilante every 28 hours. At the same time, past and present order-maintenance regimes inflict numerous non-lethal, civil, and human rights abuses against African Americans daily. Thus, on the one hand, extrajudicial violence occurs so often that it has become a banal fact of American life (Burton, 2015).

1960s and '70s Heroin Epidemic

This research uses the East Coast urban environment of Baltimore, Maryland, as the source example. Like other cities, Baltimore has faced the challenges described in this research between its urban inhabitants and the police department. Baltimore has also been one of the epicenters of the explosion of heroin addiction throughout the United States. Illicit drug use, in general, and the use of heroin, specifically, have financially prospered in impoverished communities. However, the fundamental question of the drug field remains unanswered: Why were those people in that place then? (Agar & Reisinger, 2002) The literature shows the challenges African Americans faced in urban environments through urban heroin epidemics. These addiction epidemics led to more interactions/encounters with police officers. Indeed, people other than African Americans used heroin, and only a tiny minority of African Americans became addicted. Nevertheless, the fact remains: most addicts during this period in Baltimore clustered in the African American population (Agar & Reisinger, 2002).

Crack Cocaine Epidemic of the 1980s

Following the heroin epidemic of the 60s through the 70s, the 1980s brought a new outbreak that would affect urban communities for years. The use of crack cocaine reached epidemic proportions among disadvantaged populations in inner-city neighborhoods across the United States in the 1980s. Social repression, poverty, and deteriorating living standards gave rise to feelings of apathy, despair, and frustration, providing fertile ground for a significant drug epidemic (Trinh, 1998). Highly and rapidly addictive and capable of producing intense euphoria, this illegal drug became a prevalent substance among poor urban residents. As a result, the use of crack cocaine exploded in

urban areas (Trinh, 1998). The explosion of crack cocaine, its low price for service, and the drug being readily accessible led to a significant epidemic of epic proportions.

Between 1975 and 2007, the American incarceration rate increased fivefold, a historic increase that puts the United States in a league of its own among advanced economies. We incarcerate more people today than ever, and we stand out as the nation that most frequently uses incarceration for those who break the law (Raphael & Stoll, 2013). During this period of the crack cocaine epidemic and mass incarceration, the people being arrested and jailed for these violations were mostly in the urban community. (Raphael & Stoll, 2013) This high incarceration rate came from legislative changes that increased sentencing and created “three-strike rules.” Nevertheless, the most significant demographic to fall victim to imprisonment was urban inhabitants.

The Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994

The Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 was initially thought to bring sweeping changes in law enforcement and criminal reform. Harsh criminal sentencing laws enacted in the 1980s and 1990s have received renewed attention following several high-profile events. The deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, combined with the election of President Joe Biden, who was a chief architect of policies that fueled mass incarceration and exacerbated racial disparity in the criminal legal system (Biale, Hinton & Ross, 2021). The 1994 Crime Bill created the three-strikes rule, a federal ban on assault weapons, the end of inmate Pell Grants for college education, contained a federal death penalty act, and included strategies for community-oriented

policing. The legislation aimed to increase community-oriented policing and take a tougher stance on crime.

Post the 1994 Crime Bill, the results were exactly the opposite. The period after the inception of the 1994 Crime Bill included the highest number of incarcerations of urban inhabitants in the history of the United States (Raphael & Stoll, 2013). The period following the 1994 Crime Bill's inception has shown that this bill created the same inequalities for urban inhabitants that other periods in our country's history had led to. The inequity created an environment in which increased confrontations with urban police departments led to increased incarcerations of urban inhabitants. This continued the psychological and mental frustrations of urban citizens dealing with urban police departments. Increased detention of urban inhabitants created a further divide between the two groups. Without appropriate research, programs aimed at change will likely be based on implicit or assumed problem identification and inferred community needs and wishes (McLoughlin & Young, 2005). The "unintended" consequence of high incarceration and continued inequality across racial demographics was the failure of this crime bill. More importantly, the literature indicates that these consequences also led to conflict between urban police and urban residents.

The Fair Sentencing Act of 2010

While the mean sentence length for crack offenders fell following the implementation of the FSA, these changes primarily reflect the continuation of ongoing sentencing trends initiated by various non-congressional reforms to the federal sentencing policy that commenced around 2007 (Bjerk, 2017). One of the primary goals of this Act

was to reduce the gap between crack cocaine sentences and those charged for violations involving powdered cocaine. Urban inhabitants convicted of crack cocaine possession were receiving harsher penalties than urban citizens convicted of possessing powder cocaine, even when the amount of crack was small. This separation/distinction between crack and powder helped influence the influx of urban citizens jailed, causing the prison rolls to rise with exacerbated sentences. Moreover, the disparate treatment of crack cocaine relative to powder cocaine also became viewed as racially biased, as over 80 percent of those convicted for crack have been African Americans. Less than 33 percent of those sentenced for other drugs, such as powder cocaine, methamphetamine, and marijuana, have been African American (Bjerk, 2017). The literature reveals a continued disparity in treatment between urban police and urban citizens.

Technological Changes and Use of Force by Police Officers

The advancement of social media platforms and increased visibility with body-worn cameras (BWCs) have created an expectation of higher accountability for urban police departments. After the 2015 riots in Baltimore, following the death of Freddie Gray, the public was pressing the BPD for more transparency. Moreover, the heinous transgressions that were uncovered because of the actions of the Gang Trace Task Force, otherwise known as the GTTF, revealed startling accounts of police corruption, racketeering, robbery, extortion, and overtime fraud (Stephoe, 2022). BWCs became a regular part of a police officer's uniform in the 2020s. Along with the technological advances of social media platforms, the expectation for urban police departments is complete transparency. The ability to transmit video information across the globe in

seconds brings quick and public judgment on encounters between urban citizens and police.

The use of force by police continues to be a significant international concern, drawing interest from academics and practitioners alike. Whether justified or unnecessary/excessive, the exercise of power by police can potentially tarnish their relationship with the community. (Ariel et al., 2015). The city of Baltimore and the Baltimore Police Department (BPD) received the message loud and clear after the in-custody death of Freddie Gray and the reign of terror launched on the city by members of the GTTF. The BPD had to admit failing to reach its community, and a fractured relationship was worsening. The research supports the use of BWCs to improve police relations within urban environments. The most significant advantage of BWCs is that they provide immediate transparency. In the study conducted by Ariel et al. (2015), the use of BWCs decreased the number of police complaints in use-of-force situations from 0.7 complaints per 1,000 contacts to 0.07 complaints per 1,000 contacts. (change) Consistently across the research landscape, BWCs have been a proven way to increase police viability and transparency.

Social Media Platforms

Prior research suggests that exposure to adverse news stories involving the police hurts consumers' attitudes toward these actors (Intravia et al., 2020). It is evident through the murder of George Floyd that the Black Lives Matter movement and the push for social justice reform in this country display the impact of social media on the relationships between urban citizens and police departments. The recording of Floyd's

death on a cell phone by a passerby led to an explosion on social media faster than the reporting through regular news media outlets. Scholars have alluded to a “legitimacy crisis” happening throughout the United States after high-profile incidents of misconduct/deadly force involving the police and (mostly) unarmed African American men have been captured on video and captivated the national media and audience (Intravia et al., 2020). Research suggests the police legitimacy crisis may be due, in large part, to the number of incidents of negative police-citizen encounters caught on video. Researchers feel that these types of incidents harm the community and police officers. The research states that a “viral video effect” now exists. According to this hypothesis, officers may “de police” and take less initiative due to negative media attention (Intravia et al., 2020).

The literature discusses this new wave of less initiative-taking policing and even calls from urban citizens to police themselves due to the on-duty work slowdowns created by frustrated metropolitan police. Progressive prosecutors like the Baltimore City State’s Attorney Marilyn J. Mosby have used social media platforms to spread her message of a less aggressive prosecutorial scope to reduce mass incarceration.

The African American Experience and Cultural Diversity

The cumulative impact of racial discrimination accounts for the distinct way that African Americans have of looking at and evaluating their experiences in public encounters. For example, descriptions of the mistreatment of African American citizens by the police are abundant in African American communities (Brunson, 2007). Brunson is speaking of the disenfranchisement of African American people in urban environments

who deal with these inequalities. Still, the public at large feels it is only an urban issue. Carl Jung once stated, “There can be no transforming of darkness into light and of apathy into movement without emotion (Thomas et al., 2009).” Jung spoke about the plight of modern-day urban citizens, whose emotions are often heightened when encountering the metropolitan police. Cultural diversity within urban police departments has long been a key argument for improving the relationships between metropolitan police and urban citizens.

However, has the hiring and integration of police departments changed and reduced the number of hostile exchanges between members of the African American community and police departments? The data suggests that the answer to the question is no. Race/ethnicity has long been recognized as a critical factor in influencing public perceptions of the police. Existing research has focused mainly on the experience of African Americans, consistently showing that they have much less favorable views of the police than Whites (Wu, 2014). Tyler’s theory of “procedural justice” argues that officers who interact fairly and respectfully with the public can win legitimacy (Waddington et al., 2015). The acceleration of modern technology, body-worn cameras (BWCs), and the development of social media have all contributed to our ability to evaluate police encounters. These encounters are now captured on these platforms, and the data collected comes in a video form that can be forwarded worldwide in seconds.

Urban police and citizens do not share the same understanding of the reasons behind the issues between them. In the Pew study cited earlier in this research, 68% of police officers surveyed said the demonstrations over the death of African Americans

during encounters with law enforcement were motivated by anti-police bias (Pew, 2020). Despite the research literature that has been presented on this subject, urban police departments still believe in some anti-police movements that are fueling these demonstrations. However, the literature continues to show that it is not anti-police hate. Still, it is the continuous tragedy of unarmed African Americans continuously dying at the hands of law enforcement officers without clear explanations as to why so many of these situations end up this way. Cultural diversity within urban police departments is a suggested starting point in improving relations between urban citizens and police. It seems logical, yet the research has found it inconclusive in improving community-oriented policing relations (Todak et al., 2018).

Factors That Have Influenced the Public Opinion of the Police

The Baltimore Metropolitan area has a historically checkered past with its police department, and the police department's interactions with the public they serve have been less than stellar. In general, policing institutions tend to be centralized, report to, and operate at the discretion of the government, have inadequate training in public order management, have a philosophy of "hard" policing (i.e., zero tolerance), weak or non-existent systems of accountability to thwart police excess, and disorganized or malfunctioning operating procedures for dealing with public disorder (Moran & Waddington, 2016). Baltimore was no different than the cited analysis. Baltimore's Police Department, historically, at the time of the Freddie Gray incident in 2015, did not have the best reputation with the public they served.

One of the causes of the historically disengaged relationship between the city's urban population and the police department was a lack of communication. Communication processes are salient, as they can stoke up or suppress the potential for disorder (Moran & Waddington, 2016). This may include an adverse history of interactions between the police and community members, which can become highly charged, as well as the arousing effect of rumors, media sensationalism, and threatening statements from one or both parties involved (Waddington et al., 1987). However, the potential for disorder may be offset by a liaison who negotiates between police representatives and the community. This process would help establish ground rules to accommodate both parties, generate trust, and prevent police over-preparation for a confrontation (Waddington, 2010). In an examination of the 2015 Riots after the death of Freddie Gray, the findings underscore that unrest in the city of Baltimore resulted from a confluence of causal factors that ignited years of pent-up tension. It highlights the significance of race as an organizing feature, as race proved to be a central theme (Cobbina et al., 2020).

Another source of conflict between the police department and the urban community within the Baltimore metropolitan area has been a lack of trust between the two. The Baltimore Police Department has been scandal-ridden since the 2015 riots after Freddie Gray's death. Several instances of police corruption during this period, the most prolific being the notorious Gun Trace Task Force Unit (G.T.T.F.) scandal, have led to severe distrust between the urban citizens of Baltimore and the police department. What furthered the suspicion of the Baltimore Police Department during this time was the

actions of this unit that occurred while the department itself was operating under a Department of Justice (DOJ) reform consent decree. The actions of this renegade squad were revealed in a court case in which two parties sued the Baltimore Police Department for the unit's illegal activities. The Court of Appeals of Maryland held that the activities of the police officers made the Baltimore Police Department liable for their actions against urban citizens.

In two incidents, approximately a year apart, the G.T.T.F. unit stopped citizens without probable cause at traffic stops. Ivan Potts was arrested without probable cause on 9/2/2015 by three members of the G.T.T.F. After refusing to consent to a search of his person, Potts was slammed to the ground, kicked, and beaten (Boyd, 2020). Potts was beaten so severely that employees at the Central Booking Intake Facility (C.B.I.F.) refused to accept Potts for processing until the officers took Potts to a medical facility. Potts was charged with possession of a handgun that he had never seen before. Potts was convicted and sentenced to eight years in jail. When Potts' sentence had been vacated after the exposure placed on the G.T.T.F., Potts had served nineteen months in prison (Boyd, 2020). In a second incident carried out by members of the G.T.T.F. on August 18, 2016, three G.T.T.F. members stopped William James at a traffic stop without probable cause. Without reasonable suspicion or probable cause, the G.T.T.F. members advised James that they would let him go if he provided them with the name of a person he knew would possess guns or drugs. When James advised the officers that he did not know of such a person, the officers produced a firearm and informed James that he would be

arrested for possessing this weapon. As a result of the officers' actions, James spent seven months in jail (Boyd, 2020).

Members of the Baltimore Police Department's G.T.T.F. squad posed a threat not only to the urban public but also to other officers who had previously worked with members of this elite unit. What made this unit such a menace and a cause of distrust between the police and the public was the fact that the department was rewarding and encouraging the behavior of this unit as it continuously violated the rights and freedoms of the citizens of Baltimore (Boyd, 2020). A veil of secrecy and deception permeated the department, allowing this unit to undermine the credibility of the entire police department through the actions of a few rogue officers. Moreover, the cover-up by department heads of the extent of the G.T.T.F. poisoning within the department further eroded public trust in the police department. This lack of confidence deepened even further after the death of BPD homicide detective Sean Suiter.

On November 16, 2017, Detective Sean Suiter of the Baltimore Police Department was killed in the line of duty, but what remains a mystery, depending on who you ask, is whether Detective Suiter killed himself or someone else shot him. Suiter died a day before he was set to testify in a federal grand jury against members of the G.T.T.F. David Simon, an acclaimed Baltimore writer who also developed a mini-series on the G.T.T.F. and the death of Sean Suiter, feels that it is unequivocal what happened that day. Simon states, "Sean Suiter killed himself, attempting –and indeed partially succeeding – at making his sudden end look like a line of duty death (Simon, 2022)." When all the investigations were completed, it remained clear that the Baltimore Police Department

had another controversial incident that would bring a cloud of doubt over it and continue the distrust between the citizens of Baltimore and its police department. Suiter's untimely death and his testimony that would never be given created an even bigger conflict between the police and the public. Despite the evidence, the perception at the time was that members of the G.T.T.F. were willing to kill one of "their" own to protect the reign of corruption and terror this unit had unleashed on the city of Baltimore. As the federal government continued its investigation and the unraveling of this unit was unchecked, unlawful behavior began to be revealed. The one fact that remained clear was that the citizens of Baltimore had severely damaged the reputation of the Baltimore Police Department. This has laid the foundation for the relationship between urban inhabitants and the police department.

Summary and Conclusions

The challenge facing urban communities and police departments is a lack of clear understanding of the fundamental issues between them. African American communities comprise the most significant populations within various urban areas. The source of these disagreements between the two groups is demonstrated in this literature review. Each side has a unique perspective on why and how these disagreements begin. Moreover, each side has a different ideology and theory for why so many police encounters end with the death of African Americans, especially African American men.

The role of the African American police officer is crucial in facilitating the reconciliation between the two sides. African American urban police officers come from the same environments and are familiar with the customs within their environment.

African American officers can also play a crucial role in facilitating communication between urban police and urban citizens. The research shows such a wide gap in understanding and outcomes, and the African American police officer can provide civil discourse that will help clear up some of the issues between both groups.

This research draws on the social learning theory proposed by Bandura. Bandura discussed the cognitive effects of learning and how people interact with one another in smaller environments. Because African American police officers have participated in urban environments and then worked for urban police departments, they can bring valuable understanding and clarity to the table when negotiating knowledge within the African American community. Nevertheless, this research shows that urban police departments must do a better job than just blaming the causes of the rifts between them and the communities they serve, because of anti-police bashers. Honest dialogue must occur before problems are resolved, and an African American officer who has lived and worked in an urban environment is ideally suited to help facilitate a level of understanding. This study will utilize a unique group, and these African American officers can provide insight from both perspectives. The study will show how the attitudes of African American officers can cause positive social change, help police departments achieve their community-oriented policing goals, provide better diversity training to prevent the unwarranted deaths of African Americans during police encounters, and lead to new policing strategies that will also help improve relations between urban police departments and urban citizens. Chapter 3 will outline the research design that will be employed and the basis on which this research will be conducted.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine the attitudes of African American police officers toward violent police encounters and the role that African American officers play in reducing violence during these types of police encounters. This study examined the relationships between African American police officers and the citizens who live in urban environments. The study examined the relationship from the perspective of African American police officers who grew up in this environment.

Participant Selection

First, approval from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) was required. Upon receiving IRB approval (07-02-24-1025820), the recruitment process began. Voluntary sampling was used to select the participants for this study. The approved social media flyer and email were used and submitted to the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement (NOBLE). The organization submitted and distributed these social media flyers and email flyers. As a result of some of the voluntary sampling, a snowball effect occurred, where some volunteers contacted others, who then, in turn, volunteered for the study. Two interviews were conducted in person, and six interviews were conducted using Zoom or Microsoft Teams. Modern technology was used to conduct interviews because they could not be held in person due to scheduling conflicts, time constraints, and/or geographical distance. Eight participants were selected, and these participants were chosen based on the following criteria:

- The officer must be African American

- The officer worked in an urban environment within the Baltimore Metropolitan area.
- The officers were current or retired police officers. Current police officers must have departmental approval to participate in the study.
- If the officer is retired, their retirement must have been in the last five years or less.

The above criteria are the standard used for this paper to examine this research. In 2012, starting with the death of Trayvon Martin, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement was born. Martin's death ignited a trend, and it began a series of inexplicable deaths of unarmed African Americans at the hands of law enforcement officers. This, even though George Zimmerman killed Trayvon Martin, became a rallying cry for urban people tired of watching unarmed African Americans die at the hands of the police. Baltimore's contribution to the BLM movement during this time was the death of Freddie Gray. Gray was also an unarmed man who suffered severe, inexplicable injuries while in police custody and later died.

Furthermore, the criteria for the officers were important because it was clear to this researcher that these officers, who were both raised and worked in an urban environment, could provide a more detailed account of what it is like to be a resident and a police officer in such an environment. This addresses an unexamined gap in the research, as existing studies do not investigate the emotional experiences of officers working in these types of environments. This research reveals a unique and unexamined

relationship where officers who were raised in this environment can offer insights from both perspectives, as both residents and police officers.

Data Collection

The data collected from the interviews were managed with the assistance of MAXQDA. The researcher used this data collection device to analyze and manage the data collected from this study. To ensure the integrity of the research undertaken, the study was conducted with approval (07-02-24-1025820) and in accordance with the guidelines of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Walden University. Chapter 3 will address the research design, methodology, my role as a researcher, potential issues with this research, and a conclusion.

Research Design and Rationale

This section presents the research study's questions and the rationale behind the ethnographic research design. I examine the attitude of Urban African American police officers toward police violence against African American inhabitants. The research for this study is going to be directed by the following RQs:

RQ1. How does minority representation within urban police departments affect police legitimacy in that community?

RQ2. How do you feel about police violence against urban African American citizens during police encounters?

Rationale for an Ethnographic Research Design

The word ethnography comes from the Greek word *ethnos*, which means “folk/the people,” and *grapho* is “to write (McGranahan, 2014).” Ethnography is a methodology based on direct observation. Like any other methodology, ethnography is not simply an instrument of data collection (Gobo & Marciniak, 2011). Ethnography is defined as the first-hand experience and exploration of a particular social or cultural setting based on (though not exclusively by) participant observation. Observation and participation (according to the circumstance and analytic purpose at hand) remain the characteristic features of the ethnographic approach (Atkinson et al., 2001). Ethnography, emerging from anthropology and adopted by sociologists, is a qualitative methodology that lends itself to the study of small societies' beliefs, social interactions, and behaviors, involving participation and observation over a period and interpreting the data collected (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Ethnography has developed as a social science tool. It involves the social scientific observer, the observed, the research report as a text, and the audience to which the reader is presented (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). An ethnographic research design is intended to analyze the behavior of a specific group of people in a particular culture or subculture.

The classic description of ethnographic research belongs to anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski. Malinowski's report of the goal of ethnographic research states the purpose is to “grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realize his vision of the world” and that following from that “to study the institutions, customs, and codes or to study the behavior and mentality without [also considering] the subjective desire of feeling by which these people live, of realizing, of realizing the substance of their

happiness, in my opinion, is to miss the most significant reward which we can hope to obtain from the study of man (McGranahan, 2014). His peers have revered Malinowski's research due to his meticulous attention to detail, his thorough documentation of research through diaries, and his ability to develop positive relationships with his research participants (Hoey, 2013).

Hoey defines ethnography as qualitative research that involves some manner of "prolonged immersion" in the field and continuous, face-to-face interaction with informants, resulting in the generation of massive amounts of thickly descriptive data in a potentially narrative form that provides an intimate view of what is being studied (Hoey, 2013). What we mean by ethnographic research Anthropologists believe ethnographic research consists of the Malinowski program of an ethnographer in the field conducting participant observation paired with a range of other methods, living within a community, and getting deeply into the rhythms, logic, and complications of life as lived by a people in a place, or perhaps peoples in areas (McGranahan, 2014). Many consider Malinowski the founding father of ethnographic studies (McGranahan, 2014).

No textbook contains recipes for the appropriate methods for any research project. It is an invitation to a reflexive, severe engagement with the difficulties of thinking about representation, even while caught up in the making and recording of evidence. As its subtitle announces, it is a "guide to theory and practice of ethnography " (Moore, 2013). The target audience in this study consists of African American urban residents and African American police officers working in the Baltimore metropolitan area. One of the unplanned causal effects of the 2015 Baltimore riots was that African American officers

who came from similar backgrounds and worked in this current environment seemed disenfranchised by the riots. An ethnographic approach to the causal effects in this situation seems appropriate.

Ethnography is often viewed as a distinct form of qualitative inquiry, to be compared or contrasted with other methods, such as life history work or discourse analysis. However, even the boundaries with these neighbors are somewhat fuzzy. However, ethnographic work sometimes includes quantitative data and analysis, so it may not be purely qualitative (Hammersley, 2006). We can identify a methodological orientation that is reasonably central to ethnography. For this discussion, I will use the term to refer to social and educational research emphasizing the importance of firsthand studying what people say and do in contexts (Hammersley, 2006). This usually involves lengthy contact through participant observation in relevant settings and thoroughly open-ended interviews designed to understand people's perspectives, perhaps complemented by the study of various sorts of documents- official, publicly available, or personal (Hammersley, 2006). As ethnographers, we typically insist on understanding the perspectives of the people being studied if we are to explain or accurately describe the activities they engage in and the courses of action they adopt (Hammersley, 2006). Parapsychological researchers are encouraged to understand the value of qualitative research techniques outside of a laboratory environment and to utilize the results of qualitative studies to structure and better develop experimental methodologies in the laboratory setting (Kruth, 2015). Qualitative ethnographic studies enable researchers to immerse themselves in the research for a deeper perspective and understanding of the

examined behavior and culture of the group (Kruth, 2015). The law enforcement field is a distinct subculture and entity. An ethnographic study or analysis can help the layperson understand the behaviors, traits, patterns, and associations that emerge within this tightly knit subculture. One of the challenges for the public is understanding the assimilation of police culture. The researcher in this study possesses a wealth of knowledge in this area and can provide clarity, guidance, and understanding regarding the collection and analysis of data derived from the research conducted. The use of adequate and appropriate sampling procedures, systematic techniques for gathering and analyzing data, validation of data, avoidance of observer bias, and detailed documentation of findings in this research will yield an enriched ethnographic study whose results can be utilized in the development of further police reform strategies and procedures (Gold, 1997).

Ethnographic research uses the researcher as its measuring stick to understand the actions and behaviors of others belonging to another subculture group. The researcher conducting this research belongs to both groups, which are the target of this research. The researcher grew up in the Baltimore metropolitan area and has also worked as a police officer in that same environment. Therefore, the researcher has made unique and insightful observations of the behavior of both groups within this subculture, providing a wealth of information. With that same knowledge, the researcher can also offer a unique insight into the behavioral patterns that will be observed and analyzed as a result of this research.

The participants in this study have lived experiences that mirror the researchers. I employed a purposeful selection process to ensure that the participants' real-life experiences were comparable to those of the researcher. The researcher selected

participants who were raised in an urban environment and then served as police officers in the same environment. The researcher believed this group had the most direct experiences, as they could provide a dual perspective on living and working in the same environment.

Role of the Researcher

One of the roles the researcher in this study must decide is the method by which data will be collected. The researcher in this study adopted a “covert” approach to data collection, as the subjects being interviewed are aware of and have volunteered to participate in the in-depth interviews for the study (Jones, 2017). Traditionally, ethnography is characterized by in-depth observations of groups of individuals, considering the influences of historical and cultural contexts on social interactions. This immersion process in a real-world context, combined with detailed analysis, enables the researcher to discover and describe the complexities and shared cultural nuances of the social world, as well as interpret the phenomenon under investigation (Jones, 2017). Using the criteria established for this research, the researcher employed a snowball sampling method to solicit participants who met the requirements. The focus of this research will be the Baltimore metropolitan area, specifically the urban community. The role of an ethnographic researcher in an ethnographic study is to use their skills, training, knowledge, and experience to extract the pertinent components of cultural behavior for examination (Abdulrehman, 2017).

When conducting an ethnographic study, the researcher must remain objective in their thought process, meticulous in their data collection, and precise in their data

analysis (Abdulrehman, 2017). This ethnographic research aims to identify gaps in the existing literature and develop conclusive strategies and techniques to inform the development of effective police reform strategies. To complete a thorough research project, the researcher must remain neutral and refrain from formulating any biases or opinions that can be inferred or taint the data collected. The data collected and gathered from this research will provide the final assessment of this gap in the literature. The researcher will treat each participant with dignity and respect and refrain from speaking on behalf of any participant. The researcher will further respect the participants in this study by keeping their responses and participation anonymous. Once this research is approved, each participant will be individually notified to maintain their confidentiality.

Methodology

Ethnographic research studies enable researchers to immerse themselves in their settings for an extended period (Dey, 2002). This critical examination enables the researcher to draw on their experience of participation and observations to generate a narrative-based interpretation of the events that took place (Dey, 2002). Critical ethnography arises from a specific concern to combine an integral concept of social and cultural reproduction with the study of organizational or social settings (May 1997). Critical ethnography is thus simultaneously hermeneutic and emancipatory. Its overriding goal is to free individuals from sources of domination and repression, particularly those characteristics of late capitalism (May 1997).

Critical ethnography will be employed in this research to facilitate an understanding of the challenges faced by urban residents and the Baltimore Police

Department. A necessary and historical divide has existed between these urban police departments and the people they serve for quite some time. This divide culminated with the riots after the death of Freddie Gray in 2015, and the furtherance of police corruption within the rank and file of the department since then has increased that divide. Through critical ethnography, this researcher can review past examinations of some of the challenges encountered by these two groups as they have attempted to coexist.

Participant Selection Logic

The first step in this process was the review and approval of this study through the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB). Approval from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) was granted on July 2, 2024 (1025820). After receiving IRB approval, the researcher used the approved social media flyer and email to solicit potential participants. The researcher utilized the services of the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement (NOBLE) to help advertise the study and generate volunteer participation. Following the email blast and the posting of the social media flyer on the organization's website, potential participants contacted the researcher via email. To confirm that potential participants met the inclusion criteria, the criteria requirements were included in both the IRB-approved social media flyer (see Appendix A) and email communication (see Appendix B). Each potential participant was screened through these criteria to see if they met the participant criteria. The researcher screened each participant via email to determine their eligibility for the study. Once a potential participant had been adequately screened, the researcher confirmed a date with the potential participant to conduct either an in-person interview or an online interview,

depending on the subject's availability, considering factors such as date, time, and distance. Two subjects could meet in person, and seven lived in other areas, a great distance away. For this reason, the researcher utilized modern technology to conduct interviews via Zoom or Microsoft Teams.

The researcher in this study has worked in law enforcement and this area for over twenty-five (25) years. The researcher applied for approval to conduct this research through the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB approved the research through approval number 07-02-24-1025820. Once this approval was received, the researcher forwarded the social media flyer and email to the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Officers (NOBLE) through the MD Chapter Secretary. After receiving the email and social media flyer, the NOBLE MD Chapter Secretary forwarded the same to the NOBLE MD Chapter President for his review and approval. After review and approval, the NOBLE MD Chapter Secretary forwarded emails to members and posted the social media flyer on the organization's website for volunteers. In the IRB-approved email and social media flyer, the researcher provided their email address so that volunteers could contact them to participate.

In qualitative research, determining the sample size is contextual and partially dependent on the scientific paradigm under which the investigation occurs. Unique examples of research that use a single sample or case but involve new areas or potentially highly relevant findings can be worthy of publication (Boddy, 2016). The desired number of participants, specifically eight to ten, was explicitly determined for the above purposes. This participation selection amount enables this researcher to provide a clear

and succinct descriptive analysis of a gap in the literature that has never been examined. Moreover, this gap has been identified because of officers interacting with people who grew up in that environment, live as citizens, and have experiences with police officers. Then, these same people grow up to become police officers who work in the same environment as officers in the areas where they grew up. The target number was eight to ten volunteers, and this researcher received nine participants. Before conducting any interview for each subject, the researcher verbally recorded and reviewed the informed consent with each participant. The informed consent form was verbally recorded and reviewed with the subject. The subject was then verbally asked if they wanted to participate in the interview. If the subject responded “yes,” then the interview would commence. If the subject responded “no,” the interview was not completed, and the subject was dismissed. Each subject agreed to participate in the research interview.

Instrumentation

The researcher used semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted with participants in this study. A total of nine subjects participated in this study. The researcher was able to conduct in-person interviews with two subjects. Seven subjects were interviewed using Zoom or Microsoft Teams because they no longer reside in the Baltimore Metropolitan Area, and the distance to meet in person was too great. When using Zoom or Microsoft Teams, the researchers followed the approved IRB guidelines (07-02-24-1025820) by protecting the identity of the subjects being interviewed. This was achieved by having them turn their cameras off and by audio recording the interviews conducted. The interview questions used for this research are listed in

Appendix C. These interview questions include the two research questions that are the focus of this dissertation paper. All interviews were conducted via audio recording, whether in person or remotely. The participant pool in this research was specifically designed for African American police officers only. This research targets the specified group, and the interviews were designed to gather their feelings. Nine subjects were interviewed, and seven subjects were retired. Two subjects were current officers now working outside of the Baltimore Metropolitan Area. The names of the participants were not utilized. Participants' names were coded using pseudonyms, such as S1 (Subject #1), S2, etc. I recorded informed consent forms, and the audio-recorded interviews were conducted with each subject and the researcher. I stored them in a locked file cabinet as instructed by the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) (07-02-24-1025820). The phenomenological interview strategy and approach are ubiquitous and frequently used in studies of this nature. Moreover, the range of eight to 10 participants is also widespread for these types of studies (Nillama et al., 2024). The study focuses singularly on this specific group to identify common themes derived from the collected data.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Upon completion of participation in this study, the researcher will provide each participant with a \$20 Starbucks gift card as a token of appreciation for their time and cooperation. The semi-structured interviews were audio-recorded. The researcher utilized Zoom or Microsoft Teams to conduct interviews. The researcher instructed all interviewees to turn off their cameras to hide their identities. This researcher conducted

interviews using IRB-approved questions (see Appendix C). The interview questions specifically addressed the study's focus and the issues facing the region. This researcher reviewed the informed consent form with each interviewee in detail and asked them if they desired to participate in the study. Once the researcher answered “yes,” the interview continued. All nine participants agreed to participate in the study. After uploading all the interviews, I used MAXQDA 24 to transcribe each one.

Institutional Review Board

Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) or research ethics committees provide core protection for human research participants through the advanced and periodic independent review of the ethical acceptability of proposals for human research (Grady, 2015). Suppose a researcher is thinking about collecting data on any of the following sensitive topics or from any of the following vulnerable populations. In that case, it is advisable to take part in IRB Office Hours during the proposal writing process to obtain ethical guidance that can be incorporated into proposal drafts and research planning (Walden, 2023). Walden University establishes strict ethical and procedural policies for students conducting research that involves human subjects or utilizes vulnerable populations. The researcher must adhere to these strict guidelines, follow ethical procedures, and utilize protective safeguards to ensure the participants' safety and confidentiality.

Identification of Key Informants

With the national emphasis on engaged and action research, approaches to enhance research with communities, and improved research translation, conventional

social science and health researchers will benefit from more excellent knowledge and skills in line with the underlying principles of collaboration and participation (McKenna, 2013). The researcher in this study has the advantage of working within the targeted police community and the urban community, having established a positive network that will be utilized for this research study. The researcher encountered no difficulties in recruiting participants and did not anticipate any challenges in maintaining their privacy and confidentiality. The researcher will use purposeful sampling to obtain the desired number of participants.

The Safety and Protection of Participant Information

To ensure the safety of participant identification and participation information, the researcher in this study will follow and adhere to the strict guidelines set forth by the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The research study was approved by IRB (07-02-24-1025820), and the guidelines set forth by the IRB were followed to the letter. The researcher in this study ethically and purposefully provided and went over the informed consent form. The researcher ensured the confidentiality of each participant by providing a pseudonym. Moreover, when utilizing modern technology, the researcher had the interviewee turn off their camera so their faces could not be recorded, and their identity would not be revealed. The researcher transferred the audio recordings for each interview on a separate drive and maintained informed consent forms and audio recordings in a locked file cabinet. This information will be locked and secured for 5 years as required by the IRB.

In most academic contexts, institutional review boards use these regulations to assess and monitor research protocols to limit participants' exposure to physical and psychological risks. Although these guidelines provide rigorous oversight of research activities, they do not offer direction on how to set up data collection sites, that is, the specific places where interviews or surveys are conducted (Smoyer et al., 2014).

Data Analysis Plan

Primary data analysis commenced with the collection of data through semi-structured interviews with the nine participants. The researcher then utilized MAXQDA to analyze the data collected from each subject. Secondary data was collected from the Department of Justice (DOJ) research on the Baltimore Police Department (BPD, 2017). Each research participant was asked the same questions, and their responses were recorded. Results were submitted to MAXQDA for transcription and coding. The researcher in this study listened to every recorded interview and went through every transcript to ensure trustworthy analysis. MAXQDA utilizes a system of en vivo coding that provided this researcher with themes and subthemes from the data collected. All the data are directly referenced to the research questions in this study. There were no discrepant cases in this study.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness or rigor of a study refers to the degree of confidence in data, interpretation, and methods used to ensure the quality of a study (Polit & Beck, 2014). The credibility of the study, or the confidence in the truth of the research and, therefore, the findings, is the most crucial criterion (Polit & Beck, 2014). The validity and

reliability of this study were embedded in the interviewees' responses, and this group being studied is expected to provide verifiable responses. The participants in this study are "Oath Keepers," and the researcher's perception is influenced by the obligation and duty associated with the participants' positions; the responses given are expected to be truthful and forthcoming. Two officers interviewed in this study are active officers in different jurisdictions. That said, the study participants are specifically aware of duty, obligation, and oath, so they are familiar with working or operating under a higher standard. Officers will have the ability to decline any questions they may feel may place their job in jeopardy or cause a 5th Amendment self-incrimination situation. The researcher utilized MAXQDA to facilitate transcriptions, coding, and the identification of sub-themes, thereby analyzing the data and providing specific results from this study.

Ethical Procedures

All guidelines, policies, and procedures of the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) were strictly adhered to. A structured solicitation was sent to a small group of potential participants. The structured solicitation process was closed once the desired number of participants was reached. All selected participants received a letter outlining their participation and the details of their involvement. All personal data collected from participants was converted into coded information for this research. All original Personal Information (PI) will be stored in a locked file cabinet marked as confidential, and the head researcher will maintain the chain of custody. During the research, participants were identified solely by their coded identification, encompassing both data collection and the release of results. The only entity to receive the actual name

and PI for participants is the Walden University IRB, and that information will only be furnished upon request.

Summary

This chapter begins with an introduction to the research study. The researcher discussed the plan and structure of the research design, providing a detailed explanation. The researcher discussed the action plan for the research, including how participants would be selected for the study and how the selection process would be fair and equitable. During this chapter, the researcher discussed the research method that would be used, what research strategies would be employed, how the data would be collected and analyzed, and what Walden University IRB strategies would be employed to protect the identity and personal information of the participants of this research study. In this chapter, the researcher also reviewed some ethical concerns that may arise from this research.

In this chapter, the researcher went to great lengths to explain the proper research strategies for an ethnographic qualitative research study. The researcher also identified some potential issues that may arise from this research. The researcher also established several research techniques to reduce researcher bias and maintain participant integrity. The researcher hopes that using ethnographic qualitative interviews, he/she will be able to obtain the necessary information from African American police officers working in the urban Baltimore metropolitan area, which will help identify areas where strategic change is needed to improve the relationships between these two groups. In Chapter 4, I will

present the results of the data collected and the evidence gathered following the completion of this study.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The central phenomenon that is being examined by this paper is the increase and continued death of unarmed African American men/women at the hands of police officers here in the United States. Most prior research on this topic utilized information and data from the victim's perspective. This study examines police encounters from the perspective of officers who have participated in such encounters. These officers can provide the unknowing public with the viewpoint of the officer who has received the training to deal with these encounters. The officers offer a unique perspective, as they possess expertise in handling these situations. These officers can provide a more accurate and viable explanation of an officer's actions in a violent encounter, as they are police officers themselves. The subjects interviewed in this study never participated in a police encounter where they were murdered or killed.

Examining the responses to the interview questions, these officers speak to their experiences growing up in an urban environment, contributing to their ability to communicate and relate to urban inhabitants without these encounters becoming extremely violent or leading to the death of a suspect. The first RQ I examined was, How does minority representation within urban police departments affect the validity of police in that community? The second RQ was, How do you feel about police violence against urban African American citizens during police encounters?

Setting

This researcher conducted one-on-one semi-structured interviews with nine interview subjects. Three interviews were conducted in person, face-to-face, and in a private and secure office at my workplace to maintain participant confidentiality. Six subjects were interviewed via Zoom or Microsoft Teams, whichever they preferred, if they could not meet in person or lived out of state. To maintain the confidentiality of these subjects, each subject turned off their camera, and only audio recordings were conducted. Informed consent forms were read aloud to each research participant who agreed to participate in this study. No unusual events occurred that could have affected the outcome or results of this research study.

Demographics

This study focused on law enforcement in the Baltimore Metropolitan area, specifically from 2015 to the present. All the participants were African American officers who grew up in an urban environment. Nine officers were interviewed; eight were male, and one was female. Each received an advertisement for this study via social media or email, which was distributed through the NOBLE blast or by another participant. Table 1 includes participant demographics.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant	Race	Community type	Years of service
1	African American	Urban	22
2	African American	Urban	27
3	African American	Urban	23
4	African American	Urban	28
5	African American	Urban	14
6	African American	Urban	21
7	African American	Urban	25

8	African American	Urban	26
9	African American	Urban	35

Data Collection

I received permission from Walden University IRB (approval no. 07-02-24-1025820) to begin my research study. After obtaining this permission, I began seeking out participants. I created a social media post to advertise my study. I forwarded a second social media post (see Appendix A) and an email recruitment message (see Appendix B) to the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Officers (NOBLE). I forwarded these advertisements through the MD NOBLE chapter to reach out to members in this area and those who used to live or work in the Baltimore Metropolitan area. One officer contacted several officers who qualified for the study, and those officers, in turn, contacted me so that they could participate. Seven of the nine officers in this study are retired, and two no longer work in the Baltimore Metropolitan area. These two officers currently work as police officers for agencies outside of this area. The social media recruitment flyer and the email recruitment message provided detailed requirements for participation, ensuring that each officer selected for this study met the specified criteria.

All participants responded to either social media recruitment or email recruitment by contacting me via email. Once a potential participant responded, I contacted him/her via email or text to confirm a face-to-face meeting or a Zoom or MS Teams meeting. I did not send out the interview questions before the interview. Nevertheless, each subject expressed their desire to participate in the study and scheduled an interview. Whether the interview was conducted face-to-face or via Zoom or MS Teams, I began each interview

by asking the participant if they would consent to a recorded interview. Each subject consented to the interview, and I recorded the informed consent. I read each informed consent form for each subject, and after reviewing it, I asked the subject if they agreed to participate in this research study. Each study subject's informed consent and agreement to participate in this study were recorded. No unusual circumstances were encountered during the data collection stage.

I conducted three interviews in my private office, a secure location where conversations cannot be overheard. I did this to protect the confidentiality of the study participants, ensuring that no one could identify them or determine their participation. Six interviews were conducted using modern technology via computer (Zoom or MS Teams). Four of the six interview subjects no longer reside in Maryland, and two other subjects were unable to meet me in person. Scheduling was based on the availability of the participants. Interviews were scheduled and conducted between July 2, 2024, and August 31, 2024. The interviews, when conducted, lasted approximately 25 minutes and covered all the questions approved by the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB).

All participants in this study appeared to be invested in the study's outcome, displayed a positive attitude toward the research, and seemed to value their responses and the potential for them to contribute to improving the relationship between urban citizens and the police. All participants seemed committed to improving the relationship between these groups and providing new techniques and strategies to assist urban police in dealing with urban citizens. I felt that each officer who participated in this study provided honest answers, drawing on their experiences growing up in an urban environment and working

there as the foundation for their responses. No unusual events occurred that altered or deviated from the results of this study.

Data Analysis

I completed each interview with a research participant and transcribed it using MAXQDA, a data collection application that assists researchers throughout the research data analysis process. The transcriptions of the interviews were not error-free. To protect the integrity of each interview, I listened to each interview to ensure quality. I made the necessary corrections when the transcribed portion did not correctly interpret the correct word or phrase. After ensuring that all corrections and transcription errors were corrected, I began reviewing each interview to initiate the coding process. Coding in qualitative research involves processes that enable collected data to be assembled, categorized, and thematically organized, providing a structured platform for constructing meaning (Williams & Moser, 2019). I began by using *en vivo* coding to conduct an initial theme analysis throughout each interview transcription. Coding methods employ processes that reveal themes embedded in the data, suggesting thematic directionality toward categorizing data through which meaning can be negotiated, codified, and presented (Williams & Moser, 2019).

I reviewed each transcription several times for accuracy, detail, and reliability. I wanted to capture each officer's lived experiences in vivid detail so that they (their experiences) could be transferred to those who choose to read this paper. From that point, I coded each paragraph of each interview until I reached saturation in coding all the interviews. Through this analysis, I developed themes and subthemes that clarified the

lived experiences of these officers. These themes and subthemes also helped this researcher answer the research questions posed in this study. Breaking down these themes and subthemes provided me, the researcher, with a better understanding of the points the interviewees were trying to convey in analyzing this phenomenon. Once all the themes and subthemes were developed, I examined them again for quality assurance and to ensure they effectively represented the responses and points expressed by the interviewees.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was established from the beginning of this study. To begin each interview, I first informed them that the interview would be recorded and obtained their permission to do so. In every situation, the interviewee agreed to participate in the interview and to be recorded. Secondly, I asked each interviewee to confirm their participation in the study before proceeding. In each situation, the interviewee agreed to participate in the study. I conducted a total of nine interviews. Two of the nine interviews were conducted in person. When conducting the in-person interviews, I protected the interviewees' confidentiality by meeting them in a private work office after hours, when the campus was empty.

Given my experience working in the same environment as many of the interviewees, I assured them that I would provide clear and distinct instructions on how to answer the questions using their personal experiences. All subjects interviewed in this study are no longer working or have retired from working in the Baltimore Metropolitan Area. Knowing this information assures more trustworthiness in the responses of the

subjects being interviewed, as they were not guided or restricted by departmental policies and procedures. I ensured I was direct, clear, and concise in conducting my interviews with each subject. I took great care to ask open-ended questions, ensuring that the responses from the subjects I interviewed were not influenced.

I took the time to ensure that while interviewing each subject, I did not display or make any preferential faces or comments that would affect the subject's responses. While conducting interviews with each subject, I ensured that I did not bring in my experiences, stereotypes, or preconceived notions about these encounters between these two groups. Having grown up in an urban environment and worked as a police officer in the same environment, I wanted to ensure that I captured only the interviewee's ideas, thoughts, and experiences, not my own. I kept the questions simple and direct. I allowed the interviewees to answer the questions and elaborate on any answers they desired. The goal was to ensure I captured the viewpoints of the subjects being interviewed and their experience concerning the phenomenon being examined in this study.

I established credibility, reliability, accountability, and transparency by having each interviewee review their responses to each question with me. This ensured that each interviewee's responses were recorded responsibly and reliably without their words being misinterpreted. Confirmation of their answers and responses to each interview question provided each interviewee with greater confidence in the study's overall value. The interviewees' responses made it clear that each one felt and wanted their responses to be captured to effect social change upon completing this study. The findings of this study accurately reflect the responses provided by the participants. Only their individual lived

experiences were utilized for this study. Reliability was established through a methodology that ensured dependability, achieved by coding to saturation. This coding was effectively represented through themes and subthemes and was thoroughly checked and rechecked.

One aspect I expected to examine and report on in this paper is the unusual perspective of these officers as they began their lives in urban environments. The importance of this dynamic cannot be overstated, given the unique experiences of this group. These officers, who started as urban inhabitants, have examined the experience from both sides. The findings of this study are based solely on the responses and experiences of the officers who participated in this study, and the experiences shared are theirs alone. Transferability was established through a detailed description of the study's purpose, the methods used for data collection, and the complete analysis. The starting focal point of the analysis of this study was the Freddie Gray uprising in 2015 and the Department of Justice Consent Decree that was signed in January 2017 between the Baltimore Police Department and the United States Department of Justice (BPD, 2017). Following a federal investigation into the Baltimore Police Department's policing methodologies, the Department of Justice determined that the Department's policing of the city was separate and different. The perception was that there was one Baltimore that was wealthy and primarily White and a second one that was impoverished and Black (BPD, 2016). Members of these predominantly African American communities often felt they were subjected to unjustified stops, searches, and arrests, as well as excessive force (BPD, 2016). Table 2 lists the themes and subthemes that emerged from data analysis.

Table 2*Themes and Subthemes*

Theme	Subtheme
Identity and community connection	Growing up in poverty: motivation to serve
Community policing and relationship building	Early positive exposure, practice of engagement, and community trust during unrest
Race and policing	Pressure of being African American in uniform: representation matters
Use of force and department culture	No personal experience with police brutality, good departmental standards
Social media and body-worn cameras	Media skew and public misunderstanding: support for cameras
Police reform and cultural awareness	Need for cultural competency, systemic complexity
Challenges from within the community	Cultural stigma: earning respect
Solutions and path forward	Unified approach: restoring trust
Initial reaction to civil unrest	Shock, unpreparedness
Police culture and internal dynamics	Aggressive officers in specialized units: culture of silence
Violent encounters and use of force	Witnessed trauma, lack of empathy
Race and representation	Skepticism toward diversity alone, need for passionate officers
Training & education	Constitutional training, early detective training, education incentives
Policing philosophy and practice	Enforcement vs. community policing, hands-on policing
Training and preparedness	Inadequate FTO training, physical standards, ongoing training
Departmental culture and racism	Internal racism, leadership inaction
Reactions to high-profile incidents	Freddie Gray uprising, command failures
Use of force and de-escalation	Tactical discipline, de-escalation philosophy
Role of social media and technology	Citizen interference, public mistrust
Race, identity, and urban policing	Racial dynamics, cross-racial treatment, bias in policing
Community perception and trauma	Intergenerational fear, dual identity conflict
Personal encounters and public perception	Redemption and gratitude, resentment and pain
Representation and hiring	Increased hiring of black officers, perceived uniform above identity
Youth engagement and trust-building	Mentorship programs: broken trust upon reveal
Reform and strategy recommendations	Early warning systems, officer wellness, recruitment and screening

Theme	Subtheme
Emotional and psychological impact	Emotional distress, dual identity struggles, hesitation after high-profile events, and public judgment
Police training and development	Implicit bias training, continuous training, emotional intelligence, and academy gaps
Policing in urban environments	Officer-community disconnect, bias and stereotyping, trust and transparency
Systemic issues in law enforcement	Stereotypes, public perception challenges, discriminatory practices, leadership accountability
Community-police relations	Mutual respect, empathy, and interdependence
Role of technology and media	Amplification through social media, body cameras for accountability
Solutions and strategies	Hiring practices, DEI training, community engagement, and leadership-driven culture
Command and leadership challenges	Conflicting directives, lack of preparedness
Police culture	Passed-down behaviors, peer accountability, and subcultures
Officer health and well-being	Mental health neglect: wellness benefits

Note. FTO = field training officer; DEI = diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Results

I will start the results section by first addressing the research questions established for this study. Then, I will present the study's results, highlighting the most significant themes that emerged from this study and their impact on the topic of this paper.

Research Question 1

The subjects who participated in this study suggest that minority representation does not affect the police's credibility in the community. The results suggest that it has little to no effect on the urban public's response to these officers. One of the challenges this study encountered was the long-standing and documented imbalance in the relationship between Baltimore citizens and the Baltimore Police Department, as outlined in the DOJ study (BPD, 2017). It was determined that the BPD engaged in a practice of

unfair treatment towards the urban community that they serve, more specifically, African Americans who live in the communities that they serve (BPD, 2017). This thought process became the prevailing perspective on how the Baltimore Police Department (BPD) operated for many years. Subject #9 of this study brings out a unique perception that he/she disagrees with the thought process that African Americans are being targeted and over policed. Subject #9 states, “Well, most urban environments are 95% African American. So, encounters with (African Americans) you are more likely to have than not.” Subject #9 believes the issue with policing predominantly African American urban environments becomes a serious challenge when you bring in officers of other races to police these urban citizens. Subject #9 suggests that an “outsider” or officer of another race may not have the intuitiveness to deal with or properly communicate with an urban citizen, and this inability to communicate with one another can cause serious friction and resentment. Subject #9 states, “Now, the problem comes when you have another race in the same space in that urban environment. Moreover, the actions that they (a White officer) take towards that person (a Black suspect) need to be thought out. Subject #9 revealed a huge question that urban African American citizens, especially the citizens of Baltimore, have long believed that officers were taught to “over police” the urban citizens. Subject #9 reflects a prevailing consciousness that the participants in this study believe should be present in police encounters. Subject #9 intimated that members of these urban communities have an issue with White officers because they are “outsiders.” Subject #9 specifically stated, “they (White police officers) are the minority. Because at that point, the alternate race is the minority.” Subject #9 suggests how a White police

officer speaks to or deals with an African American suspect in that environment, “to address them or deal with them in a manner that is inconsistent,” will bring issues for that officer and create a confrontational encounter.

Subject #2 echoed that a certain level of communication is necessary when a police officer interacts with an urban citizen. Subject #2 felt that officer engagement created viability with urban citizens. Subject #2 advised that he/she grew up in East Baltimore during the 1960s and 1970s. He/she stated that during this time, they observed Baltimore go through some of the same changes and the rise of several primary drug dealers during the era of the heroin epidemic. Subject #2 stated, “We had a couple of drug kingpins come up during my era. So, I grew up around the violence.” When asked if he/she had ever been involved in a violent police encounter, he/she responded, “Never.” Subject #2 believes that police and citizen engagement are the keys to a respectful police encounter. Subject #2 believes professional police engagement with urban community members will lead to more positive encounters between the police and urban inhabitants.

Subject #1 stated that he/she also never had a negative encounter with police in their upbringing/childhood before he/she became an officer. Subject #1 emphasized that the race of the officer should not matter. Subject #1 spoke of a police community service program he/she remembered as a child called “Officer Friendly.” Subject #1 advised that Officer Friendly at that time was a White man, and his race did not affect the situation or encounter. This subject’s positive interaction with Officer Friendly led to their interest in becoming a police officer. This officer grew up in East Baltimore and reported that he had a relatively normal childhood.

Interactions With the Police During Childhood

To gain insight into the mindset and thought processes of the officers interviewed in this study, I asked each subject about their personal experiences growing up in an urban environment and their interactions with law enforcement. Seven out of the nine subjects interviewed expressed that growing up, their viewpoint of law enforcement was opposing, and each one of them had a negative police encounter. Subjects 1 and 2 were the only subjects who stated they “never” had a negative experience with the police, despite growing up in an urban environment with high crime. Subject #1 even described a community service-oriented program called “Officer Friendly.” This program was a community policing initiative that sent officers to schools, starting with elementary schools, to familiarize children with the police and improve their relationship with law enforcement, ultimately leading to fewer encounters. Subject #1 in speaking on the “Officer Friendly” program stated, “So in the schools, they would come in and discuss safety tips, discuss stranger danger, and bad things to look out for. They promoted a buddy system, and they were a buddy you could go to and talk to.”

One of the current challenges facing law enforcement in Maryland is an increase in violent juvenile crime. While youth violent crime arrests fell 16.5% overall between fiscal years 2022 and 2023, according to a DJS report, carjackings increased by 85.4% and handgun violations rose almost 220%. Auto theft increased by 64.6%, doubling between 2022 and 2023 (Quinn, 2024). Youth in the Baltimore community, just as their predecessors, have a difficult time speaking and engaging with the police in the community. In 2018, coming off the heels of the Freddie Gray uprisings and the

department under the DOJ decree, then police commissioner Darryl DeSousa attempted to revive the “Officer Friendly” program. The then-Commissioner DeSousa promised citizens that the officers who would go on to participate in the program would be trained specifically for the program to “earn” a spot as a community ambassador for the BPD (Miller, 2018). The aim was for urban citizens not to view the police in a controversial light, and for the police not to view all juveniles in the same manner. During an interview with Police Reform Activist Ray Kelly, Kelly advised that the children in the Baltimore urban area needed to see police in other situations, other than taking police enforcement actions against citizens. Kelly stated, "We need to make sure that our (African American) children see police officers as more than just the light of locking up their neighbors or occupying their corners." (Miller, 2018) Kelly seems to echo with a feeling that many in urban environments convey. Commissioner DeSousa was never able to fulfill his vision of reviving the “Officer Friendly” program. DeSousa served as Police Commissioner from January 2018 to May 2018. DeSousa retired amidst a tax evasion scandal on May 15, 2018. DeSousa was convicted of tax fraud charges and sentenced to 10 months in jail, with an order to pay restitution (Miller, 2018).

The officers interviewed in this study confirm the beliefs and assumptions of many in these urban communities that they do not receive equal enforcement treatment. Subject #5 in this study stated, “We have a saying in our community that all skin folk are not kin folk.” Subject #5 referred to a common phrase among African Americans: just because someone physically appears to be African American, their temperament, demeanor, personality, and actions may not be consistent with what is considered a

traditional African American demeanor. The urban culture dictates behavior by using words like “Uncle Tom,” sell out, whitewashed, or simp to describe members of the community who they believe have betrayed the culture. The urban culture displays this same level of scrutiny for African Americans who wear a police uniform, as it is viewed as a negative trait. So, as pointed out by Subject #5, just because you have a police encounter between an African American man and an African American police officer, Subjects 4-7 suggest it does not mean that the outcome of that encounter will be a favorable one for the urban citizen. Despite the scale of the interviewed subjects in this study having grown up in the Baltimore Metropolitan area between the late 1960s and the early 1980s, Subjects 3-9 all spoke of hostile and combative police encounters during their childhood. According to the results of the 2016 DOJ investigation into the policing practices of the Baltimore Police Department, the DOJ found that the department committed daily violations of citizens’ First, Fourth, and Fourteenth Amendment rights as officers went about conducting their jobs. During this time frame, the department was predominantly European American, dealing with a predominantly African American urban environment (BPD, 2017).

Of the seven subjects who participated in this study and discussed the types of police encounters they either witnessed or were involved in during their childhood; the responses were consistently similar. Moreover, the stories these subjects told were consistent with the results of the DOJ investigative study, which led to the signing of the consent decree. African Americans who lived in the urban environment known as

Baltimore City from the 1960s until this study was completed in 2016 were more likely to have had some hostile or violent encounter with the police.

Research Question 2

In this study, you have nine subjects who not only grew up in this environment, but after seven of the nine had negative experiences with the police during their childhood, they still grew up and became police officers. Subject #5 spoke of an incident when he and his friends were in their neighborhood, just hanging out. Subject #5 stated that police officers got out of their cars and approached them for no reason, and made them pull their pants pockets inside out, and they were illegally searched. Subject #5 stated that the police would search for him/her and then his/her friends, they would then be handcuffed and possibly abused, and then the police would leave the area as if the stop/encounter had never been made. As the researcher, this incident resonated with me, and I believe it is essential for outsiders to understand the dynamic I am about to describe. As a kid growing up in West Baltimore, my peers and I often had interactions with the police. I had the same situation as Subject #5 of this study. I was in my neighborhood, and we had just finished playing football, so we were resting and hanging out on the corner of my block. The police drove by once and gave us a dirty look. I knew it was on. Although I had never been arrested, although I never committed a crime, and I was never talkative or disrespectful to the police, I knew if those cops came back, my friends and I would be in trouble. So, I told my friends we needed to leave the corner and move deeper into the block to avoid drawing attention. They did not want to go because they wanted to restart the game once everyone was ready. The police returned and yelled

at us to leave the corner. I politely stated, "We live here, officer." The officer responded, "Are you talking back to me, boy?" I responded, "I was making you aware that we live here and we are playing football, and I know my rights. I am going to be a lawyer one day." I still remember to this day that it was not my intention to get smart with the officer. See, we had an Officer Friendly at my elementary school as well. He was the only police officer I had ever dealt with at that time. So, my only previous police encounter had been a positive experience up to that point. I expected this situation to be positive because it was just a misunderstanding. They did not know that we lived on this block, and it was going to end because I am a good kid, and I told the truth. We were not doing anything except playing football. It didn't end as I expected. My three friends and I were put in the back of this officer's squad car, and he drove into the cemetery that was at the end of our block. When we arrived, two other police cars from the local police district were already present. They dragged us to a distant area of the cemetery and beat us senselessly. After they decided they were finished, they drove us to an alley near the top of our block, dumped us out, and drove off. Other people saw it, and no one said anything other than a woman who looked directly at me and said, "I bet you will move off that corner the next time they tell you." This was everyday life growing up in Baltimore, and it made sense to everyone who lived here.

Will police legitimacy and viability increase among inner-city inhabitants if more officers racially resemble the community's residents? In a recent study, the subjects observed were streetwise (urban environment) men and women. In this study, it was determined that this group was more likely to have negative encounters with the police.

The results of the study suggested that street-identified African American men and women are the group most likely to experience police contact. Unlike African American men, African American women's perceptions erode with more involuntary police contact and victimization. Future research should systematically examine these gender-based distinctions to better understand the problems and solutions of policing within marginalized communities (Hitchens et al., 2023). Previous literature suggests that the race of the officer matters when urban citizens encounter police. Subjects 2, 3, 5, 7, and 8 of this study believed that the officer's race could influence citizens' acceptance of the police officer's validity. Subject #9 stated that they started with this viewpoint but have since changed their mind towards the end of their career. Subject #9 pointed out that many inner cities' populations are African American-dominant, so officers are going to have more encounters with this group than with other groups. "Are there any discriminatory practices towards African American citizens? Of course, there is, because of the implicit and explicit biases that American police officers are taught to have." Subject #9 believes that a lot of these situations are a result of high African American concentration in the inner cities.

Fear

A DOJ investigation and consent decree confirmed everything that urban community members were already aware of, and that was part of the reason there was continued conflict between the citizens of Baltimore and the police who served them. Because of the civil rights violations and zero-tolerance crime enforcement strategies that

police departments were deploying during this time, this led to the unintended mass incarceration of lower-income African American citizens from urban environments.

When asked whether the race of the officer makes a difference in the type of encounter or the temperature of the encounter, the subject of fear arose with several respondents. What makes the responses in this study so interesting is the types of fears elicited by the respondents. The DOJ study into the practices of the BPD revealed a culture of fear amongst urban inhabitants, who feared that they would not have a positive outcome from an encounter with the police. The subjects in this study introduce a new dynamic of fear from the officer's viewpoint. Many describe this fear as an uncertainty when officers of other races are dealing with African American subjects. Kim Potter was a Brooklyn Park, MN, police sergeant with 26 years on the job. On April 11, 2021, Sgt. Potter, who was field training two new officers, was involved in a physical encounter during a traffic stop, Sgt. Potter pulled her gun instead of her Taser and shot 20-year-old Daunte Wright in the chest, killing him. Despite 26 years of firearms training and training to know the difference between her gun and her Taser, Potter still accidentally pulled her firearm instead of her Taser and killed Wright. On the BWC recording, Sgt. Potter advises the other officers who are with her, "holy shit! I shot him (Fox, 2021). Several years prior to Wright's killing, on July 16, 2016, Philando Castile was shot and killed by Officer Jeronimo Yanez of the St. Anthony Police Department. St. Anthony is a jurisdiction that resides within the Minneapolis-St. Paul, MN area. During this stop, Officer Yanez makes the traffic stop for a brake light that was out on Castile's car. Yanez gets assistance at the stop from his friend and fellow officer, Joseph Kauser. Yanez and

Kauser had close affiliations, having graduated from college and the police academy together. During the stop, Kauser approached the vehicle from the passenger side, where Castile's girlfriend, Diamond Reynolds, was sitting. Review of the BWC showed there was a total of 40 seconds between the time Officer Yanez asked Castile for his license and registration and Officer Yanez firing seven rounds from his service weapon, five hitting Castile, two hitting him in his heart. Castile gave Officer Yanez his insurance card and then advised Officer Yanez that he had a license to carry a firearm, and the firearm was in the car with him (Castile) and Reynolds. Officer Yanez threatened Castile not to pull the weapon out. Despite Castile never pulling the weapon or displaying it, because Castile was reaching back into the bag behind him, probably to retrieve the license that he had not given Officer Yanez yet, Officer Yanez put five rounds into Castile's body.

Subjects #2, #7, #4, #5, and #8 all believe there is a theory that exists that explains less tolerance toward African American suspects in police encounters. Subject #9 believes that many urban police departments have faced significant hiring challenges over the last several decades. During this time, police departments have been forced to adopt modern strategies in attempts to employ a more racially and gender-balanced police department successfully. As a result of these new hiring strategies, there tends to be a larger push of candidates who are not from the immediate metropolitan area. Many come from other states, but a significant number also come from other regions of Maryland, and many of these individuals have not been in an urban environment to socialize or interact with others. Subject #9 stated, "Many officers come from rural areas with perceptions about the urban areas before they arrive on the job." Subject #9 goes on to

explain that because these officers enter the realm of policing with a great deal of misinformation, they carry that misinformation into their jobs. There is an expectation of violence or physical harm that the police officer is expecting when they enter the job. Subjects #2 and #9 believe that the media's coverage of urban life contributes to the spread of misinformation. These two subjects believe that, between their upbringing in areas outside of Baltimore and the misinformation that is constantly distributed about some of the inner-city violence that occurs, many officers who work in the Baltimore Metropolitan area expect that some physical harm can come to them. Policing is and can be a dangerous occupation, as we all know. One of the challenges that police officers face during their training is learning through repetition. Because police agencies train their officers through constant repetition, many officers become complacent when dealing with suspects, as in many encounters, suspects immediately comply. However, working in the Baltimore Metropolitan area, it is not easy to make that claim. Citizens, due to their distrust, personal experiences, and encounters with friends and family, have little faith and/or trust in the police. Baltimore, as a city, has a "us against the world" mentality, so if you are not from the immediate Baltimore Metro area or a nearby location, a warm welcome is not necessarily assumed or expected. Baltimore is a tough, gritty town that only respects their own, and the residents are willing to put our city, its pride, and its values up against any other city. Therefore, it is challenging to establish a trusting relationship with the citizens of Baltimore, especially if you are not from the area.

Regarding policing in an urban environment and a review of some of the deadly encounters as I just described, Subject #2 stated, "For the most part, I do not think that

these officers are racist. I think they are cowards. I think that they are scared.” Subject #2 believes there is a deep correlation between the officers and urban inhabitants that allows them to relate to one another. Subject #2 discusses how many people who live in an urban environment do not have that fear because violent encounters and death are things to which they are constantly exposed. Subject #2 goes on to say that it is this same willingness to challenge these violent situations that both the officer and the urban citizen develop a bond with one another if the officer makes sure that they (police) treat people with respect and dignity, regardless of the type of situation they are dealing with.

Subject #4 did not entirely disagree with Subject #2’s analysis, but they added more to the better understanding between urban police and urban citizens. Subject #4 felt that the key to reducing fear on both sides was good and truthful communication. Subject #4 discussed some of the difficulties that stem from a lack of communication, which can sometimes lead to serious friction. Subject #4 believed some of the officers that he/she used to work with in the department had difficulties transitioning from their environment, and these officers picked up bad habits that led to them having difficulties in dealing with the urban citizens they encountered, along with the “following the leader” mentality of some officers. Subject #4 discussed some of the situations as an officer and a commander in which he/she had to intervene to assist with the officers' communication with other officers and members of the community. This lack of trust and poor communication led officers to take shortcuts and alternative methods in dealing with citizens in urban environments, which resulted in bad behavior within the department and a poor reputation among the citizens, according to Subject #4.

Subject #8 spoke of a different kind of fear that developed within the officers' culture, which resulted from them going out and doing their jobs. Subject #8 spoke of himself/herself as a go-getter. During the height of Zero Tolerance and other crime-fighting strategies, this subject stated that they were one of the largest producers within the department. This subject stated that there was always a fear of going out and doing the job because the command staff was never consistent with what they wanted officers to do. Subject #8 stated that as an officer, he was clear on what was expected of him/her. He/she was expected to be a producer, to write tickets, to make arrests, and to get drugs off the streets; the method or way this was done was never examined or criticized. If you produced, you received accolades and awards, and you also received promotions. As long as an officer did not do anything that would put that officer's face all over the news, and the officer's actions did not result in the department being sued. At one point, even an officer being sued was shielded from severe punishment, no matter how many violent encounters he/she was involved in. There were even several officers within the Baltimore Police Department who had the department on the ropes due to civil suits that were paid out to settle these disputes without the officer being fired or losing their pension.

Fear, whether on the side of the officer or the citizen or the department or city hall or the state's attorney's office, ruled the day over government in law enforcement in Baltimore for too many decades. Continuity between the police department, the mayor's office, and the State Attorney's Office at the time of this writing is probably the best it has been in over 40 years in the city of Baltimore. This is one of the first times in my life that I recall seeing the leaders of these three offices, and they appear to get along well and

want to continue working in cohesion to improve the city of Baltimore. At the time of this writing, crime in the city of Baltimore is down. Currently, as of July 5, 2025, the city has had 73 homicides as compared to 90 this time last year. We have had 167 non-fatal shootings as compared to 207 at the same time last year. Robbery/carjacking is down to 191, compared to 229 at the same time last year. Aggravated assaults are at 2421 now, as compared to 2718 at the same time last year. So, it is clear to me that some of the new strategic police strategies have been implemented. The prosecutor's office is moving to prosecute cases instead of the standstill of cases that were backed up 1.5 years ago when the city had a different State's Attorney whose agenda it was to reduce charging criminals and move more to eliminating things that could help foster a better relationship with the mayor and police commissioner's office. Our citizens were in fear because it seemed that more suspects were being charged than the crimes they were accused of. Currently, both the mayor's office and the State's Attorney's office are implementing new community policing and enrichment initiatives to engage with the community. These groups are making substantial efforts to foster a better relationship with the urban community and build trust within these communities.

Theme 1: Race and Policing

The method in which police interact with the public is crucial for shaping perceptions of police legitimacy and effectiveness. Factors such as tone, demeanor, willingness to explain decisions, and the use of force influence perceptions of the police, affecting the public's willingness to cooperate with and assist the police (Sunshine & Taylor, 2003). One aspect of the law enforcement process that has raised significant

concerns about the legitimacy of police, particularly in minority communities, is the use of force. Indeed, the often-tense relationship between the police and black Americans is partly rooted in concerns about police racial bias and brutality in black communities (Johnson & Kuhns, 2009). The participants in this study, speaking about their experiences growing up in Metropolitan Baltimore, also spoke about the real fear they had of dealing with or interacting with the police. This issue is not limited to the Baltimore Metropolitan area, but instead appears to be consistent across the country, as evidenced in the literature on this subject. African Americans, especially inner-city inhabitants, seem to expect some level of violence or brutality to occur because of the citation above, according to Johnson & Kuhns (2009). In European American communities, there is an expectation that most innocent police encounters will not escalate into a grand, violent police encounter unless the European American subject causes the violent encounter between him/her and the police. This does not seem to be the case or thought process for African American suspects who live in urban communities. The officers in this study grew up in predominantly African American, urban neighborhoods. Seven out of nine of the subjects who participated in this study stated they had some negative police encounters during their youth before they became police officers. All nine subjects spoke about how viewing and observing activities and things happening in their neighborhoods changed their perspectives and made them want to become police officers. However, this does not negate the level of responsibility that each subject in this study seemed to carry like a weight. Each subject in this study spoke of the responsibility they felt as African Americans, working in those uniforms, and the

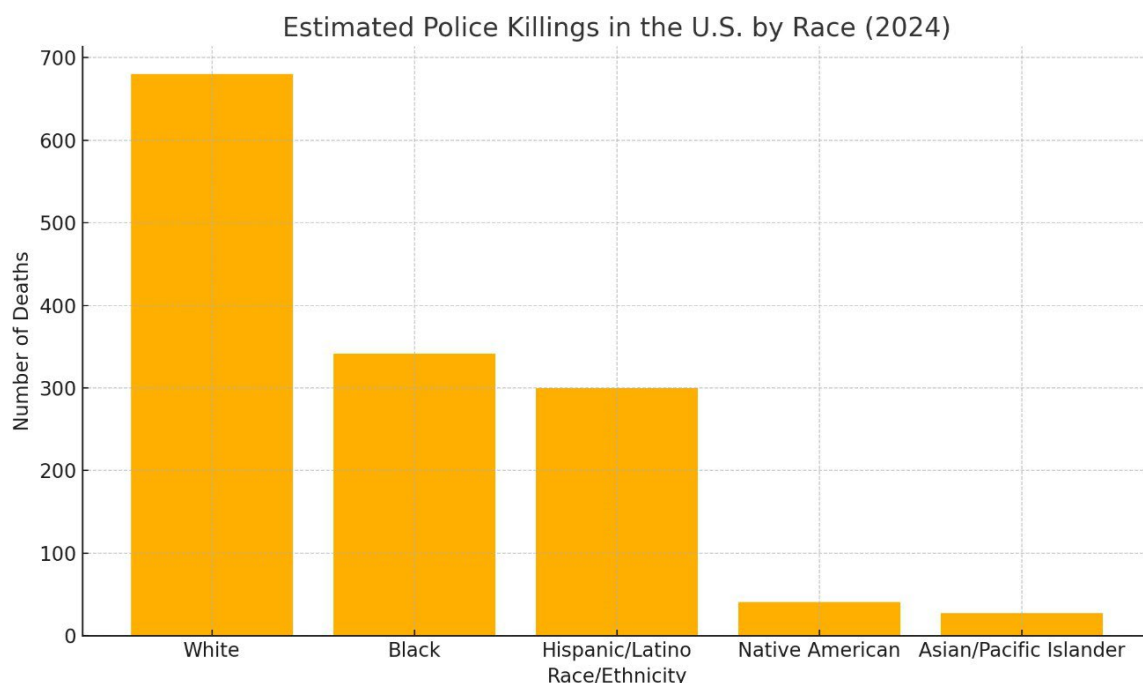
obligation they owed the urban community to be pillars not only of the police department they worked for, but also of the communities they served. These officers went to work each day knowing that race would be one of the factors that would affect their ability to carry out their job, and the citizens they served would hold them more accountable than any other police officer. Subject #5, “You felt a sense of obligation. I mean, this is where I grew up!” The intriguing comment made by Subject #5 was the sense of responsibility they felt regarding interactions with family members and the police. In African American communities, this is known as “The Talk.” These conversations are general discussions between parents and children, or between a police officer in the family and a non-police family member who needs guidance on navigating a police encounter. Subject #5 stated, “I have conversations with my family members all the time on how to navigate encounters with police officers. I need to have these conversations with them. I do not want to look at the news and see one of my family members is a victim of police brutality or worse, a police shooting.” Subject #2, on the other hand, felt the difference in treatment came from fear and a lack of familiarity between European American, Latino, and/or Asian officers dealing with inner city inhabitants, and not being familiar with how one should communicate with this demographic. Subject #2 stated, “For the most part, I do not think that these officers are racist. I think they are scared. These officers are working in unfamiliar areas, and they do not know how to communicate with subjects that live in these urban environments.” Subject #3 suggested, “I think we all need to come together and work together for viable resolutions. There will be differences, but

through community policing and officers getting to know their community, I believe we can resolve some of the differences between us.

The challenges that we face in trying to create police reform and address the issues that many citizens in urban areas, predominantly African Americans, face are due to unequal policing. The urban world is a world of police. From city to city, regardless of country, whether controlled by local authorities or national governments, whether detached from the military or a unit within it, the police are present. While their ability to prevent, deter, or solve crime varies, the police are expected to maintain public order and preserve “the peace.” As uniformed agents of the state (and other sectors of collective action), the police possess discretionary powers of detention and arrest (Owens, 2020). Police are a definitive participant in the urban experience. Consequently, the police influence how urban denizens experience the city. The police influence how race and ethnicity, as well as other social markers that determine health, opportunities, and wealth (e.g., class and neighborhood), operate in cities (Owens, 2020). Outsiders must understand that urban citizens need to be familiar with the ways and mannerisms they must adopt to navigate daily life and interactions with law enforcement, thereby avoiding negative police encounters. On the other hand, they must also be aware that some of these situations are unavoidable; that is why coping skills are necessary.

Figure 1

Police Killings in the United States by Race, 2024



Washington Post, (2024).

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/investigations/police-shootings-database>

Let us examine some facts about the interaction between African Americans and the police. In 2024, there were a total of 1,365 people killed by the police. That was the highest number of people killed by the police since 2013 (The Post, 2024). Figure 1 displays the racial demographic breakdown. There were an estimated 341 African Americans killed, while police killed an estimated 300 Latinos. There were an estimated 680 European Americans killed in 2024 by the police. Here is the startling information derived from these statistics. African Americans made up only 14% of the US Population in 2024, but they made up 25% of the population that was killed by police in 2024 (The Post, 2024). European Americans made up 61% of the US Population in 2024 and

accounted for 50% of persons killed by police officers in 2024. Latinos made up 18% of the US population, and they accounted for 22% of persons killed by police officers in 2024 (The Post, 2024). These statistics show that there is a massive overrepresentation of African American citizens and Latinos. These two groups are the predominant racial demographics that represent the urban environment. It displays the disproportionate levels of these violent police encounters, and it further asserts previous scholarly literature that asserted the racial differences between policing standards and over policing of certain racial groups.

Theme 2: Policing Philosophy and Practices

Policing styles, philosophies, practices, and strategies come from the top. In most large cities and urban areas, the mayor provides the police commissioner with structure and direction, and they expect police commissioners to develop innovative and unique policing strategies. The main objective of these police strategies is to achieve positive results that please citizens and the city hall. This is the fine line that police agencies attempt to balance every day as they send the men and women of their department out to serve their communities. This area is likely the most problematic and challenging to achieve success in, due to factors such as crime trends, changes in government leadership, and shifts in effective strategies. Time shifts and changes in the needs of the public police officers serve to alter the dynamics of their job and the ways they approach completing their tasks. I can recall some of the investigative techniques I utilized when I first became a narcotics detective. Today, these strategies would likely be considered a

violation of a person's civil rights, and I would no longer be able to use them to achieve my investigative goals.

In this study, I aimed to provide readers with an inside look at the decisions made behind the closed doors of police departments that affect everyday citizens. Citizens need to understand that the goal is to make everyone feel safe and secure in their neighborhoods; however, police are not always able to achieve this goal. More importantly, understand that sometimes that goal is not possible for a myriad of reasons, but do not always assume it is because law enforcement does not care about certain racial groups. Strategies are just that - they are strategies, new ways to solve old problems, and sometimes they do not work. Traditionally, as I began this study discussing the major issues that law enforcement has had to address over the last one hundred years, it was to provide you a look at the progression of the major law enforcement issues and the information we (law enforcement) learned from patrolling a certain way and dealing with criminal issues and people from specific racial demographics. The persistent tension between urban communities and the police departments that serve them is a clear signal to all of us in this country that we have not done enough. Even the subjects of this study do not agree on what strategic measures we should take to achieve at least a partial resolution that allows for fair policing in urban environments.

Subtheme 1: Familiarity as a Cause of Contempt and Corruption

One of the most significant observations I made during my police career was the rapid deterioration that can occur when a lack of supervision allows a unit, division, or police agency to deviate from its intended purpose. Lack of institutional control is a

fundamental contributor to police corruption, and it begins subtly, evolving into its own culture. In interviewing the subjects in this study and sharing my own experiences of working in a federal narcotics task force group with officers from several different agencies, I always wondered how this massive, dysfunctional machine continued to thrive. To understand how it works, being a police officer is akin to being part of a legacy group with a secret handshake known only to its members. As an active police officer, you are not allowed to discuss certain things about your job, your job policies, or rules and regulations with the public. Police departments are para-military organizations. In other words, their rank and structure are like those of the military, and they are in place to maintain group organization and structure. There are required physical requirements to maintain officers in top physical condition (which can deteriorate for some officers over time), and officers learn the job through repetitive processes, traditions, habits, and strategies that previous officers passed down. The thought process is that the rank structure will be tight, and this structure will guide officers in navigating appropriately and keeping them accountable. This is why I knew the differential association theory was the best theory for this study and the most suitable way to describe my experience as a police officer. I was certain that the other participants would contribute to my hypothesis about this theory.

Subject #1 discussed this “unspoken” behavior that just became the norm in his/her department. Subject #1 states, “Many things (bad behavior) were just passed on from there. From their superiors, it was passed on as a generational thing.” Subject #1 was discussing the way bad cops are allowed to train new or less experienced police

officers and teach them bad or illegal behavior. In most instances, these officers were not scrutinized or even punished if their work production was of a high level. Subject #1 goes on to tell how the department's management leadership created competition between officers for the seizures of guns. Subject #1 states, "It was known within the department that people received days off or other rewards for getting guns. They used to call these days "G" days (gun days) as a reward for taking a gun off the street. Subject #2 clearly stated that there was no policy or operational procedure listed in his/her department's Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) that authorized the use of this strategy. The practice persisted for several years.

Subtheme 2: A Broken Grapevine

During the 2015 Baltimore City riots after the death of Freddy Gray, one of the biggest challenges for the Baltimore Police Department (BPD) specifically was disorganized communication on how to handle the situation as it spiraled out of control. Then, Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake sent officers into violent harm's way throughout the city as rioters were looting and destroying stores, vehicles, and neighborhoods. At that time, Larry D. Hogan was the new Governor of the State of Maryland. Governor Hogan, newly minted, began to learn how discombobulated and unclear the communication vine throughout Baltimore City government was. In his book, "*Still Standing: Surviving Cancer, Riots, a Global Pandemic, and the Toxic Politics that Divide America*," former Governor Hogan spoke about his high level of frustration that existed throughout his initial dealings with then-Mayor Rawlings-Blake's response to the fires and destruction as Baltimore was being violently demolished. Governor Hogan, a

Republican in a highly democratic state, had just beaten an incumbent Lieutenant Governor who had previously been a highly revered Democrat in the State. Governor Hogan was also dealing with a Democratic Mayor whom he knew nothing about; they had never met or had a conversation with each other. Mayor Rawlings-Blake was also not available when the Governor was trying to reach her to address the violence that was going on in her city. Governor Hogan then received another curveball. He would write, “I was advised I was receiving a call from the President (Obama). I assumed he was calling to offer federal assistance to the state of Maryland. Boy, was I wrong (Hogan, 2020).” President Obama expressed concern that the state of emergency might potentially inflame an already tense environment. Hogan respectfully responded, “Mr. President, I can assure you that we are going to exercise caution and show restraint. Nevertheless, I am also going to do whatever it takes to make sure that this violence does not continue and that we keep the people of Baltimore safe (Hogan, 2020).”

The officers who participated in this study present a similar dysfunctional picture of communication between law enforcement in the Baltimore Metropolitan area and their superiors. They provide a picture of a management culture that created its own internal rules and policies, which were exclusive to themselves. The officers in this study present an image of their management as being consistently inconsistent in enforcement strategies and lacking consistent leadership. Subject #1 stated, “If you get a gun, and I do not know if it was an unwritten rule. The command staff would never stand in front of anyone at City Hall or a news reporter and admit this. They would never say they gave an officer three days off after getting a gun. I think some competition is healthy, but I also

believe it can encourage corruption. Putting them in a position to make them think that they must do whatever is necessary to get a gun so that they can get days off.”

Subject #7 discussed their role as a commander at the time, including the challenges they faced in leading their team due to conflicting messages from the command staff, who were receiving conflicting instructions from City Hall. Subject #7 asserted that it was clear there was no structured plan of action for the troops who were boots on the ground, dealing with these violent rioters. Most of the reasons were that Baltimore had not experienced anything like this since the early 1960s during the civil rights movement. From top to bottom of the BPD, the command staff and troops had no real strategy on how to attack these riots. Then, add to the conflict a new Governor for the state of Maryland and an incumbent Mayor who had her own ideas on how things should be done in “her” city, and it was a recipe for disaster. Subject #8 discussed his/her knowledge from moving through the ranks from an officer to a commander. “Consistent management leadership has always been a point of contention. It changes so much that the officers or commanders can keep up with our day-to-day activities.

Subjects #7, #8, and #9 collectively speak on inconsistent messages from the chain of command as they all worked for the same department (BPD). As commanders, they spoke of the challenges of trying to deliver an inconsistent message to their troops when they were unsure of the main objective. These officers cite constant conflict with the State’s Attorney’s Office (SAO) and City Hall (Mayor’s Office) as the sources of conflict.

Theme 3 Departmental Culture and Racism

The scathing Department of Justice (DOJ) report issued in January 2017 regarding the Baltimore Police Department (BPD) sent a clear message to the department about the direction it was headed and a sign of things to come. If you have been a citizen who has been reared or lived in Baltimore City over the last 60 years, you were not surprised by the analysis or the information that was presented from that DOJ report. As a citizen and someone who became a police officer in this area, it was not surprising. I experienced racial discrimination when I went to apply for a position as a Baltimore City police officer in 1993. I was a resident of Baltimore City at the time, having completed my first year of graduate school at what is now Coppin State University. I completed the entire process and attended my final interview at HQ, where I was supposed to find out whether I would be hired or not. The investigator advised me that everything looked good except for my drug questionnaire. I asked what was wrong with it. I politely told him I drew a big "N/A" on the entire page as I had never taken any drugs in my life. He stated, "What about marijuana?" I advised him, "I have never tried it at all, sir." My background investigator then explained to me how he used to work in BPD's SW District, which my neighborhood was in. He then stated, "There is no way in the world you grew up in Edmondson Village and never used drugs. You are going to have to take a polygraph, my friend." Then he asked me if I wanted the job. I told him yes. He told me to write down the name, address, and phone numbers of anyone in my neighborhood that I knew to be a drug dealer. I told him no thanks, and I was not taking the polygraph for his agency. I would become a cop somewhere else, and I eventually did. I watched him hire four White men who lived out of state that day. None of them took a polygraph.

Racism has been a significant deterrent for African American candidates applying for police positions. Organizations are key mechanisms by which racism is enacted and perpetuated. Although much of the management literature has focused on organizational efforts to combat racial discrimination, some of the most transformative changes come from the everyday actions of employees themselves (Prengler, 2023). Therefore, I asked the subjects in this study to discuss how they felt that dealing with racism, internal racism, and improving hiring practices would affect the negative racism that some applicants, like me and others, who were denied the opportunity to be hired because of unfair racial hiring practices that were cited in the DOJ report on BPD. It should be noted that at the time of writing this dissertation paper, BPD has one of the most racially diverse departments in the Baltimore Metropolitan area. The current makeup is shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Racial/Ethnic Make-Up of the Baltimore Police Department vs. Baltimore City

Racial/ethnic group	Baltimore Police Department	Baltimore City
	%	
European American	45	27
African American	40	57
Latino/Hispanic	12	8
Asian and other	3	6

Washington Post, (2019)

([Baltimore-area police departments are much whiter than the people they serve - The Washington Post.](#))

So, suppose we review the comparison between the city's police department and the people it serves daily. In that case, you can see the discrepancies in the department's racial demographics compared to the population it serves. European American officers are overrepresented, as European Americans only make up 27% of the Baltimore City population, but European Americans make up 45% of the BPD force. Latino/Hispanic officers are overrepresented. Latino/Hispanic citizens make up 8% of the Baltimore City population, and they represent 12% of the BPD. African Americans, who make up the most significant chunk of city inhabitants at 57%, are underrepresented. While African Americans make up the most significant portion of the city's population at almost 60%, they do not even make up half of the BPD's force. Speaking with the subjects in this study, they all seem conflicted about the effect of racial equality on the effectiveness and the acceptability of the BPD to govern over these inner-city inhabitants. In the neighboring county of Baltimore County, the Baltimore County Police Department is 80% European American, while the county population is only 57% European American. Police pulled over vehicles 31,000 times in 2020, during the coronavirus pandemic — a substantial decrease from the 83,000 traffic stops made in 2019. African American people represent 30% of Baltimore County's population, according to census estimates, but they (African Americans) represent 58% of all vehicles stopped in 2020 (Deville, 2021).

The debate between implicit bias and explicit bias arises whenever I examine questionable police encounters. We all have biases due to our upbringing. Whether you believe the actions of a police officer who interacts with you are conscious and deliberate (explicit) or unconscious and automatic (implicit), the general opinion differs when you

review racial demographics. Just as the statistics provided above demonstrate, in this county next to Baltimore City, although just over half the population is European American and about a third is African American, two-thirds of traffic stops involve African American drivers.

Theme 4: Community Perception and Trauma

As pointed out in this paper, the Baltimore Metropolitan Area has faced some challenging times in establishing trust with its officers within the community, and the community has reached a point where it has come to accept the authority of the police. The issue is that this relationship has been very contentious over the last sixty-plus years. The retired officers who participated in this study began as children growing up in Baltimore, where they were exposed to the presence of police, and later went on to become police officers themselves. They have a unique experience that few can share. They have also seen Baltimore City at its best and its worst. Intergenerational fear is a real issue if you grew up in Baltimore over the last 60-plus years. This fear was created through police encounters, and it became a common experience or observation among urban inhabitants. One of the most disturbing things to have to accept and hear as a police officer is the number of adults who teach and advise their children that police officers are “bad” people towards African Americans. I have also witnessed an African American mom observe me in uniform and tell her teenage son to get a good look at me. “He will probably be the one who kills you.” Subject #4 stated, “There are not enough community service and community enrichment programs for the community to believe that officers are invested in these communities.” Subject #4 discussed transparency and how police leaders can develop

programs to genuinely integrate the police into the community, rather than making it appear like a publicity stunt. Subject #4 stated, “If these people think that you are phony or you are trying to play them for some publicity, they will call you out.” Hence, this is the attitude of several Baltimoreans, who have grown weary of the finger-pointing between the police, the mayor’s office, and the State’s Attorney’s office. Subject #9 brings up a common encounter between police and the public that also perpetuates the police as bad guys in the minds of impressionable youth. Subject #9 states, “You have a mom or a grandma who has a son or grandson who is acting up. She sees a police officer nearby. She will bring the child up to a police officer and tell the child that if they do not stop misbehaving, they will have the officer arrest them. This becomes an unintentional consequence, as the goal is to curb the child’s negative behavior. Unfortunately, subconsciously in the minds of many African American children, they do not view the police as their friends. Examples like these are part of the reason. African American boys and girls are made to fear the police and the consequences of getting into an encounter with them from an early age. Innocent situations like this, where a parent is just trying to maintain control over a misbehaving toddler or teenager, and they take these threats seriously, and they seem never to forget where they came from.

Another subtheme that emerged was the balancing act these officers must undertake every day in dealing with the dual identity conflict. Having grown up in the neighborhood, these officers are part of the hood. Having put on the uniform for any police agency, and now you have traded sides, at least this is the stigma attached to officers of color. These officers are placed in a very precarious position. Law enforcement agencies always tell you

that you are joining a family. Like most families, a law enforcement family is dysfunctional. Subject #5 stated, “If you were just sitting on the block, the cops would pull up on you, jump out on you, pull your pockets inside out, and throw you down on the ground. Everyone was handcuffed. If they did not find anything, they would unhandcuff us and skirt off.” This was acceptable behavior for generations. Many urban citizens would argue that these same types of situations still occur.

Subject #6 believes a lot of the blame for the public perception of African Americans, African American men specifically, comes from social media. Subject #6 states, “It is social media. It is about what is put out in the media, period, about us (A.A. men)—the perceptions and the stereotypes. There is a stereotype that African Americans are aggressive. Subject #6 points out that this perception of African American men is universal and not just the thought process of police. He/she believes there is a stigma that African American men, especially, are aggressive and unapproachable. I tested this theory at work one time, speaking to two European American colleagues. I asked them if, in the event of a traffic stop involving one African American man, they would feel comfortable making the stop alone. Both said absolutely. When I arrived at the scene, I found two African American men in the car and one officer making the stop; they both stated, “It depends.” Both European American officers stated they would not necessarily be afraid. However, they would expect, because they had worked in Baltimore for as long as they had at that point, that either the driver or the passenger might have a gun. That was their expectation. Then I asked what the maximum number of European American passengers

would need to be in the car before they called for backup. The answer was four. “No concern of a weapon being in the car?” I asked. Nope was their reply.

The in-custody death of Freddie Gray in 2015 destroyed Baltimore City in many ways. This is why the riots occurred. Generation after generation had to deal with high-level police corruption coming out of the BPD, the Mayor’s Office, and the State’s Attorney’s Office. In his first major crisis as a newly minted Governor, Larry D. Hogan had to deal with the trauma that Baltimoreans have faced every day. Fire, riots, and destruction were ravaging Baltimore, and the then-Mayor of Baltimore uttered those famous harrowing words on CNN, “While we try to make sure that protesters were protected from the cars and other things that were going on, we also gave those who wished to destroy space to do that as well.” The words from then-Mayor Rawlings-Blake still echo in the minds and hearts of many police officers in the Baltimore Metropolitan area who protected this city from being destroyed during these riots. What also remains unresolved is the misinformation and miscommunication between City Hall and BPD. Every neighboring police department was willing and on standby to assist BPD. Eventually, after some political red tape, these allied agencies were able to assist BPD in bringing the city back under control. It has now been ten years since the incident and eight years since the start of the DOJ Consent Decree, and the trust between the urban citizens and the police in this area is just as bad as it was when this all started.

Summary

The purpose of this ethnographic phenomenological study was to examine the lived experiences of African American police officers who have lived and worked in

urban environments. The goal of this study was to receive their input on violent police encounters between urban inhabitants and the police who serve them. A total of nine officers participated in either in-person interviews or via Zoom or MS Teams. These interviews were conducted one-on-one with the researcher, and all participants provided verbal and written consent to participate in this study. The first research question examined was, “How does minority representation within urban police departments affect police validity in that community? The participants in this study provided varied responses. The subjects highlighted several challenges that suggest the race of the officer is irrelevant when discussing police encounters in the Baltimore Metropolitan Area. The BPD has a history of documented racism and mistreatment of African Americans, so any officer who is policing constantly must deal with the historically volatile relationship between the police department and the urban inhabitants. The officers in this study also point to the lack of cooperation and cohesion within the Baltimore City Government framework as a considerable obstacle that makes this theory ineffective. The officers in this study point to a lack of institutional clarity regarding leadership within City Hall, the state’s attorney’s office, and the BPD commissioner. Most officers in this study felt that it was a good thing for inner city urban children to see officers who looked like them, but it did not matter because of the constant friction between the citizens of Baltimore and the BPD; the race of the officer probably would not matter, as all police officers would be viewed as the same. Participants reported early exposure to police practices such as unauthorized searches, unnecessary handcuffing, intimidation, and unexplained releases, all described as routine in the area. Currently, BPD is still following the DOJ Consent

Decree. Officers are training in de-escalation tactics, coping with citizens who are dealing with mental health issues, officers policing other officers when it comes to excessive force, and Police Accountability Review Boards (PABs).

The second research question examined was, “How do you feel about violence against urban African American citizens during police encounters?” The participants in this study have been in these types of encounters and managed the overuse of force. The consensus of the subjects in this study is that no officer is going to sit there and watch another officer become extremely violent or violate an individual’s civil rights in front of them. Each subject in this study was once an officer, and each one transitioned from officer to management within their respective departments. With that in mind, each one of the subjects pointed to their responsibilities and duties to protect the public, not just from danger but from police officers who wanted to prey on innocent citizens as well. All officers in the study disagreed with the idea of a “thin blue line” of secrecy among police departments. The consensus among the participants in this study is that they gravely disagree with the level of violence that they see in these police encounters. Several officers feel there is a fear factor among officers who do not look like these victims and do not know how to identify with them to engage in dialogue. Two participants believed police encounters are becoming more violent. These cases involved officers drawing their weapons and shooting or beating individuals who posed no threat to their safety.

This study identified four main themes: the first, race and policing. The subjects in this study felt that the biggest racial challenge they face as officers is the fact that they are African American officers. The consensus was that this was the biggest hurdle the

officers faced in conducting their daily jobs. The urban area of Baltimore is not a very police friendly environment to work in. The officer's race is irrelevant. There is a strong consensus that has historically developed in this area, which is that the police are not someone you can trust as a friend. African American officers may encounter distinct experiences, including increased attention regarding their identity and professional conduct, and may be perceived differently due to their roles in law enforcement. There is a clear-cut emotional and psychological mindset of the African American inhabitant and their judgment of the African American police. In a city where African Americans make up almost 60% of the population, it is an arduous task to turn around 60-plus years of hatred and anger for one group. The study also notes that numerous BPD corruption scandals over the past 15–20 years have exacerbated the situation. All police departments now face challenges working in this area after the rogue BPD Gun Trace Task Force (GTTF) disrupted Baltimore during a period focused on police reform.

The study also examined the theme of policing philosophy and practice. One of the challenges highlighted by the consensus in policing is that different government departments are often unaware of each other's actions, yet they both expect the same results. Politics plays a huge part in police management. The respondents in this study confirm that. Law enforcement may implement policing strategies to support political agendas or keep public officials in power. The success of a politician, police commissioner, or commander depends on whether the strategies they have implemented are yielding the desired results. These initiatives have a significant impact on police department promotions, and therefore, they are viewed with the utmost seriousness.

Sometimes you can hit a home run on the first pitch and get lucky. At times, your approach may be unsuccessful, requiring you to return to the initial planning stage for further refinement. The officers in this study discussed rules, regulations, and policing practices that they believed encouraged corruption. One respondent stated that officers received days off as incentives for confiscating firearms or making arrests, with additional rewards provided based on the quantity of firearms seized or arrests made. The respondent's stated intent to foster healthy competition among police officers was susceptible to misinterpretation, which contributed to ethical ambiguities and led to corrupt practices with the establishment of the G.T.T.F.

The third theme that emerged from this study was the intersection of departmental culture and racism. The study documents significant errors by Baltimore Metro Area police departments over the past 60 years. This has led to a pivotal moment, as urban citizens were long assured that they faced no opposition. The police had to face the fact that the findings in that DOJ review report were spot on with the feelings of urban inhabitants who lived in the Baltimore Metro area, who lived with this fear of the police every day. The participants in this study confirmed some of the internal racism within the department that spilled over into the department's officers' actions when dealing with the public. Furthermore, the inaction of the leadership and chain of command within several departments led to the ineffective, brutal, and over policing that has occurred. The style and culture of management in many police departments in the area were built on passing on the torch of bad habits that were not recognized as such years ago, because they were a continued pattern of behavior that went unchecked. Police train like the military. A

recruit or officer candidate is taught a particular skill, which is then practiced repeatedly until the deciding leadership party determines that the candidate has mastered the task. I recall that during my time in the police academy, my instructor referred to it as “muscle memory.” They told us that we would complete these tasks repeatedly so many times that we would be able to do them in our sleep or be unconscious. For the most part, he was correct, but was this an asset or a liability for us to accomplish these tasks without having to think about them? Additionally, we were taught that we have the authority to exercise “officer discretion.” That means we can make a command decision about whether to arrest someone for an offense where the subject would generally receive a citation. However, we had the choice to utilize critical thinking and carefully weigh all the opportunities or choices available in a scenario, reviewing them thoroughly. After weighing all the options, we make a well-thought-out decision on our next course of action. That is the most logical and desirable outcome for the police and the public. Unfortunately, things do not work that way in many police encounters. Officers were once taught that they could escalate their response to one step higher than the level of aggression they were facing.

The fourth theme that emerged was the community perception and trauma that has occurred because of 60 years of discriminatory policing in this area. The participants in this study were divided on this theme. Subject #1 felt very strongly about community policing and believed that the number of community policing strategies included in the DOJ Consent Decree would enable BPD to be a leader in implementing a new style of policing in this area. Subject #2 agreed that more officers need to be more engaged in the

community and make themselves a part of the community they serve. However, they were clear that “hands-on” policing, as they defined it, is the only recourse to turning around the issues in the urban areas. There seems to be a consensus in this study that the scandals in the death of Det. Sean Suiter, the G.T.T.F. scandal, and the other scandals that have rocked BPD have affected every police department in the Baltimore Metro area that works with BPD. Urban inhabitants have an innate distrust of the police, and many do not feel that officers, regardless of their racial demographics, can provide equality in policing when it comes to the distribution of force and general policing. When it comes to the area of a police encounter, African American and Latino/Hispanic suspects receive higher levels of physical force in the beginning stages of an encounter. In contrast, European Americans escalated in level of force faster after initial levels (Kahn et. al., 2017).

The urban inhabitants in the Baltimore Metro Area still have the same level of fear of the police that I had as a child growing up in Edmondson Village. Back then, all I knew was that I should keep my mouth shut, answer an officer’s questions and/or comments with yes, sir, or no, sir. I do not recall ever seeing an African American officer until I was around 16. The children who live in those same neighborhoods I grew up in have parents and grandparents who tell them that non-compliance with a police officer may cost them their lives. Because of the large number of drugs that are sold in Baltimore City, most inner-city children's interaction with the police is the police kicking their doors in at 6 AM, and them watching a loved one being “perp walked” off to a patrol car or wagon that is going to take them to jail. You add to that the scandals, especially the death of Det. Suiter, who was one day away from testifying before the Grand Jury about

the antics of the G.T.T.F., police officers in this area have a huge mountain to climb to make urban citizens forget all the past trauma and have an open dialogue with the officers to improve the relationships that are already fractured. The urban citizens have not forgotten about Freddie Gray. Despite Mr. Gray's criminal background, he will forever be a hero in Baltimore lore because he is viewed as having stood up to the police and died for it. Solving and reducing crimes alone will not be enough to win back these urban inhabitants. Chapter 5 comprises an introduction, an interpretation of the findings, a discussion of the study's limitations, recommendations, implications, and conclusions.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of African American police officers. More specifically, to examine the experiences of African American police officers who work in urban environments within the Baltimore Metropolitan Area. The relationships have always been examined by other researchers from the urban inhabitants of this area, but never from the experiences of the police officers, who were also reared in these same police environments and later became police officers working in these same environments. Retired police officers were utilized for this study, so no officers were put in harm's way or faced any departmental retribution because of their participation and cooperation with this study. This was an important factor in this study as the interviews would yield the true feelings of the officers because of their experiences working in these urban areas. Retired African American officers were used for this study as the African American population in the Baltimore Metropolitan Area is 58% African American and 20% European American. However, the police force is only 40% African American and 45% European American. The Baltimore Police Department (BPD) is currently still operating under a US Department of Justice (DOJ) Consent Decree that resulted from the in-custody death of Freddie Gray in 2015 and the years of historic racial divide in the city between the treatment of predominantly African American communities. This study addressed disproportionate treatment and violent encounters between the police departments working in the Baltimore Metropolitan Area and its urban inhabitants. The study addressed a gap in the literature

that previous studies could not address, specifically the perspectives of officers involved in violent encounters and prejudicial procedures. Utilizing officers who grew up in the same urban environment (Baltimore) and later worked in the same environment. The problem this study addressed is the continuous challenge we have in the US, where many police encounters and confrontations between police and urban citizens end with the citizens seriously injured or dead. The results of this study presented critical information on the inner workings of urban police departments and how they operate in their interactions with the public they serve. This study may clear up a lot of inconsistencies or myths about what really happens within an urban police department. This study aims to reduce violent encounters between urban police and urban inhabitants, foster transparency between the urban public and urban departments, and promote genuine community policing. Four key themes emerged from the study: race and policing, policing philosophy and practices, departmental culture and racism, and community perceptions and trauma. Chapter 5 contains a summary of the study, interpretations of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations for further research, implications for social change, and conclusions.

Interpretation of the Findings

Through data analysis presented in Chapter 4, I identified four key themes that emerged from the study as particularly prevalent: race and policing, policing philosophy and practices, departmental culture and racism, and community perception and trauma. The Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved interview questions that examined some of the challenges that have developed because of the interactions

between urban police departments and urban inhabitants. I conducted directed semi-structured one-on-one interviews. Although qualitative investigation provides a myriad of opportunities for conducting investigational research, interview design has remained one of the more popular forms of analysis (Turner, 2010). Qualitative methodology and structural design allow for the use of open-ended questions when studying a phenomenon (Yin, 2014).

Interviewing retired police officers who also grew up in the urban environment of the Baltimore Metropolitan area provided me with unique data. Often, prior research, as cited in Chapter 2, which involves urban inhabitants' experiences of inequalities dealing with urban police, usually presents a one-sided viewpoint, as we rarely hear the side of the police officers when we are dealing with violent police encounters. Due to the nature of policing, sworn officers cannot always express their true personal feelings or thoughts on these subjects, as this is often frowned upon in most departments. Conducting interviews with retired officers provided a unique perspective, as these officers grew up in the Baltimore Metropolitan urban environment as well. These officers were able not only to provide a perspective, but they were also able to speak to and confirm the history of disenfranchisement and over policing tactics that were used on the urban citizens of Baltimore. The DOJ data also confirmed this information. These police respondents were now free to address challenging areas that are typically not spoken about by law enforcement officers. I found the retired officers in this study to be remarkably candid and forthcoming. The interviews were conducted via Zoom, MS Teams, or in person on a neutral site. The interview setting was relaxed and not in a law enforcement environment.

All the subjects in this interview were either retired or currently working with agencies outside the Baltimore Metropolitan area. The officers had no difficulties speaking on any subject or answering any of the questions, as many advised that they wanted to participate in the study to help improve community relationships in the Baltimore Metropolitan area. When asked why they participated, all the officers cited their experiences growing up in this environment and their desire for positive change in the Baltimore urban environment as key motivations for this study. It was clear that the officers in this study wanted to participate in the study to change the narrative that has been developed on policing in the area over the last 60 years. The largest department, BPD, was crucified when the DOJ conducted its study of policing in the area. The Freddie Gray in-custody death and the riots that culminated afterwards destroyed the community and created further distrust between the police and the community. Body-worn cameras (BWCs) became a regular part of police officers' uniforms in Baltimore.

Research Questions

RQ1. How does minority representation within urban police departments affect police legitimacy in that community?

RQ2. How do you feel about police violence against urban African American citizens during police encounters?

When we discuss the topic of increasing minority representation within urban police departments, the research has not definitively shown an increase in police legitimacy with the integration of more minority officers into most departments. The public significantly overestimates minority representation in policing, and information

interventions correcting these biased beliefs can reduce trust in the police and increase support for diversity reforms (Peyton et.al., 2022). The respondents in this study had mixed emotions regarding this topic, primarily due to past police transgressions that have eroded their trust in public research. Hiring more minorities may lead to more equal treatment of minorities in urban environments. Officer #9 in this study stated that he/she once believed this was the answer to solving the issue of racial inequalities in police encounters. Officer #9 even stated that he believed having officers who were European American and/or Latino/Hispanic creates even more tenuous police encounters due to an inability to communicate with African American urban inhabitants effectively. Officer #6 discussed the imbalance in numbers, noting that the city is almost 60% African American. The police department, not even being half African American, sends a message to the citizens that, despite all the things handed down by the DOJ, people in the urban environment of Baltimore see no change in the type of policing that is given to African Americans. Seven out of nine of the officers interviewed reported they had negative experiences as kids growing up in Baltimore with the BPD. Even the two officers who had never personally had a physical encounter with the police growing up were aware of many of their friends and families who had been involved in physical encounters with police.

When the respondents were asked research question #2, each of the respondents was clear that they either were directly involved or witnessed violent police encounters while on the job. All the participants seemed to agree that the goal is not to attempt to engage in physical violence, but sometimes it is necessary. The respondents in this study

seemed to be very aware of the perception of the police from any department in the Baltimore area. Officer #1 spoke on the importance of projecting a positive image to citizens of color. All the respondents spoke about a feeling of “responsibility” being African American and wearing the uniform. These respondents were clear about the public's perception of them in these urban environments. Officer #1 spoke on the importance of “presenting a different image,” especially to young African American children in urban environments. Officer #1 spoke about how, due to their circumstances and living in this environment, many of these children only see officers enforcing the law. Five out of nine officers spoke about the internalized fear that exists amongst African American children in these urban neighborhoods. Officer #4 spoke specifically on observing parents teaching their children that they can grow up and be killed by a police officer because cops “kill Black people.” I remember executing a search and seizure warrant in the inner city. In executing this warrant, my team found two guns and the two subjects for whom we had an arrest warrant. As I was exiting the home with one suspect, the suspect’s father asked me, “You must love your job! Locking nig*@s up and taking them to jail. Makes you feel good, huh?” It was amazing to me that the resentment shown to African American officers who joined the police department, many of them trying to make a difference and decrease disenfranchisement.

Theme 1: Race and Policing

Several racial challenges emerged from this theme in the study. The results of this study show that African American officers have had to deal with racial challenges in carrying out their jobs in several ways that make it difficult. Several respondents in this

study identified the race of the cop as an issue when dealing with the police in this area. Several respondents feel that non-African American officers have inexperience in dealing with and communicating with predominantly African American urban citizens. Officer #4 noted that many European American officers continue to employ an “authoritarian” policing style, where officers are proper and citizens are expected to comply with policing because they are instructed to do so. Officers #3, #4, and #8 felt that bringing in officers with this type of policing style and them being of the opposite race made police encounters a nightmare. These respondents believe that urban citizens already face enough challenges with urban police departments, especially since the racial majority in the police departments does not match the racial majority in the urban environment. Many urban inhabitants expect and assume that they will not receive favorable and preferential treatment.

The respondents also spoke on the “fear” factor as part of the racial dichotomy between non-African American officers and African American inhabitants. Communication in urban African American communities is different from that of the general population. Just like many other subcultures, inner city African American citizens have a manner, a tone, a posture in the way that they communicate with one another and how they interpret that communication. I did not ask that question, but I believe Officer #9 was speaking on this when he/she stated, “to address them (African Americans) differently than you would with other urban inhabitants (European American citizens), this is what causes much strife for African American urban inhabitants. Officer #9 was pointing out the constant inconsistency that urban inhabitants, who are primarily African

American, feel and perceive that they are overpoliced due to their race. In this analysis, the Office speaks to the rage these urban inhabitants feel, seeing as though these Caucasian officers are in the majority in the department, but in the minority when it comes to being a member of this community. This information confirms what has been pointed out previously in some of the scholarly literature listed in Chapter 2.

The last aspect of the race and policing theme these respondents addressed is the pressure they feel to do their jobs with little reward or approval. Previous literature has shown that African Americans and European Americans view the role of the police differently. Some research suggests a racial-ethnic hierarchy exists as to the perceptions of the police, with African Americans exhibiting the most negative attitudes towards the police, European Americans with the positive attitudes towards the police, and Latinos/Hispanics having the most intermediate feelings towards the police (Graziano & Gauthier, 2017). The respondents in this study feel a sense of obligation regarding their service as police officers. Seven of the nine respondents spoke about negative and physically violent encounters with the police during their childhood/teenage years. However, they used these situations to drive them into a career in law enforcement. Despite their negative perceptions of the police, they believed they could serve as a positive example and alter the narrative. All these respondents ended their careers with the same urban inner-city view of police as when they started. Six of the nine respondents in this study actively participated in the protection of Baltimore City during the riots. Those who were on the front lines had to deal with the visceral anger that extended not only from the in-custody death of Freddie Gray but also the long history of

disenfranchisement and disproportionate treatment of African Americans in the Baltimore Metropolitan area. These things clearly established the operating space that law enforcement in this area is dealing with. They are facing and dealing with adversarial members of the community who do not want to accept their authority or the necessity for the protection of these urban communities. This study confirms what I already knew about this theme.

Theme 2: Policing Philosophy and Practice

The results of this study indicate that all police departments in this region need to strengthen their leadership hierarchy and align with the mission of the departments in the Baltimore Metropolitan area. Seven of the nine respondents in this study made it to the rank of Lieutenant or above. So, these respondents have made it to some of the highest annals of police management. They say that the “politics” of police management is one of the things that cripples urban police environments. The “politics” of policing can control budgets, initiatives, planning strategies, criminal strategies, and officer deployment. Internally, these commanders recognize that creating a plan sends a mixed message when governmental powers intervene to reinforce an agenda they wish to promote or focus on. Every officer, upon entering the field of law enforcement, must complete an academy that covers all the basic objectives needed to enter law enforcement at the entry level. I remember as a young recruit, I will never forget the day that my commanding officer at the academy gave us a speech about the “politics” of policing. Crime sometimes dictates whether departments force officers to adhere to a particular strategy, but a couple of things are clear. The differential association theory aligns perfectly with this study and

the experiences shared by these officers. Officer #1 spoke about an incentive policy that was created via the command staff of his/her agency, where officers were awarded days off for seizing a gun. This type of differential association could lead to corruption. This officer rose to the rank of Major in their department, and even though they disagreed with this idea/reward program, the department still utilized it to encourage officers to be proactive. It provided it as an incentive to produce results. Encouraging this type of initiative can lead to reckless behavior from officers. It may cause them to compromise their moral compass, ultimately violating the rights of urban civilians in pursuit of the desired results. This was one of the tactics/practices that led to the creation of the ruthless BPD G.T.T.F.

Theme 3: Departmental Culture and Racism

My study seemed to bring out the very real point that racism and racial balance still do not exist in police departments when it comes to representation within the department, within the ranks, and within the group of decision makers. Leaders tend to select other leaders with whom they share commonalities. Race and gender tend to be the primary considerations when many of these choices are made. I previously listed the racial demographics of the two largest departments in this urban region and their imbalance in racial composition. This dichotomy helps to create the false narrative of the supremely aggressive nature of urban inhabitants, which these arrest statistics seem to imply. Officer #5 was evident in his support of this theory. They provided two examples of how certain officers were hand-picked based on race and their relationships with the supervisor awarding the promotion. He/she provided details on how, on one occasion, the

commander even changed the requirements to qualify for a position in a specialized unit. Officer #5 stated, “I knew they were not only qualified, but they had not been on the job long enough.” The results of this study show that racial favoritism for leadership positions, extreme punishment for African American officers when they violate policy, and the creation of unreasonable competition for promotions and specialized unit assignments. These African American officers stated that achieving their aims and goals was even more difficult in these working environments. The culture for urban police departments in the Baltimore Metropolitan area, as implied from this study, is that it is still a job that White men dominate in an environment where the population they serve is mostly minorities. Opportunities for minorities to thrive in law enforcement exist, but officers face numerous difficulties in navigating the process to advance and receive promotions. Promotional opportunities for African American officers occur, but when you compare the commander-level management positions with the population of the city and the department, White men still dominate these positions.

Social learning theory is a perfect example of the subculture that exists within policing in the Baltimore Metropolitan area. Groups and squads like the G.T.T.F. were not established to enhance the safety of urban citizens in the community. This group terrorized the citizens of Baltimore every day, and they were given a license to do so by being employed with the Baltimore Police Department. When you spoke to other officers from other departments, rumors were always flying about “how” members of the BPD carry out their daily policing. Citizens and officers were both aware. I know this because when I became a member of one of the DEA/HIDTA Drug Task Force Groups, I was

warned by veteran African American officers who worked for BPD to be careful of working with certain officers. There were officers from about 20 different agencies that worked in our task force groups. Many of them had compromised their moral compass by lying on the stand in court, some of whom framed other officers on false charges and complaints for competitive purposes and manipulated and withheld evidence to ensure a conviction in a case. What amazed me most was that these people not only still had jobs with their respective agencies but were also still being unleashed in the community, rather than being confined to a desk where they could cause no harm to urban citizens. Therefore, the culture of a department and the accepted behaviors of officers while performing their duties are crucial to public perception and police legitimacy.

Theme 4: Community Perception and Trauma

It was clear that at the time of the DOJ Investigation into the activities of the BPD, several things became crystal clear to everyone, BPD had unleashed a reign of terror on the urban citizens of the Baltimore Metropolitan area through fear, violence, violation of civil rights, in some instances led to the death of some citizens, loss of assets (property seized or stolen), and more importantly a loss of freedom. A review of the history of Baltimore, as well as discussions with Baltimore homicide detectives, revealed that prior socioeconomic and political trends likely primed Baltimore for the protests and violence that occurred after Freddie Gray's death. It is probable that a perceived "overcharging" of officers by the State's Attorney resulted in a "pullback" from policing that directly led to increased homicides in Baltimore (Sweet et.al, 2020). The riots after the death of Freddie Gray and Mr. Gray's death while in police custody did nothing to

improve or change the relationship between the citizens of Baltimore and the police departments that serve Baltimore, mainly the BPD. No one ever being made responsible for Mr. Gray's death contributed to the already fragile relationship between the police and urban citizens. An air of mistrust and dissatisfaction already existed between these two groups. For decades, this relationship was brittle at best, and the situation and its consequences only exacerbated the issue. This study was unique in that each participating officer was familiar with the relationships between the community and the police. Each officer who participated in this study grew up during their impressionable years as citizens in the Baltimore Metropolitan area. Having this unique experience, they are aware of the history between the police and citizens, both before and during their time on the job. As per the direction of the DOJ Consent Decree on November 10, 2023, Dr. Natasha Pratt-Harris presented the results of a survey completed as part of the consent decree on the public's perception of the BPD and its work in the city during a live town hall meeting. The period reviewed was from Fall 2021 to Spring 2023, and over 400 Baltimore City residents were surveyed. When it came to police responding to crime quickly, 72% of the respondents disagreed with the police responding quickly. When asked about the faith that officers working on the streets instill in residents, 59% of residents stated that the presence of police officers does not affect crime at all. One of the biggest challenges to police validity is the faith of urban citizens and their interaction with the community. Of the residents surveyed, 73% stated they never see officers interacting with citizens at all. (BPD Consent Decree, 2025).

Theoretical Implications of This Study

Social process theories view criminal behavior as learned behavior. Differential association theory considers unlawful behavior as learned behavior. This study has revealed numerous actions, civil rights violations, controversies, and corruption as behaviors that the Baltimore Police Department, after the DOJ study was conducted, learned these practices continued over a 60-plus-year period. The Department of Justice (DOJ) conducted a comprehensive examination of the BPD's interactions with Baltimore citizens, and the results were not good. The implication from the study results shows that this has historically been a continuous process of disenfranchisement for the citizens of Baltimore, with the police department that represents them. One unique way unethical behavior continued among officers was through the practice of supervisors taking and reviewing civilian complaints, even after a complaint was filed against an officer, and then “administratively” closing the complaint without investigation (BPD, 2017). Citizens who had gone through this process were aware of these practices before the report from the DOJ was released. However, this was another example of how the city and the police department were warned of the practices of some of their officers and command staff, yet this incorrigible behavior continued.

This study has also revealed a consistent pattern of officers from agencies within the Baltimore Metropolitan area engaging in unconstitutional and unethical practices that impact urban inhabitants. The Baltimore County Police, which is an agency that borders Baltimore City, has a department that is 80% White in a county where the residents are 60% African American. In November 2020, the Baltimore County government settled a \$2 million lawsuit against the County police and government for discriminatory hiring

practices against African American applicants (BCG, 2020). This suit alleged that the Baltimore County Police Department was engaging in a pattern or practice of unintentional employment discrimination against African American applicants for entry-level police officer and cadet positions between 2009 and 2016 by making hiring decisions based on the results of hiring examinations that were not job-related and that disproportionately excluded African Americans (BCG, 2020). The results show the disproportionate levels in hiring of these police positions and the discriminatory practices that have continued to keep this unbalanced system in effect. These studies also show the racially discriminatory practices that continue within the two largest police agencies within the Baltimore Metropolitan area. It is not enough that these agencies have identified practices they deem “unintentional.” However, if they are unintentional, why do these practices only seem to affect one minority group?

Limitations of the Study

This study consisted of nine participants and an author, all of whom worked as police officers in the Baltimore Metropolitan area. The special requirements for this study effectively aimed to provide clear answers to some of the challenges that have occurred in this area over sixty years. One of the study's limitations was its requirement for participants to be African American. This selection was made to specifically target African Americans who grew up in the Baltimore Metropolitan area as children and then became police officers when they grew up. These participants provided a unique perspective, drawing from their experience as members of both urban citizen and law enforcement categories. Although the parameters were perfect for this study, future

research could provide additional insights by using the same questions with other races to explore their lived experiences and conduct a comparative analysis.

A second limitation was the expectation that I would not be able to recruit any officers who were still currently on the job. The selection process was a social media and email campaign. Some of the participants were already friends and had heard about the project through word-of-mouth campaigns. Upon learning about the research study, these officers were more than happy to participate. I emphasized the importance of the research I was conducting and the value of their insights into their lived work experiences. Several officers have transitioned from the Baltimore Metropolitan area to working with other agencies in different regions. As a researcher, the ability to receive the thoughts, ideas, and lived experiences of many is beneficial for any research project. To address the gap in the literature, I deemed it essential to engage participants who have previously been unable to share their lived experiences. Most police agencies do not like their officers to participate in research projects, studies, surveys, or make statements to the public or the press without first reviewing these statements and/or monitoring what is said. The officers' willingness to participate in this study helped overcome some obvious obstacles, including the release of critical information and shared lived experiences that might not have been disclosed under normal circumstances.

When it comes to trustworthiness, these officers were very candid, honest, and open in their discussion of their lived experiences working in the Baltimore Metropolitan area. Each participant in this study grew up in Baltimore and was clearly invested in the area's future success and policing. Each officer spoke freely on each question without

hesitation. Whether discussing positive or negative subjects, including police corruption, the officers were clear and concise in their responses. It was clear to this researcher that these officers cared about policing in this area, striving to be a better product than it was when they served in the force. Each subject, when asked, clearly expressed their willingness to discuss these subjects, hoping to improve the relationship between the police and citizens who co-exist in Baltimore's urban environment. Despite the limitations of this study, I believe the study fills a gap in the literature in that the lived experiences of many African American police officers have never been shared.

Recommendations

One recommendation I would make for future research studies is to conduct a similar study that includes European American and Latino officers. Racial demographics in research studies typically reveal differences in socialization within intra-racial relationships. Baltimore is a similar urban environment compared to other urban environments across the United States. Comparative analysis can assist researchers in different ways to help break the racial divide that clearly still exists in jobs like policing. For example, the statistics cited in this paper regarding Baltimore County Police and the county population remain relatively consistent. The county's police department remains predominantly European American, while the African American population continues to grow, currently standing at around 60%. Even though the African American population in the county has grown, it still has not changed the imbalance of the African American population within the police department. The hiring practices of departments in the Baltimore Metropolitan area are a good place to start new, socially changing research.

A second place to centralize or start police reform is working within each department to end “good ole boy” networks within the department. This study revealed several key themes important to police reform. These studies’ participants clearly pointed out how these departments supervised themselves outside of the departmental rules and regulations. These officers and commanders operated with impunity, showing no regard for departmental guidelines and Standard Operating Procedures (SOP). The Baltimore Police Department alone, through the words of the participants of this study, has been involved in too many situations of abuse of power, unethical policing, discriminatory policing, unethical behavior by officers, and unethical supervisors who allowed the creation of abusive police powers. These participants attested that rewarding officers for aggressive police enforcement behavior led to an even higher level of corruption within the department. The fact that complaints against officers were either “tossed” away or “administratively closed” suggests even more egregious behavior by management. These same commanders allowed their officers to operate with impunity and then stood in front of cameras, unable to provide answers for department corruption. As the officers who participated in this study revealed, it was a lie to say that commanders were unaware of many things that were going on. Many things were swept under the rug if officers were aggressive and productive. This is where much public outcry came from, and rightfully so. The BPD vehemently denied some of the reported corruption at the time. However, the DOJ report quickly dismissed this denial after speaking with students in the areas where these police officers worked.

One final recommendation is for additional training for BPD officers and officers from other agencies operating within Baltimore City. In Spring 2025, I attended a training session with BPD officers on officer accountability. The attitudes of the police officers were abysmal. One officer candidly expressed their belief that the training was a waste of time, stating, “This department is not going to back you up anyway.” The level of anger, disdain, and disrespect in this officer’s voice was disturbing to me. How can an officer effectively police on the street when they hate their job and believe it is a waste of time, knowing the department will not back them anyway? In 2021, the State of Maryland created the Maryland Police Accountability Act (MPAA), which provided a unilateral statewide discipline matrix that replaced the Law Enforcement Officers Bill of Rights (LEOBR). Officers need to continue in-service training of these types of programs to effectively change the attitude toward the use of force and officer responsibility training.

Implications

My most significant implication is that I hope officers, commanders, and politicians will acknowledge the participants' words in this study and recognize that the corruption, discrimination, and bias in policing in this area must cease. The other thing that needs to cease for positive social change to occur is the “politics” of policing and the manipulation of numbers for political advancement. At the time of writing this research paper, the statistics for crime in Baltimore City have gone down in almost every category. Currently in Baltimore City, homicides are down 29%, non-fatal shootings are down 21%, rape is down 32%, robbery/carjacking is down 26% and aggravated assaults are

down 10% (BPD, 2025). A new relationship has developed between the mayor's office, the police commissioner, and the State's Attorney. As an outside observer, it appears that these entities communicate and work with each other much better than previous administrations have over the last thirty years. The social implications of this study can be huge for improving the relationship between urban citizens and urban police departments. I want this study to serve as a verification for the police officers I used to work with, demonstrating that we no longer need to argue about whether there is an issue between the public and the police. The participants in this study were not only police officers at one time, but they were also young people who grew up in these communities and had some of the same negative experiences that some of these officers of today could be taking citizens through. I hope that officers and commanders will leverage the experiences of these officers to develop and implement more effective leadership, patrol, and community engagement strategies within the Baltimore urban environment.

Management reform is essential. The G.T.T.F. did not exist solely due to the behavior of the officers who worked in this unit. This unit existed because members of the command staff approved and gave liberty to a group of rogue officers that terrorized the citizens of Baltimore by violating their rights and, in some instances, costing them their lives. One of the most egregious situations I observed as a Task Force Officer (TFO) was the lack of management displayed by the BPD supervisors. If there were a member from BPD in a group, a supervisor was present, and HIDTA always had a BPD Lieutenant to oversee all BPD officers across the groups. The problem with this setup was that it allowed for malfeasance and unethical police behavior. Even in the DOJ

evaluation of BPD 2017, the DOJ spoke of the level of corruption, mismanagement, and lack of guidance displayed by upper management.

Community engagement is another social reform implication. By approaching your job correctly and aiming to serve the public, you can effectively manage urban environments. One of the things I personally observed, and which was also noted in the DOJ study, was the lack of community engagement. This is one of the reasons I chose to include officers in this study who went through the Freddie Gray experience. It is 8 years later, and the wounds of Freddie Gray have not healed this city. Police felt attacked by six of their own being accused of killing Freddie Gray, and many of the officers patrolled in protest. I have personally observed officers responding to calls for service without engaging with the urban public they serve. One of the biggest complaints from citizens was the lack of officer engagement with the public. Officers are more concerned with the MPAA and complaints than with fostering relationships with the people they serve, which would lead to better understanding and a healthier experience with the public.

Conclusion

I embarked on this journey of social change for the same reason I became a police officer: I wanted to see the world I lived in change. The world that I lived in, where you had to fear the police, whether it was getting arrested or getting beaten up for no reason, there was a real fear of the police in Baltimore City during my teenage years in the late 1980s and early '90s. I knew there was corruption, injustice, inequality, and discrimination. When I applied to become a police officer with BPD in 1993, I was sitting in my background review with my background investigator. My background

investigator asked me why I did not answer yes to any questions on the list of drugs. I advised him that I have never tried drugs of any kind. He checked my home address and stated, “You live in the Southwest District. There is no way you grew up over there and you have never used any drugs.” Two weeks later, I received a denial letter in the mail. From that point on, I decided to join another agency and prove this guy wrong. It was vital for me to conduct this research and to complete this paper. I cringe every time I remember how helpless many officers appeared when they felt their hands were being tied during the Freddie Gray conflict. I remember so many officers having conflicted feelings about the conflict, officers being charged at that time in the death of Mr. Gray, and the fear that this incident was going to change policing in Baltimore. I hope that, in conducting this research, I have provided validation for these officers. The men and women I worked with, stood shoulder to shoulder with, and went to battle with for 23 years, who had to deal with the uncertainty during that time. No one seemed to care about their feelings. No one seemed to understand their fears. Mr. Gray’s death was tragic, and I will never make light of that. However, there are always three sides to a story. Here we are 8 years later, and it seems that the same animosity, hostility, and hatred exist between officers and urban inhabitants. It does not seem like it has improved. The time has come for everyone to step out of their comfort zones and make peace, allowing everyone to co-exist. One of the things that disturbs me the most is when an African American parent in the city looks at a BPD officer and literally tells them, “He/she is most likely the person who will kill you.” Alternatively, these parents will teach their children to hate the police.

This level of conflict highlights the need to bridge the gap between the police department and the urban community it serves. The officers who participated in this research paper aimed to make a positive impact. They spent most of their lives working in careers to make Baltimore better than it was when they started. So, it is time for us to put forth the same effort to save and rebuild trust with the communities we serve.

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Appendix A: Social Media Recruitment Post



Interviewing current, former, and retired police officers for social research regarding their experiences during their years of service.

About the study:

- 30-60 minute in-person interview that will be **audio recorded**.
- You will receive a \$20 gift card as a thank-you for participating.
- To protect your privacy, the published study will not share any names or details identifying you.

Volunteers must meet these requirements:

- Be African American
- Must be a current, former, or retired police officer.
- Must have been an officer in the Baltimore/Washington Metropolitan Area
- If retired, must have retired within the last five (5) years.
- Must have experience working in an urban environment.

This interview is a part of the doctoral study for Larry E. Jackson, Jr., a Ph.D. student at Walden University. Interviews will take place in June and July 2024.

Appendix B: Email Recruitment Template

Subject line:

Interviewing current, former, and retired police for social research regarding their experiences during their years of service.

Compensation:

As a token of our appreciation for your time and contribution, each participant will receive a \$20 gift card as a thank you for participating in the social research interview.

Email message:

A growing phenomenon is creating challenges in effective and safe policing and causing a great divide in urban communities, where citizens fear the police who are sworn to protect them. This study, which relies on your experiences and insights as African American police officers who have worked and lived in these environments and encountered these citizens, aims to bridge this divide and improve community relations. Your participation is crucial in this endeavor.

About the study:

- 30-60 minute in-person interview that will be **audio recorded**.
- You will receive a \$20 gift card as a thank-you for participating.
- To protect your privacy, the published study will not share any names or details identifying you.

Volunteers must meet these requirements:

- Be African American
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- Must have experience working in an urban environment.

This interview is a part of the doctoral study for Larry E. Jackson, Jr., a Ph.D. student at Walden University. Interviews will take place in June and July 2024.

You are welcome to forward this email to others who might be interested.

Appendix C: Interview Questions

1. What is your identifying number?
2. Are you currently an active police officer, a separated police officer, or a retired police officer?
3. How many police agencies have you worked for?
4. What is the name of the agency you currently work for, separated, or retired from?
5. Were you an active police officer during the Baltimore Freddie Gray riots?
6. As an African American officer, how did the riots and ensuing situations after the riots make you feel?
7. Did you grow up in an urban environment?
8. If so, were your interactions with the police negative or positive?
9. How do you feel about violent police encounters with urban African American males?
10. Have you participated in a violent police encounter with an African American male who comes from an urban environment?
11. Do you feel you have ever prevented an African American male from police brutality during a police encounter?
12. As an African American police officer, do you feel that increased hiring of African American officers will reduce violence against urban African American citizens during police encounters?
13. Do you feel social media has increased the social phenomenon of police brutality against urban African American males?

14. What do you feel is the solution to the social phenomenon of an increased level of violence against urban African American males?
15. What strategies need to be instituted to reduce this social phenomenon?