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Underrepresented and Understudied: Exploring the Lived Experiences of African American Women in Policing

Brenda Goss Andrews
Walden University

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Walden University

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Walden University
2025

Abstract

Underrepresented and Understudied:

Exploring the Lived Experiences of African American Women in Policing

by

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MA, Michigan State University

BBA, Howard University

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Criminal Justice

Walden University

November 2025

Abstract

African American women are underrepresented in policing and understudied in the research. Grounded in Collins' Black feminist thought, whose theme seeks to empower Black women to speak in their authentic voices, this qualitative phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of 12 African American female officers from Midwest departments. It examined how the intersection of race and gender shaped their workplace realities. The purpose of the study was to gain perspectives from the participants on strategies to recruit and retain African American female officers. Historically, policing has been a gendered and hypermasculine profession, making it difficult for African American female officers to thrive. Using open-ended semistructured questions, the participants shared rich, candid narratives of their lived experiences. Being able to express themselves and be heard was paramount for the participants to feel valued and supported. The findings contribute to the lack of research on African American female officers. The effects of race and gender in the workplace were examined and highlighted the need for institutional and cultural change that promotes diversity, equality, and inclusion. This study includes recommendations for improving hiring and retention. Results indicated that the participants faced discrimination, harassment, lack of support, emotional stress, and feelings of isolation. Participants described the value of community support and positive female camaraderie as important to their development. The results of this study can inform policy and guide organizational change aimed at creating a more supportive work environment for African American female officers.

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BBA, Howard University, 1973

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Dedication

This body of work is dedicated to all the women who instilled in me the quest for education and to never stop learning. I know they are all looking down on me from above. My mother, Edna Lucille Phelps Goss, graduated from Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan, during an era when it was uncommon for African Americans, especially women, to have an opportunity to obtain higher educational degrees. It was in college that my mother met my father, Theodore H. Goss. Her mother, my grandmother, Mary Ethel Phelps, and my grandfather, Britton Phelps, were determined to pay for and give their daughter the education they never had growing up in the Deep South. My grandparents also paid for my undergraduate education at Howard University in Washington, D.C. My aunt, Elizabeth Goss, and my uncle, Nathaniel Goss, inspired me and were my biggest cheerleaders. Though none of them are living, their guidance and love taught me to persevere and never give up. I would also like to dedicate this work to all the women who have chosen law enforcement as their profession to protect and serve our communities, while raising our future generations. I salute the many women who have been killed in the line of duty, making the ultimate sacrifice serving their community. And lastly, a special thank you to my sister, Charvette A. Goss, who is always by my side, cheering me on, and to my son Julian Andrews, who is wise beyond his years and, as a millennial, always provides me with a new way of looking at life. I dedicate this dissertation to all of you.

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This was my second time embarking on a doctoral journey. I started years ago while working and raising a son as a divorced mother. I would leave work, travel to the university, which was about a three-hour round-trip drive, and then home to care for my son. This became overwhelming, and I had to drop out of the course. Years went by, and after a terrible bout of COVID, I decided that if I lived through it, I would go back to school and obtain a PhD that I had begun years prior. I have so many people to thank for being by my side, offering words of encouragement.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

In this study, I focused on the underrepresentation and the lack of research on African American females in law enforcement. Several studies have revealed that research on women of color in policing was limited and outdated (Sands et al., 2023; Schuck, 2014; Suboch et al., 2017; Todak & Brown, 2019). Similarly, Kringen et al. (2018) argued that the experiences of Black women in policing were understudied and should be included in future studies. These studies concluded that future research should further examine the experiences of women of color in within the field of policing. The social implications of this study include addressing and identifying police reform strategies that speak to a hypermasculine police subculture that oppresses, intimidates, and marginalizes women, especially women of color. The results of this study may inform policy and practice by guiding police administrators and political leaders on effective strategies for recruiting and retaining female officers, particularly African American women.

The findings of this study suggest that efforts to reform the hegemonic police subculture should begin with addressing the implications of race and gender within police agencies. Batton and Wright (2019) noted that understanding and addressing the underlying causes of inequalities in the criminal justice system is important to making social changes to the cultural and social culture. This qualitative study examines the lived experiences of twelve African American women in law enforcement, addressing a

pervasive gap in the literature. Grounding their perspectives brings attention to the challenges and barriers faced by African American women in policing that have been largely absent in the literature. This research advances the understanding of the intersection of race and gender in policing and its effects on African American female officers.

In this chapter, I examine the background, problem, purpose, and significance of the study, along with the research questions and theoretical framework that guided this study. The research addresses a gap in the literature on the lived experiences of African American women in policing, centers their perspectives, and amplifies their voices, which have been largely absent from prior studies.

Background

Understanding the historical and evolutionary context of women in policing in America is important for examining their experiences, contributions, and challenges within the police profession. Historical records indicate women have been in some aspect of policing since the late eighteenth century (Archbold & Schultz, 2012; Clinkinbeard et al., 2021, Sands et al., 2023); however, women today are still underrepresented in policing throughout the country (Archibold & Schultz, 2012, Brown et al., 2020, Clinkenbeard et al., 2021, Duffin, 2010; Gibbs, 2019; Rief & Clinkinbeard, 2020; Suboch et al., 2017). Despite significant gains in hiring women for police service in the United States, all women continue to be underrepresented in police work comprising only 12%

of all police officers in the United States (Brown et al., 2020; Clinkenbeard et al., 2021; Gibbs, 2019; Rief & Clinkinbeard, 2020; Suboch et al., 2017).

Four waves of feminism beginning in the 20th century and continuing into the 21st century have shaped the “theories, ideologies, and movements” of women in the United States (Posey et al., 2020, p. 8). Ruiz (2018) described the feminist movement as a series of waves created by women to address centuries of oppression and gender inequality.

Todak and Brown (2019) conducted a study of empirical research studies focused on the experiences of Black policewomen. The review located 12 studies focusing on the hiring, recruitment, retention, and the lived experiences of this population. Their study concluded that police departments were hypermasculine, gendered, racialized, and sexualized, which made recruiting minorities and women difficult. Todak and Brown made a much-needed contribution to the literature; however, they concluded that there was a gap in the literature regarding the experiences and perspectives of Black women in policing, and that future research was needed on this population. Likewise, Sands et al. (2023) recognized a gap in the literature on African American women in policing and concluded that future research should examine this gap. These researchers concluded that the intersectionality of race and gender in women of color in policing should also be a focus of future research. Accordingly, Kringen and Novich (2018) suggested that Black women in policing are understudied, and there exists minimal literature on their

experiences in law enforcement. They stated that future research should include more experiences of Black females in policing.

The qualitative study by Brown et al. (2020) examined the effects of hypermasculine police culture on female officers in the workplace. The researchers posited that women were underrepresented in policing across the country and argued that women continue to face challenges and barriers in law enforcement, particularly in environments where a hypermasculine subculture allows sexual harassment, discrimination, and gender inequalities to persist. Evidence from the study confirms the presence of a hypermasculine police subculture in the department and indicates a need for future research on how female officers navigate this environment.

Several studies provide historical context on the evolution of women in policing. Although research has shown some hiring gains for women in policing, women continue to be underrepresented in policing, especially women of color (Todak & Brown, 2019). There are gaps in the literature on African American women in policing. More research is needed to explore the perspectives and experiences of African American women in policing.

In summary, understanding the historical and evolutionary context of women in policing provides a solid foundation for examining their experiences and challenges within the police profession. Therefore, this study addresses a persistent gap in the literature and centers the perspectives of African American female officers by highlighting the barriers and challenges they face working in hypermasculine policing

environments. The findings offer insights for policymakers, law enforcement, and government administrators, informing strategies for recruiting, hiring, and retaining a diverse workforce, and promoting inclusive and equitable workplace environments and policies.

Problem Statement

This study addresses the problem that African American female officers face challenges shaped by the intersection of race and gender, which directly affects their work experiences. Limited and outdated research on their lived experiences creates a critical gap in understanding the barriers they encounter and the support they need. As a result, law enforcement agencies face challenges in creating and implementing policies and practices that effectively promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace.

Most research has focused on women as a homogenous group or highlights the experiences of White and Black males. As a result, the unique challenges faced by African American female officers as they navigate both a racialized and gendered hypermasculine police culture remain understudied (Todak & Brown, 2019). Haakmat and Ruffin (2024, p. 1) stated that more studies were needed to explore the “interlocking systems of oppression” relating to race and gender that affect African American females in the workplace. They continued, noting that the failure to examine race and gender as intersectional constructs may lead to the underrepresentation of Black women in policy and research.

The literature suggests that women have made significant gains over the past forty years. However, women continue to be underrepresented in police work, particularly women of color (Brown et al., 2020; Clinkenbeard et al., 2021; Gibbs, 2019; Rief & Clinkenbeard, 2020; Suboch et al., 2017). Policing in the United States has primarily been the domain of White male officers, where a hegemonic climate of hypermasculine culture has prevailed (Brown et al., 2020; Sanders et al., 2022; Todak & Brown, 2019). Minorities who decide on a career in law enforcement enter a culture that is “racialized and sexualized” (Todak & Brown, 2019, p. 1052).

Despite significant gains in hiring women for police service in the United States, women continue to be underrepresented in police work comprising only 12% of all police officers in the United States (Archibold & Schultz, 2012; Brown et al., 2020; Clinkenbeard et al., 2021; Gibbs, 2019; Rief & Clinkenbeard, 2020; Suboch et al., 2017). Simpson and Croft (2021) explained that despite the increase in females in policing in the past several decades, the number of female officers has stagnated over the years and continues to remain at about 12-13% of all officers in the United States. Conversely, according to Simpson and Croft, countries such as Canada and the United Kingdom outpace the United States in female officers, reporting 22% and 30% of their workforce as female.

Prior research has indicated that women in policing are marginalized in male-dominated police cultures. Nash (2019) stated that the lives of Black women are routinely shaped by systematic discrimination, which is further exacerbated by the intersection of

race and gender. Nash referred to this as double jeopardy. Similarly, Sands et al. (2023) argued that Black female officers experience a form of marginality associated with intersectional oppression based on their racial and gender identities, which they also viewed as double jeopardy.

Suboch et al. (2017) recognized the significant gap in research on Black women in policing and emphasized the need for more research on the unique experiences of minority women in policing. Likewise, researchers such as Todak and Brown (2019) argue that there has been little progress made over the years to capture the experiences and perspectives of Black women in policing. Recognizing this gap, Todak and Brown (2019) conducted a meta-analysis of empirical research studies focused on the experiences of Black policewomen. From their study, they concluded there was limited and outdated research on the lived experiences of Black women in policing. Moreover, Todak and Brown called for future studies that specifically explore the patrol experiences of minority police officers. This call for current research on the experiences of minority female officers supports the focus of this study.

Today, 21st-century policing finds itself at a crossroads between satisfying the community demand for police reform and juxtaposing the difficulty of hiring and recruiting individuals who are interested in careers in policing, especially women and minorities. The failure of police administrators and government officials to address the underrepresentation of women and women of color can only further exacerbate tension between the community and the police. Kringen et al. (2018) asserted that the

experiences of Black women in policing have been largely overlooked in the literature and highlighted the importance of including their perspectives in future research

Studies have indicated that women in policing are better communicators and are more likely to reduce the number of negative encounters between the police and the community (Morabito & Shelley, 2018). Consistent with previous research, Paoline and Sloan (2022) agreed that women are underrepresented in policing but pointed out that a male-dominated environment often creates barriers to prevent women from pursuing careers in policing. Prior research has clearly identified a gap in the literature regarding the lack of studies focused on African American female officers. This study actively addresses that gap by specifically exploring the lived experiences of African American women in policing within police departments in the Midwest region of the United States. The study discusses implications for social change and directly addresses a void in the literature, potentially driving positive social change in diversity recruitment and hiring, retention of female officers, police, and legislative reform, and law enforcement governance.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research is to explore and understand the experiences of African American policewomen who work street patrol in police departments across the Midwest region of the United States. This study seeks to gain valuable insight into their work experiences and their perspectives on recruiting and retaining African American women in policing. The study examines how the intersection

of race and gender operates as an oppressive barrier that shapes their daily work experience in law enforcement. Prosek and Gibson (2020) viewed lived experience in qualitative research as an opportunity for individuals to express themselves and describe how they process a particular phenomenon. They concluded that the strength of qualitative research is in the essence of the knowledge and understanding of those who lived through the experience. Similarly, Reich (2021, p. 576) suggested getting closer to the subject of inquiry is important in qualitative research; however, the author posited it was equally important to critically examine “how and why” this relational intimacy matters.

Babbie (2017) defined a phenomenon as an event or occurrence that individuals experience. The phenomenon in this study is the experience of African American female officers working police patrol duties in a hypermasculine police environment. Data collected from in-depth interviews with 12 participants contributed to an understanding of their experiences navigating a male-dominated profession.

Ravitch and Carl (2021) address ontology as the reality of our existence, where no single truth prevails. In qualitative research, the researcher must recognize that individuals have different realities, and the aim is to comprehend and ethically report in the study these various viewpoints. Burkholder et al. (2020, p. 15) described an ontological viewpoint as the “nature of reality and being” and that truth is subjective and determined by how individuals interact. Likewise, Babbie (2017, p. 19) supported this view, suggesting that within the relativist-constructivist view, truth is subjective and is

shaped through interactions with others as “realities exist in people’s minds”.

Accordingly, in this study, the participants' ontological perspectives were shaped by their lived experiences in policing, and their understanding of truth was shaped by their own knowledge and interpretations (Burkholder et al., 2020).

Epistemology is concerned with the science of knowledge and how it is generated through the experiences of individuals. In qualitative research, epistemology posits that each person has the knowledge and situational awareness of their world (Babbie, 2017; Ravitch & Carl, 2021). The participants in this study each have specific work knowledge and experiences that shape their epistemological and ontological perspectives, which may differ from those of their male counterparts or the views of White female officers. This qualitative study aligns well epistemologically and ontologically within a constructivist paradigm. Burkholder et al. (2020) espoused that the philosophy of constructivism aligns most with qualitative research, whose goal is to understand a phenomenon.

In summary, this study examines the lived experiences of African American female officers, analyzes how the intersection of race and gender shapes their work and explores their perspectives on recruiting and retaining women in policing. This study also contributes to the literature by addressing a gap in understanding the unique challenges faced by African American female officers and by giving voice to a population that prior research has largely overlooked.

Research Questions

Research Question 1 (RQ1): How do African American women police officers in police departments in the Midwest region of the United States describe their experience working in a hypermasculine police profession?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): What are the views of African American police officers on how to recruit more women of color to careers in policing?

Theoretical Framework

It is necessary to examine the experiences of African American women through the intersectional lens of race and gender, as this perspective reveals the unique challenges and barriers they face. How these concepts intersect leads the way to a better understanding of how the lived experiences of women shape their narrative when confronted with oppression and socio-political inequalities. This study explores the lived experiences of African American female law enforcement officers through the lens of Black feminist theory. The main tenets of Black feminist theory articulated by Collins (2009) are associated with the intersectionality of race, gender, and class as forms of oppression and power domination for African American women. Dyson et al. (2017) viewed the basic principles of Collins' Black feminist theory of racism and sexism as interconnecting systems of power domination; that the lived experiences of Black women must be recognized; and that Black women are individuals with unique experiences different from Black males or White females.

Collins (2009) in her book “*Black Feminist Thought*” analyzed Black feminist thought as a critical social theory whose intention is to empower African American women to resist oppression and encourage activism. Similarly, Jeffries et al. (2022) described Black feminist theory as a social methodology that focuses on the lived experiences and perspectives of Black women. Collins’ Black feminist theory describes a *matrix of domination* whereby Black women experience oppression through the intersectionality of race, gender, and class, as well as facing other societal barriers. (Wade et al., 2022).

The intersectionality of race, gender, and class persists as oppressive tactics challenging the survival of African American women. Collins (2009) argued that the overarching theme of Black feminist theory was the ability of Black women to feel empowered and find their voice in a society that often renders them invisible. Moreover, according to Collins (2019), Black feminism is a study of how African American women empower themselves within a society that attempts to dominate, oppress, and marginalize them. Likewise, Wade et al. (2022) and Lewis and Williams (2023) explained Black feminist theory involves Black women maneuvering the oppression of a racist and sexist society whose lived experiences are different from Black males and White women.

Collins (2009, p. 110) pointed out that Black women often struggle with the reality of sexism and racism and must learn to speak in a “unique and authentic” voice that reaches beyond society’s derogation of Black women. Previous scholars have expressed similar views. For example, Pogebrin et al. (2000) stated that African

American women were “double marginalized” in society because of the existence of sexism and racism. Likewise, Shelley et al. (2011) observed that African American women in law enforcement frequently encountered inequitable treatment and experienced marginalization within the profession. Collins (2009, p.36) viewed Black feminist thought as a “critical social theory” offering Black women an opportunity to fight against the intersectional oppression of racism and sexism.

Historically, Johnson (2015) cited that Black feminism originated from activism during the civil rights movement during the 1960s and 1970s. However, she argued that Black feminism found historical roots in the anti-slavery movement of the 1800s. The slave trade in the United States was abolished in about 1809, but slavery continued, especially in the South. It was during this time that northern women began to outwardly challenge the institution of slavery and began organizing anti-slavery societies, including circulating petitions and supporting efforts such as the Underground Railroad (Johnson, 2015). Even within these societies, according to Johnson, race was an issue, as opposing slavery did not necessarily translate into the ideal of racial equality. This movement and the themes surrounding the lived experiences of Black women allowed Black female intellectuals of that time to unite and combine academia with activism. This prompted many women during this era to speak up publicly about the plight of Black women (Johnson, 2015).

Collins (2009) argued that African American women, regardless of social class, education, sexual orientation, or age, all encounter similar experiences and challenges

associated with race and gender. She further noted that it was important to collect and analyze the thoughts, views, and perspectives of various sub-groups within the collective group of African American women. She described this as a recurring pattern of challenges and differential treatment faced by African American women in hegemonic male-dominated organizations. Collins (2009) argued that the overarching theme of Black feminist thought examines the lived experiences of Black women and seeks to give marginalized women a voice. She emphasized that the purpose of Black feminist thought is to serve as a theoretical framework for resisting oppressive practices centered on race and gender and to empower Black women to assert their voices. Jeffries et al. (2022) viewed Black feminist theory as an ideal theoretical framework for qualitative research involving groups who have suffered systemic and institutional discrimination. This framework, according to Jeffries et al., offers an opportunity to contribute to the body of knowledge on the intersectional effects of race, class, and gender on Black women.

Epistemological and Ontological Viewpoints

Interviewing women allows them to express themselves in their own voices. DeVault and Gross (2022) posited that interviewing was a compelling research tool for feminist researchers focused on exploring the experiences of women. Ravitch and Carl (2021) address ontology as the reality of our existence, where no single truth prevails. In qualitative research, the researcher must recognize that individuals have different realities, and the aim is to comprehend and ethically report in a study these various viewpoints. Burkholder et al. (2020, p.15) described an ontological viewpoint as the

“nature of reality and being,” and where truth is subjective and determined by how individuals interact. Likewise, Babbie (2017, p. 19) supported this theory and suggested that truth is subjective and is determined by the “realities that exist in people’s minds”.

Ravitch and Carl (2021) addressed ontology as the reality of our existence, where no single truth prevails. In qualitative research, the researcher must recognize that individuals have different realities, and the aim is to comprehend and ethically report in the study these various viewpoints. Burkholder et al. (2020, p. 15) posited an ontological viewpoint that describes the “nature of reality and being,” where truth is subjective and determined by how individuals interact. Similarly, Gregory (2023) argued that the true responsibility of defining reality lies with the individuals who have lived through a certain experience. Therefore, the participants’ ontological viewpoint was shaped by their lived experiences in policing, and their understanding of truth was determined from their knowledge (Burkholder et al., 2020).

Epistemology is concerned with the science of knowledge and how knowledge is generated and acquired through the experiences of individuals. In qualitative research, epistemology posits that each person has knowledge and situational awareness of their world (Babbie, 2017; Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Reich (2021) believed the central theme of qualitative research resides in the epistemological exploration of knowledge.

The participants in this study each have specific work knowledge and experiences that shape their epistemological and ontological perspectives, which may differ from those of their male counterparts or the views of White female officers. Therefore, this

qualitative study aligns well epistemologically and ontologically with a constructivist paradigm. Burkholder et al. (2020) espoused that the philosophy of constructivism aligns most with qualitative research, whose goal is to understand a phenomenon. Epistemology studies how knowledge is formed and gained through personal experience. In qualitative research, epistemology posits that each person has knowledge and situational awareness of their world (Babbie, 2017; Ravitch and Carl, 2021).

Johnson (2015) pointed out that Black feminism believes Black women have a voice that should be heard. He continued in his analysis that Black women possess a distinctive life experience due in part to the oppression they have faced because of their race and gender. One of the aims of Black feminism, according to Johnson (2015, p. 5), is to intertwine activism with theory. Johnson argues that Black feminism is continually reinterpreting the Black woman's experience through a "new theoretical lens" and presenting new narratives of these experiences. Additionally, he noted, Black feminism should not be viewed as a "one size, fits all" experience. According to Johnson, Black women view oppression through a different lens based on their life experiences. He continued, explaining that Black feminism has emerged not as one distinct group but into many sub-groups whose epistemology may differ according to their lived experiences.

Collins (2009, p. 279) viewed epistemology as an “overarching theory of knowledge”. Collins explained that knowing the epistemological level determines which research questions merit further inquiry. Further, she claimed, it determines the theoretical or conceptual framework by which findings are analyzed and how the

resultant findings will enhance the body of knowledge. Crenshaw's epistemic viewpoint, according to Collins (2019), argues that the experiences of Black women have theoretical value and should be treated with respect and importance. Therefore, this qualitative study, grounded in Black feminist theory, explored the lived experiences of 12 African American female officers and offers a significant contribution to the literature on this understudied group.

Intersectionality and Black Feminist Theory

According to Collins (2009), Black feminist theory centers on the intersectionality of race, gender, and class as forms of oppression for African American women. Likewise, Pogebrin et al. (2000) coined the term "double marginality" to describe the intersectional race and gender plight of African American women. Collins (2009) argues that the oppression of African American women has focused on three dimensions; economic, political, and ideological. Earlier forms of labor exploitation defined the plight of African American women, subjecting them to subservient, low-paying jobs. Political oppression denied African American women the privileges of White America by denying them the right to vote and take part in the political process. Lastly, Collins (2009) explained that African American women are continually subjected to racist and sexist ideologies, which prevent them from flourishing in society and seek to silence their voices. Collins argues that the combination of these factors serves as a form of oppression that suppresses the voices and societal elevation of African American women while continuing to protect a White male hegemonic society.

Collins (2009) explained that Black feminist thought addresses the intersectional oppressions of race, gender, and class as forms of oppression for African American women. She explained that the purpose of Black feminist thought is to challenge oppressive practices and ideologies experienced by Black women. As a social theory, according to Collins (2009), Black feminist thought seeks to empower African American women and assist them in resisting race and gender intersectional oppressions. Defining and interpreting the views and experiences of African American women, noted Collins (2009), lies at the epicenter of Black feminist theory.

Likewise, Jeffries et al. (2022, p. 1438) viewed Black feminist theory as a “critical social theory “capturing the experiences and perceptions of Black women. They further posited that this theory is appropriate for research because it centers marginalized groups within the intersection of race and gender. Therefore, Black feminist theory was best suited for this research as it examined the lived experiences of African American females in law enforcement and how the intersectionality of race and gender defined their experiences. The study explored the challenges and barriers faced by the participants and how they navigated working in a male-dominated police culture that objectifies and marginalizes them in the workplace.

Nature of Study

This study is grounded in a qualitative phenomenological methodology, which allows for an in-depth exploration of the lived experiences of African American female officers. Data were collected from interviews of 12 African American female law

enforcement officers. The participants were full-time sworn active police officers with at least two years of continuous patrol experience working in a Midwest police department. The study explored the lived experiences and perspectives of these African American female police officers.

Phenomenological research seeks to understand the lived experiences or perspectives of a group of individuals who share the same experience concerning a topic of interest or phenomenon (Burkholder et al., 2020; Ravitch & Carl, 2020). Sloan and Bowe (2014) viewed in-depth interviewing as the primary data collection method for phenomenological studies. Using a qualitative methodology is to understand the phenomenon of the lived experiences of participants and how they bring meaning to those experiences (Babbie, 2017; Burkholder et al., 2020). This study collected data from 12 participants through in-depth virtual interviews. Therefore, I determined this was the best approach for the study to adequately answer the research questions and gain insight into the experiences of the participants. Data analysis began with transcription of the audio-recorded interviews and included coding and categorizing to identify emerging themes.

Definitions

Gender: Refers to the differences between males and females, masculinity, and femininity, and describes the balance of power and the subordination of women in organizations (Shafritz et al., 2016).

Gendered institution: According to Todak et al. (2022), policing is considered the most gendered profession in the United States. It is a concept that perpetuates the marginalization of women in the profession and stymies their efforts for advancement. Gendered institutions devalue and subordinate women because of their gender (Shelley et al., 2011).

Gendered processes: Describes the process of female subordination that permeates organizations and promotes male workplace superiority (Shafritz et al., 2016).

Hegemonic masculinity: A concept idealizing masculine imagery of aggression, dominance, strength, power, hypersexuality, and the subordination of women (Alexander & Nowacki, 2022; Huff & Todak, 2022; Marsh & Harr, 2012).

Hegemonic police environment: A police subculture that downplays diversity, fortifies the status quo, amplifies policies, and embraces practices that perpetuate male success to the detriment of females, and where sexualized behavior is encouraged in the workplace to further alienate women (Brown, et al., 2020; Huff & Todak, 2022).

Hypermasculinity: A term used to describe a police patriarchal subculture that glorifies male dominance and perpetuates gender disparities and sexualized behavior in the workplace (Brown et al., 2020).

Hypersexuality: Is described as an element of the police subculture that permits crude jokes, sexual harassment, unwanted and coercive sexual touching, and displays of sexual images by males toward females in the workplace (Brown et al., 2020).

Intersectionality: Feminist writer Kimberle Crenshaw's seminal works in 1989 and 1991 described intersectionality as a metaphor to describe social inequalities of race, gender, and class and how they are interconnected to oppress, subordinate, and marginalize African American women within a patriarchal hegemonic system of power. (Collins, 2019, 2009; Nash, 2019).

Midwest Region: Midwest states are defined by the United States federal government as Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wisconsin (Britannica, 2021).

Assumptions

This study assumes that all participants provided honest and truthful responses to the research questions and voluntarily consented to participate without coercion. The study also assumes that participants work in a male-dominated police environment and provided accurate accounts of their work experiences. Additionally, it assumes that most participants will describe similar experiences related to their roles and challenges within policing. The study further assumes that its findings can be applied to and replicated by other researchers interested in this topic. Lastly, these assumptions provide a framework for understanding the participants' perspective within the context of the study.

Scope and Delimitations

Each participant in the study was required to identify as an African American female who was an active, sworn, and full-time officer in a local law enforcement agency in the Midwest region of the United States. Participants were required to have at least two

years of patrol experience with their respective agencies as an eligibility requirement. Accordingly, the study was limited to African American uniformed police officers. No supervisory or command-level African American females or those who have retired from policing will be considered in this study.

Transferability strategies can be achieved when the researcher provides thick and detailed descriptions so the study may be applicable in other settings by different researchers and participants (Burkholder, et al, 2020; Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

Transferability has been achieved in this study through in-depth and thick descriptions from the participants during interviews. Though the sample size is small, this research provides evidence for future researchers to replicate the study using similar settings.

Limitations

Several limitations occurred in this study. This qualitative research study was limited by its small sample size of approximately 12 African American policewomen from various Midwest police departments, which may have influenced their patrol experiences and perspectives. Other limitations that were anticipated included difficulties recruiting participants and site selection. Eleven interviews were conducted virtually, and there was one in-person interview; therefore, there were no site selection issues.

Participants were recruited and interviewed from the latter part of November 2024 until the first weeks of February 2025. Flyers and letters were distributed across social media platforms and electronic mail to recruit participants.

Although Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was considered as a potential limitation, I did not encounter any exceptional delays having my request processed. Subjectivity and bias were cited as limitations; however, I constantly and consistently examined my biases and positionality through memos and journal writing. Transferability was cited as a limitation. According to Burkholder et al. (2020), the transferability of responses in phenomenological studies allows the researcher to determine if the experiences of one participant apply to the understanding of other participants with similar backgrounds. Similarly, Chenail (2010) considered transferability as the ability of an individual in one setting to choose to follow or accept the findings from another study. This study provided thick, rich descriptions of the participants' lived experiences, allowing the findings of this study to be applicable in other settings and contexts.

Positionality was listed as a possible limitation in this study. I have close to 30 years of law enforcement experience with the Detroit Police Department before retirement. Toma (2011) posited it is important for researchers, especially in qualitative research where objectivity is often questioned, to account for their position in the context of the research. A researcher's positionality and social identity are important to consider in qualitative research (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). How a researcher views themselves in the context of the research is critical to avoid bias which leads to validity problems in the study. However, being cognizant of these experiences helps guard against biases. Ravitch and Carl (2021) argued ethical research requires researchers to possess situational

awareness of their biases, prejudices, and subjectivities which could impact the study, and adopt a reflective approach to critically examine their biases and find ways to address them during the entire process.

As the researcher, I examined my own positionality throughout the study. I was honest and transparent with participants and disclosed my former role as a police executive. This disclosure allowed participants to view me as an “insider” who possessed an understanding of law enforcement. This allowed the participants to feel comfortable and allowed me as the researcher to develop trust and credibility with the participants.

Significance

This study filled a gap in the research and provided a meaningful contribution to the literature by focusing on how African American women police officers in Midwest departments describe their work experience. Additionally, participants offered their perspectives on strategies for retaining and recruiting African American females in policing. Studies have indicated women are underrepresented in policing, comprising only about 12% of law enforcement officers in the United States (Archibold & Schultz, 2012; Brown et al., 2020; Clinkenbeard et al., 2021; Gibbs, 2019; Rief & Clinkinbeard, 2020; Suboch et al., 2017). Kringen (2014) posited most research on minority officers has focused on Black male police officers. Moreover, scholars have argued research on Black female officers has been noticeably absent even though prior studies have recommended future research on this population (Suboch et al., 2017; Todak & Brown, 2020).

Diversity in policing has been cited in the *2015 President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing* as a major determinant of police legitimacy and community concern (U.S. Department of Justice, 2015). Likewise, Schuck (2014) argued that studying women in policing has many important aspects, including the public's desire for a diverse police department that reflects the demographics of their community, as well as promoting community trust. Research has suggested that women in policing often de-escalate volatile situations and cause the reporting of more violent crimes against women to occur (Alexander & Nowacki, 2022). Hence, this research promoted positive social change in communities and within the law enforcement profession. Furthermore, the study informs policy by providing law enforcement administrators, government officials, and policymakers with evidence-based tools to develop budget and hiring strategies for recruiting, hiring, and retaining a diverse and inclusive police department.

Summary

Chapter 1 introduces the study, covering the background, problem, statement, purpose, significance, nature of the study, and the theoretical framework. Chapter 2 presents a literature review aligned with the research questions and framework, examining the history of women in policing through the lens of three historical waves of feminism, the underrepresentation and marginalization of women, especially African American officers, and the intersectionality of race and gender. The literature review highlights the lack of research on the lived experiences of this population, therefore setting the stage for the current study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Chapter 1 introduced the study by presenting the background, problem statement, purpose, significance, nature of the study, and theoretical framework. Chapter 2 builds on this foundation through a comprehensive review of scholarly research that aligns with the study's research questions, problem statement, purpose, theoretical framework, methodology, and research design.

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research was to explore and understand the experiences of African American policewomen working street patrol in police departments in the Midwest region of the United States, gain valuable insight into their work experiences, and their views on recruiting and retaining African American women in policing.

The problem is that there is no current research on women of color in policing. A gap in the research on African-American females in law enforcement has been documented in several studies (Suboch et al., 2017; Todak & Brown, 2020). Several researchers have concluded that research on Black women in policing is understudied and dated, and future studies should focus on the experiences of Black women in policing (Kringen et al., 2018; Suboch et al., 2017; Todak & Brown, 2019). Therefore, the problem addressed in the literature suggests a noticeable absence of current literature on African American females in policing.

Kringen et al. (2018) stated that research on Black women in policing was limited and more research was needed. Kringen (2014), in earlier research, posited that research on minorities was limited and that studies tended to focus on either Black or White males. These peer-reviewed articles by scholars further prove that a gap in the literature exists on African-American females in policing. Limited research has also revealed that African-American women are understudied in the research and underrepresented in the police field (Todak & Brown, 2019). Likewise, Kringen et al. (2018) argued that the experiences of Black women in policing were understudied and should be included in future studies.

This qualitative research is important because it explores the lived experiences and complexities of being an African American female in policing and examines how these women navigate a male-dominated police culture. A comprehensive review of the literature indicates a lack of current research and the presence of outdated studies, establishing a gap that this study seeks to explore and analyze. It also establishes a framework for future researchers to replicate and expand upon this study.

Additionally, the literature review examines the historical progression of women in policing through the lens of three waves of feminism, diversity within law enforcement, the theoretical underpinnings of the study, and the concept of policing as a gendered profession. The literature review also explores the intersection of race and gender and how this shapes the lived experiences of African American female officers, thereby situating the study within the theoretical lens of Black feminism.

Literature Search Strategy

The literature review consisted of peer-reviewed scholarly articles that I accessed using several search engines and databases, including Thoreau, SAGE, ProQuest, EBSCO, Google Scholar, and various criminal justice databases found in the Walden Library. I also queried the Walden and ProQuest dissertation databases. I visited the Detroit Public Library to search for books and articles on Black feminist thought. Appointments were scheduled with Walden University librarians to locate peer-reviewed articles focusing on African American women in law enforcement. An additional method involved reviewing pertinent references cited in the scholarly literature, although most of these sources were found to be outdated. Consequently, this gap in existing research provided the foundation for the present study.

Keywords used in the literature review search included: *African American or Black females in policing or law enforcement, Black police, African American police, policewomen, women in policing, hypermasculinity, police subculture, gender in policing, race in policing, hegemonic masculinity, female police, and motherhood; work-life balance or conflict in policing; female officer retention; qualitative research, and phenomenology*. The literature review search included keywords such as *feminism, feminist theory, Black feminist theory or thought, and Black feminists* to identify articles for the study's theoretical framework.

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical foundation selected for this study grounds the research in Black feminist theory, which, as articulated by Collins (2009), emphasizes the intersectionality of race, gender, and class as interconnected forms of oppression for African American women. Gonzalez (2022) stated that in research, understanding the lived experiences of Black women requires a framework that considers the oppressive intersection of race and gender. According to Gonzalez (2022), Collins emphasizes that the perspectives and epistemic viewpoints of Black women are central tenets in qualitative research that uses a Black feminist framework. Further, Gonzalez posited that the views of Black women are important in research as they offer critical insight into social injustices brought about by the inequities of race and gender. Lewis and Williams (2023) argued that the strength of Black women is grounded in their shared experiences. Black feminist theory, according to Lewis and Williams, was formulated by African American women feminists to convey the lived experiences and viewpoints of Black women who are marginalized in society. Gonzalez (2023) expanded further, describing Black feminist theory as a means to understand the culture, context, and dialect that are unique to Black women.

This qualitative study examines the lived experiences of African American policewomen working in a hypermasculine work environment through a Black feminist lens. The study applies Collins' (2009) Black feminist theory to analyze how race and gender shape their police experience. Through its research questions, the study examines the intersection of race and gender in 21st-century policing and contributes to a deeper

understanding of the challenges, barriers, and work experiences of African American women in policing. Black feminist theory serves as an appropriate framework for this study, providing a lens to examine the lived experiences of African American women, a group that has been historically underrepresented in scholarly literature.

Collins (2009) described Black feminist theory as a social methodology. Similarly, Jeffries et al. (2022) considered Black feminist theory as a methodology that considers the perspectives and lived experiences of Black females. He concluded that Black feminist theory is appropriate for research on traditionally marginalized groups that examines and challenges the intersectionality of race and gender. Earlier research by Pogebrin et al. (2000) examined the intersectionality among African American women and concluded that they experience marginalization based on both their race and gender. Therefore, this study applies Black feminist theory to examine the lived experiences of African American female officers in law enforcement, addressing a gap in the literature by giving attention to a marginalized group that has been underrepresented in scholarly research.

Dyson et al. (2017, p. 534) posited that Black feminist theory encourages Black women to express themselves and “share their lived experiences.” Dyson et al. argued that Black feminist theory recognizes the unique experiences of Black women. Furthermore, they noted that the oppressive struggles of Black women can be captured in research studies and methodologies, which include interviews and surveys. Interviewing

African American female officers in this study provided valuable insight and perspectives into the unique challenges they faced in the workplace.

Black feminist theory incorporates aspects of feminist theory where the lives of women matter and their concerns should be heard (Collins, 2019; Ferguson, 2017; Swigonski & Raheim, 2011). Similarly, DeVault and Gross (2014, p. 16) argued that the perspectives and views of women have been “silenced or ignored” in the research for many years. Further, Ferguson (2017, p. 278) viewed feminist theory as an ever-changing practice of “confronting oppression where women must develop their voices and tell their stories.”

Wade et al. (2022) conducted a qualitative focus group study of 29 Black females to identify the health concerns and challenges of Black women and how they engage with health-related programs. The study utilized Black feminist theory as the foundation for the study. In selecting this theory, Wade argued that using a Black feminist approach may lead to addressing some of the health-related concerns and lived experiences of Black women that are often overlooked. As other scholars have such as Jeffries et al. (2022) and Collins (2009) have asserted, Black women are faced with intersecting oppressions of racism, sexism, and gendered-related discrimination. Wade et al. (2022) expressed that these gender-related oppressions often lead to negative health outcomes for Black women. Several participants in this study discussed how discrimination in the workplace contributed to trauma and stress in their lives. Wade et al. asserted that issues facing Black women must be studied and viewed through a Black feminist lens.

This qualitative study includes interviews with 12 African American female police officers and aims to document and analyze their personal narratives about their experiences working within a predominantly male-dominated environment. Guided by Black feminist theory, the study provides critical insight into how the intersection of race and gender shapes their daily work experience serving within male-dominated police agencies.

The literature review in Chapter 2 will provide greater detail about the application of Black feminist theory and how the historical implications of feminist theory played a role in the development of Black feminist theory. This review will explain the history of women in policing, the waves of feminism, and a discussion on gendered institutions and diversity in policing. The literature review will further highlight a gap in studies about African American women in policing. Therefore, this qualitative study is significant as it explored the unique lived experiences and complexities of African American women in policing and how they navigate a male-dominated police culture.

Literature Review

History of Women in Policing

Women have been involved in policing since the late eighteenth century (Archbold & Schultz, 2012; Hemp, 2007; Clinkinbeard et al., 2021); however, they continue to be significantly underrepresented across the United States. Currently, only about 12% of all police officers nationwide are women (Brown et al., 2020; Clinkinbeard et al., 2021; Gibbs, 2019; Rief & Clinkinbeard, 2020). A review of the literature revealed

that despite significant gains in hiring women for police service in the United States, women continue to be underrepresented in policing. Conversely, countries such as Canada and the United Kingdom outpace the United States in female officers, reporting 22% and 30% of their workforce as female (Simpson & Croft, 2021).

Consistent with previous research, Paoline and Sloan (2022) concluded that women are underrepresented in policing, but pointed out that male-dominated environments often create barriers preventing women from pursuing careers in policing. Limited research has revealed that African American women are understudied in the research and underrepresented in the police field (Todak & Brown, 2019). Likewise, Kringen et al. (2018) argued that the experiences of Black women in policing were understudied and should be included in future studies. Earlier researchers, Archibold and Schultz (2012), posited that future research should concentrate on learning more about the experiences of women working in law enforcement. African American women face double marginalization in policing due to both race and gender, as noted by Pogrebin et al. (2000). Shelley et al (2000, p. 354) concluded that African American women are “doubly isolated and discriminated against”.

Historically, law enforcement has been a male-dominated profession since the advent of American policing in New York City during the mid-1800s (Jones & Johnstone, 2012). Law enforcement continues to be led primarily by a hegemonic male police culture organized along patriarchal norms and standards (Archbold & Schultz, 2012; Batton & Wright, 2019; Clinkinbeard et al., 2020; Donohue, 2021, Simpson &

Croft, 2021). There is no argument among scholars that men are “disproportionately represented” in policing in America (Shelly et al. 2000, p.351). The hegemonic male-dominated culture of policing has traditionally excluded women from its ranks, primarily due to the perception of the job being too physically demanding and the sexist attitudes of males toward women pursuing a career in policing (Diaz & Nuño, 2021).

The presence of women in law enforcement began in the late eighteenth century and into the early nineteenth century, when women were assigned domesticated assignments caring for women and children in police custody. As early as 1907 in New Jersey, police matrons advocated for police powers that would allow them to extend their responsibility in providing services and advocacy for children, particularly neglected children. During the next several years in several cities throughout the country, traditional police matrons and the new policewoman co-existed in their respective roles. . (Archbold & Schultz, 2012; Brown et al., 2020; Hemp, 2007; Clinkinbeard et al., 2021).

During this early period, prominent women, such as Aurora Matilda Baldwin, who was the first woman to command the new Women’s Protective Division in Portland, Oregon, and Alice Stebbin Wells, considered to be the first female in the United States to have arrest powers, along with others, toured the country to convince government officials of the effectiveness of having sworn policewomen on their departments (Duffin, 2010). However, even when women were hired, their duties centered around women, children, and morality issues. Women rarely wore uniforms or carried a weapon. Many of the women preferred not to wear a uniform or carry a gun and since women in policing

were still mostly performing social work duties, they felt wearing ordinary clothing would allow them to be more effective in dealing with women and children (Duffin, 2010).

The beginning of the 20th century saw women entering policing; however, most were relegated to clerical and non-patrol duties (Simpson & Croft, 2021). The evolution of women in law enforcement began with matron duties in prisons and later in police stations in the nineteenth century, which led the way for women in modern-day policing (Duffin, 2010). However, women were used in matronly roles for many years until the 1960s, when the advent of the Civil Rights movement called for changes in urban policing. This period saw frequent reports of police brutality, especially targeting minority groups. During this time, it was believed that hiring women would bring a gentler approach to policing and improve police community relations (Archibold & Schultz, 2012).

Women in policing during the 19th century served in roles that were similar to social workers; most were college-educated, religious, and well-to-do (Archbold & Schultz, 2012; Sands et al., 2023). Women were drawn to policing by the influence of strong feminist civic groups seeking to eradicate vice crimes and corruption in the community. Women who had served in the military after World War II were also motivated to join police departments and were used for undercover assignments, and some were even allowed to carry firearms (Archbold & Schultz, 2012).

Several laws in the 1960s and early 1970s changed the landscape for women entering law enforcement. For example, the 1963 Equal Pay Act, the 1964 Civil Rights Act, and the Crime Control Act of 1973 opened the door for women to enter policing. These laws prohibited sex-based discrimination and unequal pay for women. Changes in civil rights legislation, affirmative action policies, consent decrees, and lawsuits led to a sharp increase in the number of women joining police departments (Archbold & Schultz, 2012; Hemp, 2007; Decker & Huckabee, 2002).

Waves of Feminism

Feminist thought is often depicted in waves beginning from the mid-19th century to the early 21st century. Each wave of feminism had distinct characteristics and contributed meaningfully to the evolution of feminist theory (Allen, 2016). Earlier views by Buzzanell (1994) were rooted in feminist theory, which examined women's work themes and experiences. The researcher suggested that research should strive for a deeper understanding of women's work realities and the meaning of these experiences.

Allen (2017) and Swigonski and Raheim (2011) explored three periods of feminism in the United States spanning from the 20th century through the 21st century. The authors concluded that these periods shaped feminist theory and contributed to an appreciation and understanding of women's lived experiences. Swigonski and Raheim (2011) explained that the three periods of feminism shaped and defined women's battle against masculine hegemony, especially within social institutions. Swigonski and Raheim suggested that feminist theories serve as frameworks to analyze and interpret the lives

and experiences of women. Similarly, Shelley et al. (2011) stated that feminist theory provides a structure for examining the historical and contemporary experiences of females in law enforcement.

First-Wave Feminism

According to Allen (2017), the first wave of feminism emerged from the efforts of middle-class White women seeking equality with men and advocating for women's right to vote. Significant moments during this first wave were associated with feminist activism and the abolition movement tied to feminist activism in the context of the abolition movement (Allen, 2017). Hankins (2009) states that this early movement was dominated predominantly by White women and focused mainly on gender equality rather than the issues of racism and sexism faced by women of color. White women were granted much greater freedom and liberties than minority women. As a result, conflicts over race and gender arose during this period between White women and women of color, particularly when the rights of African American women conflicted with those of White women. Consequently, the rights of African American women were ignored, paving the way for the emergence of the Black feminist movement in the 20th century (Allen, 2017).

Second Wave Feminism

The second wave of feminism was characterized by social change, activism and protests during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Protest movements during the Vietnam War, women's liberation, and gay rights were preeminent during this period prompted by

the Black civil rights movement (Allen, 2017). It was during this time, according to Allen (2017) women attempted to find their voice and be heard and fight against the oppression of a patriarchal society whose attempt was to keep women silenced and marginalized. Black women began to realize neither White women nor Black men understood their struggles, and therefore, they set out to form groups whose purpose was to empower them. Johnson (2015, p. 5) noted that these groups were formed to "combat negative images" of Black women and confront both racism and sexism. Additionally, these groups aimed to empower and promote more positive images of Black women. Similarly, several participants in this study reported that their departments failed to show positive images of Black female officers in recruiting materials. Likewise, some participants explained that African American women officers were occasionally depicted in a negative light, often being labelled as the "angry Black female."

Third Wave-Feminism

The intersectionality of gender, race, and class was a central tenet of the third wave of feminism, which gave a different perspective on women's empowerment and gender inequalities (Collins, 2009). Swigonski and Raheim (2011) noted that this period marked a renewed focus on diversity and inclusion, which earlier feminist waves had mostly ignored.

The feminist movement was largely linked to White women and faced criticism for its lack of multiculturalism (Allen, 2017). Women of color brought new conceptualizations of the feminist movement, embracing other ideologies and

perspectives beyond those of White women. These viewpoints embraced the intersectionality and overlapping of multiple viewpoints surrounding experiences of “race, class, sexual orientation, and gender” (Allen, 2017, p. 212). Third-wave feminism also called upon White feminist scholars to explore the nuances of female oppression among all women and challenge men to understand the universal oppression and needs of all women (Allen, 2017).

Fourth Wave Feminism

Posey et al. (2020) concurred with earlier scholars regarding the three waves of feminism; however, they noted that the fourth wave differed by introducing the age of technology and social media. According to Posey et al., this wave enabled a deeper exploration of the intersecting systems of race and gender and their influence on the lived experiences of women, particularly women of color.

Policing as a Gendered Institution

Workman-Stark (2015, p. 766) contended that the police profession is a gendered institution characterized by “advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity, and distinctions between male and female, masculine and feminine”. Likewise, earlier research by Shelly et al. (2000) viewed police departments as gendered institutions that idealize masculine imagery of aggression, strength, power, hypersexuality, and the subordination of women. They noted that hegemonic masculinity is entrenched in police culture. Similarly, Huff and Todak (2022) viewed policing as a gendered institution whose policies and subculture encourage male

success and perpetuate a “glass ceiling” that stymies police reform efforts and the upward mobility of women in policing. A study conducted by Todak and Brown (2019) concluded that police departments were hypermasculine, gendered, racialized, and sexualized, which made recruiting minorities and women difficult. The observations of Todak and Brown in their study accentuate Collins's (2009) Black feminist theory that Black female oppression was characterized by racism, sexism, and gender discrimination.

Further, a hegemonic police environment downplays diversity, fortifies the subculture status quo, and nurtures an environment of sexualized and antagonistic behavior, alienating women in the workplace (Huff & Todak, 2022). Warrior mentality, which emphasizes aggression and hegemonic masculinity, often prevents women from pursuing law enforcement careers (Paoline & Sloan, 2021).

Sanders et al. (2022) argued that research portrays policing as a gendered, male-dominated profession that reinforces hegemonic masculinity. They noted the gendered nature of policing excludes women from promotional and work-related assignments, which makes it difficult for women to successfully navigate within the police culture. Likewise, Morash and Harr (2012) argued that public perception of policing glorified authoritarianism and suggested male aggression, risk-taking, power, and dominance as attributes of effective crime fighting. Todak and Brown (2019) found that attrition among female officers was caused by conflicts with work-life balance, workplace discrimination, and other factors that adversely affect women. They argued that research was

significantly lacking on the intersection of gender and race for female minority officers who experience higher rates of attrition. Todak and Brown (2019) stated that current research was lacking on minority female officers, and future studies should explore the patrol experiences of Black female police officers. Batton and Wright (2019) explained that women in policing were subjected to sexual harassment, hostilities, and discrimination by male counterparts in the workplace. The antagonistic police culture toward women, they noted, had a deleterious effect on hiring, recruiting, and retaining female police officers. Likewise, Wade et al. (2022) posited that African American women are subjected to gendered racism, which includes bias, violence, and harassment, particularly in the workplace.

Hegemonic masculinity, according to Gregory (2023) and Morash and Harr (2012), feeds into the stereotypical image of male power and privilege associated with strength, forcefulness, dominance, and subordination of women. Likewise, Angehrn et al (2021) described that strong hegemonic masculine tendencies are highly valued in police work. Men are idealized as aggressive, misogynistic, and virile, traits favored in male-dominated police organizations. On the other hand, women are considered subordinate to men and have their authority questioned even if they are ranking officers. Moreover, Workman-Stark (2015) argued that the military style of policing perpetuates a hegemonic hypermasculine police environment that excludes women and relegates them to non-enforcement positions, oftentimes stymying their maturation and advancement in the

organization. Additionally, women were often characterized as emotional and considered too weak for police work (Diaz & Nuño, 2021).

Brown et al. (2020, p. 166) conducted a qualitative study using in-depth interviews with policewomen and concluded that a hypermasculine police culture existed, shaping the “social and professional” hierarchical structure of the agency. This atmosphere, in most cases, led to systemic discrimination against women. Brown et al. concluded that gender-based ideology defines the social constructs, perceptions, and structural divisions within an organization.

Likewise, participants in this study reported experiencing instances of discrimination, sexual harassment, and racism within their departments. These narratives support findings in this study and prior studies that Black females in policing face systemic biases, gendered discrimination, and are faced with microaggressions in the workplace. Additionally, participants noted that these instances contribute to their feelings of being marginalized and isolated.

Brown et al. (2020) noted that the inclusion of women in policing challenged the entrenched hegemonic and hypermasculine culture within law enforcement. The increase of women in the policing profession, argued Brown et al, has not changed the hypermasculine police environment. Shelley et al. (2011) described the hierarchy of male-dominated policing as marginalizing women by subjugating them to persistent and pervasive hypersexualized and demeaning behavior in the workplace. Moreover, Todak et al. (2022, p. 2) stated “Despite evidence that women can and do perform equally well

as male police officers, the occupation remains one of the most gendered professions in the U. S.” Earlier research from Shelley et al. (2011) upholds the notion that police work as a gendered institution is viewed as an aggressive male-dominated profession, even though policing often involves resolving quality-of-life issues and effective communication skills over force.

In their research, Angehrn et al. (2021) posited that the gendered nature of police work often divides men and women into gendered work classifications. Duties and assignments may be assigned according to gender-based expectations, with skills attributed to men as aggressors and women as passive. However, they concluded police organizations should strive for gender-balanced work duties such as patrol assignments. Todak and Brown (2019) found that attrition among female officers was caused by conflicts with work-life balance, workplace discrimination, and other factors that adversely affect women. They argued that research was significantly lacking on the intersection of gender and race for female minority officers who experience higher rates of attrition. Todak and Brown (2019) stated that current research was lacking on minority female officers, and future studies should concentrate on the patrol experiences of Black female police officers.

Batton and Wright (2019) maintained that women in policing were subjected to sexual harassment, hostilities, and discrimination by male counterparts in the workplace. The antagonistic police culture toward women, they contend, had a deleterious effect on

hiring, recruiting, and retaining female police officers. Many participants in this study experienced discrimination and male hostilities toward them in the workplace.

In examining gendered institutions, it is important to consider Acker's theory regarding women employed in male-dominated settings such as policing. Acker contends that police organizations are both culturally and structurally dominated by men, fostering environments characterized by aggression, discrimination, patriarchy, and hegemonic masculinity (Alexander & Nowacki, 2022). According to Shelley et al. (2011), policing constitutes a gendered institution that perpetuates four inequitable processes which contribute to the marginalization of women and inhibit their professional advancement in fields such as law enforcement. These processes include: (1) the ongoing propagation of sexualized behavior (Brown et al., 2020) alongside imagery and symbols reinforcing a hegemonic police subculture (Shelley et al., 2011); (2) workplace decisions and practices intentionally implemented to alienate and control female employees; (3) the tendency of hypermasculine institutions to devalue and subordinate women based on gender; and (4) situations in which women may feel compelled to adopt gendered behaviors of male colleagues as a means of coping within the workplace (Shelley et al., 2011).

Diversity in Policing

The literature widely acknowledges that women remain underrepresented in policing, comprising approximately 12-13% of sworn officers in the United States (Archibold & Schultz, 2012; Brown et al., 2020; Clinkenbeard et al., 2021; Gibbs, 2019; Rief & Clinkenbeard, 2020; Schuck, 2014; Seklecki & Paynich, 2007; Suboch et al.,

2017; Todak et al., 2021). Additionally, Clinkinbeard et al. (2021) report that only 5% of police officers in the United States are women of color.

Research suggests that women police officers tend to be less confrontational and possess strong skills in de-escalating tense situations, thereby fostering greater trust within communities. According to Todak et al. (2021), law enforcement agencies in the United States are currently facing unprecedented levels of public distrust, largely attributed to inadequate accountability measures, questions regarding legitimacy, and concerns about police brutality and misconduct. Barnes et al. (2017) noted that perceptions of police corruption erode institutional legitimacy and may contribute to increased lawlessness. Similarly, Todak (2017) highlighted a crisis of legitimacy in American policing, evidenced by declining public trust, particularly among communities of color. Empirical studies demonstrate that cultivating a diverse police force, particularly by hiring and promoting women, can help address significant challenges in policing. Benefits include strengthened community trust, enhanced police-community relations, mitigation of agency corruption, and improved responses to issues of force and biased policing (Barnes et al., 2017; Donohue, 2021; Gibbs, 2019; Gustafson, 2013; Todak & Brown, 2019; Todak et al., 2021; Vermeer et al., 2020)

Further, Shjarback and Todak (2019) asserted that increasing female representation within police departments signals positive change and organizational transformation, with gender diversity serving as an important indicator of reform efforts.

Similarly, Diaz and Nuño (2021) posited that hiring women in policing improves service delivery in the community, especially in marginalized and minority communities.

Barnes et al. (2017) reported that several studies found the public perceives female officers as less corrupt than their male counterparts. The researchers conducted an experimental design survey of approximately 1,000 individuals in a Mexican City. The study hypothesized that women in policing would be perceived as being more effective at reducing corruption within the agency. Survey results were statistically significant, showing that respondents viewed the inclusion of women, particularly in traffic enforcement, as the most effective strategy for combating corruption. Barnes et al. (2017) stated their study had broader policy implications, indicating hiring more women in government and policing may restore public trust and legitimacy and be an effective tool for combating corruption.

Research indicates that more women in departments can lead to positive organizational changes and fewer sexual harassment complaints (Clinkinbeard et al., 2020). Other scholars have concluded that more women in policing will reduce sex-related assaults on women and domestic violence incidents and improve the police response to these crimes (Alexander & Nowacki, 2022; Shjarback & Todak, 2019).

Interest in policing has eroded over the years because of high-profile cases involving the shootings and mistreatment of Black males and females. Vermeer et al. (2020) suggested that increasing the representation of minorities could have a positive effect on recruiting efforts, concluding that people are more interested in joining

departments where others share their ethnic characteristics. Moreover, Alexander and Nowacki (2022) pointed to prior research that indicated women in policing encourage community policing, which is a hallmark in the furtherance of improved police-community relations. However, Todak and Brown (2019) found that interactions between Black female officers and the Black community could have both negative and positive effects. Opportunities for advancement for women are oftentimes limited and when they are promoted, women are often assigned to areas dealing with crimes affecting women and children, such as sexual assaults or human trafficking (Morabito & Shelley, 2018).

Todak and Brown (2019) argued that Black women were more likely to remain on patrol and less likely to be promoted than White women. There is often a lack of diverse job assignments and opportunities for women, which can lead to women not having the varied job experiences of their male counterparts (Morabito & Shelley, 2018). Archibold and Schultz (2012) noted that future research should concentrate on learning more about the experiences of women working in law enforcement.

According to Shjarback and Todak (2020), gender diversity serves as an important measure of progress towards positive police reform. However, the lack of diversity within police departments often hinders African American women from promotions and job assignments, preventing them from expanding their knowledge and increasing their career opportunities (Morabito & Shelley, 2018; Todak & Brown, 2019). Diversity was a preeminent theme in the 2015 *President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing*. This report suggested police departments should hire across several domains of

diversity, including “race, gender, language, life experience, and cultural background,” to increase trust and legitimacy in the police (Todak, 2017, p. 251).

Recruiting and Retaining Women in Policing

Todak and Brown (2019) found that attrition among female officers was caused by conflicts with work-life balance, workplace discrimination, and other factors that adversely affect women. They noted that research was significantly lacking on the intersection of gender and race for female minority officers who experience higher rates of attrition. Todak and Brown (2019) stated that current research was lacking on minority female officers, and future studies should explore the patrol experiences of Black female police officers. Batton and Wright (2019) concluded that women in policing were subjected to sexual harassment, hostilities, and discrimination by male counterparts in the workplace. The antagonistic police culture toward women has a deleterious effect on hiring, recruiting, and retaining female police officers.

Haakmat and Ruffin (2024) stated that initiatives such as *30 x 30* have emerged to increase females in policing by 30% by the year 2030. However, the researchers noted that despite some of the hiring gains, sexism and racism continue to persist in policing, defining the workplace experiences of Black female officers. Batton and Wright (2019) noted that hiring more policewomen in the short term is necessary; however, failing to address the hypermasculine and patriarchal culture of policing that subjects women to hostilities and alienation must be addressed if women are to be successful in police careers.

Research has shown that women in policing must deal with issues and choices surrounding work-life balance, such as child-rearing or caregiving (Alexander & Nowacki, 2022). For example, in a qualitative study of Canadian police officers, Angehrn et al. (2021) found that female officers expressed conflicts while balancing the demands of work and home life. Angehrn et al. found that female officers reported that police agencies failed to develop policies that were “family friendly,” which often led to women terminating their employment to raise a family. The research highlighted gender-based conflicts, such as balancing work and home life expectations, that were challenging for female police officers. The study raised several policy implications to address retention and resolve work-life balance. Participants in their study reported that on-site daycare and organizational policies that promoted a family-friendly work environment would help retain policewomen. Further, providing training to male officers on the challenges faced by women in the workplace to reduce gender-based discrimination and harassment was another recommendation in the study. (Angehrn et al., 2021).

Though not a focus of this study, another overlooked aspect of retention is the negative gendered experiences that women encounter in police academies. The gendered nature of police recruit training with an emphasis on physicality and masculinity often has women reconsidering their career choice or dropping out of the academy (Paoline & Sloan, 2022). Despite efforts to recruit more women, Paoline and Sloan contend that police organizations should make more effort to retain women in the police academy. Retaining women in police recruit training should be a focus for future research. There is

little research on the number of women entering police academies in the United States, how many fail to complete the academy, and the reasons they leave before completing the training (Pauline & Sloan, 2022).

Summary

The intersectionality of race, gender, equality, and the empowerment of women, characterized by the “third wave” of feminism, including the marginalization of African American women and their unique issues, is a recurring theme in the literature (Collins, 2019; Swigonski & Raheim, 2011). The literature suggests that women have played a significant role in American policing, beginning in the late eighteenth century and continuing into the early nineteenth century (Archibold & Schultz, 2012). Scholars have delineated three waves of feminism describing the history of women in policing from the early eighteenth century through the 20th century (Allen, 2017; Hankins, 2009; Swigonski & Raheim, 2011). Women in early policing served as “matrons” and were tasked with the care and safekeeping of women and children in police custody. As the nineteenth century advanced, the number of women increased in policing; however, their role was more akin to social work. College-educated, religious White women with strong feminist views were drawn to policing to eradicate the growing number of vice crimes in the community (Archibold & Schultz, 2012). Scholars such as Archibold and Schultz (2012), Hemp (2007), and Decker and Huckabee (2002) noted that changing laws prohibiting sex discrimination and inequalities in pay for women, along with affirmative action and civil rights lawsuits, contributed to an increase in women joining police

departments. Women have made notable contributions to the field of law enforcement; however, despite the increase of women in policing through the years, the literature has shown women continue to be underrepresented in policing, especially women of color, and the number of women in policing has been stagnant (Archibold & Schultz, 2012; Brown et al., 2020; Clinkenbeard et al., 2021; Gibbs, 2019; Rief & Clinkinbeard, 2020, Schuck, 2014; Seklecki & Paynich, 2007; Suboch et al., 2017).

Research has indicated that diversity in policing strengthens community perception and legitimacy (President's Task Force on Century Policing, 2015). Further, women have been shown to play a significant role in quelling many disputes and disturbances in the community (Archibold & Schultz, 2012; Todak & Brown, 2019).

The literature indicates that African American women like their White counterparts, are underrepresented in policing. Research indicates studies on African-American women in policing have been minimal and dated (Schuck, 2014; Suboch et al, 2017; Todak & Brown, 2019). Other scholars such as Pogebrin et al. (2000) posited further research should focus on the experiences of African American women in policing. Pogebrin et al. argued that African-American females face additional barriers in policing and are “double marginalized” by racism and sexism. Moreover, Kringen et al. (2018) argued the experiences of Black women in policing were understudied and should be included in future studies.

A review of the literature suggests a noticeable gap in current studies on African American women in policing and their lived work experiences. As recruiting and hiring a

diverse police force becomes essential to police reform, it is important for social change that current studies are conducted to gauge the perspectives and experiences of women, especially African American women in policing, to assist in the hiring and diversification of police agencies. This study addresses that gap by contributing to the limited body of research on the experiences of African American women in law enforcement and providing a meaningful addition to the existing literature.

The findings from this study may also inform police administrators, policymakers, and government officials in developing strategies to increase representation and improve the hiring and retention of African American women in policing.

Chapter 1 outlines the introduction to the study, including the background, problem, and purpose statement, significance and nature of the study, and the theoretical underpinnings of the study. Chapter 2 presents the literature review which will outline the theoretical framework and the history of women in policing through the lens of the three waves of feminism and further research from scholars on the problem of the underrepresentation of women in policing and the lack of research on the lived experiences of African American women police officers. Chapter 3 will explain the research methodology, followed by Chapter 4, which will present the results of the qualitative study utilizing purposeful sampling. Lastly, Chapter 5 will present an overall discussion of the study, an analysis of the study, followed by the implications for social change, and the study's conclusion. Applicable tables, charts, or other relevant information can be found in the Appendix section of the study.

Chapter 3: Research Design

Introduction

This chapter presents the research design, rationale, methodology, data collection and analysis procedures, instrumentation, and ethical considerations. It also outlines the role of the researcher, participant selection criteria, and procedures established to ensure confidentiality and trustworthiness. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research is to explore and understand the experiences of African American policewomen who work street patrol in police departments across the Midwest region of the United States. This study seeks to gain valuable insight into their work experiences and their perspectives on recruiting and retaining African American women in policing. The study examines how the intersection of race and gender operates as an oppressive barrier that shapes their daily work experience in law enforcement. Prior studies have consistently documented a gap in research examining the lived experiences of women of color. (Suboch et al., 2017; Todak & Brown, 2020).

The study involved in-depth interviews with 12 participants using open-ended, semi-structured questions. Data saturation was determined after 12 interviews, indicating that no additional interviews were necessary. Some scholars have debated saturation. According to Mason (2010), the concept of saturation in qualitative research occurs when no new information emerges that contributes additional information to the research inquiry.

Participants in the study were identified as African American policewomen with at least two years of continuous patrol experience who are sworn and full-time active officers employed by Midwest police departments in the United States. Midwest states are defined by the United States federal government as Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin (Britannica, 2021). A flyer soliciting participants was prepared and approved by the Walden Institutional Review Board (IRB #09-241058697). The flyer was posted on social media platforms such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, and TikTok. Letters were sent to police chiefs of several Midwest police departments and police organizations, such as the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE).

This study examines the lived experiences, challenges, and perspectives of African American policewomen serving in police departments in the Midwest region of the United States. The findings address an existing gap in the literature and provide police administrators with valuable insights for recruiting and retaining African American women in policing, as well as for developing organizational policies that foster a fair, equitable, and inclusive work environments. The virtual Zoom interviews allowed participants to share their lived experiences working in a male-dominated environment, providing rich data on the challenges they face daily.

Ravitch and Carl (2021) stated that research design begins with the research topic and is guided by the research question and problem. Likewise, Abutabenjeh & Jaradat

(2018) asserted research design is critical to research studies in most disciplines.

Research design is a process focusing on the overall structure of the study (Babbie, 2015). It is an organized plan or strategy allowing the researcher to determine how to collect and analyze data, what to observe, why, and how. The research design is the blueprint guiding the study (Abutabenjeh & Jaradat, 2018; Bouchrika, 2020; Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

Abutabenjeh and Jaradat (2018) argued that researchers should focus on two key areas in research design: defining the nature of the inquiry and selecting the most appropriate approach to answer the research question. Likewise, according to Babbie (2015), research design should be developed by considering the researcher's interests and abilities, as well as the available resources for the study. Burkholder et al. (2020) viewed qualitative research as an exploratory and descriptive inquiry into a particular phenomenon that seeks to comprehend an individual's experience and ultimately bring meaning to their unique experience. Similarly, Bouchrika, (2020) posited that qualitative research explores the state of mind of the individual and their experiences. As such, phenomenology seeks to understand the lived experiences of individuals and their shared experiences (Burkholder et al., 2020). This study, therefore, is grounded in a qualitative phenomenological methodology, which allows for an in-depth exploration of the lived experiences of African American female officers.

Research Questions

RQ1: How do African American female police officers in police departments in the Midwest region of the United States describe their patrol work experience?

RQ2: What are the views of African American female police officers on how to recruit and retain more women of color for careers in policing?

Research Design and Rationale

The overarching questions for this study describe the meaning African American female police officers working in Midwest police departments bring to their work experiences. Burkholder et al. (2020) asserted phenomenology is constrained to research exploring individuals' experiences and perceptions and is best suited to "how" and "why" questions. A phenomenological qualitative methodology was selected to explore how African American female officers in police departments in the Midwest describe their work experience. Using qualitative methodology in this research was necessary to understand the phenomenon of lived experiences and perspectives of the participants and how they described their work environment. Babbie (2017) defined phenomena as events or occurrences that individuals experience. Burkholder et al. (2020) suggested that qualitative research is ideal for exploring phenomena and understanding individual experiences.

Quantitative and qualitative research differ in their purpose and techniques. Qualitative strives for an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon using a smaller sample size obtained through purposeful sampling, whereas quantitative inquiry strives to

generalize from a larger randomly selected sample to a population (Patton, 2015). Qualitative research is not concerned with null hypothesis, causality, or making comparisons as in quantitative inquiry. Quantitative research seeks to understand a phenomenon through the quantification of numerical data collection and analysis (Burkholder et al. 2020). Therefore, this approach was not suited to capture the lived experiences of individuals.

Suboch et al. (2017) and Todak and Brown (2019) both highlight in their qualitative studies that there is limited and often outdated research on Black women in policing. Similarly, Morash and Haarr (2012) found that earlier work had not sufficiently examined the diverse perspectives and experiences of female officers. Therefore, this study fills an important gap by focusing on the lived experiences of African American female officers in law enforcement, providing valuable insights to the existing literature.

Words such as *how* and *describe* are consistent within a qualitative design, whereas words of measurement, such as *correlation*, *compare*, and *contrast* are associated with a quantitative approach (Burkholder et al., 2020). A quantitative approach, however, is not suited for this research study. The research questions in this study are designed to explore the lived experiences of African American women in policing are aligned with a qualitative approach. Because this study is exploratory, a qualitative design offers the most appropriate framework for addressing the research question. Burkholder et al. (2020) emphasized that alignment is essential to ensure agreement and consistency within a research proposal. Burkholder et al. explained that

the problem and purpose statement must align with the research questions, design, and method of the study. Likewise, Amanfi (2019) posited that wording the problem statement, purpose statement, and research question similarly will strengthen research alignment. Proposal alignment demonstrates research rigor and reflects a well-organized research design (Burkholder et al., 2020). The study applies these principles to maintain consistency and alignment throughout the research process.

Role of the Researcher

According to Burkholder et al. (2020), researchers must strive to avoid bias in data collection and adhere to strict ethical standards with human subjects. Ravich and Carl (2021) further argued that researchers should continually monitor their biases, be aware of their positionality, and the way they communicate with participants. Reich (2021) emphasized that qualitative research must consider the position of both the researcher and the participants. The positionality of the researcher shapes the foundation of the study, influences the development of the research questions, and guides the data collection and analysis processes (Reich, 2021).

The Walden Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved this study #09-24-241058687. The three guidelines promulgated in the Belmont Report established ethical standards when using human subjects, which include “*respect for others, beneficence, and justice*” (Burkholder et al. 2020, p. 200). This study adhered to the strict standards of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and endeavored to cause no harm to the participants.

This researcher's positionality is informed by thirty years of service with the Detroit Police Department prior to retirement. This experience provided insight and brought a wealth of knowledge and lived experiences to the study, which allowed me as a researcher to empathize and identify with the participants. Toma (2011) pointed out the importance of researchers, especially in qualitative research where objectivity is often questioned, to account for their position in the context of the research. A researcher's positionality and social identity are important to consider in qualitative research. How a researcher views themselves in the context of the research is critical to avoid bias, which may lead to validity problems in the study. However, being cognizant of these experiences helps guard against biases (Ravich & Carl, 2021). Accordingly, Ravitch and Carl (2021) argue that ethical research requires researchers to possess situational awareness of their biases, prejudices, and subjectivities, which could impact the study. Researchers must adopt a reflective approach to critically examine their biases and find ways to address them during the entire process. Therefore, as the researcher, I disclosed my law enforcement background to the participants to ensure transparency and minimize potential biases in the study.

This study did not anticipate conflicts of interest or power relationship issues with any participants. My former role as President of NOBLE could have been perceived by participants as either beneficial or adverse to their positions within their agencies; however, neither scenario occurred during the study.

Participants did not receive payment for participating in the study; however, each participant who completed the interview process received a small token of appreciation in the form of a \$20 gift card.

Methodology

This research is grounded within a qualitative phenomenological framework, which is well-suited for capturing the lived experiences of African American female officers. This approach prioritizes participants' voices and provides insight into the meanings they assign to their law enforcement experiences. This study employed open-ended, semi-structured interview questions to elicit rich, robust, and detailed narratives that reflect the views and perspectives of African American female police officers working in patrol settings in a male-dominated profession.

Ravitch and Carl (2021) stated that the research design starts with the topic and is shaped by the questions and problem statement. Likewise, Abutabenjeh and Jaradat (2018) asserted that in most disciplines, research design is critical to research studies. According to Babbie (2015), research design is a process that focuses on the overall structure of the study by providing an organized plan or strategy that directs how a researcher will collect and analyze data. Other researchers have similarly described research design as a blueprint that guides the research study (Abutabenjeh & Jaradat, 2018; Bouchrika, 2020; Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Abutabenjeh and Jaradat (2018) asserted that researchers should focus on two key areas in research design: defining the nature of the inquiry and selecting the most appropriate approach to answer the research question.

Likewise, according to Babbie (2015), research design should be developed by considering the researcher's interests and abilities, as well as the available resources for the study. Burkholder et al. (2020) viewed qualitative research as an exploratory and descriptive inquiry into a particular phenomenon that seeks to comprehend an individual's experience and ultimately bring meaning to their unique experience. Burkholder et al. (2020) argue that research methods should focus on the processes and procedures most suitable for the study.

The eligibility criteria for this study required participants to self-identify as African American female officers, with a minimum of two years of continuous patrol experience at a police department located in the Midwest region of the United States. Participants were recruited using a combination of posted flyers on social media, letters to police administrators, and police organizations. Data collection involved conducting virtual interviews with participants, using an open-ended, semi-structured question format. Data from the virtual Zoom interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim using Rev.com. NVivo15 software was used for data analysis. The emergent themes identified the depth of the experiences and perspectives of the participants in this study.

Phenomenology seeks to understand the lived experiences of individuals and their shared experiences (Burkholder et al., 2020). Therefore, in this study, a phenomenological approach was essential to explore and understand the experiences of the participants in their own voices. The underpinning of this research, therefore, is

informed by a descriptive phenomenological methodology as it explores the lived experience of African American female police officers in police departments in the Midwest region of the United States. Abutabenjeh and Jaradat (2018) described three types of research design, qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods, each design adhering to its worldview and research methodology. Burkholder et al. (2020) described qualitative research as an exploratory and descriptive form of inquiry that seeks to bring meaning to individuals' unique experiences. Similarly, Bouchrika (2020, p. 1) emphasized that qualitative research delves into the "beliefs, behaviors, and emotions" of the human experience.

Accordingly, the following section outlines the rationale for selecting a phenomenological approach as the most appropriate design for this study. The origins of phenomenology can be traced back to a philosophical movement with two primary approaches: descriptive (or transcendental) and interpretive. Descriptive phenomenology has been attributed to the works of Edmund Husserl and interpretive phenomenology evolved from the philosophy of Martin Heidegger. Both approaches lend themselves to a qualitative design (Burkholder et al. 2020; Patton, 2015; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Descriptive phenomenology involves reducing the experiences of individuals into patterns and themes to find shared experiences between participants. Interpretive phenomenology explores the experiences of individuals and utilizes the same data collection methods as descriptive phenomenology but concentrates on the psychological and sociological aspects of the individuals' responses. Phenomenology studies human

experiences and the ways individuals view the world (Burkholder et al. 2020; Patton, 2015; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Likewise, Burkholder et al. (2020) viewed phenomenology as the collection of data and data analysis of individuals' lived experiences and the meaning they attribute to those experiences. Transferability of responses is another element of phenomenology that allows the researcher to determine if the experiences of one participant apply to the experiences of other participants with similar backgrounds. This approach lends itself favorably to future replication of this study.

The strength of phenomenological research is the ability to elicit rich descriptions and detail by conducting in-depth interviews with individuals who have shared experiences (Burkholder et al., 2020; Patton, 2015). Eberle (2013) posited that a phenomenological approach can be applied to most areas of social science and that the subjective experiences of researchers and participants are valuable to research. Numeric inquiry, such as quantitative approaches, cannot bring complex meaning to the lived experiences of humans and therefore, was not used in this study. A phenomenological approach explores the depth of human experience. Accordingly, this study was well-suited to this small, homogenous sample.

Participant Selection Logic

Female sworn officers who identified as African American, had at least two years of continuous patrol experience, and were employed in police agencies in the Midwest were considered for this study. Midwest states are defined by the United States federal

government as Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin (Britannica, 2021).

Purposeful sampling was used in this study. Patton (2015) viewed purposeful sampling as strategic alignment with the study's objective, research questions, and data collection. Purposeful sampling aims to acquire knowledge through case selection, which provides answers to the researcher's inquiry. Likewise, Ravitch & Carl (2021) stated that purposeful sampling or strategic sampling in qualitative research gives the researcher the ability to select participants who have specific knowledge relevant to the study, have a certain subject matter expertise, work in the same environment, or share other unique experiences to answer the researcher's inquiry. Purposeful sampling is considered the primary approach in qualitative research (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Hence, purposeful sampling was best suited for this research.

Participants in this study were recruited through letters and flyer solicitations to police organizations and administrators. Flyers were posted on social media platforms such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, and TikTok. Twelve African American female officers who met the eligibility criteria were selected to participate in the study and were scheduled for interviews. Participants were emailed the Walden informed consent form and were asked to respond by emailing "I consent" to the researcher.

A total of eleven interviews were carried out utilizing online Zoom technology. One interview was conducted in person. Qualitative research is oftentimes criticized by scholars because of the smaller sample sizes associated with this method of research. One

of the key questions asked by Patton (2015) is whether the sample size is aligned with the purpose of the study. Likewise, Urica (2021) asserted researchers must decide how many interviews are enough to answer the research objectives. Moreover, Mason (2010) argued proficiency and experience of the researcher in data collection could influence reaching saturation. Patton explained there were no fixed rules in qualitative sampling. He concluded that the sample size in qualitative research can be flexible and may increase if observations or fieldwork dictate or decrease if saturation occurs sooner than expected. Urica (2021) posited that phenomenology is the most robust methodology when researching the lived experiences of participants. Further, Urica concluded that purposive sampling allows for robust and varied experiences of the phenomenon being studied.

Theoretical saturation, according to Urica (2021) and Guest et al. (2006), happens in data collection and analysis when no new information or categories emerge. There are varied perspectives on the number of interviews necessary to reach saturation. Baker et al. (2012) posited that since qualitative research is exploratory, it is often difficult for qualitative researchers to know beforehand how much data to collect, contrasting with quantitative researchers who know what and how much data is needed to evaluate their hypotheses. Urica (2021) noted that the sample size for phenomenological research can range from as few as 3–4 participants to as many as 10–15 individuals who have directly experienced the phenomenon under investigation.

Other researchers, such as Guest et al. (2006), concluded that saturation is key to good qualitative research; however, they concluded there was a lack of literature

estimating sample size saturation. Similarly, Baker et al. (2012) supported Guest et al. (2006), asserting that few guidelines exist for determining saturation. Guest et al. concluded from their study that 12 interviews using purposive sampling should be adequate when the group is homogenous and the participants have common experiences. Charmaz (as cited in Baker et al., 2012, p. 21) argued that 12 interviews may be sufficient to “generate themes but not command respect”. Twelve participants were selected for this study. While Charmaz suggested that 12 interviews may be insufficient to “command respect”, the rich and detailed narratives shared by participants in this study produced meaningful themes that hold academic significance. Therefore, the findings of this study support the adequacy of the sample size and offer valuable insight into the lived experiences of the participants.

Each participant received a copy of their transcribed interview as part of the member checking audit train and was asked to review it for accuracy. Participants were advised to email the researcher with any modifications or corrections. All participants confirmed that no changes were necessary. Ravitch and Carl (2021) explained that the member check process adds to the validity of the study. Participants were not compensated for the study; however, they received a nominal token of appreciation in the form of a \$20 gift card after the interview process was completed.

Data collection included virtual interviews with 11 African American female officers, and one interview was conducted in person. The participants were purposefully selected from police departments in the Midwest regions of the United States. The

participants were active officers with at least two years of continuous police patrol. This population has unique experiences and specific police knowledge that were important to the study and answered the research inquiry posed in the study. Excluded from the study were African American women who were retired and women who are active but not working in a patrol capacity or who are in supervisory, command, or executive officer ranks.

The primary research tool of this study was in-depth qualitative interviews using open-ended, semi-structured questions derived in advance from the study's interview guide. According to Rubin and Rubin (2015), semi-structured questions are prepared in advance and are focused on answering the study's research questions. Moreover, qualitative interviewing, according to Patton (2015, p. 421), requires "rigor and skill" and requires the researcher to remain focused and immersed in another person's lived experience.

All interviews were conducted via Zoom, and audio recordings were obtained for transcription purposes. Redundant recording devices served as backups to ensure data preservation. Rev.com was used to transcribe the interviews, and NVivo15 served as a tool for organizing and analyzing the data.

Participants meeting the eligibility criteria were purposefully selected to participate in this study. The informed consent form was electronically transmitted to each participant. Participants were asked to review the form and indicate their agreement by replying to the researcher via email with the statement, "I consent". Interviews were

scheduled between November 2024 and February 2025. Eleven interviews were conducted using the technology Zoom. One interview was conducted in person. All participants selected for the study met the inclusion criteria.

Instrumentation

Examples of data collection instruments include procedures, questions, and prompts that help to guide the researcher through the data collection process (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). The instrument used for data collection was a semi-structured, open-ended interview guide. Other instruments in the study included a demographic questionnaire, audio recordings, and transcripts from the participant interviews. A recruitment letter (Appendix B) explained the purpose of the study, adherence to participant confidentiality, the study's timeline, and the method of recording and transcribing. Participants were advised that compensation would not be offered; however, a thank-you gift card of \$20 was emailed to each participant who completed the interview. Contact information for the researcher and the Walden Institution Review Board was provided in the recruitment letter.

Before conducting the interviews, I received written consent to conduct the study from Walden's Institutional Review Board (IRB). This consent ensured that the study adhered to university policy compliance, confidentiality, and the code of ethics. A recruitment flyer was prepared and approved by the university's IRB. Flyers and solicitation letters were distributed to police organizations such as NOBLE and to the

CEOs of several Midwest police agencies. Recruitment flyers were posted on social media platforms such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, and TikTok.

Another instrument in this study was the interview guide protocol (Appendix D). Qualitative studies use instruments or protocols to direct data collection. Burkholder et al. (2020) explained that protocols are useful tools to ensure coherent and concise interviews across all participants. Ravitch and Carl (2021) stated that interview guides should include an introduction that outlines the process and procedures of the interview. A demographic questionnaire (Appendix C) was developed to capture information such as gender, age, marital status, and years of police experience.

To establish content validity, the interview questions were developed from the literature and grounded in the study's Black feminist thought. I asked two retired African American female supervisors, both with over 25 years of police experience, to review the interview questions and provide feedback. Faculty from Walden University reviewed the research questions to ensure they were clear, appropriate for the research, and free of potential ethical concerns. Revisions to the interview questions were made based on this feedback.

The introduction to the interview guide in this study confirmed the participants' permission to audio record the interview, explained confidentiality, security, and storage of data, and further explained the interview process. The informed consent form is crucial in preventing misunderstandings and ethical issues. Patton (2015) posited that informed consent forms and introductory statements to participants should cover the purpose of the

study, how the information will be used and stored, an overview of the type of questions that will be asked, inherent drawbacks, and the confidentiality of the responses as being important considerations for researchers as they conduct interviews. Before the interview began, participants were given an opportunity to ask questions of the researcher about the process.

To answer the study's research questions, participants were asked semi-structured open-ended questions to explore their lived experiences working in a male-dominated environment and to gain their perspectives on the best strategies to recruit and retain African American women in policing.

Other instruments employed in this study included journal memos, audio-recording devices, transcripts, and note-taking. Ravitch and Carl (2021) explained that researchers should engage in memo writing throughout the research process. Memo writing, according to Ravitch and Carl, is an important research tool for data collection and analysis. Alpha-numeric codes were assigned to each participant to protect their identity.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Purposive sampling was the most appropriate strategy for this research, as it allowed for the intentional selection of participants who could provide rich and relevant insights into the lived experiences of African American female officers. Participants were selected through purposeful and snowball sampling. Snowball sampling was used as a secondary sampling method to increase the participant pool. Snowball or convenience

sampling is often utilized in qualitative research. This technique uses research participants to recommend others to participate in a study and is often used by qualitative researchers (Geddes et al. 2018). Ravitch and Carl (2021) viewed purposeful or strategic sampling as the primary approach in qualitative research. This method allowed the selection of participants who shared similar experiences and specific subject matter expertise, enabling them to respond effectively to the research questions. The participants in this study possessed comparable police experience and knowledge in the field.

Participant recruitment began after receiving approval from Walden University's Institutional Review Board. Recruitment letters and flyers were distributed to police organizations such as NOBLE, social media, former colleagues, and CEOs of police agencies. Flyers were also posted on social media platforms, such as LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. Twelve African American female officers, who met the eligibility criteria, were purposely selected to participate in the study. The inclusion criteria required participants to identify as African American female officers, be employed in a Midwest police department, and have a minimum of two years of patrol experience. The policewomen in this study were selected because they share common experiences, work in a male-dominated profession, have a certain level of knowledge in law enforcement through their training, and all identify as African American. These unique experiences were important to the study and answered the research inquiry posed in this study. Participants who met the eligibility criteria and who were willing to participate in the study were selected. Informed consent forms were electronically

transmitted to each potential participant. Participants were asked to review the informed consent and acknowledge their consent by sending an email to the researcher indicating “I consent”. No interviews were scheduled until I received this acknowledgement. The date and time of each Zoom interview were scheduled after receiving the email acknowledgement of informed consent from each participant. Participants were again informed of the voluntariness of the study and advised that they could discontinue the interview at any time during the questioning. Confidentiality was of utmost importance, and the identities of the participants were masked using numeric identifiers, P01 through P12. Ravitch & Carl (2021) described confidentiality as privacy for participants, including decisions researchers make to protect the privacy of those being studied.

Data collection included in-depth, virtual Zoom interviews with participants using an open-ended, semi-structured question format. This method was selected by the researcher to produce thick descriptions of the lived experiences of African American female officers. Data was collected in 40 to 60-minute Zoom interviews. Prompts and follow-up questions were posed to participants during the interview to obtain clarification or to solicit more detailed and meaningful responses. Interviews were audio-recorded using the Zoom recording feature. Additionally, external recording devices were used as redundant devices if the primary Zoom recording technology failed. The data from the recordings were transcribed by Rev.com and uploaded to the software NVivo 15 for data analysis.

Data collection documentation also included handwritten journal notes and memos from each interview. Handwritten field notes for each participant interview were recorded in a spiral notebook to capture thoughts and observations during each interview. Maxfield and Babbie (2018) described field notes and “memoing” as techniques that establish a research audit trail. Additional notes were taken while reviewing and comparing the written transcript with the recording.

After the transcripts were transcribed, they were placed in a labeled folder with each participant's numeric identifier. To maintain confidentiality, all folders, notes, and audio recordings were securely stored in my home office. As I live alone, no one else has access to the research documents or my personal computer. These procedures were implemented to comply with the Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines and ethical standards to ensure data protection and participant confidentiality. All documents and recordings will be retained and destroyed in accordance with Walden University's retention and document destruction protocol.

Data was collected from participant interviews until saturation was determined by the researcher. According to Mason (2010), saturation is achieved when data collection no longer yields new information, insights, or themes relevant to the inquiry. At the conclusion of the interview, participants were advised that they may be contacted later by the researcher to answer follow-up questions or to clarify a statement. After the interview, I asked the participants if they had questions. I thanked the participants for taking part in the study and let them know they would receive a \$20 gift card as a token

of appreciation. Participants were informed that they would receive a copy of the transcript via email for review and would be allowed to modify or clarify any portion of the transcript to ensure accuracy. Participants were also informed that if they had additional questions or concerns, they could contact the researcher using the email provided throughout the study.

Data Analysis Plan

Coding and thematic content analysis were used to analyze the data for this study. NVivo 15 software was used to support the coding process and to identify and organize emerging themes. According to Ravitch and Carl (2021) and Saldana (2021), thematic analysis involves recognizing commonalities, disparities, and connections within the data by applying a word, a group of words, or phrases to make meaning of the data being analyzed. In qualitative research, codes are descriptive and enable researchers to systematically organize and analyze data by logically recognizing patterns and themes and identifying their relationship with the data. (Ravitch & Carl, 2021; Saldana, 2021).

NVivo 15 software was used to identify codes and themes during the data analysis process. Participant transcripts were uploaded into the software, which was then used to code the data and identify emerging themes. Ravitch and Carl (2021) described data analysis as a systematic process of examining the data set, identifying and compiling emerging themes, and generating findings that answer the research questions. Data analysis begins with the conception of data collection and continues throughout the study. Attention to the data analysis processes is critical for “valid and rigorous” qualitative

studies that present the findings of human experiences that are true to the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

First, I began data analysis by assembling handwritten notes, transcripts, and audio recordings from each interview. Recording recurring themes during note-taking assists the researcher in asking follow-up or probing questions during the interview (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Second, I actively engaged with the data by listening to each recorded interview while simultaneously reviewing the corresponding transcript. This immersive process allowed me to become thoroughly familiar with the data and gain a profound understanding of the participants' lived experiences, as well as their perspectives on recruiting and hiring African American female officers. This review also enabled me to identify and correct any discrepancies in the transcript, ensuring the accuracy of the data before analysis. Third, after completing the transcript review and ensuring that the data accurately reflected the participants' lived experiences, I entered the data into the software NVivo 15 to begin the data analysis process. Lastly, I began a systematic search for codes and emerging themes that formed the basis for addressing the study's research questions. I developed a codebook in Microsoft Word based on the data coded in NVivo 15. Similar codes were grouped, which allowed the identification of emerging themes. From these codes, I identified recurring themes based on keywords articulated by each participant during the data collection process. Thematic analysis, according to Ravitch and Carl (2021) and Saldana (2021), entails recognizing commonalities, disparities, and

connections within the data. Codes in qualitative research are descriptive and help researchers analyze and organize data. It brings meaning to data by applying a word, a group of words, or phrases to make meaning of the data being analyzed (Ravitch & Carl, 2021; Saldana, 2021). Coding is iterative and is a systematic and logical process of recognizing patterns and themes and their relationship with the data. Themes emerge as the researcher continues to engage with the data by analyzing the codes (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Saldana (2021) emphasized that themes bring meaning to recurring patterns. Likewise, Rubin and Rubin (2012) argue that themes are often developed from the feelings of the participants.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Each participant was required to review and sign the Walden University informed consent form before the interview commenced. Participants indicated their consent by replying to the informed consent form with an email stating “I consent,” which served as confirmation of their willingness to participate in the study. To ensure trustworthiness, each participant was assigned a numeric identifier upon providing consent to protect their identity. Additionally, participants were allowed to review their interview transcripts to verify accuracy and provide clarification if necessary.

According to Burkholder et al. (2021), trustworthiness refers to the extent researchers trust their data and methodology. Reviewing the purpose and design of the study early in the process will allow researchers to determine if their collection methods will yield trustworthy data capable of answering the study’s research questions. In this

study, I determined that conducting virtual interviews with participants via Zoom technology was an effective means of producing trustworthy data, thus enhancing the credibility of the findings. One of the premises of trustworthiness posited by Korstjens and Moser (2018) was whether the research findings could be trusted. The four levels of trustworthiness in qualitative research include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Burkholder et al., 2020; Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Ravitch & Carl, 2021; Shenton, 2004). The strategies used to ensure trustworthiness are discussed in the next section.

Credibility

Credibility refers to the accuracy and confidence in the truthfulness of the findings and how the research findings represent the interviewees' thoughts and perspectives (Ravich & Carl, 2021). Member checking was used in this study to establish credibility by providing participants with their transcripts for review and allowing them to modify or correct any information. Member checking and detailed descriptions are methods described by Ravich and Carl (2021) that ensure credibility. Additionally, I employed follow-up questions and prompts during the interviews to gain more detailed information and elicit thick descriptions from the participants in this study.

Transferability

Transferability in qualitative research entails whether the study's findings can be applied contextually to other settings or populations. Transferability strategies are achieved when researchers provide thick and detailed descriptions so the study may be

applicable in other settings by different researchers and participants (Burkholder et al, 2020; Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Similarly, Chenail (2010) considered transferability as the ability of an individual in one setting to choose to follow or accept the findings from another study. To promote transferability, I elicited thick and in-depth descriptions of each participant's demographics, workplace culture, and their lived experiences as African American female officers. This research provides evidence and a framework that future researchers can use by applying the findings of this study to African American female officers in other geographic locations and within other law enforcement contexts.

Dependability

Dependability relates to the consistency and uniformity of the data collection and analysis process. Dependability questions whether the research methods are suitable for the study, whether rigor has been established, and whether the research can withstand challenges to the data collection and analysis process (Ravich & Carl, 2021). The authors further emphasized that having a strong research design is paramount to achieving dependability. Adu (2024) noted that to achieve dependability, researchers must clearly document the steps they took in collecting and analyzing the data in the study.

Further, Shenton (2004) explained that dependability can be achieved through triangulation and an audit trail. I established dependability by maintaining a detailed audit trail that consisted of handwritten notes and memos, audio recordings, and data collection and analysis documentation. I used NVivo 15 software to organize the data, establish codes, and develop emerging themes. A Microsoft Word document was prepared to

organize the study's codes and identify emerging themes. This process ensures that other researchers can replicate this study in similar settings and contexts and obtain comparable results, which demonstrates the reliability of the research methodology.

Confirmability

Confirmability emphasizes researcher neutrality and objectivity, ensuring that the findings represent the experiences and perspectives of the participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Journals and handwritten notes were employed throughout the research process to ensure that the narratives were grounded in the participants' narratives of their lived experiences rather than researcher bias. To acknowledge and bracket my role and previous experience as a law enforcement executive, I was transparent with participants and shared my policing background. Sharing this information minimized potential bias and helped participants better understand my positionality as the researcher in this study.

Ethical Procedures

The United States conducted unethical, non-consensual medical experiments on humans, particularly people of color, as in the Tuskegee experiment (Burkholder et al., 2020; Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Guidelines for ethical research stemmed from several historic human experiments that brought harm and suffering to human subjects (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). These abuses led to the 1974 National Research Act in response to the atrocities of the Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment and established ethical considerations for studying human subjects. As a result, the 1974 *Belmont Report* was promulgated and continues to serve as a blueprint for ethical research when using human subjects. This

report addressed three ethical principles: beneficence (do no harm), respect, and justice (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Later, Institutional Review Boards (IRB), particularly within academia, were established to review research proposals to ensure that researchers did not cause harm to participants and that ethical principles, including fidelity to participants, were upheld (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Burkholder et al (2020) asserted that Institutional Review Boards were particularly concerned about harm or risk to participants. The National Research Act established the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and informed consent requirements to monitor compliance with ethical standards (Babbie, 2017; Burkholder et al., 2020). Ravitch and Carl (2021) emphasized the importance of researchers following ethical codes and communicating with their study participants to maintain ethical research standards.

Patton (2015) emphasized that researchers should strive to anticipate potential areas where participants may experience harm and clearly articulate these concerns to the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Moreover, researchers should thoroughly outline strategies to avoid or minimize these risks to participants. According to Ravitch and Carl (2021), researchers should strive to preserve participant confidentiality throughout the research process. Similarly, Babbie (2017) emphasized the importance of researchers understanding the difference between anonymity and confidentiality. Anonymity occurs when neither the researcher nor the readers can identify participants based on their responses. Comparatively, confidentiality takes place when the researcher knows the identity of the participant and their responses but vows not to reveal the identities

publicly (Babbie, 2017). The National Research Act also established the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and informed consent requirements to monitor compliance with ethical standards (Babbie, 2017; Burkholder et al., 2020). Ravitch and Carl (2021) stated that it is incumbent upon researchers to adhere to ethical codes and communicate with their study participants to maintain high ethical research standards.

I obtained approval from the Walden Institutional Review Board before conducting my research. I began recruiting participants for the study after approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board, which granted permission to conduct the study. I posted the IRB-approved recruitment flyer on social media platforms like Facebook, LinkedIn, TikTok, and sent letters to law enforcement organizations such as NOBLE and police administrators of Midwest police agencies

The flyer provided my contact information for participants who were interested in participating in the research study. Participants who contacted me were emailed a recruitment letter explaining the purpose of the study and a copy of the informed consent form. Participants indicated their consent by replying to the informed consent form with an email indicating “I consent”, which served as confirmation of their willingness to participate in the study.

Twelve participants were purposely selected to participate in the study who met the eligibility criteria. In this study, participants were informed that numeric identifiers and not their names would be used to protect their identities throughout the research process. Participants were also informed that their respective agencies would not be

identified in the study. Assigning pseudonyms or a numerical identifier is a method to prevent or minimize breaches of confidentiality (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Researchers must strive to protect study participants throughout the entire process, including recruitment, data collection, and after the interview concludes (Patton, 2015).

The date and time for the Zoom interviews were scheduled once the consent form was received from each participant. Participants were notified by email of their scheduled interview. No interviews were conducted until participants acknowledged their consent to participate in the study. Eleven interviews were conducted via Zoom, and one interview was in person. At the beginning of each interview, I explained the purpose of the interview and indicated to the participants that the interview would be audio-recorded and transcribed. Additionally, I emphasized that participation in the study was voluntary and that participants could withdraw from the interview at any time. I emphasized to participants that confidentiality was of utmost importance. Patton (2015) explained that introductory statements to participants should cover the purpose of the study, how the information will be used and stored, an overview of the type of questions asked, inherent drawbacks, and the confidentiality of the responses as important considerations for researchers as they conduct interviews. Doing so, he emphasized, minimizes misunderstandings and avoids ethical issues.

There was a low human risk of psychological or physical distress. Interview questions were developed to minimize stressful or embarrassing subject matter. Qualitative faculty from Walden University reviewed the research questions to ensure

they were clear, appropriate for the research, and free of potential ethical concerns.

Revisions to the interview questions were made based on this feedback.

During the interviews, I was mindful of any gestures or facial expressions that would signal the participant was experiencing stress or was uncomfortable. No such instances occurred during data collection. After the interview, participants were thanked for their participation and allowed to ask any questions about the process. Further, participants were informed that they would be emailed a copy of their interview transcript and could modify or clarify their responses. This process, identified as member checks, according to Ravitch & Carl (2021, p. 176) is widely regarded by scholars as the primary validity measure for ensuring qualitative credibility.

My former role as the president of NOBLE could be interpreted as a position of power that participants may view as detrimental or advantageous to their respective positions at their agency. Therefore, I was transparent with participants about my former roles. This disclosure did not interfere with or compromise the integrity of the study.

Data security measures have been implemented to protect the data and study materials, including storing data in a secure location, password-protecting electronic data, and preventing access to study documents. As I live alone, no one else has access to my computer or study documents, thus further ensuring the confidentiality and security of materials. After the study is completed, all data will be stored securely in a locked storage cabinet in my home for five years, after which hard copies will be shredded using a commercial shredding company, and all electronic files will be deleted.

Summary

The purpose of Chapter 3 was to present a detailed description of the research methodology, including the research design and rationale, participant selection logic, instrumentation, procedures for participant recruitment, and the processes for data collection and analysis. This phenomenological qualitative study explored the lived experiences of 12 African American female officers working in police departments in the Midwest and sought to understand their perspectives on recruiting and hiring other African American females. The study used Collins' (2009) Black feminist thought as the theoretical framework. The chapter explained the use of purposeful sampling to select participants who met the study's inclusion criteria. Participants were asked a series of open-ended, semi-structured questions to answer the research questions. Interviews were conducted and audio-recorded using Zoom technology; however, one interview was conducted in person. The chapter presented strategies to ensure trustworthiness, such as credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Ethical considerations, including informed consent, confidentiality, data storage, and security measures, were described to demonstrate adherence to Institutional Review Board requirements, the 1974 Belmont Report, and Walden University policies. Potential limitations of the study were also addressed, including discussions on data saturation, the researcher's role and positionality, and the ethical considerations guiding this study.

In Chapter 4, I present the findings of this qualitative study, which are derived from the data collected and organized into emerging themes from participant interviews.

Chapter 5 will discuss the research findings, conclusions, and social and policy implications. Recommendations for social change and future research are discussed in this section.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research is to explore and understand the experiences of African American policewomen who work street patrol in police departments across the Midwest region of the United States. This study seeks to gain valuable insight into their work experiences and their perspectives on recruiting and retaining African American women in policing. The study examines how the intersection of race and gender operates as an oppressive barrier that shapes their daily work experience in law enforcement.

The study addresses the problem that African American female officers face challenges shaped by the intersection of race and gender, which directly affects their work experiences. Limited and outdated research on their lived experiences creates a critical gap in understanding the barriers they encounter and the support they need. As a result, law enforcement agencies face challenges in creating and implementing policies and practices that effectively promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace. This has been documented in several studies (Suboch et al., 2017; Todak & Brown, 2020).

Research consistently documents that African American women experience both sexism and racism in the workplace. According to Sands et al. (2023), Black female officers are doubly jeopardized, facing marginalization and oppression resulting from racial and gender discrimination.

Haakmat and Ruffin (2024) explained that racism and sexism still exist in policing for minority women. They argue the need for further research on the workplace experiences of Black women in policing and how their experiences are shaped by the intersection of “multiple identities” (p. 1), specifically race and gender. Likewise, Suboch et al. (2017) recognized in their study that there was limited research on Black women in policing and called for more research on the experiences of minority women in policing. Therefore, this study aimed to contribute to the literature by examining the lived work experiences of African American female officers and capturing their perspectives on strategies for recruiting and retaining African American women in policing.

The research questions guiding this study were as follows:

RQ1: How do African American female police officers in police departments in the Midwest region of the United States describe their patrol experience working in a hypermasculine police profession?

RQ2: What are the views of African American female police officers on how to recruit and retain more women of color for careers in policing?

To address these research questions, I interviewed 12 African American policewomen from Midwest police departments about their patrol work experience. I also explored participants' perspectives on strategies to recruit and retain African American women in policing, gathering their insights on how police departments can better attract and support this underrepresented group.

I used a phenomenological qualitative approach for the study. Qualitative research is used to explore a phenomenon by assembling and analyzing non-numeric data (Adu, 2024). Further, Prosek & Gibson (2020) explained that qualitative research examines factors of the lived experience of individuals and how they define that experience. Moreover, they explained that interviewing individuals with common experience will allow a general meaning and understanding of the phenomenon to evolve. I used a phenomenological outlook to submerge myself in the data to develop a rich understanding of the experiences of the participants. The strength of phenomenological research is the ability to elicit rich descriptions and detail by conducting in-depth interviews with individuals who have shared experiences (Burkholder et al., 2020; Patton, 2015).

Chapter 4 is divided into five main sections. First, the research setting is described. According to Adu (2024, p. 413), this section should give a brief description of “where, how, and when” data was collected. Second, the demographic profile of each participant is described in Table 1 below. In the third section, I describe the data collection procedures. The fourth section describes the data analysis process, outlining the codes and themes derived from the data collection. In the fifth section, I present the findings of the study by exploring significant themes developed from the participant interviews. Evidence of trustworthiness will also be delineated in this section. Lastly, I will present a summary that will synthesize the findings presented in Chapter 4.

Setting

Participant recruitment commenced after receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). I recruited participants using various social media platforms and by sending correspondence to law enforcement professionals and organizations. Informed consent forms were sent to potential participants who had expressed interest in taking part in the study. Twelve participants who met the inclusion requirements agreed to participate in the study. Interviews with 11 participants were conducted using Zoom software, and one in-person interview was conducted in a private room at a local library. Most participants elected to be interviewed from home, while one participant opted to be interviewed from her parked vehicle at her workplace. Participants were informed of their right to discontinue the interview at any time. Several participants chose to keep their Zoom cameras off during the interview. I exerted no pressure on them to do otherwise. A few participants experienced minor computer-related technical problems; however, they were quickly resolved, and the interviews continued without further disruption. No additional conditions or concerns arose that could have influenced the study results.

Demographics

Participants were required to be African American female police officers with a minimum of two years of patrol experience and employed in local police departments within the Midwest region of the United States. The 12 participants selected for the study all met the inclusion criteria.

The participants were between 26 and 40 years old, with one participant aged 46 or older. Participants reported a median of 7.9 years of law enforcement experience and a median of 4.5 years in patrol assignments. Of the 12 participants, six reported obtaining a Bachelor's degree, two with Master's degrees, two with Associate degrees, and two obtained high school diplomas. Regarding marital status, seven participants reported being single, four married, and one divorced. Ten participants reported having children. Table 1, shown below, illustrates the participant demographics.

Table 1*Participant Demographics*

Participant	Age Range	Education	Marital Status	# Children	Years in Law Enforcement	Years in Patrol Assignment
P1	26-30	Bachelor's Degree	Single	No	10 years	2 years
P2	41-45	Bachelor's Degree	Divorced	Yes	16 years	8 years
P3	31-35	Bachelor's Degree	Single	Yes	8 years	2 years
P4	36-40	Associate Degree	Single	Yes	2 years	2 years
P5	36-40	Bachelor's Degree	Married	Yes	9 years	2 years
P6	26-30	Bachelor's Degree	Married	Yes	5 years	5 years
P7	26-30	High School Diploma	Married	Yes	2 years	
P8	31-35	Master's Degree	Married	Yes	8 years	2 years
P9	26-30	Bachelor's Degree	Single	Yes	4 years	3 years

Participant	Age Range	Education	Marital Status	# Children	Years in Law Enforcement	Years in Patrol Assignment
P10	36-40	High School Diploma	Single	Yes	8 years	8 years
P11	46 or older	Master's Degree	Single	No	17 years	17 years
P12	36-40	Associate Degree	Single	Yes	6 years	4 years

Data Collection

I obtained Walden University 's Institutional Review Board approval on September 24, 2024, with an expiration date of September 25, 2025. After obtaining this approval, I began a campaign to recruit volunteer participants for my qualitative study. The recruitment flyer was posted on my personal social media platforms, for example, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, X, and Next Door, and emailed and texted to friends and colleagues. Recruitment letters and flyers were sent to the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE) to send out to their membership list. Letters and recruitment flyers were emailed to Midwest police department CEOs for distribution within their agencies.

The recruitment flyer instructed potential participants to contact me using my Walden University school email address, indicating their interest in participating in the

study. As a result, 12 participants who met the inclusion criteria were selected for interviews. Each participant was emailed the informed consent form and was required to submit an email to me stating “I consent”. Interviews were scheduled after I received the participant's consent. Twelve participants who met the inclusion criteria were selected to participate in the study. Eleven interviews were conducted utilizing a Zoom platform. One interview was conducted in person in a private, soundproof room at a local library, a location mutually agreed upon in advance by the participant and me.

Participants were assigned a numeric pseudonym (P01-P12) for data collection and identification to protect their identities. Although not required, most participants agreed to be interviewed with their video cameras turned on. Those who were not comfortable with the Zoom camera were not pressured to turn their video on. Interviews lasted between 40-60 minutes. Before each interview, I checked my computer and recording devices to ensure they were operable. Although a few minor technological problems arose during some of the Zoom interviews, they were promptly resolved, allowing the interviews to proceed without further disruption.

Data from each interview was audio-recorded on my home computer using the Zoom platform. Additionally, two mobile phones with recording capabilities were used as redundant recording sources. Access to my personal computer and mobile devices is not accessible to others; therefore, I maintained strict confidentiality that ensured participant privacy. Participants were advised they could discontinue the interview at any time.

Purposeful and snowball sampling were used for this study, resulting in 12 participants who met the inclusion criteria. Ravitch and Carl (2021) posited that purposeful sampling or strategic sampling in qualitative research gives the researcher the ability to select participants who have specific knowledge relevant to the study, have a certain subject matter expertise, work in the same environment, or share other unique experiences to answer the researcher's inquiry. Purposeful sampling is considered the primary approach in qualitative research (Ravich & Carl, 2021). Therefore, purposeful sampling was the most appropriate strategy for this qualitative study. I used snowball sampling as an additional sampling method. Snowball or convenience sampling is often utilized in qualitative research. This technique uses research participants to recommend others similarly situated to participate in a study and is often employed by qualitative researchers (Adu, 2024; Geddes, et al., 2018).

Data saturation was achieved when interviews no longer yielded new information from the participants. According to Adu (2024), data saturation occurs when the researcher determines that no new insights or information have emerged from participant responses.

Each participant's Zoom interview recording was uploaded to the online data transcription software Rev.com. I printed each transcribed interview and reviewed it simultaneously while listening to the participant audio recordings to ensure the accuracy of the transcription, noting any errors or omissions. After I reviewed the transcripts, I emailed each participant a copy of their transcript for review. Participants were invited to

review the transcript for accuracy and were given an opportunity during the review to add or delete information. Maxwell and Babbie (2018) emphasized that member checks ensure the accuracy and credibility of findings, allowing participants to correct any inaccuracies.

Each participant was asked to acknowledge their review of the transcript by sending an email indicating whether any changes or revisions were necessary. All participants indicated that no revisions to the transcripts were required. After acknowledging the review of the transcript, participants received a \$20 electronic gift card as a token of appreciation for participating in the study.

Data Analysis

I utilized inductive qualitative thematic analysis for this study. According to Saldana (2021), thematic analysis is more applicable to interview transcripts where themes are derived from codes in the data. He explained that themes become a “strategic” choice of the researcher (p.260). Adu and Miles (2024) further explained that thematic analysis involves thoroughly reviewing the data, identifying salient information that aligns with the research question, and assigning codes to facilitate theme development. Ahmed et al. (2025) emphasized that thematic analysis is most often used in qualitative methodology and involves a systematic approach to engaging with the data.

Each participant was assigned a numeric identification number from P1 through P12. Identification numbers were assigned in the order in which each participant completed the interviews. I began each interview by confirming with each participant

their willingness to consent to participate in the interview, which all of them acknowledged and agreed to. Before the interview, each participant submitted their informed consent. After receiving their consent, I contacted each participant by electronic mail (e-mail) to set up a convenient interview date and time. Data was collected using the auto-recording feature of the Zoom software. Two other redundant recording sources were also used to capture the participants' interviews.

Data analysis began after participant transcripts were transcribed. I began the data analysis by applying Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis framework; Phase I, familiarization with the data; Phase II, generating codes; Phase III, theme development; Phase IV, reviewing themes; Phase V, naming the themes; and Phase VI, reporting the findings (Ahmed et al., 2025; Byrne, 2022).

Phase I: Familiarization with the Data

Adu (2024) described the initial step in qualitative data analysis as reviewing the transcripts and acquainting oneself with the data. Eleven participants were interviewed on Zoom, and one participant was interviewed in person. I used Zoom and two redundant recording devices to capture the interviews. Handwritten notes for each participant interviewed were recorded in a spiral-type notebook, documenting my thoughts and observations throughout the data collection process. Maxfield and Babbie (2018) emphasized that qualitative interviewing involves active listening and self-reflection, including keeping written notes to address any potential biases. Semi-structured interview questions were utilized in this research and can be found in Appendix E. Using the

interview guide ensured each participant was asked the same questions. However, when necessary, I posed follow-up questions to ensure clarification and understanding between myself and the participants. Maxwell and Babbie (2018) explained that including probing questions in the interview allows for deeper understanding when later developing themes.

Data analysis began by reading the handwritten notes after each interview. Ahmed et al. (2025) described note-taking as a crucial element during the preliminary stages of data analysis. The Zoom interview recordings were transcribed by Rev.com software. I printed and read each transcript line by line, while simultaneously listening to the Zoom recordings and noting any errors or omissions on the written transcripts. Additional handwritten notations that emerged were recorded in the spiral notebook for further review. Transcripts were read and re-read several times throughout the data analysis process. This process allowed me to submerge myself in the data and gain a deeper understanding of the participants' point of view. It also gave me greater insight into emerging themes. Ahmed et al. (2025) emphasized that familiarizing oneself with the data is essential for understanding various elements that help in accurate coding.

Phase II: Generating Codes

In qualitative research, documents such as transcripts, field notes, photographs, and memos can be coded. Codes are then arranged systematically to construct themes (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). I employed open coding by reviewing the transcripts and handwritten notes multiple times and developing initial codes that emerged from the data. These potential codes were handwritten in the margins of the spiral notebook for each

participant. Maxfield and Babbie (2018, p. 289) described open coding as “brainstorming” and the first step in developing themes. According to Ahmed et al. (2025), the purpose of this phase is to break the dataset into manageable and meaningful units. Reflexive management, utilizing memos and journals at this stage, is important to ensure transparency, rigor, and credibility. I maintained a journal with handwritten notes for each participant throughout the process. This reflexive engagement, according to Ahmed et al. (2025), allows the researcher to be aware of underlying biases that may affect the findings.

Following the data familiarization stage, I uploaded the 12 participant interviews into the NVivo 15 software to facilitate coding and theme development. I reviewed the transcripts in NVivo 15 and my handwritten notes, paying close attention to emerging patterns across the interviews. Based on this review, a list of codes was developed and uploaded into NVivo 15. Key passages were extracted from each participants’ interview to support the codes and maintain alignment with the research questions. From there, I created a codebook using Microsoft Word to organize the codes. This allowed an easy review of the codes and helped facilitate theme development outside of the software. The code book was divided into clusters for each research question. Codes were developed under the category “other findings” for observations that emerged that did not support the research questions but offered potentially valuable insights and important nuances to the overarching findings.

Using the Microsoft Word codebook, I systematically reviewed and grouped the codes into clusters based on similar attributes. This resulted in six clusters for Research Question 1, four clusters for Research Question 2, and three for Other Findings. Upon further review and analysis, the number of clusters for Research Question 1 was reduced from six to four and for Research Question 2 from five to three, while the clusters for Other Findings remained unchanged. This systematic and iterative approach was used to generate themes in the subsequent phase of the analysis.

Phase III: Developing Themes

In this phase, I thoroughly examined each cluster developed in Phase II and began analyzing and grouping the codes while searching for patterns. This thematic coding process generated themes within each cluster that most closely aligned with the research questions. Based on this review, I evaluated whether the codes contributed clarity and meaning to the theme. Codes were then grouped to reveal potential themes. As a result of this continued review, several codes were either eliminated or reassigned to different clusters that better represented the underlying meaning of the theme. Byrne (2022) emphasized that researchers must be willing to discard themes that do not align with the research questions. Miscellaneous codes can also be developed that may not fit within the established codes and may be used later or discarded. Ahmed et al. (2025) described that thematic analysis is an iterative process that may require revisions, such as collapsing or merging themes. Additionally, they emphasized that themes must be thoroughly reviewed

to ensure they reflect the phenomena being studied. This process generated potential themes that aligned with the research questions.

Phase IV: Reviewing Potential Themes

This phase further refined the themes developed in Phase III. According to Byrne (2022), this stage continues to refine the potential themes generated from the initial codes to ensure they accurately reflect the data. During this stage, I continued to systematically review the codes grouped within each cluster in the Microsoft Word document to ensure they were coherent and aligned with the research questions. During this phase, several themes were reclassified or eliminated to reflect the narratives of the participants' lived experiences. During this stage, according to Byrne (2022), themes are assessed to determine how well they provide the most accurate representation of the data that aligns with the research question.

Phase V: Defining and Naming Themes

During this stage, I continued to review and refine the themes developed in Phase IV. This iterative process led to renaming or eliminating several themes and reorganizing codes to themes that provided a more detailed accounting of the participants' overall narrative. According to Byrne (2022), each theme should tell its own story while contributing to a cohesive narrative. Several codes were reassigned to themes that more accurately reflected the participants' lived experiences and better aligned with the research question. I spent considerable effort developing theme names. Byrne (2022, p. 1408) emphasized creating theme names that are "memorable, catchy, and concise",

capturing the readers' attention and providing insight into the theme's meaning. This phase saw a further reduction in themes for both research questions. The final review in this phase reduced the themes for Research Question 1 from five to four, and for Research Question 2 from three to two. This thematic analysis aligned with the research questions while ensuring the voices of the participants were heard.

Phase VI: Writing the Report

According to Braun and Clark, this stage of the report synthesizes the researchers' findings into a document that distinctly conveys the results of the thematic analysis. In this phase, the aim is to present the themes in a manner that aligns with the research questions and which most accurately reflects the data (Ahmed et al., 2025).

Data Analysis Discrepancies

This study depicts the lived experiences of African American female police officers and their perspectives on recruiting and retaining individuals who share their racial identity. The participant interviews were recorded, and their verbatim accounts were transcribed using Rev.com software. Transcripts, recordings, and handwritten notes from the interviews were thoroughly reviewed and analyzed. No outliers or inconsistencies were noted; therefore, no discrepancies in the data analysis were found.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness, according to Burkholder et al. (2021) refers to how the researcher trusts their data sources and methodologies. They concluded that reviewing the study's purpose and design early in the process helps researchers determine the type of

data collection method that will yield the most trustworthy data that aligns with the research question. In Chapter 3, I described that face-to-face interviews would be conducted. I reviewed this methodology and determined that face-to-face interviews would not be feasible or cost-effective. Therefore, I chose to conduct interviews using Zoom technology. After the vetting was completed, 12 individuals were selected to be participants in this study. Eleven interviews were conducted using Zoom, and one interview was conducted face-to-face.

The informed consent form was sent electronically to each participant. Participants were instructed to forward an email stating, “I consent” to acknowledge their willingness to participate in the study. This approach differed from what was proposed in Chapter 3. Initially, I proposed audio recording participants reading the consent form and verbally confirming their consent. However, I concluded that this would be cumbersome, time-consuming, and potentially uncomfortable for participants. Instead, to streamline the process, I invited participants to forward an email stating “I consent,” acknowledging their willingness to participate in the study. This process was more efficient while also establishing an audit trail. Participants were assigned a numeric identifier (P1 to P12) before the interview began. Participants were allowed to review the transcripts of their recordings to verify accuracy.

One of the premises of trustworthiness posited by Adu (2024) and Korstjens and Moser (2018) is whether there is a level of confidence in the research findings. The four levels of trustworthiness in qualitative research include credibility, transferability,

dependability, and confirmability (Adu, 2024; Burkholder et al., 2020; Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Ravitch & Carl, 2021). The following sections will discuss the four key levels of trustworthiness in qualitative research that guided this study.

Credibility

Adu, (2024) and Ravitch & Carl (2021) emphasized that research credibility establishes trust in the data collected and represents the confidence the reader has that the findings represent an accurate depiction of the data source. Ravitch and Carl (2021, p. 168) went on to say that “credibility is an important part of critical research design.” They described strategies, such as member checks or participant validation, as effective methods for ensuring credibility in qualitative research. According to Burkholder et al. (2020), credibility strategies should be tailored to align with the design of the research study.

To enhance the study's credibility, each participant was sent a copy of their transcript by electronic mail. I invited each participant to review their transcript and provide feedback on the accuracy of its contents. Participants were allowed to provide additional details, provide clarification, or omit information from the transcript. According to Adu (2024), providing participants with a copy of their interview transcript strengthens credibility by allowing them to review and verify the accuracy of the data.

Transferability

In qualitative research, transferability refers to the degree to which a study's findings can be applicable in a broader context. Ravitch and Carl (2021) explained that

transferability inquires if findings can be applied contextually to other settings, people, or groups. Transferability strategies can be achieved when the researcher provides thick and detailed descriptions so the study may be applicable in other settings by different researchers and participants (Burkholder et al, 2020; Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

In this study, 12 African American female police officers provided thick, rich descriptions of their lived experiences working in a male-dominated profession as well as their perspectives on recruiting and retaining African American females in law enforcement. The participants' detailed descriptions support the study's transferability by providing context that enables others to assess how the findings could relate to a range of demographics or populations.

Dependability

In qualitative research, Ravitch and Carl (2021) emphasized that studies are considered dependable when they are reliable and stable throughout the research process. Dependability describes the researchers' ability to consistently employ uniformity in data collection and analysis. I demonstrated dependability in this study by employing a systematic and transparent approach to data collection and analysis. An audit trail was maintained throughout the study to allow for replication by other researchers. As Maxwell and Babbie (2018) emphasized, creating an audit trail of memos, field notes, and coding decisions strengthens the quality of the data.

Eleven participant interviews were conducted and recorded using Zoom video software. One participant interview was conducted face-to-face and was recorded using a

recording device. I recorded and kept handwritten notes from each participant interview in a research journal. The journal documented participants' verbal reactions along with my reflections on their responses. The transcripts were uploaded and transcribed by Rev.com software. Each transcript was printed, reviewed, and organized in separate folders labeled P1 to P12. All participant folders and research materials, including transcripts, audio recordings, and files on my personal computer, were stored securely in my private home office. Living alone, I was the only person with access to research materials, ensuring the confidentiality and security of all data. Additionally, email communication with participants was retained on my personal computer to document recruitment and informed consent, as well as for future reference.

I re-reviewed the printed transcripts while simultaneously listening to the participants' recorded interviews. Additional handwritten notes were taken during this review and recorded in a spiral journal notebook. The participant transcripts were uploaded into NVivo 15 for further review and analysis. To ensure dependability, initial codes were developed directly from the transcripts, labeled, and placed into containers within NVivo 15. These codes were then exported from NVivo 15 to a Microsoft Word document for further analysis and review. Clusters were developed for each research question and other findings within the Word document. Homogeneous codes were grouped within each cluster that best aligned with the research questions. This iterative process included repeatedly reviewing and refining each cluster's codes to maintain clarity, consistency, and alignment with the research questions. This process identified

patterns in the data, which led to the emergence of key themes that reflected the participants' lived experiences.

Dependability was demonstrated throughout the study through a systematic and transparent process that could potentially be replicated. A systematic process of detailed documentation was kept, maintained, and secured. Coding decisions were consistent and transparent. The audit trail provided a clear record of how codes and themes were developed. Additionally, the use of NVivo 15 software allowed for organizing codes and themes logically and coherently.

Confirmability

Confirmability, according to Ravitch and Carl (2021, p. 171), refers to the degree to which the research findings are derived from the participants' experiences and "confirmable data" rather than the researcher's biases. Researchers must consistently be aware of biases and prejudices throughout the research process and take proactive steps to ensure that it does not interfere with the study's findings. The inclusion of verbatim quotations in this research enhances confirmability by ensuring that participants' perspectives are presented directly, thereby minimizing the potential for researcher interference, misinterpretation, or bias. Additionally, confirmability was achieved by maintaining reflexive memos and a detailed and transparent audit trail that documented the data collection process.

Throughout the research process, I systematically maintained handwritten notes for each participant interview, along with reflexive journal entries to monitor and address

potential biases or prejudices. These practices ensured that the authenticity of the participants' experiences was captured in the analysis and that the research findings reflected their voices.

Results

This qualitative phenomenological research explored the lived experiences of African American policewomen working street patrol in police departments in the Midwest region of the United States. This research aimed to gain valuable insights into the participants' lived experiences and perspectives on recruiting and retaining African American women in the policing field. Prosek and Gibson (2020) viewed lived experience in qualitative research as an opportunity for individuals to express themselves and describe how they process a particular phenomenon. They concluded that the strength of qualitative research is in the essence of the knowledge and understanding of those who lived through the experience. Similarly, Reich (2021) suggested getting closer to the subject of inquiry is important in qualitative research.

The purpose of this study was to answer two research questions:

Results for Research Question 1

Research Question 1 was: How do African American female police officers in police departments in the Midwest region of the United States describe their patrol work experience? Thematic analysis of the participant interviews disclosed several key themes. Four themes emerged from the analysis of Research Question 1, Microaggressions and Systemic Bias, Supportive and Empowering Relationships, Feelings of Marginalization

and Isolation, and Intersectional, while two themes surfaced for Research Question 2: Inclusive and Equitable Workplace Culture, Intentional and Purposeful Recruiting Strategies.

Theme 1: Microaggressions and Systemic Bias

This theme underscores how microaggressions and systemic biases work together to perpetuate exclusion and inequities in the workplace, particularly for African American female officers. This theme also supports the framework for this study, Black Feminist Theory, which examines the intersectionality of race and gender as forms of systematic oppression for Black women. (Collins, 2009). Further, Gonzalez (2022) and Haakmat and Ruffin (2024) stated that understanding the lived experiences of Black women requires a framework that considers the oppressive intersection of race and gender.

According to Williams et al. (2021, p. 991), microaggressions were first described over 50 years ago by Harvard psychiatrist Chester Pierce in his seminal works that described microaggressions as “subtle and stunning daily racial offenses”. In this context, racial microaggressions are reported as targeting marginalized individuals, particularly those situated at the intersection of gender and race. Williams continued that microaggression behavior can be “systemic” and contribute to other harms for marginalized groups. The harms associated with microaggressions can be systemic and include stressors such as depression, anxiety, decreased self-esteem, and other negative mental and physical outcomes (Williams, 2021).

Williams (2021, p. 1002) identified 16 types of microaggressions, noting that people of color frequently experience invisibility and negative treatment in society. Microaggressions described by the participants in this study included mistreatment, harassment, racial and gender discrimination, having their competence and intelligence questioned, and being placed in situations where they constantly had to prove themselves. Williams et al. (2020) argued that microaggressions have been associated with increased stress levels, including a myriad of negative physical and mental outcomes.

Participants in this study reported being stressed and traumatized due to discrimination, sexual harassment, and unfair treatment by White male supervisors and peers. These experiences of microaggression led some participants to question their abilities and competence, resulting in feelings of anxiety. Participants described experiencing subtle and overt forms of discrimination through verbal and non-verbal expressions from both supervisors and colleagues. Participants reported how their perspectives and input were routinely ignored or minimized. Several participants expressed that their contributions were overlooked or ignored. These microaggressions were often manifested as dismissive remarks, exclusion from critical decision-making, or unfair treatment because of their race and gender.

Participants reported feeling alienated, undervalued, and disrespected. Some participants felt as though their department was not supportive of them and that their presence and voices were not heard or welcomed. These microaggressions reinforced a perception that the participants were not trusted, respected, or valued within their

departments. The workplace was viewed as unwelcoming, particularly for Black women who had to navigate the intersection of race and gender in a predominantly White male-dominated work environment. These persistent microaggressions described a pattern of systemic bias embedded in the culture of the department. Many participants consistently expressed a sense of being mistrusted, undervalued, and disrespected. Participants consistently expressed feeling that their race and gender played a part in how they were treated by supervisors and colleagues.

Participants described experiencing unfair treatment and disparate treatment in assignments, annual evaluations, and roadblocks to promotional opportunities, which they attributed to their race and gender. Systemic bias was described by several participants who explained unfair treatment, uneven policy application, and a police culture that continues to embrace antiquated policies. P2 shared that she felt excluded and was not taken seriously, frequently being labelled as angry and aggressive. She reported feeling unsupported and disrespected, commenting that Black females did not get the same opportunities as White males. She described her experience by stating, “This journey is harder for Black women”. Many participants reported experiencing challenges while on patrol, oftentimes feeling a constant need to prove themselves. These experiences highlight the difficulty Black female officers encounter in navigating racial and gender biases within a predominantly White male police culture. This was further reflected in a statement by P04.” I do feel like, as a Black female, I feel like I've always had to go the extra mile to prove myself”. She shared that she was not treated fairly,

especially when she filed complaints about biased behavior against her. She explained that her White male supervisors seemed to make excuses for those who mistreated her. She expressed the need for systemic change within her agency that is more inclusive of Black females as respected and valued members of the department.

Similarly, P05 reported a constant need to prove that she belonged within the police profession, especially as an African American female. She commented, "So just navigating gender and race has been sort of a challenge for me". Other participants also reported feelings of inadequacy. P06 stated, "We have to be exceptionally excellent to be seen. I feel it's a lot harder for Black females." P03 mentioned being perceived as weak due to her gender, despite her experience. Further, P4 reported experiencing unfair treatment from supervisors and colleagues that she attributed to her race and gender. She commented that White female officers were given preferential treatment despite their shortcomings, whereas she, as an African American female, was left to struggle with very little support or assistance from her White-male colleagues. P04 commented that she continues to speak out against unfair treatment, striving to be a voice not only for herself but also to support other African American females following in her footsteps.

Participants consistently reported that their race and gender influenced how supervisors and colleagues treated them. P4 explained,

Well, race, unfortunately, it's a double-edged sword for me, being Black and being female. I just feel like we will be at a disadvantage until people accept and

put changes in place to accommodate the treatment that we get from other officers.

Further, P4 commented that certain departmental policies perpetuate a negative police culture that disproportionately and unfairly targets African American female officers. P4 stated, “I don’t feel like I would ever be treated as other officers”. She explained that her White male supervisors failed to acknowledge her feelings and continually made excuses for her mistreatment. Similarly, P5 expressed feeling that her race and gender were a hindrance to her job, requiring her to continually prove her capabilities. She reported that navigating gender and racial bias was a constant challenge for her in the workplace.

P6 described working in a predominantly White male department where she was the only Black female officer. She expressed similar views as (P2, P4, P5, P10), feeling less confident in her abilities and often second-guessing herself. P6 explained, “I did not feel safe. I didn’t feel confident in what I knew. I second-guessed myself a lot. I wasn’t part of the camaraderie.” She noted that the divisiveness of race and gender is clearly evident in her department. Likewise, P09 spoke about her experience of being an African American female officer on patrol and having her abilities questioned. She reflected, “...as a Black woman, it’s easy to start second-guessing yourself because White men are naturally overly confident, and they like to kind of take over”. She shared that this behavior from her peers often led her to question herself and experience feelings of inadequacy.

P10 shared her perspective on how race and gender impacted her job performance. She described being Black and a female as a “double whammy”. She reported that the actions of White male officers towards her led her to believe they preferred not to work with her. P12 reported feeling devalued and disrespected by peers and White male supervisors, expressing the following sentiment, “Generally, I do not feel seen. I definitely don't feel respected and valued”. Similarly, P10 described purposely suppressing her voice to avoid judgment. She explained, “When I was put in this box, it's like, okay, how do I tone that down? How do I become more subtle”? She reported she was sometimes the only female at roll call when some officers engaged in offensive “guy talk” in her presence, an example of the microaggressions female officers often endure. She stated that she typically accepts the behavior. This behavior points to the negative, hypermasculine environment that female officers must navigate (Huff & Todak, 2022).

P12 expressed similar feelings as P10, stating, “I don't think that we're seen as a Black woman. I think collectively we're frustrated, and we definitely wear a mask just to get through roll call, really, because the streets are easier”. P12 spoke of the loneliness and isolation of being the only Black female on her shift. Further, P12 contemplated her future in law enforcement and her frustrations as a Black female officer working in a male-dominated workplace. She responded, “Do I want to fight every move...It is a lot”. However, she felt it was important for her to keep showing up. Likewise, P03 recounted being looked down upon because she is female, despite her many years of police

experience, and being perceived as weak. P11 is a training instructor for her department. She described that supervisors often undermine her department-mandated instruction by negatively influencing officers to disregard the training. This lack of supervisor support made her job more difficult. She reported that when she voiced her concern, her supervisors ignored her and failed to take corrective action.

Several participants shared that they believed race and gender were barriers to promotions, assignments and evaluations. P02 and P11 each reported experiencing discriminatory barriers when seeking promotional opportunities and assignments within their agencies. P11 explained, “It was two of us who typed for this position. It was me and a White male. The position was given to him, even though I have more time and more credentials”. P11 stated that the position was later given to her only because her peer was unable to adjust his schedule at a moment’s notice. This implied that the agency, despite her being more prepared for the position than her White male counterpart, was not considered as the agency’s first choice. This serves as another example of how African American female officers are disproportionately discriminated against due to the intersection of race and gender.

Similarly, P02 recounted a negative and disappointing experience with a supervisor’s evaluation of her, “I had a supervisor, he gave me a review, and this review was to put me on a promotional list. The review was outstanding. The words of the review, I’m the top officer; I handle my business... but I got to the bottom of that review, and it read *not promotable*”. Additionally, several participants recounted experiences in

which White female officers received preferential treatment in assignments and promotions. P02 stated, “I think it's the intersection. I've seen White females not have as hard of a time as Black females in our career. I think it's the Black female combo that kind of pushes it over the edge”. Other participants recounted that African American female officers often face greater challenges advancing in their careers compared to their White counterparts. Similarly, P06 stated that Black females are often the last to get positions in her agency; most times after the list has been exhausted, even though they are more qualified than White female officers.

In another example of bias, P10 reported being reprimanded by her White male supervisor for allegedly violating department hair standards, while White female officers were permitted to violate the same policy without consequence. This incident highlights systemic bias within the department, where policies are unevenly applied and enforced based on both gender and race. Additionally, P06 believes that race and gender are factors used by her department in making patrol assignments. She stated, “...we can all say we don't see gender...we don't see color. We see it very clearly. There's some precincts that just look straight whitewashed, and in the other ones, it is all nothing but us Black folks.” P02 described her patrol encounters with White male supervisors as negative. She reported that these supervisors were self-absorbed and showed little concern about the officers they supervise. She recounted another negative experience with a White male supervisor who initially made a false statement against her, later retracted it, and then provided a different version that was also inaccurate. She perceived

these repeated negative encounters with her supervisors as detrimental to her career advancement.

Overall, participants' experiences highlight the pervasive impact of microaggressions and systematic bias within law enforcement agencies. African American female officers reported encountering discriminatory behaviors from supervisors and peers, including unequal enforcement and application of policies, and barriers to career advancement and opportunities. Participants described navigating a police environment where they felt disrespected and undervalued. These challenges illustrate how a hypermasculine police culture continues to shape the intersection of race and gender in the workplace, hindering the inclusive and equitable treatment of African American female officers.

Theme 2: Supportive and Empowering Relationships

Participants described their experiences working with fellow Black female officers during patrol. The participants' shared lived experiences demonstrate both their resilience and fortitude in navigating the challenges of working in a male-dominated environment. They explained the importance of developing supportive professional relationships. For example, P08 explained, "...we try to, at least the people on my shift, the females try to all stick together, kind of like we know we're in a predominantly male field, so we all get along on our shift. She continued, "I mean, there's a handful of us and we have to help each other out when we can".

This sentiment was also echoed by P06, who spoke about her experience working with Black females, "... the camaraderie, the love, the respect, the morals are the same. It makes me feel a lot more comfortable. It makes me feel like I'm not in danger". P06 expressed that she sometimes did not feel safe working with other officers. Similarly, P10 described working with fellow Black female officers as a "sisterhood", emphasizing a sense of mutual respect and support. P01 also reported having "good experiences" working with Black female officers. She described that her fellow female officers were very supportive.

Participants gave their perspective on interacting with Black and White female supervisors. P05 explained that she had a good rapport with a White female supervisor who she described as "kind, straightforward, and someone who doesn't discriminate." P12 stated that White female supervisors were "more approachable." While P09 described having a "great experience" with a Black female supervisor who was "respectful and encouraging." Participants described having positive interactions with some supervisors. Accordingly, P03, P06, and P08 reported experiencing positive relationships with their direct supervisors. P02 recounted encouraging experiences with White male supervisors who were willing to "kind of stand up and do what's right". Similarly, P07 described her experiences with both White and Black male supervisors who have been encouraging and empowering. She explained, "...they give us a reason to keep moving".

Eight participants (P02, P06, P07, P09, P10, P11, P12) reported having positive and empowering relationships with the community they serve. They described building a positive relationship with the community that embraced mutual respect, empathy, and trust. This highlights the unique skills and the positive impact that Black females bring to law enforcement and the community they serve. For example, P02 stated, “The community loves me.” “...they always welcome me when I come to their calls”. She continued, “It’s because of a relationship I built with them.” Similarly, P04 reported that support from the community helped her through challenging times, noting that she is often welcomed by both younger and older residents. She believed being a Black woman was advantageous in developing rapport with the community. She explained, “...that’s my advantage being a Black woman, being able to talk to them as if I’m their mother or their sister or somebody that actually cares about them.”

P06 explained that having a positive relationship with the community allows her to obtain important information to help fight and solve crime. She believes Black women are making a difference in the community. She noted, “I feel like Black women are the ones who are changing the stereotypes of police officers and we’re making our communities safe again.” Research has supported that women in policing are more adept at defusing tensions and calming hostilities more than their male colleagues. Alexander and Nowacki (2022) found community support for females in policing as positive, noting that women use a wider level of interpersonal and communication skills, including de-escalation techniques rather than aggression and force utilized by their male counterparts.

For example, P10 described how she and other female police officers use their communication skills and rapport with the community to defuse volatile street situations. She explained, “Females on a scene, a lot of times the guys can be like, sister, I need you to help me talk. Because sometimes we have to intervene to make the situation more safe”. She further commented that White male partners sometimes do not have a rapport with the community, and being a Black female often brings calmness to street encounters. Similarly, P11 shared this sentiment and commented, “So sometimes I think when we go on calls, we can calm the situation”.

P10 noted that being relatable is important to building trust within the community. Similarly, P09 stated, “I think that's really how you influence the community, is using that relatability to your advantage.” She commented on her patrol experience with the community, “I personally get a lot of love, especially from the Black community. I think it makes me somewhat more empathetic when I deal with people because I can see their perspective.” She reported that, in some instances, members of minority communities feel more relaxed talking with her, a response she attributed primarily to their ability to identify with her as a Black female. P08 commented that she has observed male partners interact with members in the Black community more aggressively. However, P10 and other participants have noted that Black female officers de-escalate tense situations by communicating with minority communities with compassion and respect. She stated her presence often, “softens the situation just a very little bit”.

Collectively, participants emphasized that supportive relations with fellow African American female officers and positive interactions with minority community members provided a source of camaraderie and empowerment. Participants also noted that their shared racial identity with minority communities often enabled them to de-escalate tense situations and build rapport with community members.

Theme 3: Feelings of Marginalization and Isolation

This theme examines the lived experiences and challenges faced by African American female officers as they navigate a male-dominated workplace. The presence of a hegemonic hypermasculine culture within law enforcement agencies has been well documented. For example, Shelley et al. (2011) described the hierarchy of male-dominated policing as marginalizing women by subjugating them to persistent and pervasive hypersexualized and demeaning behavior in the workplace. Brown et al. (2020) found that the police culture perpetuated gendered discrimination and normalized negative behaviors towards women.

Participants described experiencing instances of lack of backup on patrol, sexual harassment from peers and supervisors, feelings of isolation, often citing race and gender as contributing factors. Black feminist thought, espoused by Collins (2009) and Pogrebin, et al. (2000), provided insight and a framework for understanding the marginalization and invisibility of women in society, as well as how these factors contribute to the silencing of women's voices, especially those of African American women.

P06 stated, “So we have to go above and beyond in whatever we do to set ourselves aside from our co-partners who are subpar, just average, and we have to be exceptionally excellent to be seen”. P07 described experiencing discriminatory treatment from White male partners, which she attributed to her race. As a result, she complained to supervisors multiple times but did not receive feedback about her complaints. Feeling ignored, she decided not to pursue the complaints any further.

P03 explained an instance where a White male sexually harassed her, and though she complained to a supervisor, no action was ever taken against him. P10 described race and gender as significant barriers within her male-dominated workplace. The experiences she described contributed to a profound sense of marginalization and isolation in the workplace. Her experience underscores the intersectional challenges of race and gender faced by African American female officers.

P10 explained, “The biggest barrier that I feel as an officer, ... is a 'double whammy'. First and foremost, being a female for one, and then in a male-dominated field, and then being Black as well.” She reported that she believes White male officers do not trust her and prefer not to work with her. She attributes this to her race and gender but also to what she described as “cultural indifference”. Likewise, P11 recounted this experience, “So the males, they do make it hard here for the females, especially when they don't want to work with the females” She reported that both Black and White males often refused to help females, allowing them to make mistakes without offering

assistance or guidance. This experience further reinforces the sense of isolation faced by African American females within the workplace.

Several participants recounted experiences where fellow male officers failed to provide backup assistance when requested. P01, P06, and P12 reported instances where White male and White female officers on their shift failed to provide backup on their runs. P06 described not feeling safe while working patrol. She described this incident, “I’ve been in a situation with a White male where I was kicked in the chest, and he just kind of stood back like he was shocked.” However, she noted that Black male and female officers consistently provided backup support during tense encounters on the street. This interaction with her fellow Black peers made her feel safe, whereas similar experiences with White officers caused her to feel unsafe.

P12 described experiencing a sense of loneliness and isolation within her department, which had very few female officers. She stated that in terms of age, she found herself positioned between older, more seasoned female officers with seniority and younger female officers who had recently graduated from the academy. She explained it was difficult for her to identify with either group. She noted, “We’re all trying to find our way. I don’t think that I necessarily have found any ladies that I can align with and trust. So yes, I am a lone wolf at work.”

Similarly, P09 described instances of loneliness and lack of camaraderie with fellow African American female officers. She explained, “It gets lonely. And it is feeling like even when we get a Black female officer...we’re not going to be put in the same

area. Sometimes you just want that camaraderie”. She expressed that her department assigns the few Black female officers throughout the community, she believes to create the illusion that there are more than what actually exists.

Several participants expressed experiencing mental and emotional stress resulting from racial, gender, and sexual harassment in the workplace. P01 described that there were a lot of racial problems within her agency. She reported feeling isolated and unsupported. She described balancing community and police relations as being stressful. P01 commented, ... there’s also a lot of mental and emotional stress. And also, there's a lot of harassment, sexual, gender, racial, just a lot of it. That's why I said there's a lot of mental stress as well. It's traumatizing most times.” Similarly, P03 recounted being sexually harassed and making a complaint that was not investigated. She felt she did not get justice. She expressed feeling “terrible, traumatized”. Huff and Todak (2022) described policing as a gendered institution that normalizes male superiority and perpetuates the subordination of women. Participants described this gendered marginalization as isolating in the workplace, often leading to significant emotional stress due to discrimination, exclusion, and lack of support.

In conclusion, the theme of marginalization and isolation highlights the unique challenges faced by African American female officers in male-dominated and predominantly White male police departments. Participant narratives described instances of isolation, exclusion, and lack of support from supervisors and peers. Many participants reported experiencing emotional stress and, in some instances, trauma associated with

these negative workplace experiences. Additionally, participants noted that the limited interaction with fellow African American female officers contributed to their sense of isolation within their departments.

Theme 4: Intersectional Conflict

This theme examined how African American female officers balance tensions between conflicting intersectional roles and expectations in the workplace and the needs of the community. The community may express anger towards Black female officers, whom they may view as upholding an oppressive police system that often victimizes the Black community. The conflicting dual roles of being both female and Black, while simultaneously upholding the law in the community, and navigating a male-dominated workplace, form the thematic foundation of intersectional conflict.

For example, P08 described the interaction of being a Black female officer and the perceived conflict with the community. She noted that she had been judged unfairly by community members who may have had negative encounters with the police in the past, stating "...they feel like I am against them or I'm against Black people." African American female officers consistently suppress their personality and mute their voices for fear of being stereotyped as an "angry Black woman" in the community and the workplace. Accordingly, a study by Motro et al. (2021, p.1) examined the implications associated with the stereotypical "angry Black women, which depicts Black females as "aggressive and hostile". Their research examined the intersection of race and gender and how Black women being labelled as angry may present barriers to career advancement.

They concluded that the angry Black woman stereotype represents a hurdle for Black women in the workplace.

For example, P08 explained how members of the community often label Black women as “angry.” She commented that she makes a conscious effort to avoid being perceived by this stereotype. She knows that if she responded negatively, her actions would be dealt with much more harshly than those of her counterparts. Moreover, Motro et al. (2021) found in their study that Black females are often penalized in the workplace for expressing anger; however, Black men were not held to the same standard.

P08 continued, “So, there's always a stereotype of the angry Black woman. And so even if we have a right to be angry and really upset,...you know that if you do that, they're going to put all of us in that same category.” She feared that if she were to “blow up”, she would be the stereotypical angry Black woman at work and also perceived as such in the community. She explained that while other officers can show signs of anger, she feels that she would be judged harsher than her counterparts. She stated, “It’s a stereotype...I’ve got to keep myself in check;...it’s not the same for me.”

Likewise, P10 shared similar thoughts as P08, stating, “I think that also, too, the misunderstanding of being a Black female in general is being put in a box of like, oh, she's too aggressive, ...especially when it comes to our personality and who we are. P10 commented that she often remains quiet, so she is not labelled. P09 commented that people’s perceptions cannot always be changed. “At the end of the day, being a police officer, you're always going to be stepping on someone's toes, and I'm a Black female, so

it's going to look like I'm stepping on your toes even harder". P09 also reflected on how she handles the duality of being a Black female and a police officer. She continued, "I remember someone asked me, How do I deal with being Black and being a police officer?"

And I've always said, I can't turn my blackness off when I go home. I'm going to be Black when I'm in regular off-duty gear. I'm going to be a Black woman. I'm going to be treated like a Black woman in society. So, I don't feel like I can turn my blackness on and off, and I don't have any intentions on doing so."

P12 felt that sometimes the community was not empathetic or understanding toward Black female officers or officers in general. She explained, "I don't think that people are aware of the toll that this job can have on anybody ...we're human beings". She shared an experience of coming home, discussing her workday as a way to de-stress. However, she noted that she did not receive the empathy or the understanding she was seeking. She explained, "I was just talking about my day, which it's a different kind of day than everybody else. And so, the community, I don't think, has the capacity to really have safe spaces for police officers, mentally and emotionally." P12 commented that Black people are traditionally fearful of the police. She noted that Black people have a "trauma response" to the police because of their historical mistreatment by police. She commented that she wears the uniform to hopefully change the negative perspective in the community about the police.

P09 commented, “Some people feel like I’ve turned my back on my own people. However, she noted, “Sometimes you cannot change the community's perspective about the police.” She feels the public’s call for defunding the police is misplaced and that a shortage of police will negatively impact the entire community. P09 wishes the community would see her as a person who just has a job to perform.

Participants reported their authority was often challenged as Black females on patrol, especially during encounters with individuals from their racial background or gender. Their account reflects the intersectional conflict they experience being both Black and female in uniform. For example, P06 and P11 both expressed that they have been aggressively challenged by other Black females while on patrol. P11 stated that although she usually can calm most situations, she reflected that sometimes Black females attempt to challenge her authority. She recalled one street encounter that escalated into a physical altercation after the Black female assaulted her. Similarly, P02 expressed that her gender often created tension with Black males that she encountered on patrol. She explained that most of her physical altercations had been with Black men who seemed more likely to challenge her than other groups.

In summary, this theme highlights participants’ accounts of how conflict can result from intersecting challenges related to race, gender, and professional identity among African American female officers in both workplace and community settings. Participants noted being perceived through the lens of the “angry Black woman” stereotype and indicated differences in how they were perceived and evaluated compared

to their counterparts. Motro et al. (2021) reported in their findings that such stereotypes may hinder career advancement for Black women in the workplace. Participants also reported encountering tensions with some community members during patrols, including Black men and women, which at times escalated into physical confrontations. Some participants were optimistic that Black female officers in the community would change the negative perception the community has of the police.

Results for Research Question 2

RQ 2: What are the views of African American female police officers on how to recruit and retain more women of color for careers in policing?

Theme 1: Inclusive and Equitable Workplace Culture

Research Question 2 revealed two themes regarding African American female police officers' views on recruiting and retaining women of color in policing. Participants emphasized the importance of building trust within agencies and upholding equal rights, with zero tolerance for discrimination. P01 noted that fulfilling promises and fostering a trustworthy environment are essential to support recruitment and retention efforts.

Similarly, P02 reported that African American female officers must work harder to prove themselves. She noted, "You have to create fair, even playing fields, you have to give them the same chances, opportunities that you gave the other officers". P02 emphasized the importance for supervisors to foster a caring and supportive work environment that communicates to African American female officers that they are valued. She further commented that departments must foster an environment of inclusivity by respecting and

supporting African American female officers. She suggested that other African American females may be more inclined to join a department that fosters an inclusive and welcoming environment.

Some participants indicated that providing additional training, mentorship opportunities, and well-being resources may help retain Black female officers. For example, P04 acknowledged that offering more department training could be effective in retaining Black female officers. Additionally, she expressed that her agency should offer “cultural competency” training to make Black females feel welcome. She expressed frustration regarding the lack of female officers in her department who shared her same racial identity. She explained that departments should make Black females feel welcome by taking their concerns and complaints seriously. P04 noted that departments should offer mentorship and support to Black female officers, especially when the agency has few females of that ethnicity. She expressed the following: “If we don't have anybody that look like me within a department, find somebody for me to connect with on the outside of the department”. P4 also emphasized that supervisors should regularly check in with African American female officers to ensure they feel valued, supported, and that their concerns are taken seriously.

Similarly, P01 explained there is a great need for mentorship opportunities, support systems for mental health, and well-being services for female officers. Several participants discussed the importance of implementing diversity training within law enforcement agencies. For example, P01, P04, and P05 stated that agencies should

implement diversity and inclusion training aimed at furthering a positive work culture.

P01 commented, “When African American females feel safe and included and they have an equal right, then I would say it’ll give them a good sense of actually wanting to stay longer.”

P05 expressed bias in promotions and harassment as areas that should be addressed to recruit and retain more females. She explained, “If they address harassment and its combination, this would equally bring more people or help retain more people in policing.” P05 reported that work-life balance should be considered by implementing flexible work schedules. She emphasized, “I’m balancing work-life; is not easy”. She noted that offering wellness initiatives, mental health support, and establishing employee resource groups, such as peer support networks, are effective strategies for retaining women in the workplace.

Participants discussed the need for agencies to be more sensitive to the needs of female officers. Accordingly, P06 emphasized the importance of departments offering postpartum services for female officers returning to work after childbirth. “Postpartum healthcare is a really big thing”, she expressed. Additionally, she spoke candidly of the emotional toll experienced by females who may be undergoing in vitro fertilization (IVF) treatments and are having difficulty conceiving. In her view, departments should be more empathetic to women who are undergoing these treatments by temporarily placing them on desk duty assignments.

P07 stated that navigating barriers and other challenges is key to the success of African American females in law enforcement. She indicated, “By stopping discrimination, I don’t know if that is possible. We have to overcome those challenges and barriers”. She continued, indicating that if barriers were not removed, then it would be difficult for African American females to be successful in law enforcement. She emphasized that it is the responsibility of the department's chief to ensure fairness and equity within their organization. Similarly, P03 indicated that to retain Black females in departments, “...there should be policies against gender or race discrimination to give people a sense of belonging”.

According to P09, providing Black women with equitable opportunities for advancement and varied assignment opportunities is essential for their retention. She indicated, “Just treat me like everybody else. I don't want special treatment because I don't ever want it to be like, well, you only got this because you're a Black female.

P11 provided another perspective on retaining African American female officers, emphasizing that retention efforts should begin in the police academy. She suggested that female recruits may benefit from additional support and encouragement, especially with physically demanding aspects of training, such as running and pushups. This camaraderie building, as highlighted by several participants, fosters a supportive workplace that helps prevent feelings of isolation among African American female officers. Likewise, P12 explained that a warm and inviting atmosphere was important to retaining Black females. For example, she stated, “When you recruit us and you say you want us here and then we

get here, you treat us like your brother; treat us like your brother in arms". P04 described being the only African American officer in her department until the recent hiring of another. She noted that working patrol in a predominantly White male-dominated department created a constant need to prove herself, as she felt she was neither viewed nor treated the same as her male counterparts. P04 explained that she represented the next generation of officers, but her department continues to operate as they have in the past. She emphasized that it was time for departments to change and embrace new ways of thinking by becoming "culturally competent" ensuring that African American female officers are recognized for their contributions and as an integral part of positive social change in law enforcement.

P07 underscored the importance of shedding light on diversity and inclusion in police departments. She noted that doing so "...will provide valuable insights to the future of women in policing." Additionally, she emphasized the importance of fostering a system of fair and equitable law enforcement practices. Similarly, P09 highlighted the importance of diversity within law enforcement as the impetus for social change. She stressed the following: "I think if we could get more African-American female police officers and African American males, we genuinely could change the perspective of policing. I think that we're strong enough and powerful enough to create actual change".

P05 views herself as a role model within the community and her department. She believes her visibility as a Black female officer in the community serves as inspiration for others to join the department and as encouragement and support for other Black female

colleagues. She emphasized, “I am strengthening the community's relations that is a voice for underrepresented people like myself. As an African American female, I bring a voice that might otherwise be underrepresented in both the police force and the community. My role enables me to highlight specific community concerns and ensure they're acknowledged and addressed.” The participants' view reflects Collins’ (2009, 2019) assertion that elevating Black women’s voices empowers them within systems that seek to marginalize and silence them.

In conclusion, participants highlighted that creating an inclusive and equitable workplace environment is important for recruiting and retaining African American female officers. Participants emphasized providing support and mentorship opportunities for active officers and those in recruit training as important to recruiting and retaining African American female officers. Participants stressed that promoting diversity and equitable treatment, recognizing contributions, providing supervisory support, and fostering a positive work environment as critical to improving a workplace culture of inclusion and respect for African American female officers. Departments should embrace the next generation of law enforcement officers, fostering innovation, positive social change, and promoting a climate that values diversity, inclusion, and opportunity.

Theme 2: Intentional and Purposeful Recruiting Strategies

This theme represents participants' perspectives regarding the most effective strategies for recruiting and increasing the representation of African American women in law enforcement careers.

Participants emphasized the importance of targeted recruiting strategies that are inclusive and diverse, as well as the use of messaging that resonates with the experiences of African American women. A study conducted by Todak and Brown (2019) concluded that police departments were hypermasculine, gendered, racialized, and sexualized, which made recruiting minorities and women difficult. According to the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing (2015), "...law enforcement agencies should strive to create a workforce that contains a broad range of diversity, including race and gender..." Additionally, despite recent gains in hiring women for police careers, all women continue to be underrepresented in police work, comprising only 12% of all police officers in the United States (Brown et al., 2020; Clinkenbeard et al., 2021; Gibbs, 2019; Rief & Clinkenbeard, 2020; Suboch et al., 2017, Simpson & Croft, 2021).

P09 offered this view, "I think if we could get more African-American female police officers and African American males, we genuinely could change the perspective of policing. I think that we're strong enough and powerful enough to create actual change." P03 stated that the police force should represent the demographics of the community. She commented that when the community sees African American women in this role, it may encourage "more diverse candidates to consider a career in policing; it gives people this sense of inclusion."

P04 emphasized the importance of transparency and diversity in hiring practices and the need for departments to openly communicate to the community their desire to recruit African American females. She noted that when African American women see

that they are intentionally being recruited, they feel valued and comfortable that the department is genuinely interested in them joining. Likewise, P04 believed in being truthful about the department's recruiting goals. For example, she explained, "If you want diversity, let those officers know that's what you need." Similarly, P12 stated, "We recruit more people that look like us by going to where they are and telling them that we want you." She explained that recruiting strategies must be "intentional about showing that you want somebody and you care".

Collins' (2009) feminist theory underscores the ability of Black women to feel valued and empowered while finding their voice in a society that marginalizes them. Accordingly, P07 emphasized, "amplifying the voices and experiences of African American women in patrol may also allow them to build better relationships with minority communities and promote diversity and inclusion within the department". Similarly, P10 stressed the importance of minority officers being visible in the community. She expressed "being the face for individuals who can identify with me" as an important component to bring change to the Black community.

P11 indicated that only male officers were assigned to her department's recruiting unit. She viewed this as a barrier to recruiting females into law enforcement careers. She emphasized that including female officers in recruiting units is essential to attracting other women to pursue careers in policing. She further noted that departmental policies should be revised to ensure the recruitment unit is diverse and inclusive.

Participants (P08 and P10) noted that departments should develop hair policies that do not disproportionately target Black female officers. P10 stated that her agency has made progress in understanding the cultural needs of Black female officers. Both P08 and P10 expressed appreciation for their agencies' efforts to recognize and embrace diversity by implementing hair policy standards that do not penalize African American female officers. P10 believes this policy change in her agency is important to retain African American female officers.

Many participants agreed that recruiting strategies need to be diverse and reflect the racial and gender diversification of the community. For example, P08 explained that recruiting must be targeted in areas where Black women frequent. She explained recruiting efforts centered in “rich white areas” or military facilities will only net mostly White males and not people of color. She emphasized the importance of recruiting within inner city schools and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). She noted, “Honestly, if they want to get African American females, then they need to be sending African American female officers out to do the recruiting in those communities.” Similarly, P09 offered this view: “I think that you can't just recruit at certain aspects or certain places and expect to get Black people to apply to be police officers. You have to again, go to Black spaces.”

P02 expressed that departments with only a few Black female officers may find it difficult to recruit other Black women into law enforcement careers. She stated, “Black females don't want to come to our department because there's only two of 'em here.”

According to Vermeer and Stickle (2020), increasing minorities could have a positive effect on recruiting efforts, concluding that people are more interested in joining departments that have others who look like them.

P02 continued, “Our department doesn’t try to advertise and recruit in places where Black females would be”. She stated that her department recruits at colleges where a majority of White males are enrolled in criminal justice programs. She expressed that recruiting Black females for law enforcement careers should be aimed at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Black Greek organizations such as the “Divine Nine”, and Black organizations like NOBLE (National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives).

P02 further commented that departments aiming to recruit more African American females should consider the recruiting locations and the individuals representing the agency. “I would say if you’re interested in recruiting Black female officers, you need to be more strategic about where you’re sending your recruiters and who you’re sending.” She expressed that recruiters should genuinely be interested in recruiting Black females. P02 also noted that inviting potential candidates to participate in department ‘ride-alongs’ as a strategy to promote interest in the profession.

Likewise, P09 also shared the view of P02, reporting that offering “ride alongs” as a great recruiting strategy to get people interested in police work. She stated, “I think that’s where I fell in love with the profession, was my ride-along. While other participants spoke about assigning Black females to recruiting units, P09 offered a

different perspective: "...don't make the Black woman on your department, the trophy Black woman. I don't want to be the Black woman face of the department; the poster child for Black women on the department".

P06 commented that Black females often work behind the scenes during high-profile investigations. She commented that once the investigation comes to fruition, Black females who worked hard are ignored and not invited to participate in on-camera press events. She remarked further, "What we see is what we think is possible. So, to see more Black women in the media, on our platforms, on our social media pages, that would retain more Black women to stay, that would show the Black women here that we have a space to be in." Moreover, P06's comment supports earlier views from participants that Black female officers often feel pressured to work harder to prove themselves in male-dominated police environments.

Several participants shared their views on recruiting in high schools. P11 believes recruiting efforts aimed at high school students may be too late, as many have already developed negative images of law enforcement. She stated, "If we are going to do recruitment, we have to start with the younger ones and keep on them." She believed police routinely visiting and engaging with younger students would build trust and rapport in the community.

However, P09 offered a different perspective on recruiting in high school settings. She views police visiting high schools and answering questions about policing as a way to change students' perceptions of the police. She stated, "I think the biggest overall issue

is people have a perception of policing that's not accurate, which makes them not want to apply." She is optimistic that increasing the number of officers who are African American could change the community's negative perspective of the police

According to P03, an inclusive recruitment campaign" should be designed highlighting diversity and showcasing African American women in law enforcement roles. She explained, departments should support diversity by "featuring real stories of African American women in policing." She noted that developing public messages aimed at promoting police career advancement opportunities may help recruit African American women for positions in law enforcement. She emphasized that seeing more African American female officers in the community may encourage others with diverse backgrounds to consider a career in law enforcement. She believes that police departments should reflect the community's demographics, further explaining that "creating a more inclusive and representative profession overall, it gives people this sense of inclusion."

Several participants highlighted the importance of mentorship and serving as role models in the community as strategies to encourage other African American females to pursue careers in law enforcement. Many participants emphasized that their strong desire to project a positive image in the community was important, suggesting that visibility and representation could serve as inspiration to other women of color and the next generation of officers. For example, P09 indicated that becoming a police officer was not her initial plan after college, but a female relative working in a local law enforcement agency

encouraged her to apply. She spent time with her relative, meeting other female officers, and decided one day to experience a ride-along. She stated that the ride-along convinced her to join the police department. She noted,

I am grateful that I had a Black woman to introduce me to it. I just wish that was more common, because I do think more Black women would do it, if they had someone else kind of reach back and pull 'em along". P09 commented that she loved police work even though it remains a predominantly male-dominated profession.

P03 reported that African American female officers can influence others, especially the younger generation, to join law enforcement by serving as role models and mentors. Similarly, P05 was optimistic about her plans to encourage other African American females to become law enforcement officers, stating, "I fully have plans of changing the future of policing that helps recruit more African American females, encouraging them to be police,... giving reassurance that being the police is a great thing."

P10 and P11 both reported that many females struggle in the police academy to get through the physical agility program, finding running and pushups as the most challenging. Both participants regarded mentoring women and providing support at the beginning and throughout academy training as effective strategies to encourage women to remain in the profession. Participants highlighted the significance of having strong African American female role models within law enforcement. Several indicated that the

inclusion of African American female officers fosters diversity in the community and may positively influence public perceptions of policing. Moreover, participants noted that these officers serve as examples, demonstrating to the community that careers in law enforcement are accessible and attainable for women of color.

For example, P02 noted that having a strong group of African American female officers in the community will attract other females who look like her. She noted the following, “We as Black females, ...as we go up, we need to reach down and bring someone else up. ... you got to do something to make it less hard for the person walking in the steps behind you”. Similarly, P04 felt it was important for the community to see more Black female police officers. “I know I can't change the world, but I can go out there and hopefully change somebody's perspective on how they feel about the police”. She noted that her presence in the community has given hope to the younger generation. She stated, “I’ve heard so many, both young and old teenagers, younger kids, saying because they see me, they know that it's possible for them to be a police officer one day”.

Further, P04 emphasized that knowing your purpose is vital for Black women in policing. She highlighted the need for a strong external support system and being clear about your purpose. She acknowledged that she has experienced both positive and negative experiences as a minority officer. P04 is confident as an African American female in policing and believes that the future is bright for other females entering the profession, stating, “I really make sure I'm all put together. I change the narrative of

policing every time I go out there. They call me bougie, they call me whatever they want to, but this is the way I love doing it, and can't nobody do it like me”.

Participants emphasized that effective recruitment of African American females involves transparent and intentional strategies, diverse recruitment teams, culturally sensitive department policies, and mentorship opportunities. The visibility of African American female officers in the community was seen as a crucial factor in attracting other women of color to careers in policing and improving the negative perception of the community towards the police.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research is to explore and understand the experiences of African American policewomen who work street patrol in police departments across the Midwest region of the United States. This study seeks to gain valuable insight into their work experiences and their perspectives on recruiting and retaining African American women in policing. The study examines how the intersection of race and gender operates as an oppressive barrier that shapes their daily work experience in law enforcement. The officers were purposefully selected from participants who are active officers working in Midwest police departments in the United States and who met the inclusion criteria. Interviews were conducted from late November 2024 through early February 2025.

Data for this study were collected using in-depth semistructured interviews. Eleven interviews were conducted via the Zoom video conferencing platform, and one

was conducted in-person in a private room at a local library. Each participant voluntarily consented to participate in the study. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed using Rev.com technology. Transcripts and audio-recordings were reviewed and analyzed. Handwritten field notes were recorded in a journal, capturing the researcher's thoughts, observations, and non-verbal cues for each participant.

The findings from this research answered the study's two research questions:

RQ1: How do African American female police officers in police departments in the Midwest region of the United States describe their patrol work experience?

RQ2: What are the views of African American female police officers on how to recruit and retain more women of color for careers in policing?

The study setting, participant demographic profile, data collection and analysis procedures, and evidence of trustworthiness were delineated in the chapter's findings.

Thematic analysis revealed four overarching themes for Research Question 1:

Theme 1: Microaggressions and Systemic Bias; Theme 2: Supportive and Empowering Relationships; Theme 3: Feelings of Marginalization and Isolation; Theme 4:

Intersectional Conflict. Two themes emerged from the analysis for Research Question 2:

Theme 1: Inclusive and Equitable Workplace Culture; Theme 2: Intentional and Purposeful Recruiting Strategies

The findings of this study align with the Black feminist theoretical framework, focusing on how the intersection of race and gender contributes to oppression and

systemic bias in the workplace for African American female officers faced with navigating a White-male dominated police culture.

In Chapter 5, I will provide an interpretation of the study's findings, compare the results to the body of literature, discuss the study's limitations, and offer recommendations for future research. Additionally, I will discuss the implications for advancing positive social change.

Chapter 5: Discussions, Conclusion, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research is to explore and understand the experiences of African American policewomen who work street patrol in police departments across the Midwest region of the United States. This study seeks to gain valuable insight into their work experiences and their perspectives on recruiting and retaining African American women in policing. The study examines how the intersection of race and gender operates as an oppressive barrier that shapes their daily work experience in law enforcement. Specifically, the study examines how participants experienced and navigated workplace environments that often devalued, marginalized, and disrespected them, while simultaneously suppressing their voices. Shelley et al. (2011) found that African American women in policing are marginalized and treated unfairly in police professions. Participants discussed how the intersection of racism and sexism shaped their day-to-day work realities. Additionally, this study explored participants' perspectives on strategies to improve the recruitment and retention of African American women in law enforcement. Understanding the lived experiences of African American female officers may lead to positive social change.

This research situates its analysis within Black feminist theory, which emphasizes the intersection of race and gender and explains how these overlapping oppressions shape the lived experiences of the 12 participants in this study. Collins (2009, p. 110) explained that Black women struggle with the realities of both sexism and racism while

simultaneously learning to speak in a “unique and authentic voice”. Within the context of policing, this framework is particularly important because it addresses how African American female officers navigate a profession dominated by White men, where their competence, authority, and agency are either questioned or ignored. This framework provided a lens for understanding the lived experiences of the participants and how they navigated a system that subjected them to marginalization, microaggressions, and isolation. It also highlighted how these intersecting oppressions shaped their daily work experience. Additionally, participants offered critical insight into effective strategies for recruiting and retaining African American women in policing.

The study used open-ended, semi-structured interview questions. These questions were developed to explore and understand participants' lived experiences and how they navigate working in a predominantly male-dominated police environment. To answer the research questions, a purposeful sample of 12 African American female officers was selected that met the inclusion criteria of the study. Outside of race and gender, participants varied in age, educational attainment, marital status, and the number of years they had spent in law enforcement.

A review of the literature revealed that research on African American women in policing remains both limited and outdated. The lack of research on African American female officers has been well-documented across several studies (Suboch et al., 2017; Todak & Brown, 2020). Therefore, this qualitative study addressed the problem statement that it was unknown how African American female officers working in Midwest

departments view their work experience. This research was necessary to advance much-needed research and to fill the gap in the literature on African American females in policing. Further, this study will contribute broadly to criminal justice research and add to important discourse on race, gender, and the impact of intersectional oppression on the organization. Additionally, RQ2 provides perspectives from the field on strategies to more effectively recruit and retain African American females for careers in law enforcement.

Research has consistently documented that African American women face discrimination, sexism, and racism in the workplace. Sands et al. (2023) described that Black female officers are faced with a form of marginality and oppression due to the intersectionality of race and gender, described as “double jeopardy theory.” This study reveals the real-world challenges encountered by African American females in policing as they navigate an often-unwelcoming police culture. Grounded in a Black feminist theoretical framework, the study examined the intersectional challenges of race and gender that described the participants' daily work lived experiences. C

In this chapter, I will discuss the interpretations of the study's findings, limitations, recommendations for future research, and implications for positive social change.

Interpretation of the Findings for Research Question 1

This qualitative phenomenological study aimed to address two research questions. The overarching research question of this study was: RQ1: How do African American

female police officers in police departments in the Midwest region of the United States describe their patrol experience working in a hypermasculine police profession? Four major themes emerged from the data in the study to answer RQ1.

Theme 1: Microaggressions and Systemic Bias

This theme aligns with the Black feminist theoretical framework, which examines the intersectional challenges of race and gender in policing experienced by African American female officers. It reflects the lived experiences of the participants as they navigated systematic oppressions associated with race and gender, including marginalization, isolation, and conflict. Participants reported experiencing microaggressive behavior from White male supervisors, which they described as disrespectful and as perpetuating unfair and disparate treatment in the workplace. Participants felt that the entrenchment of a White male-dominated police culture promoted institutional racism and sexism, creating a climate of ongoing discrimination that the organization failed to address.

The study reinforces how systemic bias and microaggressions work together in a male-dominated culture to devalue the opinions and contributions of Black female officers. Moreover, the participants reported how these exclusions affected their work assignment, promotional opportunities, and advancement within the department. Some participants felt that their mistakes were often magnified, while their White female counterparts' oversights were either ignored or diminished.

This finding further supports prior research by Brown et al. (2020), whose qualitative study explored the influence of a hypermasculine police culture and its effects on female officers in the workplace. They argued that women continue to suffer challenges and barriers in law enforcement in a police subculture where sexual harassment, discrimination, and gender inequalities continue to flourish. Their study concluded that a hypermasculine police subculture existed in the department being studied and called for future research on the experiences of women working in policing within these male-dominated environments.

Data analysis in this study revealed that participants consistently expressed a sense of being alienated, mistrusted, disrespected, and unsupported by their departments. Participants felt their presence and voices were not heard or appreciated. These microaggressions reinforced a perception that the participants were not trusted, respected, or valued within their departments. The workplace was viewed as unwelcoming, particularly for African American women who had to navigate the intersection of race and gender in a predominantly White male-dominated work environment. These persistent microaggressions, as described by many participants, showcased a pattern of systemic bias embedded in the department's culture that demonstrated an unwillingness to embrace change. P2 explained, "It's just they don't take us seriously...they don't actually look at our capabilities and what we can bring to the table." Additionally, P6 stated Black females must excel to be noticed. Both participants noted that the journey was harder for Black female officers.

Other participants reported experiencing challenges while on patrol, oftentimes feeling a constant need to prove themselves. These experiences highlight the difficulty of African American female officers navigating racial and gender biases within a predominantly White male police culture. Evidence from the study suggests that African American female officers face workplace challenges associated with discrimination, sexual harassment, and feelings of inadequacy. This was reflected in a statement by P04, “I do feel like as a Black female, I feel like I've always had to go the extra mile to prove myself.”

The significance of the findings in this theme suggests that microaggressions and systemic bias exist and are embedded in the culture of police organizations and often remain unabated. In previous research, Brown et al. (2020) determined that women continue to suffer challenges and barriers in law enforcement in a police subculture where sexual harassment, discrimination, and gender inequalities flourish.

In this study, the lived experiences of the participants shaped their epistemological and ontological perspectives, which align with the study’s constructivist paradigm. In this sense, Burkholder et al. (2020) explained that qualitative research seeks to understand a phenomenon by exploring how individuals construct meaning of their lived experiences.

Participants reported feeling inadequate, stressed, and traumatized due to experiencing workplace discrimination. According to Williams (2021), the harms associated with microaggressions can be systemic and include stressors such as

depression, anxiety, decreased self-esteem, and other negative mental and physical outcomes, especially for marginalized groups.

Participants in this study felt they were treated unfairly because of their race and gender, bringing into focus the intersectional oppression described by Collins (2009) that Black women face daily. The experiences of the participants revealed that they faced an unsupportive department where their opinions and work experience were not valued or trusted. Moreover, participants described navigating a male-dominated police culture that perpetuated systemic inequalities where discrimination and sexual harassment were normalized and allowed to continue.

Overall, participants agreed that Black female officers had to work harder than their male counterparts to be noticed and gain recognition. Furthermore, participants reported the stress of constantly having to prove themselves to gain recognition and credibility. Collins (2009, p. 132) describes the journey of Black females as persistence: “Black women’s persistence is fostered by the strong belief that to be Black and female is valuable and worthy of respect.”

Theme 2: Supportive and Empowering Relationships

This theme highlighted the positive interpersonal experiences that participants reported with their peers, supervisors, and members of the community. Despite facing systemic barriers, discrimination, sexual harassment, and the emotional toll of negative work experiences, participants reported that supportive relationships provided

encouragement, validation, and a sense of resilience as they navigated male-dominated departments.

Participants noted that the camaraderie experienced with fellow African American female peers provided the support and strength needed to continue in their role.

Participants explained the importance of developing supportive relationships and stated that working with fellow Black female officers felt safe and like a “sisterhood”. For example, P08 explained, “...there’s a handful of us and we have to help each other out.” P06 spoke about the closeness, respect, and love that she felt working with fellow Black female officers. Similarly, P10 emphasized that Black females are in the minority within her male-dominated agency, noting the importance of supporting one another.

Additionally, several participants reported having positive interactions with both Black and White female supervisors, who they described as encouraging, approachable, and straightforward.

Participants reported having strong connections and positive interactions with the communities they served. Participants felt their presence in the community brought a sense of calm, even during tense street encounters, and reported positive interactions with community members. P02 expressed “The community loves me...,” highlighting the positive connections she developed with community members. Participants emphasized that support from the community played an important role in helping them navigate the challenges of being a Black female officer.

The significance of this finding supports research that women in policing are more adept at defusing tensions and calming hostilities in communities than their male counterparts. Alexander and Nowacki (2022) found community support for females in policing as positive, noting that women use a wider range of interpersonal and communication skills, including de-escalation techniques rather than aggression and force utilized by their male counterparts.

Further, participants emphasized that relationships between Black female colleagues served as a source of comfort, safety, and strength as they navigated an unwelcoming male-dominated police environment. This finding reflects Collins' view on the power of relationships among Black women. Collins posited that Black women have a special connection with each other that "affirms one another's humanity, specialness, and right to exist" (Collins, 2009, p. 113).

Theme 3: Feelings of Marginalization and Isolation

This theme embodies the feelings of loneliness and exclusion experienced by participants. Several participants reported experiencing situations where they felt unsupported by male colleagues, particularly in situations of safety while on street patrol. Participants described instances where their calls for back-up assistance were ignored or delayed. For example, P01, P06, and P12 recounted instances where White male and White female officers on their shift failed to provide backup on their runs. P06 described not feeling safe while working patrol. These situations created potentially dangerous situations for Black female officers and contributed to their heightened level of insecurity

and isolation. However, participants reported that both Black male and female officers provided backup assistance when possible.

Literature on Black feminist thought, espoused by Collins (2009) and Pogebrin et al. (2000), provides insight and a framework for understanding the marginalization and invisibility of women in society, especially among African American women. The findings of this study suggest that African American female officers are marginalized and isolated within their male-dominated departments.

Participants described that they often felt lonely and isolated within their departments. P12 shared that she experienced a sense of loneliness within her department, which had very few female officers. Other participants commented that Black females were often dispersed throughout the department, therefore, making it difficult to form meaningful relationships. Several participants expressed experiencing mental and emotional stress resulting from racial, gender, and sexual harassment in the workplace. P01 expressed that she was undergoing a lot of mental stress from the ongoing harassment and racial discrimination in her department. She stated, “It’s traumatizing most times.”

Participants noted that sexual harassment complaints were either not investigated or ignored, therefore contributing to their mental stress. This supports prior research by Shelley et al. (2011) that women are marginalized by the hierarchy of male-dominated policing, which subjects them to persistent and pervasive hypersexualized and demeaning

behavior in the workplace. Likewise, Brown et al. (2020) found that the police culture perpetuated gendered discrimination and normalized negative behaviors towards women.

The significance of these findings suggests that African American female officers feel isolated and unsupported within their departments. Complaints of sexual harassment were often dismissed, not investigated, or ignored. The continual racial discrimination and sexual harassment within their departments caused significant emotional stress for some participants, leaving them feeling traumatized and unsupported. Several participants described instances of feeling unsafe when White colleagues failed to assist in patrol encounters. Several participants described being the only or among the few African American females in their agencies. Participants described the lack of camaraderie in their departments as causing feelings of loneliness and isolation.

The findings of this theme suggest that African American female officers are marginalized, isolated, and unsupported within their departments. This often leads to emotional stress and trauma because of negative workplace experiences.

Theme 4: Intersectional Conflict

This theme captures how African American female officers navigate the complexities of balancing dual identities and addressing tensions arising from intersecting roles within both the workplace and the community. The challenges associated with being female and Black, fulfilling law enforcement responsibilities, and operating in a predominantly male work environment underscore the nature of intersectional conflict.

Participants reported that they often suppressed their personalities and silenced their voices for fear of being stereotyped as an “angry Black woman”. P02 and P08 explained that African American female officers are frequently labeled as overly aggressive and angry. Due to this label, participants felt that their capabilities were overlooked in the workplace and within the community (Motro et al., 2022).

Participants described feeling that community members and family did not understand the emotional toll experienced by African American female officers and were not always empathetic. In some instances, participants reported that their authority was challenged by both Black men and women while on patrol. Participants described navigating intersecting identities of race and gender while balancing the demanding duties of policing within a White male-dominated department.

The significance of these findings suggests that African American female officers are often misunderstood by the communities they serve and even by their families. Being labelled “angry Black women” and being misunderstood adds to their emotional stress. Participants described experiencing conflict as they navigated the intersecting identities of race and gender, where their loyalty as African American women was questioned by the community.

Being Blue, Black, and Female describes participants’ daily lived experiences as they navigate their profession as police officers, their racial identity as African American, and the gendered inequities of working in a department shaped by hegemonic White-male

dominance. This supports prior research by Sanders et al. (2022) that revealed policing as a gendered, male-dominated profession that perpetuates hegemonic masculinity.

Interpretation of the Findings for Research Question 2

RQ2: What are the views of African American female police officers on how to recruit and retain more women of color for careers in policing?

Theme 1: Inclusive and Equitable Workplace Culture

Participants were asked about their perspectives on the most effective strategies for recruiting and retaining African American female officers. The findings within this theme highlight a strong consensus among participants that transparency, fairness, diversity, and training, as well as proactively addressing sexism and racism in their agencies, as key strategies for retaining and recruiting African American female officers.

P01 expressed that African American female officers should be offered equal opportunities for training and promotion as their White counterparts. Similarly, other participants reported discrimination and bias in promotions and training opportunities. P02 expressed that Black females have to work harder than others. She explained, “You have to create fair, even playing fields, you have to give them the same chances, opportunities that you gave the other officers”. P09 stated she just wanted to be treated like everyone else when it came to department opportunities.

Several participants reported a need for greater sensitivity towards female officers returning from maternity leave. Other participants called for more health and wellness

training, flexible work schedules, and peer group mentorships to retain African American females.

Participants expressed the importance of diversity within their respective departments and throughout policing to promote social change. Other participants emphasized that departments should create a warm and welcoming police environment to indicate that African American females are safe and wanted. P01 emphasized, “When African American females feel safe and included and they have an equal right, then I would say it’ll give them a good sense of actually wanting to stay longer.

P05 expressed bias in promotions and harassment as areas that should be addressed to recruit and retain more females. She explained, “If they address harassment and its combination, this would equally bring more people or help retain more people in policing.”

The significance of this finding suggests that fostering a safe, fair, equitable, and inclusive workplace culture, free from bias and discrimination, supports the retention of African American female officers and encourages other women to pursue careers in policing. Participants reported a desire to work in an organizational climate that treats them with respect. Participants emphasized their desire to have the same access to training and promotional opportunities as their White male counterparts.

Theme 2: Intentional and Purposeful Recruiting Strategies

This theme reflects participants' views on what they consider to be the most effective strategies for recruiting Black females into careers in law enforcement.

Participants emphasized the importance of targeted and transparent recruiting strategies that are inclusive and diverse, as well as the use of messaging that resonates with the lived experiences of African American women. Participants in the study believed that intentional and purposeful recruiting strategies are essential for increasing the representation of African American females in police careers.

P02 and P04 both expressed that a strong connection to the community was essential in recruiting more African American females. They explained that their visibility in the community served as both a representation to other females that they could work in policing and a catalyst to inspire younger generations. Similarly, P04 stated that her presence in the community has given hope to the younger generation. I've heard so many, both young and old teenagers, younger kids, saying because they see me, they know that it's possible for them to be a police officer one day".

Other participants emphasized that departments should be more strategic in where and who they send to recruit Black females. Many participants agreed that recruiting strategies should be diverse and reflect the racial and gender makeup of the community. For example, P08 explained that recruiting must be targeted in areas where Black women frequent. She explained recruiting efforts centered in 'rich white areas' or military facilities will net mostly White males and not people of color. Another participant noted that her department recruits mostly White colleges and universities

This finding highlights the need for purposeful recruiting methods that boost transparency and build community trust. Vermeer et al. (2020) note that when minority

representation increases, recruitment benefits, as people are more drawn to departments where they see others like themselves. Diaz & Nuño (2021) add that women in policing may restore legitimacy in policing and reinforce public confidence. Participants agreed that actively recruiting African American women improves community representation, motivates young people to pursue policing careers, and challenges negative stereotypes of law enforcement. They recommended creating recruitment campaigns with positive messages and featuring African American female officers in promotional materials. Additionally, they suggested engaging with high schools, national Black organizations, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), and spaces commonly used by African American women. These strategies highlight the importance of building strong relationships between police and communities of color.

Limitations of the Study

This study provided valuable insights into the lived experiences of African American female police officers working patrol assignments in Midwest . departments. However, there are three limitations highlighted in this study. The first limitation is that the study relied on a small, purposeful sample of African American female officers in Midwest agencies, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to women of different races or ethnicities. Additionally, the study aimed to recruit between 12 and fifteen participants; however, data saturation was reached after 12 interviews. I concluded that no new themes emerged, and the data collected were sufficient to answer the research questions. Guest et al. (2006) concluded from their study that 12 interviews

using purposive sampling should be adequate when the group is homogenous and the participants have common experiences, which was the case in this study. Likewise, Patton (2015) argued there were no fixed rules in qualitative sampling. He concluded that the sample size in qualitative research can be flexible and may increase if observations or fieldwork dictate, or decrease if saturation occurs sooner than expected. Though the sample size was small, the richness of the participants' narratives provided meaningful and robust data that aligned with the research questions.

The second limitation involved the geographic location and the size of the department. Some participants did not identify their respective police departments; however, geographic information was collected to determine the state in which they served. From this information, I was able to determine whether participants represented small, mid-sized, or large departments. Therefore, participants may have had different patrol experiences or perspectives based on their department's size, culture, geographic location, or policies, which could produce different results in future studies.

A third limitation of the study relates to researcher positionality. My previous 30 years of law enforcement experience with the Detroit Police Department could have introduced bias and subjectivity during data collection and analysis. Toma (2011) posited that it is essential for researchers, particularly in qualitative research where objectivity is often questioned, to acknowledge their position within the research context. A researcher's positionality and social identity are important considerations in qualitative research (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). To address this, I was transparent with participants

about my prior career in law enforcement to minimize bias and avoid threats to validity. Throughout the research process, I maintained a reflexive journal of handwritten entries for each participant interview to critically examine, document, and bracket potential biases. These data collection strategies contributed to establishing an audit trail that enhanced the study's transparency and credibility. These practices ensured that the authenticity of the participants' experiences was captured in the data analysis and that the research findings reflected their authentic voices and not the researcher assumptions. Ravitch and Carl (2021) argued that ethical research requires researchers to possess situational awareness of their biases, prejudices, and subjectivities, which could impact the study, and adopt a reflective approach to critically examine their biases and find ways to address them during the entire process.

Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to explore and understand the experiences of African American policewomen who work street patrol in police departments across the Midwest region of the United States. This study seeks to gain valuable insight into their work experiences and their perspectives on recruiting and retaining African American women in policing. The study examines how the intersection of race and gender operates as an oppressive barrier that shapes their daily work experience in law enforcement.

Prior research has indicated the need for future studies on the lived experiences of Black females in law enforcement (Kringen et al. 2018). The findings of this study

document the challenges and barriers faced by African American female officers. It underscores the unique intersectional challenges faced by the participants as they navigated working in racialized and gendered police organizations. This is supported by Todak and Brown (2019), who concluded that police departments were hypermasculine, gendered, racialized, and sexualized, which made recruiting minorities and women difficult. Additionally, the study explored participants' perspectives on strategies to improve the recruitment and retention of African American women in law enforcement.

The findings of this study suggest that police administrators must take deliberate and urgent action to eliminate systemic bias, microaggressions, discrimination, sexual harassment and racism, and sexism described by participants as their daily work environment. This action should take the form of updating police policies and practices to reflect zero tolerance for discrimination and other oppressive actions toward female officers, particularly those negative actions that target African American female officers, for example, hair policies. One important step to address discriminatory practices and harassment is to incorporate training beginning at the academy stage and throughout the organization, instilling accountability and fostering an inclusive culture at every level. Additionally, yearly mandatory training for all officers and command staff on implicit bias. Supervisors and command-level staff should be evaluated on their ability to foster an inclusive workplace culture free of discrimination and harassment.

Participants reported that sexual harassment complaints were not taken seriously or were ignored. Policies should be promulgated that clearly outline the procedures for

filing and investigating sexual harassment complaints. These policies must ensure that officers making complaints are treated fairly and protected from retaliation.

Organizational policies should outline specific, clear penalties for supervisors who fail to investigate complaints promptly and prepare a report of their findings.

Participants described a negative police environment where many felt their sex and gender made them targets for discrimination in career and training opportunities, and assignments. Organizations that embed accountability and enshrine protections within their organization policies to address sexual harassment, discrimination, and other practices that hinder the career growth of African American female officers help in creating a more inclusive workplace environment. Establishing practices that promote fairness in the workplace may lead to strengthening retention of African American female officers. Participants described a need to feel valued, respected, and supported.

Police administrators should seek to provide health and wellness and mentorship opportunities either within the organization or through non-profit or community organizations. Participants described the need for support services that addressed their respective needs as females. Additionally, law enforcement agencies should develop targeted recruiting campaigns that highlight African American female officers.

Advertising materials and social media platforms should showcase the presence and achievements of African American women in policing. Increasing the visibility of African American females in the community and in campaign materials demonstrates the agency's long-term commitment to diversity. This also has the potential to inspire other

women of color to pursue careers in law enforcement and encourage the retention of African American female officers.

Although this research has contributed significantly to the body of knowledge on African American women in policing, future studies are needed to expand on this research. Such a study could potentially support and validate the findings of this research. Additionally, future researchers could replicate this study to include a larger sample of African American female police officers. Replicating the study in different geographic locations, such as in southern or western regions of the United States, is another consideration for future studies. Moreover, this study was specific to African American female police officers; future research could broaden these findings by including female officers of other racial and ethnic identities. This would enhance the body of knowledge on all women with careers in policing in the United States.

Implications for Positive Social Change

The findings of this study present positive social change implications for police organizations, communities, and women in law enforcement, particularly African American female officers. This study highlights how giving voice to African American female officers can improve community trust and police legitimacy, improve equitable policing practices, and inform policy decisions. This research illustrates the contributions of African American female officers who have been underrepresented in policing and understudied in the scholarly literature. Documenting their verbatim lived realities contributes to the body of academic literature and also serves as a catalyst for change in

developing and transforming police policy and practices. Haazmat and Ruffin (2024) argue that failing to examine the effects of race and gender in the lives of Black female officers risks erasing critical research, policy, and practice considerations that address their unique experiences.

The recommendations in this study provide actionable steps, including departmental training, recruitment, and retention practices, as well as proactive remedies to address systemic biases, such as discrimination and sexual harassment. The recommendations also suggest that police administrators foster a positive work environment where African American female officers can flourish and feel supported and welcomed. The adoption of a welcoming police environment aids in the retention of African American women police officers and in the hiring of future women of color to policing. Diversity within the police agency, one that reflects the community's demographics, ultimately enhances trust within the community. Seeing African American women in uniform also shows the younger generation that they can become police officers.

This study reflects the unfiltered participant narratives chronicling their lived experiences working in a White-male-dominated police environment. The participants described how the hypermasculine police culture often did not welcome African American women in policing. A study conducted by Todak and Brown (2019) concluded that police departments were hypermasculine, gendered, racialized, and sexualized, which made recruiting minorities and women difficult. Evidence from this study suggests

that African American female officers face workplace challenges associated with discrimination, racism, and sexism. The narratives of the participants demonstrated their resilience and perseverance when faced with obstacles and inequities in the workplace. By providing department training for academy recruits and current employees on implicit bias and cultural diversity, the agency demonstrates that it is concerned about fostering a supportive environment for all employees to flourish. Participants reported that there was a need for mentoring and health and wellness support services for women in their agencies. Providing these services contributes to positive social change by enhancing the well-being and retention of African American female officers.

This research amplifies the voices of 12 African American female officers, allowing their contributions to both the police profession and the communities they serve to be heard and valued. Further, this research is valuable because it serves as a call-to-action challenging law enforcement administrators to confront systemic inequities, discrimination, racism, and harassment in the workplace. Moreover, this study is important to inform police policy that promotes an inclusive workplace of equity and respect for African American female officers.

In summary, this study highlights the need for police administrators to promote an inclusive and equitable workplace environment that addresses systemic bias, discrimination, and sexual harassment through accountability measures that include training and policy reform. Intentional and strategic recruitment strategies that include and highlight positive images of African American female officers are vital to creating a

diverse workforce and improving the recruitment and retention of these officers. Additionally, mentorship programs that begin in academy training and continue throughout their careers may empower African American female officers and support their personal well-being and career advancement. Lastly, elevating the voices of African American female officers and respecting their lived experiences is essential to shaping a police culture that is fair, equitable, transparent, and culturally competent is essential for fostering meaningful and lasting social change in policing.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research was to explore the lived experiences of African American policewomen working in male-dominated police departments in the Midwest region of the United States. Specifically, the study examined how participants experienced working and navigating environments that often devalued, marginalized, and disrespected them, while simultaneously attempting to silence their voices. Additionally, this study was designed to explore participants' perspectives on strategies to improve the recruitment and retention of African American women in law enforcement.

This study addressed a critical gap in the literature regarding the lived experiences of African American officers in law enforcement. The findings of the study contribute significantly to the body of knowledge on the lived experiences of African American female officers in law enforcement. The study provided an in-depth analysis of African

American female police officers, highlighting how the intersection of race and gender shapes their daily professional roles.

The findings, interpreted through a Black feminist theoretical framework described by Collins (2009, 2019), highlight the complexities faced by African American female police officers as they navigate intersecting systems of race and gender within a male-dominated workplace. The study revealed the unique challenges and barriers faced by African American female officers in male-dominated police agencies. Further, the research offered critical insights into how participants navigated a male-dominated workplace while simultaneously managing intersectional conflicts with peers, supervisors, and community members.

The rich narratives of the participants allowed me to present a perspective of the lived experiences of 21st-century African American female officers working patrol in Midwest agencies. Research has been limited in giving voice to this population of women. This research brings “authentic voice” to Black women whose voices have been marginalized and silenced. Black women finding their voice is an overarching theme of Black feminist thought (Collins, 2009).

The systemic bias faced by the participants revealed their resilience and perseverance working in a White-male dominated police culture where African American female officers are unwelcome and ostracized. Several participants stated that the journey was harder for Black women in policing. Sound advice on retaining and recruiting African American females in policing was described by the participants in this study.

Participants felt that their agencies needed to “treat them well to keep them.” This included addressing sexual harassment complaints, and discrimination in assignments, training, and promotions. On going systemic biases of racism and sexism, and microaggressions that made them feel disrespected and marginalized in the workplace were often cited by the participants.

Participants described that recruiting campaigns should show more positive images of African American female police officers and that recruiting efforts should be targeted in areas where Black women frequent. Participants strongly felt that those assigned to recruiting in their agencies should reflect the diversity of the community.

Police administrators must ensure that fair and equitable training opportunities are available for African American female police officers and that discrimination of all types is rooted out of the organization. Cultural sensitivity and implicit bias training should be core training objectives for all officers, supervisors, and command leaders. Police administrators should ensure that recruiting messages and images of African American female officers are part of their strategic recruiting campaign.

Prior research has indicated the need for future studies on the lived experiences of Black females in law enforcement. Although this research has significantly contributed to the gap in the body of knowledge on African American women in policing, future studies are still needed to expand on this research. Haakmat and Ruffin (2024) reflected that more contemporary studies were needed on the experiences of Black women officers and

how they navigate the intersection of race and gender as interlocking systems of oppression.

This study highlights the lived experiences, resilience, and empowerment of twelve African American female officers as they face challenges in the workplace. The study reveals how intersecting systems of race and gender contribute to microaggressions, systemic biases, and the marginalization of African American female officers. By centering their “authentic voices”, this study provides critical insight into the barriers they face within a male-dominated police culture. These findings not only address a gap in the literature but also contribute to a more in-depth understanding of how women of color navigate and resist oppressive systems in law enforcement.

Importantly, this study informs police administrators and policymakers by offering strategies to mitigate discrimination and sexual harassment, reduce marginalization, improve recruitment and retention, and foster workplace equity and inclusion. Further, it underscores the urgency of cultivating equitable, supportive, and culturally aware policing environments while providing a foundation for future studies that focus on the experiences and perspectives of African American women in law enforcement.

This research has amplified the authentic voices of 12 African American female officers. The candid and robust narratives from the participants depict their daily lived experiences as African American female officers working in a male-dominated police culture. Ultimately, this study gives visibility and voice to a group long underrepresented

and understudied in law enforcement, ensuring their experiences are heard, valued, and respected.

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Appendix A: Letter to CEO's

Letter to Chief Executive Officers (CEOs), Organization Presidents

Dear Sir or Madame:

I am Brenda Goss Andrews, a retired Detroit Police Deputy Chief, and the Immediate Past President of the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE). I am a doctoral student at Walden University pursuing a degree in criminal justice. I am recruiting African American female police officers who are uniformed, active, full-time sworn officers with at least two years of continuous patrol experience to participate in this important study. My research has indicated there is extraordinarily little research on African-American females in policing; therefore, this study will fill the gap in this understudied population.

Participants from the study will be recruited from Midwest police departments in the United States. The qualitative study entitled "Understudied and Underrepresented: Exploring the lived experiences of African American women in policing" will entail conducting face-to-face interviews with the participants. The interviews will be audio-recorded and last from 60 to 90 minutes. Confidentiality is of utmost importance in this study; participants will only be identified by a pseudonym or a numerical code, and all information will be kept confidential. No police department will be specifically identified in the study.

I am seeking your assistance in recruiting African-American female police officers from your department or organization to participate in this study by distributing the attached

letter with your approval. Supervisory, command-level, or retired females are not part of this study. I plan to begin data collection in August 2024. This study will fulfill my requirements for a doctoral degree and advance the law enforcement profession.

Sincerely,

Brenda Goss Andrews

Walden University Ph.D. candidate

Appendix B: Recruitment Letter

Dear Participant:

My name is Brenda Goss Andrews, a retired Detroit Police Deputy Chief, and a doctoral student at Walden University. I am conducting a study on African-American females in policing who work in police departments located in the Midwest region of the United States. The study is entitled, "Understudied and Underrepresented: Exploring the lived experiences of African American women in policing. Research has shown African American females in policing are the least studied, therefore, this study will add much-needed research on the experiences of this population and aid administrators in recruiting and hiring more African-American females for careers in law enforcement. I am seeking African American female participants in this study who are active uniformed sworn officers with at least two years of continuous police patrol experience with a local police department. Supervisory, command-level, or retired females are not included in this study. Also, active female officers who are not working in a patrol capacity will not be included in the study.

I will conduct the interviews, which will be audio-recorded and last from 60 to 90 minutes. Confidentiality is of utmost importance in this study; participants will only be identified by a pseudonym or numeric code, and all information will be kept confidential. No police department will be specifically identified in the study. I plan to begin interviews in August 2024. If you are interested in participating in this ground-breaking

study or know someone who fits the criteria, please contact me as soon as possible.

Thank you, and I look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

Brenda Goss Andrews

Walden University Ph.D. candidate

Appendix C: Demographic Information Questionnaire

Please read the following questions carefully by circling a number or filling in the space with your answer. Thank you.

What is your age?

1. 25 or less
2. 26-30
3. 31-35
4. 36-40
5. 41-45
6. 46 or older

How many years have you been a police officer with this department?

How long have you been working in a uniform patrol assignment?

Have you served in the United States military? Yes _____ No _____

If yes, how long did you serve in the military?

Years _____ Months _____

Are you currently a reservist with the United States military?

Yes _____ No _____

What is your family status?

1. Single, no children
2. Married, no children
3. Single with children
4. Married with children
5. Divorced, no children
6. Divorced with children

How many children under the age of 18 live in your household?

Are you a caregiver for any family member or individual living in your household? Yes _____ No _____

What is your level of education?

1. High school diploma or GED certificate
2. Associate degree
3. Vocational certificate
4. Bachelor's degree
5. Master's degree
6. Doctorate degree Specify type _____ i.e., JD, PhD, EdD

Are you currently a student? Yes _____ No _____

If yes, what degree of program are you pursuing? _____

Do you plan to retire from law enforcement? Yes _____ No _____

Undecided _____

Appendix D: Interview Questions

Interview Introduction

Hello, my name is Brenda Andrews, and I am a doctoral student in the School of Criminal Justice at Walden University. Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this interview. The purpose of this research is to explore and understand the experiences of African American policewomen working in police departments in the Midwest region of the United States and to gain valuable insight into their work experiences. Additionally, to gain knowledge on their perspectives about how to recruit and retain African American females in policing. Research has shown that there is limited research on African-American females working in policing. Therefore, the purpose of this interview is to talk about your work experiences and perspectives as an African-American female in this profession. Your participation will provide meaningful insight. I will ask you a series of questions on this topic. The interview should last approximately 60 minutes. After the interview, I will examine your responses which will be part of the research data collection and analysis. These responses will be shared with Walden University faculty members and staff.

Confidentiality will be the utmost priority during this research. You will not be identified in the documents, nor will anyone be able to identify you from your answers. Your agency will not be identified, nor will your supervisors be provided with your responses to any of the questions. You may choose to stop this interview at any time during the questioning. The interview will be recorded for transcription purposes. Data

from the interview will be stored, secured, and password protected. Before we begin, please review the Informed Consent document I have provided for you and if you agree to continue with the interview, please sign and date the document at the bottom of the page. After the interview, you may reach me at the following email address brenda.andrews@waldenu.edu. Do you have any questions before we get started?

Research Questions

RQ1: How do African American female police officers in police departments in the Midwest region of the United States describe their patrol work experience?

RQ2: What are the views of African American female police officers on how to recruit and retain more women of color for careers in policing?

Interview Guide Questions

Q. Let us begin by telling me why you decided to become a police officer.

The next questions will concentrate on your patrol work experience.

Q: What has been your experience working with White and Black male and female partners?

Q: Tell me about your experience with supervisory personnel.

The next series of questions will explore your feelings on being a Black female police officer working in a more male-dominated profession.

Q: What if any have been the challenges you have encountered on your job being an African American female in policing working in a mostly male-dominated environment?

Q: Tell me about your perception of how your race and gender may affect you at work with co-workers and supervisors. Explain any challenges or barriers that you have encountered.

The following questions will focus on your opinion and engagement with the community you serve.

Q: What are the advantages or disadvantages of being an African-American female working in your community?

Q: Tell me how the community you serve can support you as an African American female police officer.

The following questions will focus on your opinion about your chosen profession.

Q: How do you believe being an African American female in policing contributes to the law enforcement profession? How does it contribute to the public's perception of police?

The last questions will center on your perspective on the future of women in policing.

Q: In your perspective what can your agency do to recruit and retain African-American women?

Q: Tell me about any future career plans you may have in your department. For example, promotion to a supervisory rank, additional training, or transfer to a specialized unit?

Q: What advice would you give to other police departments that want to hire and retain more African-American women? What advice would you give on what they should do to retain African-American women in policing?

Q: Lastly, what are your views on the future of women in policing, particularly African-American women?

This concludes our interview. Thank you for your answers. Do you have anything else you would like to share? Do you have any questions for me? Thank you again for your time.