

11-17-2025

## **Beyond the Headlines: Exploring the Mental Health Impacts of Police Brutality on Social Media in Black Americans**

Kai'Annica Walters  
*Walden University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations>



Part of the [Counseling Psychology Commons](#)

---

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies Collection at ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact [ScholarWorks@waldenu.edu](mailto:ScholarWorks@waldenu.edu).

# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Health

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

Kai'Annica Lizette Walters

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
and that any and all revisions required by  
the review committee have been made.

## Review Committee

Dr. Yvonne Ward, Committee Chairperson, Counselor Education and Supervision  
Faculty

Dr. Kristal James, Committee Member, Counselor Education and Supervision Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost  
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University  
2025

Abstract

Beyond the Headlines: Exploring the Mental Health Impacts of Police Brutality on Social  
Media in Black Americans

by

Kai'Annica Lizette Walters

MS, Grand Canyon University, 2021

BA, Portland State University, 2014

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Counselor Education and Supervision

Walden University

November 2025

## Abstract

Studies show Black Americans face high police brutality, leading to mental health issues like PTSD, depression, and anxiety. The purpose of this qualitative interpretive phenomenological study is to explore the lived experiences of Black Americans who have been exposed to police brutality on social media and how it impacts their racial identity and emotional well-being. This study employed critical race theory as both a theoretical lens and a conceptual framework to examine how race and systemic inequalities shape legal systems and societal narratives. I used IPA to explore how people interpret their experiences and the meanings they assign. This study answered two research questions: How do media stories of police brutality impact Black Americans' mental and emotional wellness? How have social media stories of police brutality impacted Black Americans' racial identity? Twelve participants—six men and six women—were interviewed during the research. Six themes were found: (a) Division Between Black Americans and the White Badge, (b) Panic, Anger, and Distrust of the White Badge, (c) Desire for Social Change, (d) Be on an Even Playing Field, (e) Impact on Racial Identity, and (f) Police Officers Need to be Held Accountable. The findings indicated that participants' racial identity remained intact, with many expressing pride in being Black. It is recommended to expand to more states using a quantitative approach. This study is significant because it highlights the impact of social media on mental health and racial identity, supporting the development of tailored mental health services, research, and social justice efforts. Policymakers can utilize these findings to promote positive changes in interactions between Black Americans and police officers.

Beyond the Headlines: Exploring the Mental Health Impacts of Police Brutality on Social

Media in Black Americans

by

Kai'Annica Lizette Walters

MS, Grand Canyon University, 2021

BA, Portland State University, 2014

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Counselor Education and Supervision

Walden University

November 2025

## Dedication

I dedicate this to all the little black girls and boys who have ever been told they could not achieve their dreams or succeed in their endeavors. I stand here as living proof that such limitations are merely illusions. With determination and belief in oneself, you can accomplish anything you want. Your aspirations are valid, and your potential is limitless. Never let the doubts of others dictate your future; instead, let your inner strength guide you toward greatness!

## Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I want to give all honor and praise to God. Throughout my journey, He has been by my side, giving me the resilience to persevere when I felt like giving up. His comforting presence in the midst of overwhelming stress and despair helped me find peace and solace. Moreover, when I felt lost and uncertain about my path, it was through His divine wisdom that I found clarity and understanding. None of my achievements and personal growth would have been possible without His grace.

I want to acknowledge my parents, my mother, Lizette Moore, and my father, Curtis Delgado. Your encouragement and relentless support have been the driving force behind my educational journey. Thank you for consistently motivating me to pursue my studies with passion and perseverance, and for never letting me lose sight of my dreams and aspirations, even during the most challenging times. Without your love, guidance, and belief in my potential, I would not be where I am today. I love you both more than words can express, and I am forever grateful for everything you have done for me.

I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to my chair, Dr. Yvonne Ward, and my methodologist, Dr. Kristal James. Your unwavering guidance, incomparable support, and immense patience throughout this journey have been invaluable. I was very needy during this process, and your willingness to provide that help has made a difference. Thank you for your commitment and for believing in my potential.

My Walden U Chicks! Wow, what a journey it has been! We have faced numerous challenges and triumphs since embarking on this path together in February 2022. The late-night study sessions, filled with stress, moments of frustration, and even

tears we shed, have only brought us closer together. As we celebrate our accomplishments, I am grateful to call you friends and consider you my sisters. We leaned on each other for support and motivation, and our incredible bond helped us push through to the finish line. Here's to the special memories we have created and the bright futures that await us. We have achieved something remarkable together, and I am so proud of us!

To my TRIBE, which includes my family and dear friends, I want to express my heartfelt gratitude for your support throughout my journey. Your encouragement has been a constant source of uplift, instilling deep confidence even during my most challenging moments. When I faced obstacles that seemed impossible and contemplated giving up, your steadfast belief in me prevented me from falling. I am genuinely thankful for each of you, as you have played a vital role in my perseverance and success.

I am grateful to the Facebook Dissertation Writing Club members for their continuous inspiration and unwavering support throughout my dissertation journey. Our late-night writing sessions have motivated us, where we shared our progress, advice, and wisdom that enriched our experiences. Even though we were all navigating different stages of our dissertation processes, the solidarity we built helped to create a nurturing and encouraging environment. Thank you for being an integral part of this transformative experience!

## Table of Contents

|   |    |
|---|----|
| List of Tables .....                                    | v  |
| Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study.....               | 1  |
| Background.....   | 3  |
| Problem Statement.....                                  | 7  |
| Purpose of the Study.....                               | 8  |
| Research Questions.....                                 | 9  |
| Theoretical and Conceptual Framework for the Study..... | 9  |
| Nature of the Study.....                                | 11 |
| Definitions.....  | 13 |
| Assumptions.....  | 14 |
| Scope and Delimitations.....                            | 15 |
| Limitations.....  | 16 |
| Significance.....                                       | 17 |
| Significance to Practice.....                           | 18 |
| Significance to Theory.....                             | 20 |
| Significance to Social Change.....                      | 21 |
| Summary.....  | 23 |
| Chapter 2: Literature Review.....                       | 24 |
| Literature Search Strategy.....                         | 26 |
| Theoretical Foundation.....                             | 27 |
| Conceptual Framework.....                               | 28 |
| The Early Years: The Five Tenets.....                   | 29 |
| The Later Years: The Eight Tenets.....                  | 33 |

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Literature Review.....  | 37 |
| Police Brutality in the Media .....                                 | 37 |
| Systematic Racism .....   | 41 |
| Society Reaction .....  | 49 |
| Psychological and Physiological Health Implications.....            | 57 |
| Summary and Conclusions .....                                       | 63 |
| Chapter 3: Research Method.....                                     | 65 |
| Research Design and Rationale .....                                 | 65 |
| Role of the Researcher .....  | 66 |
| Methodology .....   | 68 |
| Participant Selection Logic .....                                   | 68 |
| Instrumentation .....   | 70 |
| Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection..... | 71 |
| Data Analysis Plan.....   | 73 |
| Issues of Trustworthiness.....                                      | 79 |
| Credibility .....   | 80 |
| Transferability.....  | 81 |
| Dependability .....   | 82 |
| Confirmability.....   | 83 |
| Ethical Procedures .....  | 83 |
| Summary .....   | 85 |
| Chapter 4: Results .....  | 87 |
| Research Setting.....   | 88 |
| Demographics .....  | 89 |

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Data Collection .....   | 90  |
| Data Analysis .....   | 92  |
| Patterns and Coding .....   | 94  |
| Evidence of Trustworthiness.....                                    | 95  |
| Credibility .....   | 96  |
| Transferability.....  | 96  |
| Dependability .....   | 97  |
| Confirmability.....   | 97  |
| Study Results .....   | 98  |
| Theme 1: Division Between Black Americans and the White Badge ..... | 99  |
| Theme 2: Panic, Anger, and Distrust of the White Badge.....         | 101 |
| Theme 3: Desire for Social Change .....                             | 105 |
| Theme 4: Be on an Even Playing Field .....                          | 107 |
| Theme 5: Impact on Racial Identity.....                             | 108 |
| Theme 6: Police Officers Need to be Held Accountable.....           | 110 |
| Coping Strategies .....   | 112 |
| Summary.....  | 112 |
| Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations.....        | 114 |
| Interpretation of the Findings.....                                 | 114 |
| Theme 1: Division Between Black Americans and the White Badge ..... | 115 |
| Theme 2: Panic, Anger, and Distrust of the White Badge.....         | 115 |
| Theme 3: Desire for Social Change .....                             | 116 |
| Theme 4: Be on an Even Playing Field .....                          | 117 |
| Theme 5: Impact on Racial Identity.....                             | 118 |

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Theme 6: Police Officers Need to be Held Accountable..... | 119 |
| Limitations of the Study.....                             | 119 |
| Recommendations.....                                      | 120 |
| Implications.....   | 121 |
| Conclusion .....  | 122 |
| Appendix A: Study Flyer .....                             | 135 |
| Appendix B: Interview Questions.....                      | 136 |
| Appendix C: Interview Guide.....                          | 138 |

## List of Tables

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Table 1. Participant Demographics..... | 90 |
| Table 2. Themes and Coding .....       | 95 |
| Table 3. Themes and Patterns .....     | 99 |

## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The purpose of this qualitative interpretive phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of Black Americans who have been exposed to police brutality on social media and how it impacts their racial identity and emotional well-being. Police brutality encompasses both intentional and unintentional actions by law enforcement that dehumanize individuals (Alang et al., 2022). This includes acts of psychological violence and intimidation, neglect, verbal abuse, and physical and sexual violence (Alang et al., 2022). Statistics have illustrated a reality regarding police involvement in fatalities throughout the United States. Between 2013 and 2016, police were linked to a staggering number of over 4,000 deaths (Bor et al., 2018), a figure that underscores the severity of the issue. Significantly, more than 1,000 of those who lost their lives were African Americans, with a troubling 303 of them—representing 29%—being unarmed at the time of their encounters with law enforcement (Bor et al., 2018). Furthermore, an analysis from an FBI supplementary homicide report spanning from 1980 to 2012 revealed that police officers had been associated with more than 12,000 deaths (Miller & Vittrup, 2020), highlighting a long-standing and alarming trend in the relationship between police practices and public safety. In general, Black Americans face a reality where they are three times more likely to suffer fatal encounters with law enforcement compared to individuals from other racial groups (Miller & Vittrup, 2020). A thorough analysis conducted by The Guardian revealed that 32% of African Americans who lost their lives at the hands of police were unarmed, highlighting the grave nature of these incidents (Miller & Vittrup, 2020). Beyond the anguish experienced by the victims

and their grieving families, the ramifications of police killings of unarmed African Americans extend far into the population. These tragic events can cast a wide net of psychological distress, affecting the mental health of individuals who may not have any direct connection to the deceased or the events themselves (Bor et al., 2018).

Exposure to graphic instances of police brutality directed at Black Americans across various social media platforms can profoundly inflict racial trauma on Black Americans (Williams, 2021). This pervasive imagery not only serves as a reminder of systemic oppression but also tends to provoke deep emotional and psychological distress among the Black American population, making the impact of such visual content (Williams, 2021). Racial trauma refers to experiences of actual or perceived racial discrimination that involve danger, harm, injury, shame, or humiliation; in addition, it includes witnessing harm inflicted on others of the same race due to actual or assumed racism (Comas-Diaz et al., 2019).

In Chapter 1, I present an overview of police brutality and how it affects the Black American population. This chapter includes a problem statement outlining the issues faced alongside the purpose of the study, which aims to explore the lived experiences of Black Americans who have been exposed to police brutality on social media and how it impacts their racial identity and emotional well-being. The research questions are included to guide this investigation, along with a theoretical framework that supports the analysis of these microaggressions, highlighting relevant theories and concepts, as well as the nature of the study and its framework. To ensure clarity, definitions of key terms and assumptions are provided. Moreover, the scope and delimitations of the research

acknowledge the limitations that may have affected the findings and interpretations of the study, and the significance of this research is specified.

### **Background**

Black Americans tend to harbor a significantly more harmful and distrustful view of police compared to their White counterparts (Jackson et al., 2021). This perspective is rooted in the historical context of policing in the United States, a narrative that is riddled with numerous instances of brutality, systemic discrimination, and egregious injustices perpetrated against Black communities throughout history (Jackson et al., 2021). Over the past 4 decades, there has been a significant and troubling increase in the percentage of unarmed Black individuals who have lost their lives at the hands of police officers in the United States (McLeory & Wang, 2024). According to research conducted by McLeory and Wang (2024), this trend highlights systemic issues within law enforcement agencies and points to a broader context of racial injustice. The prevalence of prejudice and implicit bias among law enforcement personnel not only positions Black individuals as more likely targets for violence but also raises the risk that they will endure harm through police mistreatment. This can result in instances where lethal force is applied unnecessarily and disproportionately toward Black people (McLeory & Wang, 2024). In an illustration of this disparity, statistics from 2021 revealed that although Black people make up approximately 13% of the overall population, they represented a staggering 27% of individuals killed by police officers that year alone (McLeory & Wang, 2024). These figures underscore the deeply entrenched biases that can lead to fatal encounters, raising critical questions about accountability, reform, and the need for systemic changes within

the policing framework (McLeory & Wang, 2024). Events such as racially motivated violence, wrongful arrests, and disproportionate surveillance have contributed to a pervasive narrative of mistrust. These historical wrongs, coupled with contemporary incidents of police violence and racial profiling, have created a complex web of fear and skepticism regarding law enforcement (Jackson et al., 2021). Consequently, these elements significantly shape the current attitudes toward police among Black Americans, leading to a general reluctance to engage with law enforcement as allies (Jackson et al., 2021). The implications of this mistrust extend to broader societal interactions, as they influence not only individual perceptions but also the collective consciousness of communities that have faced systemic oppression.

With modern entertainment, spanning the captivating narratives of primetime television shows, the detailed headlines of newspapers, the insightful commentary of TV news, the persuasive imagery of advertising, the dynamic storytelling of film, the thrilling competitions found in sports, and the immersive experiences offered by video games, it becomes evident that the media landscape has long struggled with delivering accurate and respectful portrayals of diverse racial and ethnic groups (Mastro, 2015). Historically, these representations have been lacking, often reinforcing stereotypes and failing to celebrate the richness of cultural diversity (Mastro, 2015). Individuals can gain valuable insights from the media, even when they do not consciously seek them out. Both cultivation theory and social cognitive theory propose that collective messages portrayed in various media forms, along with the prominent figures we observe, can profoundly shape perceptions of reality and, in turn, influence behaviors (Maier et al., 2014). This

dynamic interaction underscores how media consumption can subtly shape understanding of the world, influencing actions and reactions in everyday life. These messages encompass a wide array of communications, transcending mere direct messages aimed at informing an audience (Maier et al., 2014). They include every form of storytelling, each capable of effectively conveying rich narratives and insights about the intricacies of society (Maier et al., 2014). Whether through literature, digital media, or oral traditions, these diverse modes of expression illuminate the complexities of human experience, revealing the underlying truths that shape the collective understanding of the world (Maier et al., 2014).

Police misconduct has long plagued law enforcement, yet recent technological advancements have dramatically transformed accountability (Dawson, 2018; Hawkins, 2022). Throughout the evolution of mass media, a vivid portrayal of Black men has emerged through various forms, including print, images, and, eventually, audio and video (Shrikant & Sambaraju, 2021). The proliferation of social media platforms, the ubiquity of smartphones, and the implementation of body cameras are now providing the public with an extraordinary level of access to information about instances of police violence (Hawkins, 2022). Initially, they were depicted as lazy, submissive, enslaved people, painted with a broad brush as prone to violence, their behavior necessitating consistent policing (Shrikant & Sambaraju, 2021). Over time, this representation transformed into the image of mythical, violent individuals and was perceived as inherently dangerous to White people, particularly to white women (Shrikant & Sambaraju, 2021). Ultimately, they came to be portrayed as criminal thugs, indiscriminately linked to a wide array of

violent crimes, justifying the view that they deserved incarceration and death (Shrikant & Sambaraju, 2021). This newfound transparency empowers citizens and amplifies their voices in holding law enforcement accountable for their actions (Hawkins, 2022). These graphic recordings reveal the chilling reality of systemic injustice and serve as powerful catalysts for mass protests, igniting fervent calls for comprehensive reforms within the justice system and demanding accountability for the officers responsible for these tragic incidents (Dawson, 2018). Alexander et al. (2023) emphasized that the injuries and fatalities of Black Americans resulting from police involvement transcend mere racial health disparities. Some instances of police brutality garner extensive media attention, often paralleling the coverage typically afforded to terrorist attacks, contentious political occurrences, and natural disasters (Alexander et al., 2023). Consequently, the repercussions of such exposure extend beyond the directly impacted individuals, contributing to widespread psychological distress within the broader community and society (Alexander et al., 2023). Also known as spillover effects, people are most often indirectly or vicariously exposed to police brutality against African Americans via victimized relatives or friends, through discussions about these events with social contacts, by watching television, listening to the radio, reading the newspaper, or more recently, using social media (Alexander et al., 2023).

Williams (2021) emphasized that the constant exposure to images of police brutality directed at Black individuals on social media platforms can significantly contribute to the phenomenon of racial trauma among Black Americans. This exposure is particularly detrimental for younger Black individuals, who represent a demographic that

is more likely to be active on social media (Williams, 2021). Their cognitive and emotional development is ongoing at this stage, making them especially susceptible to the psychological impacts of such distressing content (Williams, 2021). The imagery and narratives surrounding incidents of police violence can resonate deeply, triggering feelings of fear, anger, and helplessness. Moreover, the potential for social media to serve as an unintended catalyst for racial trauma raises critical concerns about the mental health and well-being of these impressionable youth (Williams, 2021). The repetitive nature of these visual exposures might distort their perception of social interactions and authority figures and shape their identity formation in a context marked by pervasive societal violence (Williams, 2021). Thus, the implications of social media consumption regarding Black police brutality are multifaceted and warrant attention from mental health professionals, educators, and policymakers alike (Williams, 2021).

### **Problem Statement**

Police brutality within the Black American population is examined through a racialized lens that significantly influences both public perception and media representation. This issue is paramount due to its profound psychological and physiological health implications for affected communities, often witnessed in my role as a clinical mental health therapist. The intersection of police violence and racial identity can reinforce existing stereotypes and shape societal perceptions regarding Black Americans, as articulated by Shrikant and Sambaraju (2021). This research emphasizes the necessity of critically analyzing the multifaceted dimensions of police brutality, particularly in the context of systemic racism and its implications on the well-being of

Black Americans. There is a gap in research regarding the lived experiences of Black Americans who have encountered police brutality on social media and how it influences their racial identity and emotional well-being (Green et al., 2024). In their 2024 study, Green et al. (2024) pointed out that while the research focused on exploring anticipatory traumatic reactions related to various racial identity attitudes among participants, it lacked an investigation into the specific coping strategies employed to alleviate mental health distress experienced by individuals. This is significant, as understanding these coping mechanisms is crucial for addressing mental health challenges effectively.

Furthermore, the study primarily employed a quantitative research methodology, which, although informative, may not fully capture the nuanced experiences of the individuals involved. Therefore, conducting a qualitative study to gain deeper insights into the lived experiences of Black Americans would be beneficial. Such research could elucidate the intricate ways in which racial identity attitudes influence coping processes and mental health outcomes, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative interpretative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of Black Americans who have been exposed to police brutality on social media and how it impacts their racial identity and emotional well-being. According to Alang et al. (2022), police brutality refers to the conduct of police officers, both intentional and unintentional, that dehumanizes individuals. This behavior includes psychological violence, intimidation, neglect, verbal abuse, as well as physical

and sexual violence. There is a significant gap regarding the lived experiences of Black Americans, how their attitudes toward racial identity influence their perceptions of media representations of police violence, and how these attitudes affect their coping mechanisms in response to the distress associated with such depictions (Green et al., 2024). This study illuminates the impact of police brutality on Black Americans, offering insights into how they experience and perceive this violence. It delves into the portrayal of police brutality within the media and its specific effects on the Black community.

### **Research Questions**

RQ1: How do media stories of police brutality impact Black Americans' mental and emotional wellness?

RQ2: How have social media stories of police brutality impacted Black Americans' racial identity?

### **Theoretical and Conceptual Framework for the Study**

Critical race theory (CRT) emerged in the 1970s as a response to the perceived limitations of critical legal studies in addressing the intersection of race and racism within U.S. jurisprudence (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Legal scholars Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, and Richard Delgado developed this theory to highlight the intricate and nuanced ways race influences the law and legal institutions (Bhopal, 2023; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). They advocated for a comprehensive understanding of how racial dynamics shape legal systems, aiming to shed light on the pervasive impact of racial inequality within legal frameworks (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). CRT serves as a powerful reminder of the necessity to fully grasp and acknowledge the historical context in which contemporary

racial oppression has evolved and persisted, emphasizing the importance of recognizing the enduring impact of systemic racial injustice.

CRT is a framework rooted in intersectionality, a concept that examines how racism intersects with other social factors such as class, gender, sexuality, and disability (Gillborn, 2015). CRT aims to comprehensively understand how race impacts various aspects of everyday life. The analytical principles of CRT encompass five key tenets: counter-storytelling, the permanence of racism, Whiteness as property, interest convergence, and the critique of liberalism (Ford, 2023). These principles serve as a guide for analyzing and understanding the complexities of racial dynamics in society. By integrating intersectionality, CRT offers a practical framework that allows individuals to know how racism intersects with other factors like class, gender, sexuality, and disability (Gillborn, 2015). It equips individuals with the tools and principles to actively engage with and apply their understanding of how race shapes their daily experiences. This comprehensive approach encourages critical thinking and analysis of the multifaceted nature of racial dynamics in society.

The logical connections between the framework presented and my study approach indicate that police brutality serves as a sign of racism (Alang et al., 2022). CRT serves as a comprehensive framework for unpacking the complex, systemic nature of racism and its profound implications of police brutality, particularly within Black American communities (Samuels-Wortley, 2021). CRT states that racism goes beyond individual prejudices; it is a deeply rooted structural issue embedded in our legal and social systems. Through this lens, we can more effectively analyze the disproportionate impact of police

violence on Black Americans and how it affects their racial identity. CRT illuminates the historical and ongoing injustices that intricately shape these interactions, providing critical insights into the underlying factors that drive disparities in treatment and response within law enforcement.

### **Nature of the Study**

In this research, I used a qualitative interpretive phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of Black Americans who have been exposed to police brutality on social media and how it impacts their racial identity and emotional well-being. Qualitative research involves an in-depth exploration of a multifaceted social phenomenon within its natural context (Burkholder et al., 2020). This type of research relies on observation, detailed description, and thorough analysis of participants' behavior and perspectives (Burkholder et al., 2020). The primary goal of qualitative research is to provide comprehensive explanations and gain an understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. This research study used a phenomenological approach. This approach seeks to understand the experiences of individuals who share a common experience (Burkholder et al., 2020). Phenomenology primarily uses in-depth interviews for data collection, though observations and document analyses are also utilized (Burkholder et al., 2020). This approach was chosen over a quantitative one because I wanted to focus on the participants' experiences. Quantitative refers to interconnected variables defined in propositions that outline their relationships (Burkholder et al., 2020).

I recruited 12 participants to interview. According to Peoples (2021), most sample sizes range from 8 to 15. To determine suitability, interested individuals completed a 5-

questionnaire to assess their eligibility. For example, participants must have been at least 18 years old and identified as African American or Black. Any individuals who did not meet these specified requirements were respectfully excluded from participating in the study. An interpretive phenomenological approach employs semi-structured, open-ended interview questions to gather in-depth, qualitative data, giving research participants sufficient time to offer detailed and thorough responses (Peoples, 2021). According to Burkholder et al. (2020), the interpretive phenomenological approach is a qualitative research method that provides a deeper understanding of human experiences. It involves examining lived experiences and gathering the same types of data as descriptive phenomenology (Burkholder et al., 2020). However, unlike descriptive phenomenology, which primarily focuses on the surface-level description of experiences, the qualitative interpretive phenomenological approach analyzes the psychological and sociological factors that influence these experiences (Burkholder et al., 2020). This approach emphasizes the subjective meaning individuals ascribe to their experiences and seeks to uncover how social contexts, cultural backgrounds, and individual emotions shape their understanding of the world around them (Burkholder et al., 2020). Through this lens, researchers gain a richer, more nuanced perspective on how experiences are constructed and interpreted by the individuals involved. I created semistructured interview questions designed to draw out in-depth responses, facilitating a nuanced understanding of the participants' experiences and viewpoints.

## Definitions

*Black America or African American:* “A person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa. It includes people who indicate their race as Black or African American or report entries such as African American, Kenyan, Nigerian, or Haitian” (The U.S. Census Bureau, 2022).

*Black Lives Matter:* “Seeking to end police violence and advocate for the rights and dignity of Black lives” (Campbell, 2024, p. 1).

*Colorblindness:* “The belief in treating everyone ‘equally’ by treating everyone the same based on presumptions that differences (i.e., race, gender) are problematic is acknowledged” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 282).

*Complex trauma:* A specific category of distressing experiences that profoundly impact an individual (Bryant-Davis et al., 2017).

*Grief:* “A normal process that includes reactions to the loss of a person or thing to which an attachment relationship exists” (Lee & Robinson, 2019, p. 150)

*Microassault:* “A microassault is an explicit racial derogation characterized primarily by a verbal or nonverbal attack meant to hurt the intended victim through name-calling, avoidant behavior, or purposeful discriminatory actions” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 274).

*Microinsult:* “A microinsult is characterized by communications that convey rudeness and insensitivity and demean a person’s racial heritage or identity” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 274).

*Microinvalidations:* “Microinvalidations are characterized by communications that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person of color” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 274).

*Police brutality:* “The intentional and unintentional conduct of police officers that dehumanizes people, and it includes the perpetration of psychological violence and intimidation, neglect, verbal abuse, and physical and sexual violence” (Alang et al., 2022, p. 219).

*Racial microaggression:* “Racial microaggressions are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 273).

*Racism:* A form of emotional abuse that can lead to trauma (Williams, 2021).

*Racial trauma:* Experiences of actual or perceived racial discrimination that involve danger, harm, injury, shame, or humiliation; in addition, it includes witnessing harm inflicted on others of the same race due to actual or assumed racism (Comas-Diaz et al., 2019).

*Trauma:* “A stressful event that overwhelms people’s existing coping mechanisms” (Pryce et al., 2021, p. 1366).

### **Assumptions**

The preconceptions that I brought to the research study included the belief that the participants are Black Americans who have been affected by police brutality in the media and that they experience racial identity when witnessing police brutality. I held a

preconceived notion that the experiences of individuals are significantly shaped by their unique backgrounds and circumstances. With this understanding in mind, I presumed that a sample size of 10 to 15 participants would adequately capture Black Americans' complex experiences with police brutality. I assumed these participants would provide sincere and candid accounts of their narratives, engaging openly with interview questions regarding police brutality and their implications in the media. I also assumed that their willingness to share would shed light on their challenges, contributing to a richer and more comprehensive understanding of their experiences.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

This qualitative interpretive phenomenological approach aims to explore the lived experiences of Black Americans who have been exposed to police brutality on social media and how it impacts their racial identity and emotional well-being. Among a growing awareness of the phenomenon of police brutality and its detrimental effects on individuals across diverse backgrounds, this research delved deeply into the particular experiences Black Americans face. It highlighted how these experiences affect their psychological and physiological well-being. Furthermore, the study examined their attitudes toward racial identity and how these perspectives shape their interpretations of media portrayals of police violence. This interplay influences their understanding of such representations and plays a crucial role in shaping their coping mechanisms when confronted with the profound distress caused by these societal issues. Moreover, it examines a targeted demographic. Furthermore, this study delves into a specific demographic, engaging participants who are at least 18 years old. This age criterion is

intentionally selected to ensure that the findings accurately encapsulate the nuanced experiences of individuals from the Black American community who may have faced various forms of police brutality in the media. By concentrating on this key demographic, the research aims to shed light on the significant and often distressing realities these individuals encounter in their interactions with law enforcement.

### **Limitations**

One limitation of this study is that Zoom is a platform for recording semistructured interviews. While Zoom offers convenience and accessibility, it can inhibit open communication between the interviewer and participants. Many individuals may have hesitated to share personal or sensitive information with strangers over video conferencing platforms. This apprehension can stem from concerns about privacy and the fear that the recorded video may resurface, potentially affecting their personal or professional lives. The virtual nature of interactions may undermine rapport established in face-to-face conversations, affecting the depth and quality of shared information. As a result, insights from these interviews may need to accurately reflect participants' true feelings, which could have limited the study's overall findings.

A second limitation of this study was the potential for bias introduced by interviewing participants who may be familiar with me. When participants know the interviewer, they may feel uncomfortable or reluctant to share their experiences fully. This hesitation could stem from a fear of embarrassment or humiliation, as they might worry about being judged or having their vulnerabilities perceived in a negative light.

This familiarity can unintentionally create a power dynamic, pressuring participants to present their experiences in a favorable light.

A third limitation pertained to the ability to effectively bracket, which involves setting aside personal biases and preconceptions to engage with the research objectively. Bracketing can be particularly challenging in this context because I may have personal knowledge of the participants involved in the study. Familiarity can inadvertently bias my perceptions and interpretations, raising concerns about the trustworthiness of my research findings. Personal connections may skew my analysis and compromise the integrity of the research process. To ensure the integrity of my work, I discuss the strategies I employed to mitigate such biases and uphold objectivity in my research. This approach is elaborated upon in Chapter 3.

### **Significance**

The significance of this qualitative interpretive phenomenological approach is that it examined the experiences of police brutality as depicted through the lens of Black Americans who have been exposed to the representation of police brutality on various social media platforms. There was a gap in research regarding the lived experiences of Black Americans and how their attitudes toward racial identity influence their perceptions of media representations of police violence. Furthermore, additional investigation was necessary to comprehend how these attitudes influence their coping mechanisms in response to the distress associated with such depictions (Green et al., 2024). This research explored the coping mechanisms employed by Black Americans to manage the emotional distress related to these depictions, providing deeper insights into

their psychological and social responses. By focusing on the qualitative aspects, we can capture the nuances of personal narratives and social contexts that quantitative data might overlook, ultimately enriching the discourse surrounding media impact and racial identity.

Furthermore, the research explored the broader implications of such systemic issues on community trust, safety, and overall quality of life, providing a comprehensive understanding of the intersection between systemic inequality and police violence in the Black American population. The results collected from this qualitative study inform the development of tailored educational initiatives and awareness-building strategies. Moreover, these insights can be instrumental in helping clients navigate their experiences and interventions that are both sensitive to and supportive of diversity. The implications of these efforts extend the potential for positive advancements in mental health, the development of a more culturally sensitive and inclusive environment, and the promotion of systemic change through proactive advocacy and awareness campaigns.

### **Significance to Practice**

Research on police brutality plays a vital role in advancing therapeutic practice and shaping policies that support the Black American population. This research is crucial not only for understanding the systemic issues but also for addressing the specific psychological and physiological well-being of individuals affected by such violence. By delving deeply into the impacts of police brutality represented in social media, researchers can gain insights into how these incidents affect the racial identity and mental health of Black Americans. Such understanding is instrumental in developing more

effective interventions, comprehensive support systems, and well-informed public policies that cater specifically to the needs of this marginalized community. From an intervention standpoint, the examination of both the psychological and societal impacts of police brutality is essential. This knowledge can be integrated into training programs for counselors, equipping them with the skills to recognize signs of trauma related to these experiences. Counselors can then be better prepared to address the unique psychological challenges faced by victims. Additionally, fostering community support initiatives is critical for empowerment, allowing individuals to share their experiences and promote healing within their communities.

In terms of support systems, research can help identify critical gaps that exist in current services. For instance, it is essential to understand how police brutality impacts the economic stability of victims' families, as this often exacerbates their distress. Improving legal advocacy support is another critical area; victims should have access to informed legal assistance and resources tailored to their experiences. Moreover, increasing public perception and awareness of the effects of police brutality can contribute to a more empathetic society that stands in solidarity with affected individuals. Regarding informed policies, research can serve as a powerful advocacy tool for reforms in policing practices. These reforms include implementing mandatory body cameras for officers and enhancing law enforcement accountability and transparency.

Additionally, advocating for comprehensive de-escalation training for police officers can help reduce violence and improve community interactions. Legislative measures can also be pushed forward to strengthen legal protections for victims of police

brutality, addressing systemic inequalities that have persisted for generations. By reinforcing these structures and advocating for change, research contributes to the foundational support necessary to create a safer and more equitable society for Black Americans.

### **Significance to Theory**

CRT is a crucial sociopolitical framework that comprehensively examines and reinterprets the complex dynamics between race, racism, and societal power structures (Hawkins, 2023). Within the context of modern America, CRT delves deeply into the systematic ways in which racism is entrenched within various institutions—such as education, law, and the economy—and how these systems perpetuate inequality and marginalization (McLeory & Wang, 2024). Furthermore, CRT advocates for a critical examination of discourses that are frequently overlooked or devalued in mainstream narratives (McLeory & Wang, 2024). This includes recognizing the voices and experiences of marginalized populations that have historically been silenced. By encouraging individuals and communities to engage with these often-ignored perspectives, CRT seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how these forms of oppression can be effectively challenged and dismantled. The ultimate goal of CRT is to foster an equitable playing field for all citizens, advocating for policies and practices that promote social justice and equality (McLeory & Wang, 2024).

Police brutality is frequently analyzed through the lens of CRT, which provides essential tools to deconstruct and understand the systemic factors that contribute to racial disparities within law enforcement practices across various jurisdictions (Lee &

Robinson, 2019). CRT emphasizes the notion that laws and policies are not just neutral instruments. Furthermore, CRT delves into the historical roots and evolution of racialized policing in the United States, tracing how past injustices, such as slavery and segregation, have shaped contemporary law enforcement practices (Lee & Robinson, 2019). This framework also scrutinizes the intersectionality of race with other social categories, such as socioeconomic status and gender, demonstrating how these intersections can compound the effects of police violence and discrimination against marginalized communities. By examining these complexities, CRT offers a comprehensive perspective that highlights the need for reform and accountability within policing systems, advocating for a critical re-evaluation of policies that contribute to systemic racism in law enforcement.

### **Significance to Social Change**

Police brutality and social change are deeply interconnected issues that have served as a catalyst for activism, policy reform, and significant societal movements throughout recent history. The term “police brutality” refers not only to the direct physical abuse perpetrated by law enforcement officers but also encompasses a broader spectrum of actions that dehumanize individuals, reflecting systemic imperfections within the policing framework (Alang et al., 2022). This conduct can be both intentional and unintentional, manifesting in various forms such as psychological violence and intimidation, neglect, verbal abuse, and, in more glaring cases, physical and sexual violence (Alang et al., 2022). The ramifications of police brutality extend beyond individual incidents; they create an environment of fear and distrust toward law

enforcement, particularly among marginalized communities. This phenomenon includes physical violence, characterized by excessive use of force in apprehending suspects or controlling crowds (Alexander et al., 2023).

Additionally, psychological abuse takes many forms, including racial profiling—wherein individuals are targeted based solely on their race or ethnicity—and unlawful killings that violate both ethical norms and legal standards. Historically, instances of police brutality have not only sparked profound societal outrage but have also led to a series of significant social movements around the themes of justice and inequality. These protests have underscored the need for reforms in policing policies, urging lawmakers to critically examine and overhaul legislation governing police conduct. Various activist movements have emerged in response to these societal demands, advocating for systemic changes. These movements aim to address the root causes of police misconduct, proposing solutions such as enhanced training for officers on de-escalation techniques, recognizing bias, and emphasizing the importance of community engagement. Moreover, activists advocate for the establishment of more robust oversight mechanisms, which include independent review boards to monitor police activities, transparent reporting practices, and robust protocols for addressing complaints against law enforcement personnel.

Additionally, the concept of community policing initiatives has gained traction as a means to foster trust and collaboration between law enforcement and the communities they serve. These initiatives encourage officers to engage more directly with community members, understand their concerns, and build relationships that lead to more effective

and respectful policing. Thus, the relationship between police brutality and social change continues to evolve, reflecting society's ongoing struggle for justice, equity, and human rights. Each incident of brutality becomes a standard for broader societal reflection, driving a narrative that seeks not only to confront past injustices but also to envision a future where accountability and community responsiveness are paramount in policing practices.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I addressed the lack of empirical evidence and the need for additional research on Black Americans, how they are racially profiled, and how witnessing police brutality in the media may cause psychological and physiological distress. Police brutality encompasses both the intentional and unintentional actions of law enforcement officers that serve to dehumanize individuals within their jurisdiction (Alang et al., 2022). This issue manifests in various forms, including the insidious perpetuation of psychological violence that instills fear and anxiety in the Black American population. It is characterized by acts of intimidation that undermine personal dignity, neglect of duty that places individuals at risk, and verbal abuse that belittles and humiliates. Moreover, police brutality may escalate to physical violence, inflicting harm on the body, and even sexual violence, which strips away autonomy and can leave deep emotional scars. Each instance of such conduct violates individual rights and erodes public trust in the law enforcement system. (Jackson et al., 2021).

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this qualitative interpretive phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of Black Americans who have been exposed to police brutality on social media and how it impacts their racial identity and emotional well-being. Undue police violence, a concept encompassing the application of force that is inherently violent, unjustified, and excessive, is a critical concern in contemporary law enforcement (Green et al., 2024). It refers not solely to the actions of the police but also highlights the far-reaching physical and psychological consequences endured by both survivors of such violence and witnesses to these events (Green & Evans, 2021). The ramifications extend beyond immediate harm, influencing community trust, mental health, and social cohesion. Research indicates a troubling trend: Black Americans experience a disproportionate level of violence from law enforcement compared to other racial and ethnic groups (Green et al., 2024). This excessive use of force against this demographic raises significant concerns regarding systemic issues within policing practices, which imply that these actions may serve as a manifestation of racial discrimination entrenched in the criminal justice system (Green et al., 2024). The statistical disparities underscore an urgent need to address and reform police practices to ensure equitable treatment across all communities. This is essential not only for the safety of individuals but also for the health of society as a whole, as it raises questions about the moral underpinnings of law enforcement and its role in perpetuating inequality.

In recent years, a wave of heartbreaking representations of police brutality against Black Americans has flooded social media platforms (Williams, 2021). Graphic images

and videos highlighting these incidents have ignited widespread protests, compelling calls for policy reform, and intense discussions about racial injustice (Williams, 2021). These visual portrayals have not only kept the realities of Black Americans' deaths and anti-Black state violence in the public eye but have also served as a constant reminder of the trauma inflicted on individuals and communities, potentially stirring deep-seated racial wounds and grief among viewers (Williams, 2021).

CRT originated in the 1970s by legal scholars Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, and Richard Delgado as a response to the perceived shortcomings of critical legal studies in addressing the role of race and racism within U.S. jurisprudence (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004). It sought to bring attention to the complex intersection of race and the law, advocating for a more comprehensive understanding of how racial dynamics influence legal systems and institutions. The theory aimed to shed light on how race operates within the law and the broader societal impacts of racial inequality within legal frameworks (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004). CRT serves as a vital reminder of the importance of understanding and acknowledging the historical context in which contemporary racial oppression has evolved and persists (Anthym & Tuitt, 2019).

A conceptual framework combines multiple theories because it recognizes that a single approach may not be sufficient to analyze the subject being studied. It is used to make conceptual distinctions and bring different ideas together. CRT enables individuals with historically underrepresented racial and ethnic backgrounds to share their stories in opposition to the prevailing viewpoint (Iheduru-Anderson et al., 2022). CRT is a conceptual framework that describes how microaggressions reveal how institutionalized

racism structurally mediates ordinary racist events. It is motivated by white supremacist ideas that affirm the superiority of a dominant group over subordinate groups in academic and professional contexts (Iheduru-Anderson et al., 2022).

### **Literature Search Strategy**

To retrieve relevant information, I researched scholarly articles on police brutality as depicted through various media entities within the Black American population. I employed the resources available through the Walden University Online Library and Google Scholar's search capabilities. I searched for scholarly peer-reviewed articles through Sociological Science, Sage, Routledge, American Psychological Association, and EBSCO.

To search for specific articles, I began with the keyword *police brutality*. Other variables or keywords utilized were *microaggressions*, *African American*, *Black*, *critical race theory*, *police violence*, *systemic racism*, *activism*, *Hands Up Don't Shoot*, *Proactive measures*, *mental health*, *media impact*, and *Black Lives Matter*. To search for my framework, I used the term *critical race theory*.

Most of the scholarly, peer-reviewed articles I came across were published relatively recently, within 3 to 5 years of my expected graduation date. These articles were carefully selected to provide current and comprehensive information on microaggressions. In addition to serving as primary sources of information, some articles supported the findings and conclusions drawn in the research.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

CRT states that we must fundamentally rethink and expand our conception of race and racism (Hawkins, 2022). It asserts that racism is not solely manifested through overt acts of racial discrimination by individuals (Hawkins, 2022). Instead, CRT advocates for a comprehensive framework that reveals and addresses the insidious and systemic mechanisms through which racism, particularly Anti-Blackness, permeates our society (Hawkins, 2022). The theoretical foundation of CRT and social dominance theory unfolds rich contextual nuances, illuminating the complex and systemic influences that policing exerts on Black families (Harris & Amutah-Onukagha, 2019). These frameworks enable us to gain a deeper understanding of the multifaceted dynamics of power and oppression that shape the lived experiences of these families in the context of law enforcement practices (Harris & Amutah-Onukagha, 2019).

This understanding is crucial for developing effective strategies to confront and dismantle racial oppression in contemporary society. Additionally, CRT, a transformative theoretical foundation developed in legal studies, seeks to analyze and understand the pervasive role race and racism play in shaping the experiences of People of Color (Jones, 2022). CRT challenges the conventional understanding of racism as solely based on individual acts of prejudice and instead focuses on how racism is ingrained in legal systems, institutions, and societal structures (Jones, 2022). Originating in the 1970s and 1980s, CRT was a response to the limitations of traditional civil rights movements in addressing systemic racism. It emphasizes the need to examine inequities and power dynamics from a broader ideological and historical perspective beyond personal

experiences alone. The central premise of this statement is that racism is not an irregular occurrence but rather a commonplace phenomenon that has become deeply embedded within the fabric of our society (Jones, 2022). Racism has pervasively permeated society, leading to its normalization and naturalization. However, with its transformative nature, CRT offers a hopeful and inspiring vision for change.

### **Conceptual Framework**

As a conceptual framework, CRT emphasizes several key aspects crucial to its understanding and application. These include the recognition of the centrality of race and racism in shaping societal structures and power dynamics (Iheduru-Anderson et al., 2022). CRT also involves challenging dominant ideologies that perpetuate racial inequities while advocating for social justice and praxis, which involves the practical application of theory into action. Additionally, CRT centers on experiential knowledge, respecting and valuing the lived experiences of racially marginalized individuals (Iheduru-Anderson et al., 2022). It also emphasizes the importance of honoring historical context and recognizing the historical roots of racial injustices, fostering a more empathetic and understanding approach.

Furthermore, CRT promotes interdisciplinary perspectives, bridging various fields of study to comprehensively address issues of race and racism in society. This emphasis on interdisciplinarity is particularly inclusive, making us feel part of a larger community working towards a common goal. CRT originates in legal studies and aims to challenge the assumptions surrounding race neutrality and colorblind ideologies (Iheduru-Anderson et al., 2022). This theory is particularly well-suited for examining how diverse racialized

groups navigate and experience what may appear to be race-neutral White spaces (Iheduru-Anderson et al., 2022). By examining the intricacies of societal power structures and the influence of race, CRT offers a framework through which to critically analyze and comprehend the dynamics at play within these environments.

### **The Early Years: The Five Tenets**

CRT is based on intersectionality, which examines how racism interacts with other factors like class, gender, sexuality, and disability (Gillborn, 2015). It provides the tools and principles to understand how race affects everyday life. The analytical principles have been described as a collection of five tenets: counter-storytelling, the permanence of racism, Whiteness as property, interest convergence, and the critique of liberalism (Ford, 2023). CRT, based on intersectionality, provides a practical framework for understanding how racism intersects with other factors, such as class, gender, sexuality, and disability (Gillborn, 2015). It equips the tools and principles to actively engage with and apply our understanding of how race shapes our daily experiences. Ford (2023) outlines the analytical principles as a guide for active involvement, encompassing five tenets: counter-storytelling, the permanence of racism, Whiteness as property, interest convergence, and the critique of liberalism.

Counter-storytelling, as defined by Solorzano et al. (2002), is the primary principle of CRT. It is a method that shares the experiences of individuals whose stories are often overlooked, particularly those on the margins of society. A counter-story serves as a tool to uncover, examine, and confront the prevailing narratives of racial advantage (Solorzano et al., 2002). These narratives disrupt complacency, question the prevailing

conversation on race, and advance the fight for racial change. Using counter-stories, they challenge privileged discourses, represent the majority (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004), and give a voice to marginalized groups. By amplifying the voices and experiences of individuals from marginalized communities, we present an alternative viewpoint to the historically accepted narratives that have been influenced by the perspectives of the White majority (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2020). This enables a more diverse and inclusive representation of truth and lived experiences, underscoring the transformative power of counter-storytelling in the pursuit of racial justice.

According to Solorzano et al. (2002), there are three types of counter-stories: personal stories or narratives, stories or narratives from others, and composite stories or narratives. Personal stories or narratives describe an individual's experiences with racism and sexism. These stories are often autobiographical reflections of the author's life experiences. They combine the author's personal experiences with their analysis of legal cases and a broader critique of society. However, a narrative that tells another person's story provides a broader perspective. It can reveal experiences with and responses to racism and sexism as told in a third-person voice. This type of counter-narrative typically presents a biographical analysis of the experiences of a person of color, again concerning U.S. institutions and within a sociohistorical context. Composite stories or narratives utilize various types of information or data to convey the experiences of people of color, focusing on their encounters with race, gender, and social class. These counter-stories often include biographical and autobiographical analyses, as the authors create composite

characters and put them in social, historical, and political contexts to discuss racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of oppression.

The second tenet is the permanence of racism. It is crucial to recognize that accepting the idea of racism's permanence involves taking a realistic view of American society. Within a CRT framework, a realistic view means acknowledging the significant and ongoing impact of racism in American society; this impact can occur both consciously and unconsciously (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). The permanence of racism implies that racist hierarchical structures exert control over all political, economic, and social domains, underscoring the pervasive nature of racism in American society (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004).

The third tenet is Whiteness as property. As highlighted by DeCuir and Dixson (2004), the historical narrative of race and racism in the United States, along with the profound influence of U.S. jurisprudence in shaping perceptions of race, provides insight into the concept of Whiteness as a form of property interest. Property operates on three levels: the right of possession, the right to use, and the right to disposition (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Furthermore, the right to transfer, the right to use and enjoyment, and the right of exclusion are essential attributes associated with property rights. It has been suggested that historically, these functions and attributes of property have been utilized in establishing Whiteness as a form of property (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004).

The fourth tenet is interest convergence. The advancement of civil rights in communities of color, particularly for African Americans, warrants a tempered sense of celebration (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Early civil rights legislation initially provided

African Americans with only the most fundamental rights, many of which had been enjoyed by White individuals for centuries (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). This historical context underscores the importance of ongoing efforts, which serve as a beacon of hope, in achieving true equality and justice. The substantial economic and social gaps between affluent White individuals and the majority of communities of color underscore the challenge of ensuring that initiatives supported by White elites will effectively address the needs of people of color (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). In light of these disparities, efforts that exclusively serve the self-interests of White elites are unlikely to bring about meaningful change in the lives of individuals from marginalized communities.

The fifth tenet is the critique of liberalism. The CRT scholars criticize three key principles adopted by liberal legal ideology: the idea of colorblindness, the neutrality of the law, and incremental change. Although these principles may seem ideal at first glance, as they could potentially allow for equal opportunity for all, the history of racism in the U.S., where rights and opportunities were granted or denied based mainly on race, shows that the notion of a colorblind and neutral law is insufficient to address its harmful consequences (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Furthermore, colorblindness overlooks the enduring impact of racism and the marginalization of people of color. CRT scholars argue that the concept of colorblindness has been used to justify disregarding and eradicating race-based policies that were created to tackle societal inequality (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). In essence, advocating for a colorblind society overlooks the fact that historical inequity, lack of opportunity, and oppression cannot simply be resolved by disregarding race in today's society (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Moreover, adopting a

colorblind ideology does not eliminate the possibility that racism and racist acts will persist.

### **The Later Years: The Eight Tenets**

As CRT collaborations continued to develop and explore new concepts, they identified eight essential tenets for working in CRT. CRT emphasizes the permanence of race and racism as its primary concept, highlighting that racism is not just a constant but a pervasive and enduring element of U.S. society (Martinez, 2022). It impacts multiple facets of life, including politics, law, and education, and is so deeply ingrained that it often goes unnoticed by those who are privileged (Martinez, 2022).

In seeking to end all forms of oppression, CRT is pivotal in challenging mainstream ideas like race neutrality, equal opportunity, objectivity, colorblindness, and merit (Martinez, 2022). CRT questions arguments against policies like affirmative action and scrutinizes hiring and admissions practices that claim to be neutral but often exclude people of color under the guise of merit or “fit” (Martinez, 2022). According to Martinez (2022), some may argue that these supposedly neutral ideas conceal the self-interest, power, and societal privilege of dominant groups. This self-interest is linked to CRT’s third tenet, interest convergence, which Derrick Bell discussed, stating that racial progress for people of color only happens when it benefits White people (Martinez, 2022).

Bell proposed the third principle, known as the principle of interest convergence. According to Bell’s theory, white leaders will only lend their support to racial progress for people of color when it also benefits white people (Martinez, 2022). However, it is

essential to note that this progress is not guaranteed and can fluctuate over time, introducing an additional layer of uncertainty and complexity to the issue. The 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision was often celebrated as a moral victory for African Americans (Martinez, 2022). Conversely, Bell contended that the decision was heavily influenced by the U.S. government's desire to bolster its international image during the Cold War era (Martinez, 2022). This was a time when the Soviet Union and China were seizing upon instances of racial violence in the United States to tarnish America's reputation as a democratic leader. As a result, Bell argued that the Brown decision was more about gaining strategic leverage in the battle against communism rather than genuinely addressing the issue of racism (Martinez, 2022). This example illustrates the intricate interplay between racial progress and broader geopolitical interests during that era.

The fourth tenet of CRT emphasizes the idea that race is a social construct. This means that race is not a product of biology, but rather a social construct (Martinez, 2022). This notion is closely tied to Michael Omi and Howard Winant's theory of racial formation. Despite the acknowledgment by experts that race is not biologically grounded, people continue to categorize others based on race (Martinez, 2022). These categories are continually shifting, a process significantly influenced by political struggles. The idea of race as a social construct suggests that it is perceived as a permanent characteristic and is used to structure and define the social landscape (Martinez, 2022).

Sojourner Truth, a pioneer in the United States, is among the earliest advocates of intersectionality, a crucial concept in CRT developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw (Martinez,

2022). In her influential speech “Ain’t I a Woman?,” Truth highlighted how society tends to classify individuals into simplistic groups such as Black/white and woman/man. She demonstrated how the various aspects of her identity intersect and shape her experiences. In 1989, Crenshaw authored a significant essay that introduced and elucidated the concept of intersectionality (Martinez, 2022). She argued that a sole focus on race or gender does not provide a complete perspective, particularly for Black women who might be disregarded in both feminist and anti-racist dialogues. Intersectionality, she contended, is an inclusive approach that addresses the unique experiences of Black women (Martinez, 2022).

One of the fundamental concepts is anti-essentialism, which is closely connected to intersectionality, the second part of the fifth tenet. This concept challenges the notion that all individuals within a particular racial group share uniform thoughts, behaviors, and beliefs (Martinez, 2022). While there may be a sense of solidarity and commonality within racial or cultural groups, it is essential to recognize that each person has unique perspectives, lived experiences, and identities (Martinez, 2022). CRT scholars caution against essentializing cultures and racial groups, emphasizing the need to move beyond generalizations. This emphasis is a call to action, motivating us to adopt a more nuanced and individualized approach to understanding and addressing issues related to race and culture (Martinez, 2022).

The concept of interdisciplinarity, the sixth principle, is discussed by Martinez (2022) in connection with Gloria Ladson-Billings. Interdisciplinarity combines different academic fields, and Ladson-Billings explores its historical development (Martinez,

2022). In legal studies, there was a time when incorporating ideas from other disciplines was considered unacceptable. Scholars such as Delgado, Bell, and Williams, who proposed innovative approaches, faced significant rejection—a plight with which many in the audience may empathize (Martinez, 2022). Interdisciplinarity challenges scholars to move beyond rigid, traditional frameworks. Similar to the activism of the 1960s that paved the way for the establishment of Ethnic Studies, CRT draws upon diverse scholarly traditions to better understand and address people’s experiences (Martinez, 2022).

One of the main ideas of CRT is valuing personal experiences, referred to as the centrality of experiential knowledge, as its seventh tenet. CRT scholars use counterstories to share the real-life experiences of people of color. This helps challenge common beliefs and racial stereotypes (Martinez, 2022). Derrick Bell noted that the storyteller’s voice is crucial in CRT because it highlights resistance and the desire for change, which might not be understood by those seen as traditionally authoritative (Martinez, 2022).

The eighth key idea of CRT emphasizes the commitment to social justice, a significant factor in distinguishing its storytelling method. Unlike conventional narratives, the counter-story in CRT holds a unique position as it openly seeks to confront racial, gender, and class oppression (Martinez, 2022). This method utilizes personal narratives to highlight the significance of racial experiences, challenge stereotypes, and expose injustices, thereby empowering the audience with a deeper understanding of the issues (Martinez, 2022).

## Literature Review

### Police Brutality in the Media

Incidents of police violence against unarmed citizens, particularly those that capture widespread media attention, significantly erode public trust in law enforcement and can severely undermine the perceived legitimacy of legal authority (Desmond et al., 2016). Such high-profile cases often spark outrage and provoke discussions about systemic issues within the justice system, leading to calls for reform and accountability (Desmond et al., 2016). With the evolution of portable video recording technology, incidents of police misconduct that once relied solely on nearby witnesses can now be shared worldwide (Desmond et al., 2016). This increased accessibility is further fueled by Internet-based news platforms and 24/7 news channels, which are powerful tools for spreading reports of police wrongdoing (Desmond et al., 2016). Recently, these events have grabbed the American public's attention, sparked significant outrage, and stimulated intense conversations in communities and on social media (Desmond et al., 2016).

On March 3, 1991, Rodney King, an unarmed and innocent man, found himself at the center of a harrowing scene (Iheme, 2020). In a brutal display of excessive force, he was relentlessly beaten by a group of 14 police officers from the Los Angeles Police Department, representing a shocking moment of violence that would spark outrage and demand for justice across the nation (Iheme, 2020). A bystander filmed the brutal event and forwarded it to the press. At a packed press conference, Los Angeles police chief Daryl Gates spoke candidly about the harrowing incident involving Rodney King (Iheme,

2020). He acknowledged that the officers had struck Mr. King a staggering 56 times with their metal batons, inflicting severe pain and suffering (Iheme, 2020).

Additionally, he revealed that they had unleashed approximately 50,000 volts of electricity through a Taser on his body, a method that demonstrated an appalling disregard for humane treatment (Iheme, 2020). Chief Gates went on to express that this egregious use of force was utterly excessive and assured the public that disciplinary action would be taken against the officers involved in this brutal encounter (Iheme, 2020). Since the traumatic events surrounding the beating of Rodney King in 1991, there has been a significant increase in media coverage regarding the alarming pattern of police brutality against Black Americans. The aftermath of King's beating marked a pivotal point in the national conversation about race and law enforcement in the United States, bringing to light the often-overlooked incidence of violence perpetrated by police. Over the years, numerous high-profile cases have emerged, sparking widespread protests and movements aimed at addressing systemic racism and advocating for justice. These incidents have raised awareness and prompted calls for substantial reforms within the policing system, highlighting the urgent need for accountability, transparency, and a nationwide reevaluation of law enforcement practices.

### ***Sandra Bland***

Sandra Bland's arrest began with a minor traffic violation but rapidly escalated because of the interaction between her and the arresting officer (Lowrey-Kinberg & Sullivan Buker, 2017). During a tense interaction, Officer Encinia threatened to point a Taser at Sandra Bland and physically forced her down onto the harsh roadside pavement

(Pitman et al., 2019). Following this incident, she was unexpectedly charged with assaulting a public servant (Pitman et al., 2019). Just 3 days later, the tragic news broke that Bland had been found dead in her jail cell. The coroner, after an extensive investigation, ruled her death a suicide; however, many people strongly dispute this conclusion, insisting that Bland would not have taken her own life (Pitman et al., 2019).

### ***George Floyd***

In a shocking and tragic event that unfolded in broad daylight, George Floyd lost his life as a White police officer knelt with excessive force on the back of his neck for an agonizing 9 minutes (Iheme, 2020). Disturbingly, three of those minutes passed while Mr. Floyd lay unresponsive, an image that has become seared into the national consciousness, igniting widespread outrage and demands for justice (Iheme, 2020). The autopsy report, carried out by a department affiliated with the police, detailed several significant health issues that contributed to Mr. Floyd's death (Iheme, 2020). It stated that he suffered from arteriosclerotic and hypertensive heart disease, indicating underlying cardiovascular problems (Iheme, 2020). Additionally, the report noted the presence of fentanyl intoxication, a potent opioid, as well as recent use of methamphetamine, further complicating his health situation, thereby mitigating or partially excusing the gruesome execution witnessed worldwide, carried out by Derek Chauvin and the three police officers who assisted him (Iheme, 2020).

### ***Eric Garner***

The confrontation between Eric Garner and the police unfolded dramatically and was recorded by a bystander, creating a pivotal moment in public discourse. In the

footage, Garner can be seen repeatedly gasping, “I can’t breathe,” as Officer Daniel Pantaleo applies a compression of the neck or a chokehold (Smiley & Fakunle, 2016; Holmes, 2020). Despite his urgent pleas for help, the officers maintained their hold until he ultimately fell silent and unresponsive, highlighting the tragic outcome of this incident.

***Michael Brown, Jr.***

Michael Brown, Jr., an 18-year-old, tragically lost his life on August 9, 2014, after being shot multiple times during a confrontation with Darren Wilson, an officer of the Ferguson Police Department (Smiley & Fakunle, 2016). This incident took place in the city of Ferguson, Missouri, and it sparked widespread protests and discussions about police conduct and racial tensions in the community (Smiley & Fakunle, 2016). Brown’s untimely death became a pivotal moment in the national conversation about justice and equality (Smiley & Fakunle, 2016).

***Breonna Taylor***

On the evening of March 13, 2020, police officers assembled outside an apartment building in Louisville, Kentucky, preparing to execute a no-knock warrant connected to a narcotics investigation (Cecil, 2024). The targeted apartment was home to 26-year-old Breonna Taylor, who watched a movie with her boyfriend, Kenneth Walker, before drifting off to sleep in her cozy room (Cecil, 2024). Just minutes after the officers forcefully breached the door, chaos erupted. Breonna Taylor’s life was abruptly cut short as she was shot by the police during the execution of the warrant, leaving a devastating impact on her loved ones and the community (Cecil, 2024).

***Tamir Rice***

Tamir Rice, a 12-year-old boy, was fatally shot by two police officers while innocently playing with a toy gun in a public park in Cleveland, Ohio (Smiley & Fakunle, 2016; Bryan, 2021). The incident unfolded when Officers Loehmann and Garmback responded to an emergency call from an unidentified White man who claimed that a young man was threatening nearby citizens by pointing a firearm at them (Bryan, 2021). Unfortunately, the officers arrived on the scene without realizing the “man” was a young boy engaged in imaginative play (Bryan, 2021). This tragic misunderstanding led to a heartbreaking loss of life and raised significant concerns about the perceptions and responses of law enforcement in such situations.

***Freddie Gray***

Freddie Gray, 25 years old, died on April 19, 2015, from multiple injuries, including three fractured vertebrae, damage to his voice box, and an 80% severing of his spine at the neck, following an altercation with officers from the Baltimore Police officers Caesar Goodson, Garret Miller, Edward Nero, William Porter, Brian Rice, and Alicia White in Baltimore, Maryland (Smiley & Fakunle, 2016).

**Systematic Racism*****Microaggressions***

Bryant-Davis et al. (2017) categorized police violence against individuals from racial and ethnic marginalized communities as an unsettling and devastating event that resonates at both racial and cultural levels. These traumatic occurrences can manifest in various forms, including the experience of witnessing police brutality inflicted upon

others, enduring racial microaggressions—like being derogatorily addressed with a racial slur by a police officer—or facing imminent threats of harm (Bryant-Davis et al., 2017). Furthermore, these experiences can escalate to physical assault or, in the most tragic instances, result in murder, leaving lasting scars on the affected communities (Bryant-Davis et al., 2017).

Dr. Chester Pierce, a Black psychiatrist, coined the term microaggression in 1970 as a subtle experience of racism constantly encountered in everyday life (Douds & Hout, 2020; Sue et al., 2007). Psychologist Derald Wing Sue and his colleagues have reinvigorated the study of microaggressions. Their work has involved extensive efforts to classify and differentiate various microaggressions, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of this psychological phenomenon. Microaggressions are subtle, everyday actions or comments, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate derogatory, hostile, or insulting messages to people of color (Offermann et al., 2014). Sue et al. (2007) categorized microaggressions into three types: microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations. These can occur in brief verbal exchanges, subtle behavioral cues, or environmental cues and may contribute to a pervasive atmosphere of discrimination and disrespect (Offermann et al., 2014). These actions and comments may seem trivial to the perpetrator, but they can have a significant negative impact on the individuals targeted. Sue et al. (2007) defined a microassault as a verbal or nonverbal attack used to hurt the victim through name-calling, avoidant behavior, or purposeful discriminatory actions.

On the other hand, a microinsult occurs when someone rudely and insensitively communicates, belittling a person's racial heritage or identity (Sue et al., 2007).

Microinvalidation is a type of communication that ignores, denies, or dismisses the thoughts, feelings, or experiences of a person of color (Sue et al., 2007). It is crucial to acknowledge and confront these subtle, often unintentional acts of discrimination to foster an inclusive, diverse, and respectful environment for everyone. Additionally, Sue et al. (2007) outlined nine distinct categories of racial microaggressions, each with its unique description and impact:

1. Assumptions that a person of color is not a true American.
2. Assumptions of lesser intelligence.
3. Statements that convey colorblindness or denial of the importance of race.
4. Assumptions of criminality or dangerousness.
5. Denials of individual racism.
6. Promotion of the myth of meritocracy.
7. Assumptions that one's cultural background and communication styles are pathological.
8. Being treated as a second-class citizen.
9. Having to endure environmental messages of being unwelcome or devalued.

### ***Racism***

Although the civil rights movement had an effect on changing racial interactions in this society, racism continues to plague the United States (Sue et al., 2007). Racism has various definitions (Chou et al., 2012). Bohonos (2023) asserted, "Racism benefits whites by providing a source of enjoyment and a common ground for ritualized bonding. It protects the property interests of whites by establishing white spaces that are hostile to

People of Color” (p. 607). Racism has been deeply interwoven into the lives of Black Americans for an extensive period. However, the present-day manifestation of racism differs significantly from the explicit and direct acts of hostility and discrimination that were prevalent in the past (Holder et al., 2015). Contemporary racism is characterized by covert, indirect, and ambiguous expressions, which pose challenges in recognizing and addressing its existence (Holder et al., 2015). The experience of feeling discriminated against can have profound, detrimental effects on one’s health. For instance, the perception of racism—a deeply ingrained societal issue—has been linked with a range of severe medical conditions, including dangerously elevated blood pressure and the onset of heart disease, as noted in the research by Chou et al. (2012). Black Americans face the profound burden of racial trauma, which exacerbates their challenges. Research has indicated that they are subjected to higher rates of perceived racism compared to other racial and ethnic groups, highlighting a unique and distressing dimension of their experience in American society (Chou et al., 2012). This underscores the need for continued efforts to combat racism and promote social justice.

Offermann et al. (2014) argued that many believe color blindness is fair and nondiscriminatory as it allows for the perception of all individuals as fundamentally similar and treating everyone equally, despite the controversy surrounding the concept. On the other hand, some have argued that being color blind overlooks the racially discriminatory experiences that many ethnic minority groups still face and diminishes awareness of critical racial differences. Color blindness, in the context of race and diversity, refers to the idea that race should not and does not matter. This concept

trivializes the experiences and perspectives of people from different cultural backgrounds, failing to acknowledge the importance of diversity in shaping our worldviews. It undermines the value of unique cultural experiences that contribute to the richness of our society (Offermann et al., 2014). Furthermore, the notion of color blindness threatens inclusion by dismissing the ongoing discrimination and prejudice faced by individuals from minority backgrounds. Research has shown that individuals who adhere to the idea of color blindness are more likely to exhibit implicit and explicit racial bias, thereby perpetuating societal inequality (Offermann et al., 2014).

### ***Racial Profiling***

Complex trauma can be described as a specific category of distressing experiences that profoundly impact an individual (Bryant-Davis et al., 2017). This type of trauma results not only in a state of traumatic shock but also leads to significant disruptions in the development of essential self-regulation skills, which are crucial for emotional and psychological well-being. Such experiences can hinder one's ability to manage emotions effectively and establish healthy relationships, often resulting in profound long-term effects on an individual's overall functioning and sense of self (Bryant-Davis et al., 2017). The nature of this issue is complex, characterized by repeated cycles of revictimization that can manifest in various forms, impacting the survivors' mental, emotional, and physical well-being. In this context, police brutality is defined as a consistent and escalating pattern of violence that manifests through a variety of unjustified and unnecessary actions (Bryant-Davis et al., 2017). These actions may include racial profiling, which inherently involves the unfair targeting of individuals

based on their race; instances of death or severe bodily injury resulting from excessive use of force; harassment that creates an environment of intimidation and fear; and criminal acts committed by law enforcement officers against civilians, including wrongful arrests and false accusations (Bryant-Davis et al., 2017). The term racial profiling is often referred to as “driving while Black,” encompassing the troubling reality that Black motorists are disproportionately followed and pulled over by law enforcement for driving infractions, a stark contrast to the experiences of their White counterparts. Research by DeVylder et al. (2022) highlighted these disparities, underscoring the systemic biases that contribute to this injustice, thereby drawing attention to the urgent need for awareness and reform in our societal approach to race and policing. This multifaceted nature of police brutality underscores the pressing need for comprehensive reforms within law enforcement agencies to ensure accountability and protect the rights and dignity of all individuals in society.

Since the 1960s, research has explored the relationship between various social variables and public perceptions of the police. Key factors identified include race, age, the extent of contact with law enforcement officers, and the characteristics of neighborhoods (Nadal et al., 2017). Studies have shown that individuals from racial minority groups, particularly people of color, exhibit lower levels of trust in police forces compared to their White counterparts (Jackson et al., 2021). This disparity in trust can be attributed to experiences of racial profiling, systemic discrimination, and significant racial disparities in law enforcement practices (Nadal et al., 2017). Research has consistently shown a substantial gap in how different racial groups perceive law

enforcement (Nadal et al., 2017). Mass media play a crucial role in perpetuating the systemic issue of racist policing by framing the tragic and unjust murders of Black individuals as acceptable and necessary actions (Shrikant & Sambaraju, 2021). This dangerous narrative is often presented under the guise of maintaining law, order, and safety, particularly for White communities, thereby reinforcing deeply ingrained societal biases and injustices (Dixon, 2007; Smiley & Fakunle, 2016).

According to Ihome (2020), Black men represent a disproportionately high number of individuals who fall victim to police killings, highlighting a tragic and alarming trend in our society that underscores the systemic issues related to racial injustice and violence against unarmed individuals. Despite reality, there is a gap in research that delves into their narratives of trauma and grief, which arise as a consequence of such police violence (Lee & Robinson, 2019). These narratives are critical in understanding the impacts of systemic violence and the emotional scars it leaves on individuals and communities. A qualitative study by Lee and Robinson (2019) explored the process, context, significance, and mental health effects of police violence on young Black men as they transition into adulthood. The study involved 40 young Black men, all between the ages of 18 and 24, who resided in a segregated Baltimore neighborhood (Lee & Robinson, 2019). This community, with an 89.5% Black population, faced significant economic hardships, with nearly half of all family households—49.2%—surviving below the poverty line (Lee & Robinson, 2019). The environment around these young men was marked by limited resources and opportunities, reflecting the socio-economic challenges inherent in their daily lives.

The findings of the study revealed that police violence acts as a significant traumatic stressor in the lives of Black boys and young men, illustrating a troubling progression of experiences (Lee & Robinson, 2019). Participants reported that many first encountered police violence in their childhoods, primarily as witnesses (Lee & Robinson, 2019). This early exposure laid a foundation of fear and mistrust. As they grew older, however, this experience transformed from observation to direct involvement, leading to instances of harassment, verbal abuse, and even physical injury inflicted by police officers during their adolescence and emerging adulthood (Lee & Robinson, 2019). Such experiences not only impacted their mental and emotional well-being but also contributed to a broader narrative of systemic violence and oppression faced by this demographic (Lee & Robinson, 2019). A significant 17% of the participants revealed the reality of having lost seven cherished loved ones to police killings during their years as adolescents and emerging adults (Lee & Robinson, 2019). These profound early life experiences of exposure to police violence profoundly shaped the participants' perceptions of law enforcement, leading to the manifestation of symptoms associated with posttraumatic stress. Moreover, these traumatic experiences cultivated an unsettling yet precocious understanding among the young men regarding the harsh realities of being Black—specifically, the pervasive vulnerability to racial profiling, physical harm, and even death at the hands of police officers (Lee & Robinson, 2019).

This topic holds significant importance for my study as it delves into the pervasive and distressing issue of racial profiling, specifically the phenomenon often referred to as “driving while Black.” This unjust practice of disproportionately targeting

individuals based on their race or ethnicity rather than their behavior or any credible evidence. Such practices can result in a range of adverse outcomes, including the excessive use of force by law enforcement, harassment from authorities, and intimidation of targeted communities. Moreover, the prevalence of these incidents being shared and discussed on social media platforms amplifies their impact, sparking public outrage and raising awareness about systemic inequalities. Consequently, the ramifications of racial profiling extend beyond individual experiences, affecting societal trust and community relations as a whole.

## **Society Reaction**

### ***Black Lives Matter***

Walter Scott and other cases of brutality have served as crucial rallying points for the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, which has gained significant momentum over recent years (Williamson et al., 2018). The BLM movement is a Black-centered initiative specifically designed to draw attention to the pervasive issues of racism, discrimination, and racial inequality that are faced by Black individuals in various facets of society, including policing, employment, education, and healthcare (Williamson et al., 2018). BLM was co-founded by three passionate Black women—Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi—who sought to create a space for Black voices and experiences to be recognized and respected (Williamson et al., 2018). Their work has been pivotal in mobilizing communities, raising awareness, and advocating for policy reforms aimed at addressing systemic injustices and inequities that disproportionately impact Black populations. Through protests, educational campaigns, and grassroots organizing, the

movement has become a powerful force for change, emphasizing the urgency of addressing social justice and human rights issues (Williamson et al., 2018). The BLM movement gained significant attention and momentum following the tragic and high-profile death of Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old African American who was shot in 2012 while walking home from a convenience store in Florida (Lane et al., 2020). The shooter, George Zimmerman, was acquitted of all charges, igniting public outrage and sparking nationwide protests against racial injustice and police violence.

In the wake of this verdict, Alicia Garza, a co-founder of the BLM movement, took to Facebook the next day to express her feelings about the court's decision. She crafted an online message described as a love note to black people (Lane et al., 2020). Her heartfelt post concluded with an affirming declaration: "Black people, I love you. I love us. Our lives matter," which resonated deeply with many and helped galvanize support for the movement (Lane et al., 2020). This moment marked a pivotal point in the fight for racial equality, bringing the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter into the national dialogue. The attention surrounding issues of racial injustice and police brutality surged once more in 2014, notably following the tragic deaths of two Black American men, Michael Brown and Eric Garner (Hawkins, 2023). These incidents ignited widespread protests and national conversations about systemic inequality, police practices, and the urgent need for reforms in law enforcement. They highlighted the deep-seated issues of racism and the impact of police violence on communities of color, activists, and citizens alike to advocate for change.

Williams (2021) explained,

When I look at George Floyd, I look at my dad. I look at my brothers. I look at my cousins, my uncles, because they are all Black. I have a Black father. I have a Black brother. I have Black friends, and I look at that, and I look at how that could have been one of them.” (p. 1270)

This statement references the court testimony of Darnella Frazier, a courageous 17-year-old who captured on her smartphone the footage of former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin fatally kneeling on the neck of George Floyd, an unarmed Black man (Williams, 2021). This tragic incident occurred in 2020, and it sparked widespread protests and discussions about police brutality and systemic racism across the United States. Chauvin pressed his knee and body weight on Floyd’s neck for 9 minutes and 29 seconds. Footage of the killing sparked a national racial justice reckoning (Williams, 2021). The jarring brutality that Darnella captured with her video cellphone was the genesis of the second phase of the BLM movement in 2020 (Williams, 2021).

The BLM movement has evolved into a significant global organization, playing a pivotal role in spearheading extensive protests both nationally and internationally against systemic police violence. In the United States, BLM has grown to become the most significant protest movement in U.S. history, particularly resonating in the wake of high-profile incidents of police brutality (DeVylder et al., 2022). According to comprehensive analyses conducted by the New York Times, an estimated 15 to 26 million individuals across various demographics in the United States mobilized to participate in BLM protests in major metropolitan areas and small towns, and communities (DeVylder et al.,

2022). These protests were predominantly triggered by the horrific murder of George Floyd, an event that catalyzed widespread outrage and demands for substantial social and policy changes regarding policing practices (DeVylder et al., 2022). Recent studies have revealed a significant reduction in police killings within the municipalities that actively hosted these protests, particularly those that were characterized by both large turnout and repeated occurrences over time. Specifically, data demonstrates a decline ranging from 15% to 20% in the rate of police killings in these areas, underscoring the potential influence of organized community activism on law enforcement practices (Campbell, 2024).

### ***Parental Proactive Measures***

Since the rise of the #BlackLivesMatter movement, mainstream media have increasingly focused their coverage on the issue of police violence, especially concerning the alarming rates at which black men and boys experience both murders and assaults at the hands of law enforcement (Gonzalez, 2019). Research highlights that young Black males face a significantly higher risk of fatal encounters with law enforcement, with studies indicating they are twice as likely to be killed by police before reaching the age of 21 compared to their White peers (Staggers-Hakim, 2016). This statistic underscores the urgent need to address systemic issues within policing practices and societal disparities. This heightened attention has shed light on a distressing pattern of systemic racism that persists within policing practices across the United States and beyond. In many instances, it falls upon Black mothers to navigate the challenging yet crucial responsibility of educating their children about how to respond in the face of potential encounters with

police (Gonzalez, 2019). In what has come to be known as the “police talk,” mothers share vital insights drawn from their personal experiences and societal observations (Gonzalez, 2019). They often reference controlling images that resonate within the community, including pervasive stereotypes related to criminality, race, and gender. These discussions are not merely educational; they reflect an urgent need to communicate the harsh realities of black boys’ vulnerability to profiling, discrimination, and the potential for violent encounters with law enforcement. Through these conversations, black mothers strive to equip their children with the knowledge and strategies necessary for survival in a society where they are often viewed through a distorted lens of suspicion and danger.

The prevalence of police violence against young Black males significantly heightens their risk of experiencing injury or even death during interactions with law enforcement officers. This trend is supported by research conducted by Harris and Amutah-Onukagha (2019), which highlights the systemic issues embedded within policing practices. Furthermore, studies have revealed a stark disparity in the judicial system, indicating that Black children are substantially more likely than their White counterparts to be tried and sentenced as adults (Harris & Amutah-Onukagha, 2019). This bias is compounded by the perception held by some police officers, who are shown to view Black youth as older and more culpable than their White peers, further exacerbating the already troubling dynamics at play (Harris & Amutah-Onukagha, 2019). Additionally, a staggering statistic underscores the gravity of this issue: it has been reported that 1 in every 1,000 Black boys and men will face fatal violence at the hands of

police throughout their lifetime (Edwards et al., 2019). This fact exemplifies the urgent need for reform within law enforcement and judicial practices to protect marginalized communities and ensure equity in treatment and justice. Parents play a crucial and pivotal role in preparing their children for a world where encounters with law enforcement are becoming increasingly common. Specifically, Black mothers, often designated as their families' primary caregivers, face the challenge of managing many responsibilities (Harris & Amutah-Onukagha, 2019). This includes the demands of parental duties and the stressors of everyday life, which systemic inequalities and societal pressures can exacerbate (Harris & Amutah-Onukagha, 2019).

In addition to these challenges, Black mothers must be proactive in equipping their children with the necessary tools to navigate and function within a society that is often fraught with racial bias and discrimination (Harris & Amutah-Onukagha, 2019). The socialization process that uniquely unfolds between Black mothers and their children is multifaceted. It involves not only the transmission of societal norms, values, and expectations but also a critical understanding of the implicit and explicit forms of racism that individuals will encounter. By fostering open dialogues and instilling awareness about the potential dangers and prejudices that exist within society, Black mothers prepare their children to face the realities of a racist environment (Harris & Amutah-Onukagha, 2019). This preparation is vital, as it empowers children to understand their identities and equips them with strategies to handle conflicts and interactions with law enforcement (Harris & Amutah-Onukagha, 2019). Overall, the relationship between

Black mothers and their children is not only an intimate one but also a necessary framework for cultivating resilience in the face of social injustice.

In a phenomenological qualitative study conducted by Miller and Vittrup (2020), researchers engaged with 18 African American parents through in-depth interviews to explore the multifaceted implications of police racial bias and brutality specifically directed at unarmed African American families who have minor children. The participants in this study varied in age from 33 to 59 years, providing a broad spectrum of adult perspectives. Their children ranged in age from 5 to 17, reflecting the various developmental stages and experiences they had undergone. Regarding educational backgrounds, the participants held a range of qualifications, from those who had obtained their General Educational Development (GED) certificates to those with college degrees. This study was designed with a clear social relevance, aiming not only to shed light on the lived experiences of these families but also to understand the broader consequences of systemic racism on their lives. The research focused on three critical areas of investigation: (a) the profound ways in which experiences of police racial bias and brutality harm the mental health of these parents and their children, possibly manifesting in anxiety, depression, or trauma; (b) the methods and strategies that these parents utilize to discuss issues of racism and police bias with their children, including age-appropriate conversations and the emotional tools they use to help their children process these problematic topics; and (c) the various sources of strength and resilience, such as community support, family ties, cultural heritage, and coping strategies, that these

families draw upon to navigate and withstand the challenges posed by their experiences with racial injustice (Miller & Vittrup, 2020).

The findings of this comprehensive study shed light on the profound and multifaceted impact that both systemic racism and specific instances of police racial bias and brutality have on Black American families. These families endure a heavy emotional toll, grappling with an ongoing sense of fear and anxiety not only for their safety but also for the well-being of their children. As a direct consequence of the pervasive nature of racial discrimination, many parents feel compelled to undertake the challenging task of preparing their children for what they perceive as negative encounters with law enforcement (Miller & Vittrup, 2020). This preparation requires them to impart crucial lessons on navigating potentially dangerous situations, although these families are law-abiding citizens who should not bear such a burden (Miller & Vittrup, 2020). Moreover, this psychological strain manifests in a variety of mental health issues, including anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder, that can severely affect both parents and children (Miller & Vittrup, 2020). Mental health professionals and therapists who engage with this population must approach their work with heightened awareness and sensitivity to these issues, ensuring they provide culturally competent care that acknowledges the unique challenges faced by Black American families in today's society (Miller & Vittrup, 2020). By understanding the impact of systemic racism and police brutality on mental health, professionals can better assist their clients in developing coping strategies and resilience, ultimately fostering a more supportive therapeutic environment.

## **Psychological and Physiological Health Implications**

Police brutality is a significant social determinant of health that profoundly influences various aspects of individuals' lives, including their living conditions, working environments, and leisure activities (Alang et al., 2021). This term encompasses a range of police behaviors and (in)actions that result in the dehumanization of individuals, particularly marginalized communities (Alang et al., 2021). The systemic nature of these behaviors often leads to a pervasive culture of violence and fear, which can have long-lasting impacts on the mental, emotional, and physical well-being of affected individuals and communities, including verbal assault, psychological intimidation, and physical, sexual, and emotional violence (Alang et al., 2021).

According to McLeod et al. (2020), Black Americans constitute approximately 13% of the total population in the United States. However, statistics indicated that this demographic accounts for a disproportionately high 23% of individuals fatally shot by police officers (McLeod et al., 2020). This discrepancy raises significant concerns about systemic issues within law enforcement and the societal factors contributing to such tragic outcomes. Moreover, while statistical data regarding nonlethal encounters between police and the Black community is less readily available, the implications of these encounters can be profound. The stress and emotional trauma arising from negative interactions with law enforcement can lead to a range of psychological responses among affected individuals. These responses may include heightened anxiety, chronic stress, and symptoms associated with depression, further exacerbating the mental health challenges facing this community (McLeod et al., 2020). Understanding the full impact of police

encounters is crucial for addressing these issues and fostering healthier relationships between law enforcement and the Black population.

### ***PTSD***

When communities are subjected to or bear witness to chronic police brutality, they often have challenges in the aftermath of these experiences. Individuals may find themselves in feelings of depression, heightened anxiety, uncontrollable anger, pervasive fear, and an erosion of trust, alongside a host of other complex psychosocial issues (Bryant-Davis et al., 2017). Moreover, those who have endured the trauma of such criminal acts are at a significantly increased risk of developing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), leaving lasting scars on their mental health and well-being (Bryant-Davis et al., 2017). This is in contrast to the experiences of individuals from other racial and ethnic backgrounds, who may not face the same level of psychological impact from such traumatic visual content. Alexander et al. (2023) highlighted a trend regarding the psychological impact of traumatic events disseminated online. Their research revealed that increased exposure to distressing content—particularly graphic footage, such as viral videos depicting the shooting of an African American individual by law enforcement—correlates with elevated levels of PTSD symptoms and depressive symptoms among a demographic group consisting of African American and Latinx adolescents and young adults (Alexander et al., 2023). This digital trauma adds a new layer to our understanding of mental health challenges faced by these communities. Moreover, the findings resonate with a broader body of research that has consistently indicated a direct link between violence against African Americans, especially targeting unarmed individuals within

police custody, and mental health outcomes within the African American community.

Such incidents not only highlight systemic issues but also create a pervasive atmosphere of fear and anxiety, leading to significant emotional distress and psychological ramifications.

### *Depression*

Alang et al. (2021) emphasized a growing awareness and understanding of the impact of hostile police encounters on the mental health of communities that face disproportionate policing. These encounters can lead to significant psychological distress among community members, contributing to issues such as anxiety, depression, and trauma (Alang et al., 2022). Additionally, verbal abuse and intimidation tactics employed by law enforcement can exacerbate the trauma experienced by individuals within these communities, further perpetuating a cycle of fear and distrust toward the police (Alang et al., 2022). The implications of such actions are far-reaching, affecting not just individual victims but the entire social fabric of these communities.

The findings from this study revealed a relationship between the frequency of concern about police brutality and the likelihood of experiencing depressive symptoms. Specifically, respondents who reported never worrying about police brutality demonstrated the lowest odds of experiencing a depressed mood (Alang et al., 2022). In contrast, individuals who expressed concerns about police brutality exhibited increased odds of depressive symptoms. Notably, those who consistently worried that they, or someone close to them, might become victims of police brutality had the highest likelihood of exhibiting signs of depression (Alang et al., 2022). These results highlight

the impact that concerns about systemic violence can have on mental health, underscoring the need for further examination of the psychological effects of living in a context where police brutality is a persistent concern.

### ***Suicidal Ideation***

Experiencing interpersonal violence, which includes various forms of physical and emotional abuse, is a significant and distressing type of trauma that can have lasting effects on an individual's mental health (McLeod et al., 2020). Research has indicated that individuals who endure such violence are at a significantly higher risk of developing a range of severe psychological conditions (McLeod et al., 2020; Szlyk et al., 2023). These include major depression, which can disrupt daily functioning and diminish the quality of life; suicidal behavior, where individuals might consider or attempt to take their own lives; anxiety disorders, characterized by excessive worry, fear, and panic; and PTSD, a debilitating condition that can manifest after experiencing or witnessing a traumatic event (McLeod et al., 2020). This highlights the critical need for therapeutic interventions and support systems to address the mental health challenges associated with interpersonal violence.

According to Carney-Knisely et al. (2024), research has revealed that the phenomenon of police killings targeting unarmed Black Americans has significant consequences for the mental health of Black communities. This systemic violence appears to extend its reach beyond immediate incidents, exerting a detrimental effect on the collective psyche of Black populations. Such trauma could, in turn, contribute to an increased risk of suicidal thoughts and behaviors within this demographic (Carney-

Knisely et al., 2024; Szlyk et al., 2023). Particularly vulnerable in this context are Black male youth, who may experience heightened sensitivity to acts of police violence (Carney-Knisely et al., 2024). Given the absence of unarmed Black individuals among police murder victims, these young men may face intensified feelings of despair and hopelessness, leading to increased rates of suicidality in the wake of such tragedies (Carney-Knisely et al., 2024).

### *Grief*

Grief is an intense emotion that Black individuals may experience as a direct result of exposure to anti-Black violence, a pervasive issue deeply rooted in systemic racism and discrimination (Carney-Knisely et al., 2024). Unlike the grief responses observed in White individuals, the grief experienced by Black people is often marked by the heightened awareness of cumulative, disproportionate losses suffered under systemic oppression (Carney-Knisely et al., 2024). In a focused study involving 30 Black college students, researchers Wilson and colleagues conducted an in-depth analysis of the grief and trauma responses these individuals expressed in reaction to incidents of anti-Black violence (as cited in Carney-Knisely et al., 2024). The study identified six prominent reactions: sadness, hopelessness, hypervigilance, intrusive memories, perpetual grief, and extreme tiredness. The majority of these responses correspond closely with clinical symptoms of depression and PTSD, illustrating the profound psychological impact that anti-Black violence has on individuals within the Black community (Carney-Knisely et al., 2024; Lee & Robinson, 2019). Overall, recognizing these grief experiences is essential for understanding the broader implications of systemic oppression and for

developing appropriate support systems for Black individuals facing such trauma. The Black students in this study reported experiencing significant stress levels that are exacerbated by their repeated exposure to incidents of anti-Black violence portrayed in various media forms (Carney-Knisely et al., 2024). This exposure not only serves as a constant reminder of societal injustices but also intensifies the emotional toll through derogatory comments and microaggressions from White individuals. The negative stimuli contribute to a heightened state of vulnerability, increasing the likelihood that these young individuals may encounter psychological challenges, including elevated risks for depression and suicidal ideation (Carney-Knisely et al., 2024; Lee & Robinson, 2019). This situation is alarming as it underscores the urgent need for support systems and interventions that directly address the mental health needs of Black students, fostering environments that promote resilience and recovery while combating the pervasive impacts of systemic racism.

A study conducted by Harris and O'Brien (2024) examined the relationships between grief disenfranchisement, social support, and coping style and how these factors predict stress levels, depressive symptoms, and prolonged grief among individuals. The research focused on a sample of 189 Black undergraduate students, all of whom were processing the tragic grief stemming from police murders of Black Americans. The study revealed that Black undergraduate students faced moderate stress and heightened depressive symptoms yet reported low levels of prolonged grief (Harris & O'Brien, 2024). Among the factors examined, coping strategies were the most significant predictor of these mental health outcomes (Harris & O'Brien, 2024). In particular, the coping

methods used to handle stress were essential; approaches such as planning, behavioral disengagement, and ritual-centered coping were significantly correlated with the variations in perceived stress levels among these students (Harris & O'Brien, 2024). The study also found that behavioral disengagement played a significant role in explaining the variance in depressive symptoms among students.

Additionally, the analysis highlighted other coping factors—including disenfranchised grief, changes in personal goals, and collective-centered coping—that also had a significant influence on the variance seen in prolonged grief symptoms (Harris & O'Brien, 2024). These insights are crucial as they pave the way for developing targeted interventions to mitigate negative mental health outcomes among Black undergraduate students, especially regarding their responses to police murders of Black Americans. Such interventions could promote adaptive coping strategies that enhance the psychological resilience and overall mental well-being of this demographic.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

In this chapter, I reviewed the existing literature to analyze the representation and experiences of police brutality as depicted through various media entities within the Black American population. The research literature has indicated that Black Americans face psychological and physiological health issues as a result of police brutality portrayed in the media. Despite the substantial volume of research on the experiences of Black Americans and police brutality, there remains a notable gap in the literature regarding exploring the lived experiences of the representation and experiences of police brutality as depicted through various media entities within the Black American population.

In Chapter 3 of my research, I provide a comprehensive explanation of the specific research design and methodology I employed. This includes a detailed outline of how I explored the lived experiences of Black Americans who have been exposed to police brutality on social media and how it impacts their racial identity and emotional well-being. Furthermore, I thoroughly discuss my role as a researcher, outlining the various strategies and approaches I used to ensure trustworthiness of the data I collected. I also carefully address the instruments and tools I utilized to gather data, providing a detailed rationale for their selection. Lastly, I thoroughly examine the ethical considerations inherent in my study, ensuring that I meticulously address issues of consent, confidentiality, and integrity.

### Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative interpretive phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of Black Americans who have been exposed to police brutality on social media and how it impacts their racial identity and emotional well-being. This chapter provides an overview of the research design and rationale that guided my approach to the study. I explore the role of the researcher, outlining the selected methodology in detail and elaborating on the strategies used for participant recruitment. Additionally, I describe the procedures implemented for recruitment, participation, and data collection. Furthermore, I present a data analysis plan that addresses critical issues related to trustworthiness and the credibility of the findings.

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

In this qualitative study, I used phenomenology to explore the lived experiences of Black Americans who have been exposed to police brutality on social media and how it impacts their racial identity and emotional well-being. Phenomenology, a qualitative research approach, utilizes in-depth interviews to gather rich and detailed data about participants' lived experiences and perceptions. Additionally, observations and document analysis will complement the interview data, providing a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study (Burkholder et al., 2020). These research questions guided the qualitative study:

RQ1: How have media stories of police brutality impacted Black Americans' emotional well-being?

RQ2: How have social media stories of police brutality impacted Black Americans' racial identity?

The decision to use phenomenology instead of quantitative methods was motivated by the desire to explore and understand the nuanced experiences and perspectives of the participants. In contrast, quantitative research establishes and analyzes relationships between variables through predetermined propositions and statistical analyses (Burkholder et al., 2020). The phenomenological approach is a qualitative research method that aims to delve into the lived experiences of individuals who encounter similar situations or events. This method emphasizes understanding the subjective interpretations and meanings these individuals ascribe to their experiences, providing rich and detailed insights into their perceptions and emotions (Burkholder et al., 2020).

The CRT framework is deeply rooted in the concept of intersectionality. This vital framework investigates how racism intertwines with a multitude of other social factors, including class, gender, sexuality, and disability, thereby creating a rich tapestry of social dynamics (Gillborn, 2015). The primary objective of CRT is to thoroughly explore and illuminate how race influences various aspects of everyday life, providing a comprehensive understanding of its impact on society (Gillborn, 2015).

### **Role of the Researcher**

According to the findings of Ravitch and Carl (2021), the qualitative researcher holds a pivotal position in determining the goals and importance of a research project. It is essential to uphold reflexivity throughout the entire process to ensure the accuracy and

credibility of the results. I grew up in Portland, Oregon, where roughly 5.9% of the population identifies as Black or African American, according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2022). As a Black woman growing up in Portland, Oregon, I have experiences that have significantly shaped my understanding of racism and discrimination. From a young age, I have found myself in various situations—be it in school, during community events, or casual interactions—where I faced prejudice and biases solely based on the color of my skin. These encounters often manifested as microaggressions or overt acts of discrimination, which underscored the racial disparities present in our society. While I have been fortunate enough not to have personally experienced the realities of police brutality, the stories of my friends and family resonate deeply within me. I have listened to their accounts, each a painful reminder of systemic injustices that many in our community face daily. These narratives illuminate the broader issues of racial profiling and violence that afflict marginalized groups, leaving a profound impact on my perception of safety and equality. My experiences, along with the shared stories of those close to me, fuel my commitment to advocate for justice and equality for all, underscoring the urgent need for societal change.

To uphold the dependability of data, researchers must confront their individual biases, as noted by Ravitch and Carl (2021). To obtain objective results, researchers must remain aware of their personal biases and strive to eliminate them from their research processes. Doing so can ensure their data remains accurate and free from undue influence. This requires significant self-awareness and a commitment to scientific

objectivity, which is essential for producing meaningful and trustworthy research outcomes (Patton, 2015).

I conducted a series of semistructured interviews, each lasting between 30 minutes and 1 hour, creating a space for open dialogue centered on the participants' rich and varied lived experiences. To minimize my biases and ensure authenticity, I employed a technique known as bracketing. This approach allowed me to set aside my preconceptions and encourage participants to share their unique narratives freely. Throughout the interviews, I offered comments only when necessary, carefully maintaining the integrity of the participant's responses to ensure their perspectives were accurately represented and unskewed. I only commented to clarify information or seamlessly transition the discussion to the next question, providing a clear and flowing conversation.

## **Methodology**

### **Participant Selection Logic**

This research study examined 12 Black Americans. According to Peoples (2021), sufficient sample sizes for qualitative work ranges from 8 to 15. I selected participants using a purposive sampling and snowballing method based on specific criteria: individuals had to identify as Black or African American, be at least 18 years old, and have directly been exposed to police brutality on social media, which impacted their racial identity and emotional well-being.

Purposeful sampling is a qualitative research technique used in various fields. This approach targets and recruits participants with specific characteristics or experiences

that are particularly relevant to the research objectives and questions (Groves et al., 2009). Unlike probability sampling, which relies on random selection to ensure that every individual has an equal chance of being chosen, purposeful sampling is selective of characteristics or experiences that are particularly relevant to the research objectives and questions (Groves et al., 2009). This selectivity enables researchers to focus on a smaller, more defined group of individuals who can provide richer, more nuanced data characteristics or experiences that are particularly relevant to the research objectives and questions (Groves et al., 2009). Purposeful sampling enables researchers to explore participants' perceptions, motivations, and behaviors, yielding in-depth information often unavailable through broader methods. By carefully choosing participants based on their relevance to the study, researchers enhance the data quality, facilitating a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomena under investigation. Purposeful sampling is a powerful tool for qualitative researchers aiming to uncover complex insights and foster meaningful dialogue within their studies.

Participants from various Black American communities were selected to gain a deeper understanding and diverse perspectives. This selection process aimed to include individuals from different backgrounds, experiences, and industry roles to enrich the study with broader insights and opinions. To initiate the data collection process, participants were recruited through a flyer posted on social media platforms, including Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram, as well as through snowball sampling. Gaining access to various career paths across various states via social media platforms opens up invaluable and varied data. Restricting oneself to a single state may lead to skewed

conclusions, as it limits the identification of unique themes and patterns during the research process. To facilitate a thorough analysis, interviews persisted until data saturation was achieved, marked by the repetitive emergence of similar themes in the discussions. It was crucial to understand that simply collecting more data does not necessarily equate to uncovering new insights; as Mason (2010) pointed out, the quality of information is just as significant as the quantity.

### **Instrumentation**

In this qualitative study, I was the sole researcher responsible for collecting all data relevant to this comprehensive research initiative. As the primary instrument for data gathering, I employed a range of data collection approaches to ensure a thorough analysis of the study. To ensure the participants qualify for this study, I implemented a detailed demographic questionnaire designed to capture essential background information about participants, including age, gender, and socioeconomic status. This foundational data allowed for a contextual understanding of the participant group. In addition to the demographic questionnaire, semi-structured interviews were conducted. These interviews facilitated a deeper exploration of individual experiences, perceptions, and insights related to the research topic. By employing open-ended questions, I aimed to encourage participants to share their narratives in their own words, thereby capturing rich and diverse perspectives.

Moreover, video recordings were utilized during the interviews to document interactions. This method provides an additional data layer, capturing non-verbal cues and interactions that may inform the subsequent analysis. The recordings were analyzed

to extract significant themes and patterns, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the research topic.

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

Upon receiving approval from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), I initiated the data collection phase for this study, a critical step in ensuring rigorous research methodology. To recruit participants for my research, I utilized social media platforms like Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram. To optimize participant recruitment, I strategically designed and disseminated a detailed flyer outlining the study's purpose, importance, and relevant compensation for participation. This flyer was posted on my profiles and shared within specific groups and communities pertinent to my research focus, increasing visibility among potential participants interested in contributing to the study.

Furthermore, I actively encouraged participants to share the flyer within their social networks, a technique known as snowball sampling. This approach is practical, as it taps into existing relationships and trust, potentially leading to a more diverse pool of participants. By recruiting individuals from diverse demographic backgrounds and geographical regions across the United States, I aimed to enhance the diversity of perspectives in my research. Engaging with individuals from diverse backgrounds provided me with richer and more nuanced insights into the subject matter. I personally emailed each participant the research study document, including a detailed introduction letter and the participant's informed consent form. This introductory document provided an in-depth overview of the study, highlighting essential elements such as the specific

criteria for participation, the purpose of the research, the estimated time commitment required from participants, my contact information for any inquiries, as well as the contact details of my committee chairperson for further support.

I provided my email address so research participants could communicate with me throughout the study. Additionally, I sent each participant a demographic questionnaire to assess their eligibility and suitability for participation in the study. All interviews conducted as part of the research took place via Zoom, ensuring a convenient and accessible platform for all participants to engage in meaningful discussions. I reviewed the participant-informed consent form with each participant before the interview process. This consent form was designed to provide comprehensive information regarding the voluntary nature of the study, clearly outlining that participation was optional and that the participants could opt out at any stage of the research without any repercussions or effects on their status. Additionally, I outlined the potential risks and benefits associated with participation in the study to ensure that all participants were well-informed and comfortable with their decision to participate.

Moreover, I highlighted the strict measures in place to protect the privacy and confidentiality of each participant. This includes using pseudonyms to prevent the identification of participants in all study documentation. I also assured them that any video recordings and written transcriptions of their interviews would be securely stored on my password-protected laptop, in accordance with the protocols set forth by the Walden IRB. These measures were critical to ensure the ethical standards of the research and to protect the integrity of the participants involved throughout the study.

To formally conclude the study for the participants, I first clearly communicated to each participant that their involvement had come to an end. It is crucial to express our gratitude for their valuable time and contributions, acknowledging the importance of their input in advancing our research objectives. Before the interview was over and during our exit conversation, I took the opportunity to explain the purpose of the study, detailing its significance within the field. This included discussing the research questions we were answering and how their unique participation and experiences contributed to addressing the overarching research question. Providing this context not only helped participants understand their role but also allowed them to reflect on the impact of their involvement.

Additionally, I ensured that participants were aware of available resources, offering access to counseling services or support resources if the study provoked any emotional distress or discomfort. This was a crucial aspect of our ethical responsibility to ensure the well-being of participants. It was crucial to highlight that follow-up procedures, including follow-up interviews, would only be conducted if the saturation point was achieved.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

According to Peoples (2021), the interpretive phenomenological approach (IPA) is an approach rooted in phenomenological psychology that emphasizes the exploration and understanding of individuals' subjective experiences. The primary aim of IPA is to explore how individuals perceive and interpret their experiences in various contexts, providing insight into the meanings they attribute to specific phenomena (Peoples, 2021). This idiographic approach distinguishes IPA from other phenomenological methods, as it

prioritizes the unique experiences of individuals' over-generalizations, merging elements of psychology and interpretative frameworks to enhance understanding (Peoples, 2021). A key aspect of IPA is its focus on analysis, where researchers are encouraged to recognize and articulate their preconceptions and biases concerning the data collected (Peoples, 2021). This practice aligns with Husserl's concept of bracketing, which involves intentionally suspending these preconceptions to facilitate genuine exploration of participants' lived experiences (Peoples, 2021). As researchers engage in the analysis process, they dynamically navigate between the transcribed narratives of participants and their interpretative insights, creating a nuanced understanding of shared experiences (Peoples, 2021).

Moreover, researchers utilizing IPA strive to comprehend how participants interpret their own experiences, introducing the concept of a double hermeneutic approach (Peoples, 2021). In this context, researchers interpret participants' narratives and consider how they view their own lives and experiences (Peoples, 2021). This layered analysis contributes to a richer and more comprehensive framework for understanding the complexities of human experience, making IPA a valuable tool for researchers aiming to capture the essence of lived experiences within specific contexts (Peoples, 2021).

In this study, I employed semistructured interviews to gather qualitative data that specifically addressed the two central research questions guiding the inquiry: (a) How have media stories of police brutality impacted the emotional well-being of Black Americans? and (b) How have social media stories of police brutality impacted Black

Americans' racial identity? I used the "Live Transcripts" feature on Zoom to facilitate the analysis of these interviews. This technology aided in capturing the rich, qualitative data that emerged from participants' voices, enabling a deeper understanding of their experiences and perspectives concerning the topics of police brutality, emotional health, and racial identity.

In qualitative research, the use of qualitative data analysis software plays a pivotal role in organizing and managing complex datasets through a systematic approach known as coding. According to Peoples (2021), this process is designed to help researchers illuminate various phenomena by categorizing and interpreting the information collected from participants. However, it is essential to note that while qualitative data analysis software can facilitate certain aspects of qualitative data analysis, it is not universally applicable to all study types, particularly phenomenological research (Peoples, 2021). Peoples highlighted the concerns of some phenomenologists who argue that the traditional coding process may need to be revised when engaging with this methodological approach. For phenomenologists, the primary aim is to cultivate a deep familiarity with the transcripts, enabling a nuanced understanding of participants' lived experiences rather than forcing the data into predefined categories (Peoples, 2021).

Moreover, the inherent limitations of qualitative data analysis software raise significant concerns about the researcher's engagement with the text (Peoples, 2021). By relying on software for coding, researchers may risk becoming distanced from the data, thereby hindering their ability to immerse themselves in and critically reflect upon the nuances of the text (Peoples, 2021). This detachment can potentially undermine the

richness and depth of understanding that are foundational to qualitative research, particularly in phenomenological studies, where interaction with the data is paramount (Peoples, 2021). While qualitative data analysis software offers tools for efficiency, researchers must carefully consider its implications for their methodological approach to ensure a comprehensive exploration of the phenomena under study (Peoples, 2021).

Peoples (2021) emphasized the importance of hand coding when conducting phenomenological dissertations. She argues that relying on qualitative data analysis software may require more effort than opting for hand coding, especially for those aiming to produce a high-quality phenomenological dissertation. Peoples believed that hand coding facilitates a deeper engagement with the data, allowing researchers to immerse themselves in the nuances and complexities of participants' experiences, which are central to phenomenological research. This approach fosters a more comprehensive understanding and enhances the authenticity and richness of the findings, thereby significantly contributing to the overall quality of the research output.

For my study, I implemented Saldaña's (2021) coding methods as a primary strategy. According to Saldaña, a code in qualitative analysis is primarily defined as a word or a short phrase that serves the critical function of symbolically assigning a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and evocative attribute to a segment of language-based or visual data. This coding process is essential for effectively organizing and interpreting qualitative research findings (Saldaña, 2021). The data types that can be coded are diverse and expansive, encompassing various formats and sources (Saldaña, 2021). Examples include transcripts from interviews, detailed notes derived from

participant observations in the field, personal journals kept by participants, various documents, the responses gathered from open-ended surveys, artistic expressions such as drawings, physical artifacts of significance, photographs that capture specific moments, video recordings, as well as digital interactions displayed on websites, email correspondence, social media exchanges, and both academic and fictional literature (Saldaña, 2021). Each data type can provide rich insights, making the coding process crucial in qualitative research as it helps researchers refine complex information into manageable and interpretable segments that retain the depth and degree of the original data (Saldaña, 2021).

Saldaña's (2021) coding framework for qualitative research is a comprehensive and structured approach that consists of two distinct cycles. The first cycle is dedicated to preliminary examining collected data (Saldaña, 2021). It employs various coding techniques that help researchers label and organize raw information (Saldaña, 2021). One key technique is *in vivo* coding, which involves using participants' exact words or phrases to capture their voices accurately (Saldaña, 2021). This method honors the participants' perspectives and retains the authenticity of their responses. Descriptive coding is applied to summarize key topics or concepts that emerge within the data, providing an overarching view of the materials being analyzed (Saldaña, 2021). Emotion coding is another vital technique in this cycle, as it captures and categorizes participants' emotional responses, allowing researchers to delve deeper into the feelings expressed in their narratives (Saldaña, 2021).

The second cycle further refines and consolidates the initial codes into broader categories and patterns (Saldaña, 2021). This process utilizes methods such as pattern coding, which identifies recurring themes or trends that may not have been immediately apparent during the initial coding (Saldaña, 2021). Another critical technique in this phase is axial coding, which involves analyzing the relationships and connections between different categories, providing a more nuanced understanding of how various data elements interact (Saldaña, 2021).

These two cycles offer a systematic approach to interpreting qualitative data. They transform raw descriptions into meaningful insights, enabling researchers to draw significant conclusions and develop theoretical frameworks that shed light on the complexities of human experience (Saldaña, 2021). This structured methodology enhances the depth of qualitative analysis (Saldaña, 2021).

I used Excel to effectively manage and organize my data, which was password-protected on my laptop. This spreadsheet included descriptive titles that promoted a transition between different tasks and stages of my project. The spreadsheet encompassed several essential components: first, it consisted of the video line number, which served as a point of reference for each segment of the analyzed video. Secondly, it documented the gender of the speakers involved, providing important context for the discussions that occurred.

Furthermore, the spreadsheet outlined the respective programs of study to which each speaker is affiliated, adding another layer of understanding to the content presented in the videos. It also contained the subject matter under discussion for each segment,

which is crucial for categorizing the talks in my analysis. Finally, the complete transcriptions of the videos were included, providing a thorough written record of everything said.

In addition to these components, I incorporated elements from the first cycle of descriptive coding. This entailed capturing a defining single word or phrase that captures the essence of the previous coding. Lastly, I implemented the second cycle patterns to refine these insights into a single word that captures the recurring themes identified throughout the coding process. This structured approach not only ensured organization but also enhanced the clarity and depth of the analysis conducted.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

In qualitative research, it is essential to ensure that the findings are trustworthy. This requires careful consideration of several important factors, as emphasized by Lemon and Hayes (2020). The contributing factors are credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability. Credibility refers to the accuracy and believability of the research findings, while transferability considers whether the findings can be applied to other contexts (Shenton, 2004). Confirmability ensures that the research findings are based on verifiable evidence, and dependability refers to the consistency of the research process (Lemon & Hayes, 2020). By considering these factors, researchers can ensure their work is trustworthy.

To establish credibility, a researcher must ensure that their research accurately measures or tests the intended phenomenon. This means that the research must be conducted to accurately capture the essence of what is being studied. To ensure the

trustworthiness of qualitative research, Shenton (2004) recommended several methods, including triangulation, member checking, and peer review. By rigorously applying these methods, researchers can ensure their findings are trustworthy (Shenton, 2004). Adhering to these research standards can enhance the credibility of any study and lend greater weight to its conclusions.

### **Credibility**

Shenton's (2004) work highlighted the crucial role of credibility in research. To establish credibility in qualitative research, researchers employ various approaches, including triangulation, member checking, description, and field engagement (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). These strategies help ensure the research findings are trustworthy and accurate. By adopting these approaches, researchers can enhance the credibility of their research, which is essential for developing a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

To uphold the integrity of my research, I am fully dedicated to ensuring that it is of the highest possible quality. For this reason, I scrutinized the data to ensure that they were free from bias and supported by well-researched evidence. To accomplish this, I employed a technique known as bracketing. This approach enabled me to set aside any preexisting biases, assumptions, or preconceptions that I might have brought into the research process. Doing so created an open environment that encouraged research participants to share their thoughts and feelings without reservation. In addition to bracketing, I implemented a process known as member checking. After collecting and analyzing the data, I sent the results back to the participants involved in the study. This

step was crucial as it enabled them to review and verify the accuracy of the findings, specifically regarding their contributions. Their feedback ensured that the representation of their experiences was accurate and resonated with their perspective.

Moreover, I incorporated a peer review process wherein an individual not connected to my research would assess and evaluate my findings. This outsider's perspective was vital in validating my interpretations and clustering of data. The peer reviewer's insights helped ensure that my conclusions were objective and supported by the evidence presented.

Lastly, I kept a journal throughout the research process. This practice provided me with a structured format to articulate my feelings, thoughts, and emotional responses as I navigated the research stages. Documenting my personal experiences in a journal allowed for self-reflection and contributed to the transparency and richness of the qualitative data being gathered. By maintaining a journal, I created a meaningful record that captured the nuances of my research journey and its personal impact. By taking these necessary steps, my research became a valuable resource for others to draw upon, making a meaningful contribution to the ongoing conversation surrounding the subject.

### **Transferability**

Qualitative studies offer valuable insights into complex phenomena, but their findings are often context-specific and not easily transferable to other settings (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). To address this limitation, researchers can ensure the transferability of their studies by providing a rich and detailed description of the study context and participants.

As Ravitch and Carl (2021) explained, transferability refers to the ability of qualitative research to be applied or transferred to a broader context while maintaining its contextual richness. This means researchers should aim to use their research in various contexts while preserving the original study's unique features. To ensure their research's reproducibility, researchers must provide a clear, detailed, and transparent account of their research methodology and findings (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). By doing so, they can enhance the accuracy and consistency of their results, enable other researchers to build upon their findings, and ensure that their research applies to diverse contexts and situations (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). This, in turn, can impact the relevance and effectiveness of qualitative research across a wide range of fields and disciplines, leading to valuable insights and advancements in various domains.

### **Dependability**

Dependability is a critical aspect of research that researchers must prioritize. Ravitch and Carl (2021) defined dependability in research as thoroughly documenting research findings and verifying their accuracy through auditing. This practice is crucial in establishing the trustworthiness and credibility of research outcomes, enabling researchers and stakeholders to rely on them with confidence (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). By ensuring the accuracy and robustness of research results, researchers can advance their knowledge and contribute to a deeper understanding of their fields of study (Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

## **Confirmability**

In a recent study conducted by Ravitch and Carl (2021), the role of confirmability in research was emphasized. Confirmability refers to the extent to which the research findings accurately reflect the viewpoints of the study participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Ensuring confirmability guarantees that the results are dependable, authentic, and trustworthy, enabling researchers to make well-informed decisions and draw meaningful conclusions (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Researchers can achieve a more objective outcome by minimizing the potential for bias and subjectivity (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Thus, confirmability plays a crucial role in maintaining the integrity and quality of research. Maintaining an audit trail is a widely accepted practice among researchers. An audit trail is a detailed record of the qualitative researcher's entire process of data collection, analysis, and interpretation of the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). This process involves documenting every step, including the procedures, decisions, and reasons behind them (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). By doing so, researchers can provide a transparent and systematic account of their methodology, which helps establish the credibility and rigor of their research.

## **Ethical Procedures**

For this study, I adhered to the ethical standards and protocols established by the IRB (04-07-25-1168793) at Walden University. The recruitment process for participants was designed to be transparent and informative; thus, I developed flyers that were shared on various social media platforms. These flyers outlined the purpose and scope of the study, the specific criteria individuals must meet to participate, and the confidentiality

measures in place to protect their personal information. My contact information was listed on the flyers to facilitate direct communication, allowing potential participants to reach out with any inquiries regarding the research or their involvement. All participants were fully briefed on the study, including any potential risks associated with their participation, and they would be well-informed before providing their consent. Furthermore, I emphasized that participation in this study was entirely voluntary, reinforcing that participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any point without facing any penalties or negative consequences. This level of transparency and respect for the participants' autonomy was essential to fostering an ethical research environment.

A comprehensive data security strategy was established to ensure the utmost protection of the privacy and confidentiality of all research participants. Specifically, all collected data—including demographic forms, informed consent forms, video recordings, interview transcripts, and various other electronic files—were securely stored on my laptop and protected by a password. This device was meticulously safeguarded with a robust password protection system, ensuring that only I had exclusive access to the stored files. To maintain anonymity and confidentiality during the research process, any personal identifiers associated with the interview data were systematically replaced with numerical identifiers. This means that no participant's name was directly linked to the data, which is an essential measure to protect individual identities.

I conducted all communications and interactions with the research participants directly through email, minimizing the risk of accidental disclosure of private information. Following the study's conclusion, all research data must be retained for a

period of 5 years. This retention period is in accordance with the research protocol established by Walden University, ensuring that I remained compliant with institutional guidelines. After this period, all collected data will be responsibly destroyed to uphold participant confidentiality and privacy standards.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I provided a comprehensive overview of the methodology employed in this study. This overview includes detailed instructions for selecting participants, outlining the criteria and considerations that guided this process. Additionally, I discussed various recruitment strategies to effectively engage potential participants, ensuring a diverse and representative sample for the research. The chapter further elaborated on the processes involved in data analysis, describing the analytical techniques applied to interpret the collected data comprehensively. I also outlined the various data collection processes, explaining the tools and methods used to gather pertinent information systematically. Moreover, the role of the researcher was examined, highlighting the responsibilities and ethical considerations inherent in conducting research. Lastly, I detailed the instrumentation used in the study, providing insights into the specific tools and measures employed to ensure trustworthiness of the data collected.

In Chapter 4, I provide an overview of the study setting and the specific environment in which the research was conducted. I detail the participants' demographics, including their age, gender, socioeconomic status, and any relevant cultural or educational background information that may influence the study's outcomes. Furthermore, I outline the data collection and analysis procedures, describing the

methodologies employed, any tools or instruments used, and the rationale behind these choices. I also present evidence of trustworthiness of my findings. Finally, I conduct a thorough examination of the findings, interpreting the data collected and discussing its implications within the context of existing literature and theories relevant to the study related to the lived experiences of Black Americans who have encountered police brutality on social media, as well as how this impacts their racial identity and emotional well-being.

## Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative interpretive phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of Black Americans who have been exposed to police brutality on social media and how it impacts their racial identity and emotional well-being. The goal was to delve into the impact that police brutality on social media has on Black Americans. Instead of tallying statistics, I seek to uncover the personal, lived experiences that Black Americans face. It examines how these encounters shape their internal landscapes, influencing thoughts, emotions, and identities. By prioritizing narratives and firsthand experiences, the research highlights the influence of social media, revealing its significant impact on self-perception and the navigation of one's reality. In this exploration, the voices of Black Americans take center stage, highlighting their resilience and the emotional complexities inherent in their online interactions. To do this, I explored the lived experiences of 12 Black American men and women who have been exposed to police brutality on social media and examined how it impacted their racial identity and emotional well-being. Two research questions guided this study:

RQ1: How do media stories of police brutality impact Black Americans' mental and emotional wellness?

RQ2: How have social media stories of police brutality impacted Black Americans' racial identity?

In Chapter 3, I presented the design and methodology employed to investigate the experiences of Black Americans who encounter police brutality on social media and how it impacts their racial identity and emotional health. I described my role as a researcher,

the approaches used to ensure credibility and transferability, and the tools selected for data collection. Additionally, I addressed the ethical aspects of my study, emphasizing the importance of obtaining informed consent, maintaining confidentiality, and upholding integrity. In Chapter 4, I provide a summary of the study's context and participant demographics, including age, gender, socioeconomic status, and relevant cultural or educational backgrounds. Additionally, I describe the methods used for data collection and analysis, discuss the methodologies and tools implemented, and explain the reasoning behind them. I present evidence of trustworthiness. Lastly, I analyze the findings, interpret the data, and explore its implications for the lived experiences of Black Americans confronting police brutality on social media, as well as its impact on their racial identity and emotional well-being.

### **Research Setting**

The data collection process was initiated after obtaining IRB approval from Walden University. This crucial step ensured that the study adhered to ethical standards and guidelines for research involving human subjects. The approved flyer was disseminated across social media platforms, Facebook and Instagram, to reach potential participants (see Appendix A). Prospective participants were required to undergo a preliminary screening by completing a detailed demographic Google Document designed to verify their eligibility for inclusion in the study. In addition to this document, each participant was required to review the consent form and affirm their understanding of the study's purpose and their rights as participants.

Once eligibility was verified and consent was obtained, I provided each participant with a Calendly link to schedule their appointment. This link facilitated the scheduling process by allowing participants to select a date and time that best suited their availability for the interview, which was conducted via Zoom in an audio-only format. To ensure the confidentiality and privacy of the participant, audio-only recordings were utilized during the data collection process. This approach prevented any visual identification that could compromise the participant's anonymity. To protect the privacy and confidentiality of each participant during this research process, they were instructed to create and choose a pseudonym for themselves. This pseudonym was consistently utilized throughout the interview and will be utilized in any subsequent publications resulting from this study, ensuring anonymity while still allowing for qualitative data collection.

### **Demographics**

The study consisted of six men and six women. The 12 participants ranged in age from 21 to 46 years and identified as Black or African American. All participants expressed exposure to police brutality on social media and live in the United States. All participants chose their pseudonyms to protect their privacy and identity. Table 1 shows the participant demographics.

**Table 1***Participant Demographics*

| Participant     | Racial identity           | Sex<br>(Male/Female) | Age | State of<br>residency |
|-----------------|---------------------------|----------------------|-----|-----------------------|
| Sunshine Monroe | Black/African<br>American | Female               | 46  | Illinois              |
| Delane          | Black/African<br>American | Female               | 39  | Indiana               |
| Tony            | Black/African<br>American | Male                 | 43  | Maryland              |
| Jake            | Black/African<br>American | Male                 | 34  | Florida               |
| Tay             | Black/African<br>American | Male                 | 25  | Texas                 |
| Willie          | Black/African<br>American | Male                 | 39  | North Carolina        |
| Cookie          | Black/African<br>American | Female               | 39  | Texas                 |
| James           | Black/African<br>American | Male                 | 21  | Texas                 |
| Jean            | Black/African<br>American | Female               | 43  | South Carolina        |
| Bic Damone      | Black/African<br>American | Male                 | 42  | Texas                 |
| Abby            | Black/African<br>American | Female               | 37  | Texas                 |
| Dr. Montezuma   | Black/African<br>American | Female               | 35  | Texas                 |

**Data Collection**

On April 7, 2025, potential candidates were notified via social media platforms, including Facebook and Instagram. Data collection occurred from April 11 to April 28, 2025. Within 20 hours of posting, 14 participants expressed interest by completing a Google form that included informed consent and demographic questions to confirm their eligibility. All participants received an email with a Calendly link to schedule an

interview and to choose a pseudonym for confidentiality. All participants were required to sign up for their interview using their chosen pseudonym for privacy purposes. Eight of the 14 responded and scheduled interviews. Through snowball sampling, four additional participants agreed to participate in interviews. Ultimately, the study included 12 participants.

All interviews were conducted in a secure location to ensure confidentiality and privacy. Interviews followed a standard protocol, which involved introducing myself, ensuring participant privacy when publishing the study, and thanking them for their participation. I explained the study's purpose, advised them to be in a quiet, distraction-free location, and clarified that all information would be used solely for research. I also informed them that discussing police brutality in the Black community can be traumatic and that if they needed a break or wanted to stop, they should let me know—no questions would be asked. If any questions were unclear or needed further explanation, they could ask at any time. Ultimately, I inquired if they had any questions and whether they still consented to being audio recorded.

To ensure that all participants were qualified and met the necessary criteria for the study, we first conducted a thorough review of their responses to the demographic questions. Once the qualification was confirmed, we proceeded immediately to the interview phase. The interview was structured around five main questions designed to gather insights related to the research objectives (see Appendices B and C). To facilitate a more precise understanding and ensure participants could provide accurate and thoughtful responses, each main question was supplemented with subquestions. These subquestions

served to break down complex or potentially ambiguous questions into more specific and manageable parts, allowing participants to clarify their responses if needed and providing more detailed and comprehensive data. Although the interviews were conducted over Zoom audio, I noted nonverbal cues from the participants. These may include deep breaths indicating hesitation, long pauses suggesting contemplation or difficulty in articulating thoughts, and emotional sensitivity reflected in their tone and choice of words, all of which varied depending on the circumstances of each interview.

At the end of each interview, participants were thanked for their time and contribution to my research study, assured of the confidentiality of their identity, and informed that their results would be kept confidential and under their chosen pseudonym. Participants were told that participating in this study may involve some risks, including minor discomforts that can be encountered daily, as well as sharing sensitive information. If distress arises, they could also access emergency mental health services by contacting the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline at 988. If they have any questions, they can contact me through the email provided.

### **Data Analysis**

Saldaña (2021) defined a code in qualitative analysis as typically a word or short phrase that symbolically captures the main, salient, and evocative trait of a segment of language-based or visual data. Such data collection encompasses, but is not limited to, transcripts from individual interviews, observation field notes, survey responses (both open- and closed-ended questions), documents, email exchanges, and journals (Saldaña, 2021).

The initial step I took involved downloading each participant's transcript and thoroughly reading through it to gain an understanding of their personal experiences, perceptions, and emotional responses concerning police brutality against Black Americans. To analyze the data, I adhered to Saldaña's thematic analysis methodology, which was combined with a structured coding process. The first style of coding involved examining the entire dataset and utilizing various coding techniques to categorize and interpret the information (see Saldaña, 2021). I employed descriptive coding, which entails identifying and labeling the primary concepts, themes, or topics that emerged from the transcripts. This process helped to create an overview of the topic discussed by participants, capturing the essence of their narratives. To implement this, I reviewed each transcript, highlighting the main concepts as they appeared in the participants' words. The second style of coding used was emotion coding, designed to capture and categorize the emotional responses expressed by participants (see Saldaña, 2021). This involved collecting words or phrases within the transcripts that showcased feelings or emotional reactions related to their experiences. By doing this, I was able to analyze the emotional content of the narratives and explore how participants' feelings shaped and were influenced by their experiences with police brutality.

The second style of coding aims to refine and consolidate initial codes into broader, more meaningful categories and overarching patterns that reveal deeper insights into the data (Saldaña, 2021). This process involves various methods, including pattern coding, which is used to identify and group recurring themes, trends, or ideas that might not be immediately visible during the initial coding stage. Pattern coding helps in

uncovering underlying similarities across the data, highlighting significant themes (Saldaña, 2021). Another essential technique in this phase is axial coding, which focuses on examining the relationships and connections between different categories. This technique enables a more nuanced understanding of how various data interact with one another, revealing patterns of influence or association (Saldaña, 2021). I categorized the codes based on similarities among the data points, which facilitated the creation of main themes. These themes effectively captured the essence of the participants' words and emotions, providing a richer and more detailed understanding of their experiences and perspectives.

### **Patterns and Coding**

In this study, I explored the lived experiences of Black Americans who have been exposed to police brutality on social media. This study aimed to understand how exposure to images and videos of police brutality influences their perceptions of racial identity and emotional wellness. I conducted semistructured interviews with participants, allowing them to share their narratives and emotional responses. All participants recounted their experiences witnessing instances of police brutality directed at unarmed Black Americans via various social media such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc. Table 2 shows the themes and coding.

**Table 2***Themes and Coding*

| Theme | Theme title (second style of coding)                 | Coding (first style of coding)   |
|-------|--|--|
| 1     | Division between Black Americans and the White badge | Angry, labels, lack of being unified, differences, being treated unfairly or differently           |
| 2     | Panic, anger, and distrust of the White badge        | Panic, fear, anger, sadness, aggression, shock, confusion  |
| 3     | Desire for social change                             | Interventions, activism, protest, safety concerns, change, support, conversations, organizations   |
| 4     | Be on an even playing field                          | Death, murder, playing games with Black lives, racial profiling, trauma                            |
| 5     | Impact on racial identity                            | Proud, loud, unimportant, no fear of being Black, expendable                                       |
| 6     | Police officers need to be held accountable          | False narratives, lack of accountability, lack of consequences, unfair treatment, racial profiling |

**Evidence of Trustworthiness**

In this qualitative, interpretive phenomenological study, ensuring trustworthiness was crucial to adhere to ethical guidelines and maintain the integrity of the research (see Lemon & Hayes, 2020). To achieve this, I captured the participants' concerns, ensuring that their words and emotions were accurately recorded and reflected in the analysis. This involved active listening during interviews and a careful transcription process. Additionally, I employed strategies such as member checking and maintaining an audit trail to enhance the credibility and dependability of my research. These steps helped ensure that the findings represented the participants' narratives.

**Credibility**

To ensure the credibility of my study, I conducted bracketing and a member-checking process. Bracketing is a crucial methodological approach that allowed me to suspend my preconceptions and biases, creating a safe space for participants to express their narratives openly and authentically. I provided comments when needed, which serves a dual purpose. For instance, I interjected to clarify specific information the participant shared, ensuring I fully understood their viewpoint. Additionally, these comments facilitate a smooth transition from one topic to another, maintaining a coherent and logical flow in the dialogue. This careful navigation enriches the conversation, encouraging participants to delve deeper into their experiences and ultimately leading to more nuanced insights.

Member checking involves sending the preliminary research results back to the participants involved in the study (Shenton, 2004). I gathered their feedback and confirmed the accuracy of the findings concerning their contributions and perspectives. This practice enhanced the validity of the results and promotes transparency and trust throughout the research process. This verification is crucial for establishing trustworthiness of my study and enhancing the credibility of the conclusions drawn from the data collected.

**Transferability**

Qualitative research is a valuable tool for uncovering insights into complex and multifaceted phenomena. However, one notable challenge is that its findings tend to be highly context-dependent, making them less ungeneralizable across other settings

(Ravitch & Carl, 2021). To mitigate this limitation and enhance their findings, researchers enrich their studies by providing a thorough description of the study context and the participants. To accomplish this, I examined the comprehensive transcription of the interviews to confirm that each participant's account aligned with the lived experiences of Black Americans affected by police brutality on social media and its influence on their racial identity and emotional health.

### **Dependability**

Ravitch and Carl (2021) defined dependability in research as the comprehensive documentation of findings and the verification of their accuracy through auditing. This practice is essential for building the trustworthiness and credibility of research outcomes, enabling researchers and stakeholders to depend on them confidently (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). To achieve this, I used transcriptions from the Zoom interviews. This provided me with detailed records to pinpoint errors or inconsistencies through member verification. To improve trustworthiness, peers reviewed the findings, and feedback was incorporated to enhance clarity and alignment with the research questions.

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability is essential for upholding the quality and integrity of research. Keeping an audit trail is a common practice among researchers. An audit trail involves a comprehensive record of the qualitative researcher's complete process of data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). During this process, I kept a record of interview transcripts, a journal, and other forms of data collected during this study on my

password-protected laptop. The journal includes my feelings and assumptions throughout this process. It also serves as a way to bracket and to include self-reflection.

### **Study Results**

The purpose of this qualitative interpretive phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of Black Americans who have been exposed to police brutality on social media and how it impacts their racial identity and emotional well-being. It examined how interactions with social media affect their inner experiences, shaping thoughts, feelings, and self-perceptions. By emphasizing narratives and personal accounts, the research underscores the significant role of social media in shaping racial identity and emotional well-being. This study emphasized the voices of Black Americans, including feelings of fear, anger, and helplessness, and how these experiences shape their understanding of racial discrimination and influence their mental health and resilience. Table 3 illustrates the themes and patterns.

**Table 3***Themes and Patterns*

| Participant     | Theme |   |   |   |   |   |
|-----------------|-------|---|---|---|---|---|
|                 | 1     | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| Sunshine Monroe | X     | X | X | X | X | X |
| Delane          | X     | X | X | X | X | X |
| Tony            | X     | X |   | X | X |   |
| Jake            | X     | X | X | X | X | X |
| Tay             |       | X | X | X | X |   |
| Willie          | X     | X | X | X | X |   |
| Cookie          | X     | X | X | X | X | X |
| James           |       | X |   | X | X | X |
| Jean            | X     | X | X | X | X | X |
| Bic Damone      |       | X |   | X | X |   |
| Abby            | X     | X |   | X | X |   |
| Dr. Montezuma   | X     | X | X | X | X | X |

*Note.* Theme 1 = Division between Black Americans and the White Badge; Theme 2 = Panic, Anger, and Distrust of the White Badge; Theme 3 = Desire for Social Change; Theme 4 = Be on an Even Playing Field; Theme 5 = Impact on Racial Identity; Theme 6 = Police Officers Need to be Held Accountable

**Theme 1: Division Between Black Americans and the White Badge**

Ten of the 12 participants expressed that there is a division between the Black and White communities, including their perceptions and interactions concerning law enforcement. These divisions are connected to the systemic and often brutal treatment that Black Americans have historically endured and continue to experience at the hands

of police officers. Participants clearly stated they were referring to White police officers during the interview and were not influenced in any way.

Dr. Montezuma shared,

“Because when do we see justice? But the justice system is, don’t care if you, a Black man, police officer, they’re going to arrest your ass. And they’re gonna label you violent. And you know this whole theory. I can’t think of it off my head. But how Black people like we feel secondhand embarrassment when we do some shit like, because once we do some shit, it’s all Black people are like this. All Black men are like this. And is, is it labels, all of us? But if a white person do that like the whole race don’t get labeled.”

Willie added,

“Well, I have lost friends. Well, so-called friends behind police brutality videos and watching things is because to hear people that you’ve especially for me played football with for years, and grew up together, ate at my same dinner table. But then hear their comments behind someone dying, and then, when you ask the question, hey, man, you know me, you know exactly. I mean, what if that was me? Oh, you’re just different. You’re not like the rest of them. It really. It really paints a really crazy picture.”

Moreover, Cookie emphasized,

“Most of us are angry. Most of us are sad, most of us. We just connect with each other. Through that way, and a lot of times especially, I remember it was coworkers who were not Black, they were like, why are you so upset about this

boy that died when you know he's in Florida, and we're in [a different state]. And I'm like it's because of our, our connection as people like. If one of us is wrong. We all feel wrong, and I feel like that's just generational, coming from slavery, like that's just what it is like. We feel each other.”

Finally, Delane commented,

“My perspective is, you know, keep your head on the swivel. They stay on alert, like, yeah. Police officers are there to serve and protect, but at the same time, they can be your worst enemy. So be quite aware and react accordingly, like we almost have to be more vigilant. Not even almost, we have to be more vigilant. When we are interacting. Because it can go awry so quickly. Our white counterparts don't have those same thoughts. Interaction things like that never cross their mind. So it depends on who you are.”

## **Theme 2: Panic, Anger, and Distrust of the White Badge**

All 12 participants in the study reported experiencing various intense emotions, including feelings of panic, anger, and distrust. These emotional reactions were linked to the white badge due to police brutality against Black Americans. The White badge can be described as a White police officer wearing the badge. The participants' responses highlighted the emotional impact of the white badge, concerning authority and systemic injustice.

James shared,

“It most definitely takes a toll on my emotional well-being. It makes me very fearful of, you know, even just being approached by police, having police

interactions.” Abby added, “It’s just really sad to see, and it’s sad that it’s so common, and can be so numb to it because it just happens so often.”

In addition, Tay explained,

“With the videos, it makes me feel like it is super close to home because when you look at the people it happens to, they look like me. They look like my family members, so it causes me to spiral a little bit.”

Moreover, Jean stated,

“Well, it messes with me because I have two sons and three grandsons, and I worry about them. I know I’m raising my sons to be young men. Both of my sons have dreadlocks, and I’m afraid because I know that they are good people. I know that they are good kids. They have no intention of doing wrong, but society views them differently. So yeah, I’m scared. I’m scared for them.”

Dr. Montezuma asserted,

“When do we for real get justice? So I cried. I remember, like I said, like seeing people on social media rejoicing like I called my parents. I was calling my friends like, Can you believe this? Can you believe this, like the—but I was just calling everybody and, and then just seeing like the racist comments, too, like shouldn’t have been breaking the law like he wasn’t even doing shit like. That’s the thing, like my nigga was just trying to have a good time. Y’all, y’all stopping him like I don’t know.”

Tony said,

“It’s a hodgepodge of emotions, you know. There’s anger, of course, because you really, you know, get tired of seeing the same things over and over. It’s increasingly frustrating. There’s an aspect of fear. As someone who’s been racially profiled before, it brings back anxiety. Moments of anxiety when you’ve dealt with this in your own experiences in life. To see other people deal with it and not necessarily make it out.”

Sunshine Monroe commented,

“You know, I’ll start off with being pissed. And then once I really start to look at it, I think I became hurt. I felt the fear that young man had, and I think, for the most part, as a Black person, I’m just tired, you know, so it’s that exhaustion of seeing it. There are spaces where you want to cut yourself off from it and not watch any of it because of how painful it is.”

Moreover, Cookie explained,

“At first, I was shocked mainly because I didn’t have all of the details. I knew it was just a Black boy who was shot. It’s been anger. More anger than anything because even if they have a, you know, a whole story to tell, it’s like okay, but did you have to kill him? You know what I’m saying.”

Willie shared,

“Perception for me as a Black man, it’s totally different from someone else. So emotionally, you’re just kind of numb. You know, you just have to kind of box yourself in and just try not to emotionally react.”

Similarly, Delane said,

“It makes me sick to my stomach. I don’t know. It puts you on high alert, you know, because I’ve never done anything wrong, like I’ve never been to jail or anything. The worst I’ve ever done was speed, but even getting stopped for speeding makes me leery because of Sandra Bland, like I’m antsy, I’m apprehensive. I make sure that I have stuff in my hand. Like I have this big old envelope and it’s brown, like the big legal ones ... so that I can easily spot my registration. All I have to do is open it ... I can pull it out real quick by the time I get stopped. It’s already in hand, I don’t have to make any movements because everything is right there.”

Along those same lines, Bic Damone explained,

“George Floyd. That was a big one, like, you know, it got me emotional, ‘cause it’s like, I’m watching this man, you know. He’s crying for dear life, and it’s like they’re not listening.”

Finally, Jake asserted,

“Actually, on my birthday. One of the first things I saw when I woke up was the George Floyd murder. So it was like, you know, you’re excited, hey? It’s your birthday. So on and so forth. And as soon as you open social media. You see another Black person getting killed, and the thing that really affected me is because I have family members who have been in a predicament like that and have died in police custody. Seeing that, on my birthday, really hit home. I didn’t realize how much it affected me until years later, whenever someone asked me

how my 30s have been. I'm like, well, this is how I started my 30s. I couldn't stop crying."

### **Theme 3: Desire for Social Change**

Eight of the 12 participants in the study expressed a desire for social change aimed at addressing police brutality targeted at the Black community. They expressed the urgent need for reforms and greater accountability within law enforcement agencies.

Sunshine Monroe stated,

"Everybody is telling, you know, Black women, it's time to rest. Sit still, and, and I agree with that to a certain extent. I don't think we can completely rest, because we already know if it. If we ain't doing it, it ain't gonna get done. But I do believe in that spirit for a moment, because we did. We worked our butt off to try to get Kamala elected. We worked our butt off to try to protect as many Black men as we could, but when it came down to it, most of them wasn't there for us, and so I am a little tired. I'm a little tired. I'm tired of fighting for everybody. But I will say that every video I see still puts a fire under me, and it makes me want to do something. Lately, I just been telling myself to sit down a little bit, a little bit more, but for the most part it's been my why."

Dr. Montezuma expressed,

"On the one hand, like my continued conversations, that I do on the side, and even have an individual conversation. That is my tangible advocacy as well as the children's book. My way to kind of push back against the system is still to find ways to teach about Black history and the importance of it. I am with the

movement of the Black community right now, who are opting against protesting right now, physically protesting like outside with our bodies.”

Delane shared,

“I do take part in the conversations, but I don’t feel like the right people hear them if that makes sense. The people who really need to hear it aren’t.”

Moreover, Tay shared,

“I feel like a lot of people try to distract themselves from the fact that it actually happens. And so it makes you want to talk about it, but also, like the Black people already, have a fear of like health care in general, so like, if we have a fear of health care. Then we have a fear of the police, and then we have a fear of this. Then we will be in a state of constant fear. So I think it helps me to talk about it, especially like with government officials, or like with police officers or health care professionals, because, like they need to understand, like what they’re working with if they want to be an ally. So it actually like empowers me to talk to them more about it, because they need to grasp it as much as I do.”

Willie commented,

“It gives me the conversations as well as activism. I like to be involved with things. So I got involved with different associations and organizations to try to not say prevent, but almost try to give young men a heads up. Hey, look! Try this instead. You know what I mean, you know, although we you want a voice, you know, in certain situations, it is best not to say anything at all. I try to involve myself with different organizations. Volunteering at schools just to try to reach

those young men. Young men and women. Excuse me, young men and women, you know. Have someone that looks like them to tell them. Hey, look. I'm just as mad as you are. I'm just as frustrated you are. But in the process, try these act as well because they may have worked for me. I like to unite, to fight, and have a voice in conversations.”

#### **Theme 4: Be on an Even Playing Field**

All 12 participants in the study expressed a desire to be treated fairly, emphasizing that they did not want to be discriminated against or treated differently solely because of the color of their skin. They highlighted the importance of equality, highlighting their hopes for a society where everyone is judged by their character and actions.

Dr. Montezuma expressed,

“Y'all really playing fucking games with our lives like, and it's all on social media. We could have a whole ... documented situation. It's clear what y'all did to Elijah Mccain like. It's clear what y'all did to him. Like it's clear what y'all did to Philando. It's clear what y'all did to Breonna Taylor ...”

Willie stated,

“It was just like no one cared. I can't think of the gentleman's name now, who was choked out behind selling cigarettes. I ... can't think of his name right now. But you know it, it made you feel as if you don't matter, you know you, you, you're just ... a ticket waiting to be pulled in a sense of, you know, it can be you

at any time. And what would you do about it? Because it's almost as you know. For me. It felt like. You know, you're being hunted, you know."

Jake shared,

"I think that we have to be aware of what's going on, because if we're not aware, then history is going to repeat itself. No, there's no, there's not gonna be any change that is going to be made. No one's gonna be held accountable for the wrongdoing that they do towards know, particularly Black males. So we have to be aware and alert of what's going on without dodging in. And that's the, that's the balance I've been trying to find, is being aware and alert."

Cookie said,

"I got pulled over often, at least twice a year, at the very least twice a year since I first started driving. And it's always been like, okay, is what do I have to do to be able to come home or to make it home? So and that's always like how I think, even driving around police officers nervous, driving on the highway, extremely nervous, driving on the side streets, extremely nervous. I'm always at 10 and 2. If I see a police officer window's down, making sure they see me, and I see them. So it's just again that hyper vigilance. But I know it comes from a, not necessarily a positive place, but a place that I want to be safe, no matter what."

### **Theme 5: Impact on Racial Identity**

All 12 participants in the study expressed that their racial identity was perceived as a threat by others or made them feel unimportant. Despite experiencing systematic racism, they remain proud of their identity as Black Americans. They emphasized that

their racial identity is a vital part of who they are, and they continue to uphold their pride and resilience in the face of constant racial discrimination.

Delane shared,

“I mean, it kind of makes me feel insignificant in a way, like unimportant. It makes me feel expendable simply because of the color of my skin.”

Abby said,

“I feel like people see, not all the times, but they see African Americans as a threat and as an issue. And I think, in a way, because of that ... In certain areas that I’m in or certain environments I’m in. I always try not to be problematic or you know, cause trouble, because I feel like one just instant mistake. One like little mistake can, can blow out of proportion.”

James explained,

“I mean, overall. I’m still like I still consider myself a Black African American man. My dad’s from Africa, my mom’s from here. So I still most definitely see myself as that as whole. And I’m going to 100% stand on that. And like, rep my racial identity, however, with. Everything that’s been going on in the media. I guess I’m not. I’m not as loud about it.”

Moreover, Tay said,

“... I don’t fear being Black. I love being Black, but it does like ... I still get like a little nervous in certain spaces.”

**Theme 6: Police Officers Need to be Held Accountable**

Seven of the 12 participants in the study expressed their desire to see police officers held accountable for their actions involving police brutality. They emphasized the importance of transparency in investigations, consequences for misconduct, and accountability within law enforcement agencies.

Jake shared,

“I want to see cops being held more responsible for their actions. So if someone so I understand administrative leave, however, if something is proven that this person actually murdered this person, or so on and so forth, then administrative leave is not enough. Because what is that going to do in order to change the things like, oh, you’re pretty much on time out for a little bit, and then you’re going back to do whatever you need to do, you’re still you’re not feeling the full repercussions of your actions, whereas the family members of whoever was on the other side of you know your choke, your gun, whatever, whatever they’re not gonna see the family member anymore ... So if someone killed somebody, then yes, I believe that the cop or no, the cop who are involved with that should be held responsible. They should go to jail, or, you know, whatever that sentence is, but don’t make it into a white sentence. That’s like, Oh, then go to jail for a year. It’s like, no, because if it was a Black person I killed a white person, even if they were a cop. The Black person will be in jail for 25 to life because of their skin color. However, unfortunately, we’ve seen a lot of non-minority cops that are. You know. That they get a light slap on the wrist, even with clear footage, even

with, you know, people knowing like, Hey, if I have pressure on one side of the person's neck, and I have my hand on the person's inside of the neck. That's a choke. They're restricting blood flow. This person's going to die. But yet they get administrative leave."

Jean said,

"I want them to be held accountable, like with the exposure I don't want. I don't want it to be a slap on the wrist. You know, like a suspension with pay, or none of that stuff. People need to be held accountable for their actions."

Finally, Delane expressed,

"Yeah, they would really stop blaming the victim. Let's start there, stop blaming the victim. I don't know. Stop resisting like what? Because it even if like, even if a person resists, arrest right Let's go down that vein. They deserve to get murdered for it? Make it make sense. It doesn't like, like—you know, and then the white counterpart can do that, and so much more, and get a, a Burger King meal so like. Even if what they say is true, and from their viewpoint. That, that person's resisting arrest. They're being combated. Police officers need to learn to de-escalate, de-escalate situations. And if they had that type of training, a lot of this stuff just would, would not be. It would be a non-issue. Because there's no reason that half of these people who are dead should be, because even if half of the things they say are true, that is not murder worthy, it's just not."

## **Coping Strategies**

Green et al. (2024) aimed to identify existing gaps within the research concerning reactions to police brutality as portrayed in the media. Green et al. (2024) focused their research on reactions to police brutality in the media tied to racial identity attitudes among participants, and reactions and the coping strategies used to address mental health challenges. While I addressed specific aspects of the gap, the connection between media exposure, responses, and racial identity, it fell short of exploring the effectiveness of coping strategies used by individuals to deal with mental health challenges. The findings revealed that participants' coping strategies were varied; some reported employing specific coping skills used to decrease stress, while others admitted to not using any coping strategies at all. Those who did not utilize coping skills often believed that coping strategies were ineffective or would not create change in their emotional state. Due to this, the study did not uncover any consistent themes or patterns in the coping strategies, indicating a need for further research into effective coping strategies.

If I tried to pinpoint a specific theme for the part of the gap concerning coping strategies to achieve saturation, I would deviate from my original study. This requires a deeper exploration of various coping strategies, their effectiveness, and how they contribute to achieving saturation; however, doing so would extend beyond the initial framework and objectives outlined in my original study.

## **Summary**

In Chapter 4, I provided an overview of the study's context and the participants involved, outlined the data collection and analysis methods, and detailed the

methodologies and tools employed. I also offered evidence of trustworthiness, analyzed the results, interpreted the data, and examined the implications for the lived experiences of Black Americans facing police brutality on social media, as well as its effects on their racial identity and emotional health. In Chapter 5, I summarize my analysis of the findings and the study's limitations, discuss the results, offer recommendations, and provide conclusions regarding the experiences of Black Americans with police brutality on social media.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative interpretive phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of Black Americans who have been exposed to police brutality on social media and how it impacts their racial identity and emotional well-being. I explored the lived experiences of 12 Black American men and women to explore the narratives of Black Americans sharing their experiences with police brutality on social media and how these encounters influence their sense of identity and emotional strength. This interpretive phenomenological study provides participants with a platform to share their personal experiences of police brutality on social media. By allowing participants to offer their narratives and feelings in their own words, I was able to collect rich data on this multifaceted issue, exploring how social media serves as both a voice and a witness of police brutality among Black Americans.

I conducted semistructured interviews with all 12 participants via Zoom. All participants chose their pseudonyms to protect their privacy. Data analysis was completed using Saldana's coding process. During this process, six themes were found: (a) division between Black and White communities, (b) panic, anger, and distrust of the White badge, (c) desire for social change, (d) be on an even playing field, and (e) impact on racial identity, and (f) police officers need to be held accountable.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

In this section, I discuss how the findings correlate with the literature in Chapter 2. Six themes emerged from the participants' perceptions of the lived experiences of Black Americans who have been exposed to police brutality on social media and how it

impacts their racial identity and emotional well-being: (a) division between Black and White communities, (b) panic, anger, and distrust of the White badge, (c) desire for social change, (d) be on an even playing field, (e) impact of racial identity, and (f) police officers need to be held accountable. Results from this study revealed that Black Americans' racial identity was not affected. However, they felt like they would always be perceived as a threat. Also, their emotional well-being was affected by witnessing police brutality on social media.

### **Theme 1: Division Between Black Americans and the White Badge**

Ten of the 12 participants stated a division between Black Americans and the White badge communities regarding their perceptions and interactions with law enforcement. These participants described these encounters as racially charged experiences, such as racial profiling and discrimination, which led to mistrust of law enforcement. Participants expressed that they believe trust and security are key factors in shaping the perceptions of law enforcement among the White community. These differences in experience highlight the perspectives shaped by racial identity. Holder et al. (2015) noted the evolution of racism. Historically, hostility and overt discrimination were prevalent; however, modern examples tend to be more subtle (Holder et al., 2015). This theme also highlights the need for ongoing research on racism and its effect on the relationship between Black Americans and the White badge.

### **Theme 2: Panic, Anger, and Distrust of the White Badge**

All 12 participants reported experiencing intense emotions such as fear, panic, and anger because of the white badge. Research has shown that individuals from racial

minority groups, especially people of color, tend to trust police forces less than their White counterparts (Jackson et al., 2021). This trust gap is linked to experiences with racial profiling, systemic discrimination, and stark racial differences in law enforcement practices (Nadal et al., 2017). Participants in this study reported that these experiences with police officers had a significant impact on their emotional well-being. These findings contribute to the body of research by expanding upon emotional burdens associated with racial experiences with law enforcement. This statement aligns with the findings presented in Chapter 2, which explores the various concerns and anxieties experienced by parents in a study conducted by Miller and Vittrup (2020). The study conducted by Miller and Vittrup (2020) provided insights into the emotional struggles faced by families. Their research highlights that families often endure a significant emotional burden due to feelings of fear, worry, and anxiety. These intense emotions are not only related to their own safety but are also rooted in concerns for the well-being and future of their children. The study by Miller and Vittrup revealed that emotional turmoil can have a profound impact on families, mental health, and daily life, underscoring the urgent need for support. It also highlights the importance of interventions like community-based support, counseling, and policy changes to address racial trauma stemming from the white badge.

### **Theme 3: Desire for Social Change**

Eight of the 12 participants in this study expressed a desire for social reform to address police brutality within the Black community. These participants highlighted the importance of engaging in ongoing discussions about racial injustice, advocating for

policy reforms, and participating in protests and activism as effective ways to raise awareness and drive social change. Additionally, they emphasized the importance of education as a means to inform and empower community members, thereby fostering unity in the fight against systemic injustices.

Existing literature suggests movements such as BLM to promote social change. The BLM movement is a primarily Black-led initiative dedicated to exposing systemic issues of racism, discrimination, and racial inequality that affect Black populations, including law enforcement, employment, education, and healthcare (Williamson et al., 2018). Through organized protests and educational campaigns, BLM has emerged as a significant force for social change, underscoring the pressing need to address issues of social justice and human rights (Williamson et al., 2018).

#### **Theme 4: Be on an Even Playing Field**

All 12 participants expressed a strong desire to be treated fairly. They reported feeling like their lives were disregarded and that being Black was a game. As discussed in the literature review, police brutality is characterized by a repeated and escalating pattern of violence, often involving unjustified and unnecessary actions (Bryant-Davis et al., 2017). These actions can include racial profiling, which unfairly targets individuals based on their race; excessive use of force resulting in death or severe injury; creating an environment of intimidation and fear through harassment; and law enforcement officers committing crimes against civilians, such as wrongful arrests and false accusations (Bryant-Davis et al., 2017). It stresses how crucial it is for law enforcement to treat Black Americans fairly and justly. This highlights the need to implement policies and practices

that promote fairness, respect, and dignity for everyone, regardless of their racial background.

### **Theme 5: Impact on Racial Identity**

All 12 participants reported that their racial identity was perceived as a threat by others or that they were made to feel unimportant. Even though participants felt that they were made to feel threatened, their racial identity was not impacted, and they are proud to be Black. This connects to previous research. Chapter 2 provides a detailed explanation of microaggressions, specifically distinguishing between microassaults and microinsults.

A microassault is characterized as a verbal or nonverbal aggression intended to hurt the victim, and it can manifest through actions such as name-calling, avoidant or dismissive behaviors, and deliberate discriminatory acts aimed at marginalizing or demeaning individuals based on their racial identity (Sue et al., 2007). On the other hand, a microinsult involves a more insidious form of discrimination where someone communicates rudely, insensitively, or in a belittling manner that subtly undermines a person's racial heritage or identity (Sue et al., 2007). These microinsults can be expressed through subtle comments or gestures that, although less overt than microassaults, still serve to devalue and diminish the individual's sense of self and cultural identity (Sue et al., 2007).

Despite these challenges and experiences of systemic racism, the participants continue to hold a sense of pride in their identity as Black Americans. It sheds light on how Black Americans deal with racialized experiences, revealing both the harm caused by microaggressions and the resilience that emerges in response. These results highlight

the need for continued research into building resilience, as well as policies and interventions that tackle the psychological impacts of both subtle and overt racism.

### **Theme 6: Police Officers Need to be Held Accountable**

Seven of the 12 participants expressed a desire for accountability among police officers when it comes to instances of police brutality. The participants emphasized the importance of conducting thorough investigations and ensuring that proper consequences are implemented, such as prison and termination. The participants also called for a reevaluation of current police procedures and policies to prevent the excessive use of force, emphasizing the need to hold officers accountable for their actions. Furthermore, participants highlighted that suspending officers with pay should not be considered an appropriate punishment for the killing of an unarmed and innocent person, suggesting that more severe measures or legal actions are necessary. In Chapter 2, the discussion included many examples of police brutality that were shared on social media. These cases involved officers engaging in forceful, aggressive, and unethical behavior toward innocent Black men and women. The police officers used excessive and unjustified force, leading to harm and injustice among Black Americans. This highlights the urgent need for systemic reforms within law enforcement.

### **Limitations of the Study**

One limitation of this study is that it focused on observing police brutality as viewed on social media. While social media is one way to gain insights on various topics quickly, it limits the scope of the findings and may not capture broader experiences.

A second limitation is that this study recruited participants primarily from southern states, rather than from states with fewer Black Americans, which may have affected how many participants were able to participate in the study. Black Americans in southern states may have different experiences with police brutality on social media due to their environment and cultural history, which includes a history of slavery, racial tensions, and segregation. Black Americans living in states with fewer Black Americans may differ from the participants in southern states and express different ideas about police brutality on social media.

During this study, I was able to explore the lived experiences of those who witnessed police brutality on social media. A third limitation of this study was that it was limited to those who witnessed police brutality on social media and not to those who had firsthand experience, such as witnessing police brutality in person or being a victim of police brutality.

A fourth limitation is that this study focused solely on the White badge, not the Black badge. The White badge can be defined as a badge worn by a White police officer, and the Black badge can be defined as a badge worn by a Black police officer. This limit does not account for how badges might be perceived or function across different racial groups or in various communities.

### **Recommendations**

One recommendation is to expand discussions about police brutality beyond social media. While social media offers a quick way to access information on various

topics and concerns, it limits broader experiences, such as media coverage, including news, community interactions, newspapers, and radio.

A second recommendation of this study is to conduct a quantitative research study. Although qualitative research offers rich insights through personal narratives, it has limited the number of people who were able to participate in the study due to its smaller sample sizes. The smaller sample size may limit the findings to larger populations, thereby reducing the broader significance of the study's conclusions.

A third recommendation is to actively seek potential participants who have been directly impacted by police brutality, whether through personal witnesses or as victims themselves. Understanding their experiences and listening to their perspectives can provide valuable insights into the realities of police brutality, thereby fostering greater awareness.

All 12 participants in this study expressed concerns about the negative impact of the White badge. Only one participant discussed the negative consequences of the Black badge. Given these findings, a fourth recommendation should compare the perceptions and emotional responses provoked by the White and Black badges. This comparison could shed light on whether there are significant differences in attitudes, emotional reactions, and social implications associated with the Black and White badges, providing insight into their respective impacts on individuals' experiences and interactions.

### **Implications**

This study sheds light on how police brutality on social media affects social media stories of police brutality impact Black Americans' mental and emotional wellness,

and how this impacts Black Americans' racial identity. This information can be a valuable resource for policymakers and police officers to understand the impact of police brutality on racial identity and emotional health. It may also help shift the portrayal of police brutality on social media and support trauma-informed approaches. Furthermore, this data can help police officials drive change by backing initiatives that reduce harm, prevent future incidents of police brutality, and hold officers accountable.

### **Conclusion**

This qualitative interpretive phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of Black Americans who have witnessed or been impacted by police brutality through social media. It examined how these experiences influence their racial identity and emotional strength. Using CRT as both a theoretical lens and a conceptual framework, the study explored how race and systemic inequalities influence legal systems and societal narratives. It also examined how racial injustice impacts society and the legal system. A qualitative approach was used to collect detailed stories of participants' experiences from their perspectives. Their lived experiences shed light on how systemic racism affects racial identity and mental well-being. This study is important because it raises awareness about the impact of police brutality on Black Americans and highlighted that discrimination persists in daily life. While the results provide insights into how police brutality is shared and discussed on social media and its impact on racial identity and emotional well-being, further research is necessary. More research is needed to focus on exploring effective coping strategies that individuals may utilize to manage emotional distress due to police brutality on social media. This

expanded understanding could help in designing targeted interventions and support systems in affected communities.

## References

- Alang, S., McAlpine, D., & McClain, M. (2021). Police encounters as stressors: Associations with depression and anxiety across race. *Socius Sociological Research for a Dynamic World*, 7. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2378023121998128>
- Alang, S., VanHook, C., Judson, J., Ikiroma, A., & Adkins-Jackson, P. (2022). Police brutality, heightened vigilance, and the mental health of Black adults. *Psychology of Violence*, 12(4), 211–220. <https://doi.org/10.1037/vio0000418>
- Alexander, A. C., Waring, J. J. C., Noble, B., Bradley, D., Olurotimi, O., Fronheiser, J., Sifat, M., Ehlke, S. J., Boozary, L. K., McQuoid, J., & Kendzor, D. E. (2023). Perceptions of mental health and exploring the role of social activism among African Americans exposed to media coverage of police brutality and protests. *Journal of Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities*, 10(3), 1403–1413. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40615-022-01326-2>
- Anthym, M., & Tuitt, F. (2019). When the levees break: The cost of vicarious trauma, microaggressions and emotional labor for Black administrators and faculty engaging in race work at traditionally white institutions. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 32(9), 1072–1093. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2019.1645907>
- Bhopal, K. (2023). Critical race theory: Confronting, challenging, and rethinking White privilege. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 49, 111–128. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-031021-123710>

- Bohonos, J. W. (2023). Workplace hate speech and rendering Black and Native lives as if they do not matter: A nightmarish autoethnography. *Organization, 30*(4), 605–623. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13505084211015379>
- Bor, J., Venkataramani, A. S., Williams, D. R., & Tsai, A. C. (2018). Police killings and their spillover effects on the mental health of Black Americans: A population-based, quasi-experimental study. *Lancet, 392*(10144), 302–310. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(18\)31130-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(18)31130-9)
- Bryan, N. (2021). Remembering Tamir Rice and other Black boy victims: Imagining “Black playcrit literacies” inside and outside urban literacy education. *Urban Education, 56*(5), 744–771. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085920902250>
- Bryant-Davis, T., Adams, T., Alejandre, A., & Gray, A. A. (2017). The trauma lens of police violence against racial and ethnic minorities. *Journal of Social Issues, 73*(4), 852–871. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12251>
- Burkholder, G. J., Cox, K. A., Crawford, L. M., & Hitchcock, J. H. (Eds). (2020). *Research designs and methods: an applied guide for the scholar-practitioner*. Sage.
- Campbell, T. (2024). Black Lives Matter’s effect on police lethal use of force. *Journal of Urban Economics, 141*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jue.2023.103587>
- Carney-Knisely, G., Griffin, M., Crawford, A., Spates, K., & Singh, P. (2024). Police killings of unarmed Black persons and suicides among Black youth in the US: A national time-series analysis. *Annals of Epidemiology, 94*, 91–99. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annepidem.2024.04.012>

- Cecil, D. K. (2024). Saying her name: Gendered narratives in news coverage of Breonna Taylor's death. *Race and Justice, 14*(3), 423–439.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/21533687211070552>
- Chou, T., Asnaani, A., & Hofmann, S. G. (2012). Perception of racial discrimination and psychopathology across three U.S. ethnic minority groups. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, 18*(1), 74–81. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0025432>
- Comas-Díaz, L., Hall, G. N., & Neville, H. A. (2019). Racial trauma: Theory, research, and healing: Introduction to the special issue. *American Psychologist, 74*(1), 1–5.  
<https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000442>
- Dawson, A. (2018). A space for countering colorblind discourse: Constructions of police-perpetrated homicides of African-American males. *Critical Studies in Media Communication, 35*(3), 300–313. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15295036.2018.1436763>
- DeCuir, J. T., & Dixson, A. D. (2004). “So when it comes out, they aren’t that surprised that it is there”: Using critical race theory as a tool of analysis of race and racism in education. *Educational Researcher, 33*(5), 26–31.  
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/3699853>
- DeCuir-Gunby, J. T., Johnson, O. T., Womble Edwards, C., McCoy, W. N., & White, A. M. (2020). African American professionals in higher education: Experiencing and coping with racial microaggressions. *Race, Ethnicity and Education, 23*(4), 492–508. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2019.1579706>

- Desmond, M., Papachristos, A. V., & Kirk, D. S. (2016). Police violence and citizen crime reporting in the Black community. *American Sociological Review*, *81*(5), 857–876. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122416663494>
- DeVylder, J. E., Anglin, D. M., Bowleg, L., Fedina, L., & Link, B. G. (2022). Police violence and public health. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology*, *18*, 527–552. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-clinpsy-072720-020644>
- Dixon, T. (2007). Black criminals and white officers: The effects of racially misrepresenting law breakers and law defenders on television news. *Media Psychology*, *10*(2), 270–291. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15213260701375660>
- Douds, K. W., & Hout, M. (2020). Microaggressions in the United States. *Sociological Science*, *7*(22), 528–543. <https://doi.org/10.15195/v7.a22>
- Edwards, F., Lee, H., & Esposito, M. (2019). Risk of being killed by police use of force in the United States by age, race–ethnicity, and sex. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, *116*(34), 16793–16798. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1821204116>
- Ford, J. R. (2023). In the trenches: Just trying to make it as Black men in early career faculty roles. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *36*(3), 341–355. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2022.2127014>
- Gillborn, D. (2015). Intersectionality, critical race theory, and the primacy of racism: Race, class, gender, and disability in education. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *21*(3), 277–287. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800414557827>

- Gonzalez, S. M. (2019). Making it home: An intersectional analysis of the police talk. *Gender & Society, 33*(3), 363–386. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243219828340>
- Green, D. A., & Evans, A. M. (2021). Undue police violence toward African Americans: An analysis of professional counselors' training and perceptions. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 99*(4), 363–371. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcad.12389>
- Green, D. A., Evans, A. M., Litam, S. D. A., Hornsby, T., Boulden, R., Shannon, J., Ford, D. J., & Landrum, D. (2024). Racial identity attitudes and vicarious traumatization from undue police violence on anticipatory traumatic reaction among Black Americans. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 39*(3/4), 848–868. <https://doi.org/10.1177/088626052311984844>
- Groves, R. M., Fowler, Jr., F. J., Couper, M. P., Lepkowski, J. M., Singer, E., & Tourangeau, R. (2009). *Survey methodology* (2nd. ed.). John Wiley & Sons.
- Harris, A., & Amutah-Onukagha, N. (2019). Under the radar: Strategies used by Black mothers to prepare their sons for potential police interactions. *Journal of Black Psychology, 45*(6-7), 439–453. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095798419887069>
- Harris, M. G., & O'Brien, K. M. (2024). Black grief matters: Undergraduate students' experiences grieving police murders of Black Americans. *Counseling Psychologist, 52*(3), 346–380. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00110000231220071>
- Hawkins, D. S. (2022). “After Philando, I had to take a sick day to recover”: Psychological distress, trauma and police brutality in the Black community. *Health Communication, 37*(9), 1113–1122. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10410236.2021.1913838>

- Hawkins, D. S. (2023). “Son, Black people are like Superman, but cops can be the kryptonite”: Communication about police brutality in the Black family. *Journal of Family Communication*, 23(3–4), 188–204.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15267431.2023.22408011>
- Holder, A. M. B., Jackson, M. A., & Ponterotto, J. G. (2015). Racial microaggression experiences and coping strategies of Black women in corporate leadership. *Qualitative Psychology*, 2(2), 164–180. <https://doi.org/10.1037/qup0000024>
- Iheduru-Anderson, K., Okoro, F. O., & Moore, S. S. (2022). Diversity and inclusion or tokens? A qualitative study of Black women academic nurse leaders in the United States. *Global Qualitative Nursing Research*, 9, 1–13.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/23333936211073116>
- Iheme, W. C. (2020). Systemic racism, police brutality of Black people, and the use of violence in quelling peaceful protests in America. *Age of Human Rights Journal*, 15. <https://doi.org/10.17561/tahrj.v15.5851>
- Isen, R. (2022). The contribution of social media toward racial trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder in Black Americans: A forensic perspective. *Journal of Forensic Psychiatry & Psychology*, 33(5), 692–707.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14789949.2022.2105250>
- Jackson, A., Fedina, L., DeVyllder, J., & Barth, R. (2021). Police violence and associations with public perceptions of the police. *Journal of the Society for Social Work and Research*, 12(2), 303–326. <https://doi.org/10.1086/711683>

- Jones, A. M. (2022). Conflicted: How Black women negotiate their responses to racial microaggressions at a historically White institution. *Race, Ethnicity & Education*, 25(5), 738–753. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2021.1924136>
- Lane, K., Williams, Y., Hunt, A. N., & Paulk, A. (2020). The framing of race: Trayvon Martin and the Black Lives Matter movement. *Journal of Black Studies*, 51(8), 790–812. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021934720946802>
- Lee, J., & Robinson, M. (2019). “That’s my number one fear in life. It’s the police”: Examining young Black men’s exposures to trauma and loss resulting from police violence and police killings. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 45(3), 143–184. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095798419865152>
- Lemon, L. L., & Hayes, J. (2020). Enhancing trustworthiness of qualitative findings: Using Leximancer for qualitative data analysis triangulation. *Qualitative Report*, 25(3), 604–614.
- Lowrey-Kinberg, B. V., & Sullivan Buker, G. (2017). “I’m giving you a lawful order”: Dialogic legitimacy in Sandra Bland’s traffic stop. *Law and Society Review*, 51(2), 379–412. <https://doi.org/10.1111/lasr.12265>
- Maier, J. A., Gentile, D. A., Vogel, D. L., & Kaplan, S. A. (2014). Media influences on self-stigma of seeking psychological services: The importance of media portrayals and person perception. *Psychology of Popular Media Culture*, 3(4), 239–256. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0034504>
- Martinez, A. Y. (2022). Why critical race theory matters. *Ethnic Studies Review*, 45(1), 23.

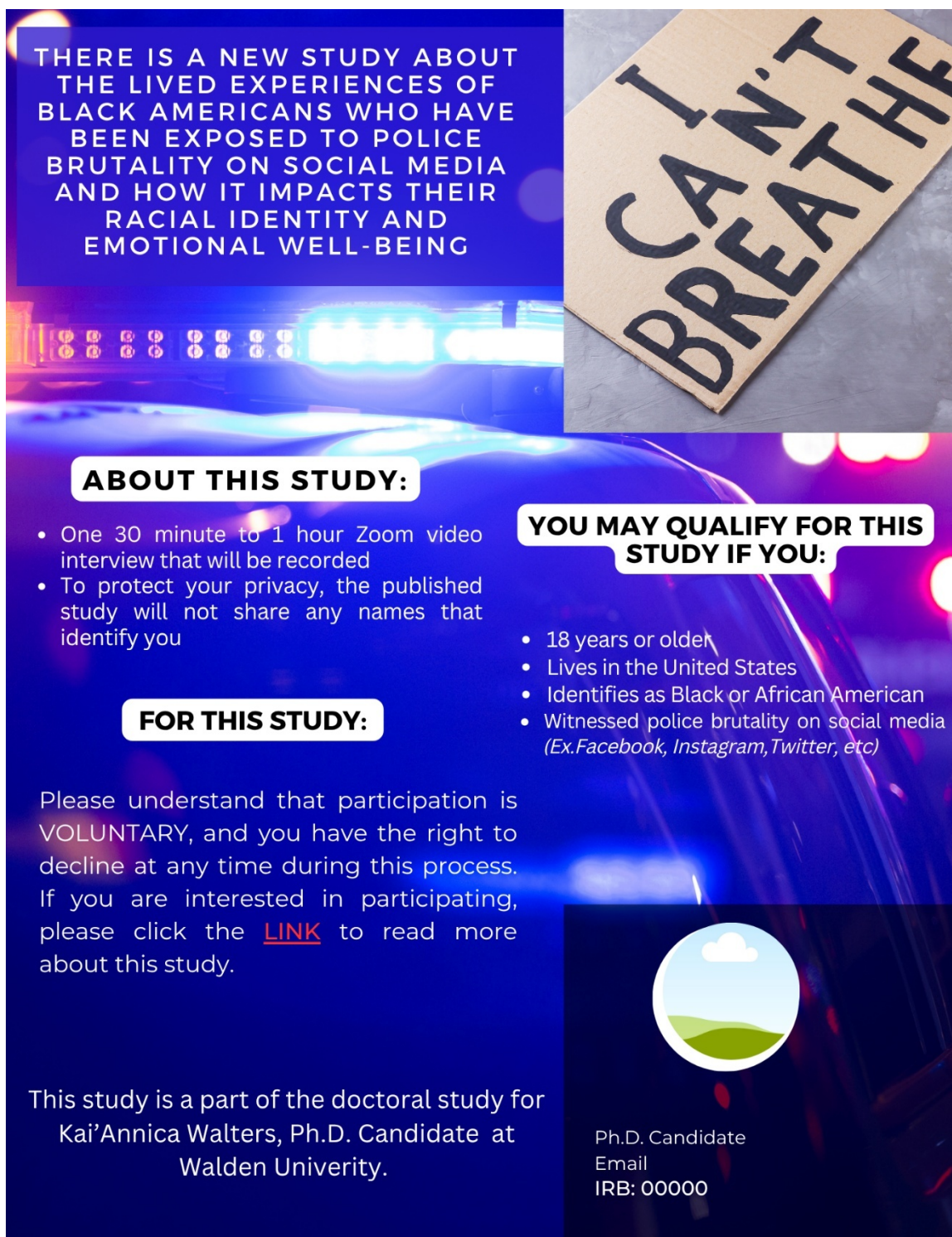
- Mason, M. (2010). Sample size and saturation in PhD studies using qualitative interviews. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 11*(3). Retrieved from <https://doaj.org/article/2657f6fdb8d4873b9f03b81307524ad>
- Mastro, D. (2015). Why the media's role in issues of race and ethnicity should be in the spotlight. *Journal of Social Issues, 71*(1), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12093>
- McLeod, M. N., Heller, D., Manze, M. G., & Echeverria, S. E. (2020). Police interactions and the mental health of Black Americans: A systematic review. *Journal of Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities, 7*(1), 10–27. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40615-019-00629-1>
- McLeory, A. M., & Wang, Y. C. (2024). “We’re not anti-police...we’re anti-police brutality”: An exploration of Black college freshmen’s perception of police brutality on social media. *Journal of Adolescent Research, 39*(4), 1086–1114. <https://doi.org/10.1177/07435584221144975>
- Miller, C., & Vittrup, B. (2020). The indirect effects of police racial bias on African American families. *Journal of Family Issues, 41*(10), 1699–1722. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X20929068>
- Nadal, K. L., Davidoff, K. C., Allicock, N., Serpe, C. R., & Erazo, T. (2017). Perceptions of police, racial profiling, and psychological outcomes: A mixed methodological study. *Journal of Social Issues, 73*(4), 808–830. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12249>
- Offermann, L. R., Basford, T. E., Graebner, R., Jaffer, S., De Graaf, S. B., & Kaminsky, S. E. (2014). See no evil: Color blindness and perceptions of subtle racial

- discrimination in the workplace. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 20(4), 499–507. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0037237>
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). Chapter 5. Module 30: Purposeful sampling and case selection: Overview of strategies and options. In *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (4th ed., pp. 264–315). Sage.
- Peoples, K. (2021). *How to write a phenomenological dissertation*. Sage.
- Pitman, B., Ralph, A. M., Camacho, J., & Monk-Turner, E. (2019). Social media users' interpretations of the Sandra Bland arrest video. *Race and Justice*, 9(4), 479–497. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2153368717705420>
- Pryce, D. K., Olaghere, A., Brown, R. A., & Davis, V. M. (2021). A neglected problem: Understanding the effects of personal and vicarious trauma on African Americans' attitudes toward the police. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 48(10), 1366–1389. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00938548211006756>
- Ravitch, S. M., & Carl, N. M. (2021). *Qualitative research: Bridging the conceptual, theoretical and methodological*. Sage.
- Saldaña, J. (2021). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (4th ed.). Sage.
- Samuels-Wortley, K. (2021). To serve and protect whom? Using composite counter-storytelling to explore Black and indigenous youth experiences and perceptions of the police in Canada. *Crime & Delinquency*, 67(8), 1137–1164. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011128721989077>
- Shenton, A. K. (2004). Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. *Education for Information*, 22(2), 63–75.

- Shrikant, N., & Sambaraju, R. (2021). 'A police officer shot a Black man': Racial categorization, racism, and mundane culpability in news reports of police shootings of Black people in the United States of America. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 60(4), 1196–1217. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjso.12490>
- Smiley, C., & Fakunle, D. (2016). From “brute” to “thug”: The demonization and criminalization of unarmed Black male victims in America. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 26(3/4), 350–366. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10911359.2015.1129256>
- Solórzano, D. G., & Yosso, T. J. (2002). Critical race methodology: Counter-storytelling as an analytical framework for education research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 8(1), 23–44. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107780040200800103>
- Staggers-Hakim, R. (2016). The nation’s unprotected children and the ghost of Mike Brown, or the impact of national police killings on the health and social development of African American boys. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 26(3/4), 390–399. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10911359.2015.1132864>
- Sue, D. W., Capodilupo, C. M., Torino, G. C., Bucceri, J. M., Holder, A., Nadal, K. L., & Esquilin, M. (2007). Racial microaggressions in everyday life: Implications for clinical practice. *American Psychologist*, 62(4), 271. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.62.4.271>
- Szlyk, H., Motley, R., Joe, S., Nonas-Barnes, L., & Azasu, E. (2023). An examination of suicidal behavior among Black college students with exposure to police violence. *Social Work*, 68(1), 18–27. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/swac046>

- U.S. Census Bureau. (2022). *Census glossary*. U.S. Census Bureau. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/glossary/?term=Black+or+African+American>
- Williams, S. (2021). Stream of sadness: Young black women's racial trauma, police brutality and social media. *Feminist Media Studies*, 21(8), 1270–1284. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2021.2006261>
- Williamson, V., Trump, K.-S., & Katherine, L. E. (2018). Black Lives Matter: Evidence that police-caused deaths predict protest activity. *Perspectives on Politics*, 16(2), 400–415. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592717004273>

## Appendix A: Study Flyer



**THERE IS A NEW STUDY ABOUT THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF BLACK AMERICANS WHO HAVE BEEN EXPOSED TO POLICE BRUTALITY ON SOCIAL MEDIA AND HOW IT IMPACTS THEIR RACIAL IDENTITY AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING**

**ABOUT THIS STUDY:**

- One 30 minute to 1 hour Zoom video interview that will be recorded
- To protect your privacy, the published study will not share any names that identify you

**FOR THIS STUDY:**

Please understand that participation is **VOLUNTARY**, and you have the right to decline at any time during this process. If you are interested in participating, please click the [LINK](#) to read more about this study.

This study is a part of the doctoral study for Kai'Annica Walters, Ph.D. Candidate at Walden University.

**YOU MAY QUALIFY FOR THIS STUDY IF YOU:**

- 18 years or older
- Lives in the United States
- Identifies as Black or African American
- Witnessed police brutality on social media (Ex. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc)



Ph.D. Candidate  
Email  
IRB: 00000

## Appendix B: Interview Questions

### **Please explain your personal experiences with social media and police brutality.**

1. Can you describe a specific instance when you encountered content about police brutality on social media? How did it make you feel at the moment?
2. How frequently do you come across police brutality content on social media, and how does it affect your day-to-day emotional state?
3. Do you actively seek out, avoid, or engage with this content? Why or why not?

### **How has police brutality impacted your emotional well-being?**

4. How do videos or stories of police brutality online affect your mental health or emotional well-being?
5. Are specific emotions (e.g., anger, sadness, fear, frustration) consistently triggered when you see this content? Can you share more about your feelings?
6. Have you discovered any coping strategies or support systems that assist you in managing the emotional toll of consuming such content?

### **Please explain your racial identity and self-perception due to witnessing police brutality on social media.**

7. How does exposure to police brutality on social media shape your understanding of your racial identity or connection to the Black community?
8. Has viewing this content altered your perception of yourself or how you believe others see you because of your race?

9. In what ways, if any, does this exposure motivate you to engage in activism, advocacy, or conversations about racial justice?

**Please explain social and community perspectives regarding police brutality.**

10. Do you feel that social media amplifies or distorts the lived realities of police brutality? Why or why not?
11. How does this affect your perspective on the issue?
12. How has discussing police brutality on social media affected your relationships with friends, family, or community members?
13. What role, if any, do you think social media should play in addressing police brutality and its effects on racial identity?

**Moving forward, what changes would you like to see implemented?**

13. What changes would you like to see in how police brutality is represented and discussed on social media?
14. What would you say if you could advise someone struggling with the impact of this type of content?
15. Is there anything else you would like to share regarding your experiences or perspectives on this topic that we haven't discussed?

## Appendix C: Interview Guide

Hello, my name is Kai' Annica Walters, and I am happy to meet with you today. As a reminder, I will address you by a pseudonym to protect your privacy. This will ensure confidentiality when publishing the study. Thank you for volunteering to participate in this research study on the lived experiences of Black Americans who have been exposed to police brutality on social media and how it impacts their racial identity and emotional well-being. Please make sure you are in a quiet location with minimal distractions. This session will be audio recorded only. All information gained will be solely used for research purposes. All identifying information will be kept confidential. I want to reassure you of the agreed-upon confidentiality addressed in your submitted consent form. Discussing police brutality in the Black community can be traumatic, resulting in unease or discomfort. If you need a break or want to stop the interview, please let me know, and no questions will be asked. If a question is unclear at any time during the session or you need deeper clarification, please do not hesitate to ask. Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin? Do you still consent to the recording?

Thank you for completing the demographic questions on the Google Form before this interview. Before we dive into the main interview questions, we will review your responses to the demographic questionnaire to ensure their accuracy for the study.

1. Do you identify as Black or African American?
2. Have you witnessed police brutality on social media? (*Ex. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.?*)
3. How old are you?
4. What state do you live in?
5. What is your sex/gender identity?
6. What is your chosen pseudonym?

Thank you. Now, I will ask the core interview questions.

### **Please explain your personal experiences with social media and police brutality.**

1. Can you describe a specific instance when you encountered content about police brutality on social media? How did it make you feel at the moment?
2. How frequently do you come across police brutality content on social media, and how does it affect your day-to-day emotional state?
3. Do you actively seek out, avoid, or engage with this content? Why or why not?

### **How has police brutality impacted your emotional well-being?**

4. How do videos or stories of police brutality online affect your mental health or emotional well-being?

5. Are specific emotions (e.g., anger, sadness, fear, frustration) consistently triggered when you see this content? Can you share more about your feelings?
6. Have you discovered any coping strategies or support systems that assist you in managing the emotional toll of consuming such content?

**Please explain your racial identity and self-perception due to witnessing police brutality on social media.**

7. How does exposure to police brutality on social media shape your understanding of your racial identity or connection to the Black community?
8. Has viewing this content altered your perception of yourself or how you believe others see you because of your race?
9. In what ways, if any, does this exposure motivate you to engage in activism, advocacy, or conversations about racial justice?

**Please explain social and community perspectives regarding police brutality.**

10. Do you feel that social media amplifies or distorts the lived realities of police brutality? Why or why not?
11. How does this affect your perspective on the issue?
12. How has discussing police brutality on social media affected your relationships with friends, family, or community members?
13. What role, if any, do you think social media should play in addressing police brutality and its effects on racial identity?

**Moving forward, what changes would you like to see implemented?**

13. What changes would you like to see in how police brutality is represented and discussed on social media?
14. What would you say if you could advise someone struggling with the impact of this type of content?
15. Is there anything else you would like to share regarding your experiences or perspectives on this topic that we haven't discussed?

Thank you for your contribution to my research study. I also want to reassure you of the confidentiality of your identity. Your identity will be kept confidential in the presentation of the study results, as originally detailed in the consent form you agreed to before your participation. In this study, you will be identified by your chosen pseudonym.

Being in this study could involve some risks, such as minor discomforts that can be encountered daily, such as sharing sensitive information. If distress arises, you can also access emergency mental health services by contacting the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline at 988. If you have any questions, you can contact me at [XXX@waldenu.edu](mailto:XXX@waldenu.edu). Once again, thank you for participating and adding value to my research.