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# Attitudes of Black Americans, Towards Police Misconduct in an Urban Area

Demetric Rayshawn Armstead  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Demetric Rayshawn Armstead

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Walden University  
2019

Abstract

Attitudes of Black Americans, Towards Police  
Misconduct in an Urban Area

by

Demetric Rayshawn Armstead

MS, Troy University, 2008

BS, Delta State University, 2002

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

Walden University

May 2019

## Abstract

Little is known about Black Americans' experience with and attitudes toward the police. For Black Americans and the police to improve their relationship, police need to understand the factors that influence Black Americans' perceptions. Asante's concept of Afrocentric theory assisted with exploring the attitudes of Black Americans about police misconduct in a Southeastern United States urban area. The purpose of the qualitative ethnographic study was to understand the attitudes of Black Americans towards the police and the factors that influence those perceptions. This study precisely addresses three main questions: (1) how has media coverage impacted Black Americans' perceptions of officer behavior in the urban area; (2) how has the community environment impacted Black American perceptions of officer behavior in the urban area; and (3) how have officers' informal and formal behaviors impacted Black Americans' perception of police conduct in the urban area. A purposive sampling strategy was used to recruit 30 Black Americans for the semi-structured interviews who discussed their thoughts and opinions about factors that are associated with the Black American community. The data were coded resulting in 12 themes. Results from this study indicated that the majority of Black Americans had overall negative views about the police. The findings suggest that social change can only happen when the police and Black Americans work together to understand each other and address issues that come with a lack of understanding. Promoting good relationships through media, the community environment, and improving police encounters with the Black American community is critical to enhancing community relations.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my wife, Marquita, my son, Braylon, and my parents for their support as I obtain a doctoral degree. Through the extended hours they have always supported my dedication to this project. Also, to my Lord and savior Jesus Christ who has given me the strength and the ability to complete this research project.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Introduction**

Since the time that Blacks were brought to the United States against their will, they have been casualties of bigotry and unfair practices by police officers in the community; who should be treating all humans as equal (Chaney & Robertson, 2013). There are many examples of misconduct by police officers: The Watts Riots of 1965, the beating of Rodney King in 1991, Kelly Thomas in 2011, Gil Collar in 2012, Eric Garner in 2014, Ezell Ford in 2014, and Tamir Rice in 2014 (Chaney & Robertson, 2013). Thus, Black Americans have been historically assaulted and unjustly treated by individuals who enforce the law. As a result, Blacks tend to have less positive attitude about the police (Schafer, Huebner, & Bynum, 2003). Earlier research has sought to understand the racial and ethnic contrasts on the perceived of police by different ethnic groups (Cochran & Warren, 2012). Research has overwhelmingly demonstrated that Black Americans dislike police more than Whites. The increased dislike in the police can be caused by police misconduct and other community factors (Cochran & Warren, 2012). While research has shown the impact of race on attitudes towards police (Cochran & Warren, 2012), research has not studied Black Americans' attitudes towards police from the Black Americans point of view and the factors that can influence perception.

The goal of this research was to provide an Afrocentric voice from the Black American perspective about police. Research has studied minorities and White Americans combined. However, no study was found that put Black Americans at the center of the research questions in order to understand the factors that can influence their

attitudes towards police. The study of Black Americans' perspective about police has been studied from a White American point of view (Asante, 2003). Black Americans need to have a voice to help understand the factors that could influence their dislike of the police, a culturally sensitive issue.

Culturally sensitive research in Black Americans can use ethnic knowledge to provide scholars and the individuals involved in the study with understanding culturally sensitive issue of Black Americans perception toward the police (Tillman, 2002). A culturally sensitive perspective can put Black Americans as the focus of the study to help in understanding a specific issue (Tillman, 2002). This study looked at Black Americans attitudes towards police and sought to understand how Black Americans develop perceptions about them. The goal was to bring a new perspective to the understanding of an issue that had been created since the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century to 20<sup>th</sup> century of distrust and inequality between Black Americans and the police. Furthermore, the study was guided from an Afrocentric point of view that shared the ethnic, past, and present-day experiences of Black Americans (Asante, 2003).

The focus was on Black Americans, aged 20–50, and their attitudes towards police misconduct in the Tampa Bay metro area. The study has implications for positive social change: Police departments could review their policies and procedures in order to implement effective practices to help understand how to improve their relationships in the Black American community.

## **Background**

According to Betancourt and Lopez (1993), there is a concern when researchers try to study a culture not their own. Previous studies of Black Americans have been from a White American perspective (Hamlet, 1998). The majority of the research on Black Americans involves other ethnic groups, which limits the Black American voice. In this study, the attitudes of Black Americans, aged 20–50, towards police misconduct in the Southeastern United States was viewed from an Afrocentric point of view.

According to Goodley, Fairfax, and LaNey (2017), in order to address factors that can impact Black American perspective towards police can best be described through the Afrocentric theory. “Afrocentricity is a viable theory that utilize African philosophies, history, and culture as a starting place of interpreting social and psychological phenomena to create relevant approaches of personal, family, and community healing and societal change” (p.1). Therefore, the Afrocentric theory made Black Americans the voice of the study. Also, Afrocentric theory can create community healing and social change. Afrocentric theory has been used in the criminal justice field. For example, researchers used the Afrocentric theory to develop a program for Black American males in the juvenile system (Goodley & Smith, 2017). The researchers used the program to access Black American males using an Afrocentric point of view. The study helped develop a community policing response in Black communities with juveniles (Goodley & Smith, 2017). Hence, Afrocentric theory can be used not only in Black American studies but can help bring equity and purpose to an issue (Goodley & Smith, 2017). Furthermore, this research will provide information that will create a positive social change.



Critical ethnographic interviews were used to gather information through an emic Afrocentric approach that provided a voice for that Black American community made up of men and women, aged 20–50, towards police misconduct in the Southeastern United States. The Afrocentric theory has core elements that were used to allow Black Americans to provide information that helped in understanding the factors that can lead to the mistrust of police. Integrating an Afrocentric approach can provide a chance for relationships between the Black American community and the police, where the primary goals are to build community trust and promote justice (Goodley & Smith, 2017). Furthermore, through the use of qualitative ethnographic interviews Black Americans will be the focus of the research.

### **Problem Statement**

Seventy-five percent of Black Americans believe that police officers treat them unfairly compared to how they treat Whites (Weitzer & Tuch, 2005). But most Whites (77%) think that law enforcement officers treat everyone fairly (Weitzer & Tuch, 2005). In addition, race is still viewed by Blacks Americans and some Whites as the cause of the injustice faced by Black Americans in the criminal justice system (Crutchfield, Fernandes, & Martinez, 2010; Huggins, 2012; Rice, 2005; Roettger, 2008). Despite apparent improvements in diversity (James, 2018), conducted a study on 80 police officers because Black Americans tend to fear the police because of racial bias. The study revealed that there was racial bias among police in the course of their day-to-day duties. Today in the United States racial bias among police toward Black American is a pressing social concern (James, 2018). Due to high profile cases of unarmed Black American

citizens being killed by police officer raises a concern about police conduct and their bias attitudes toward social groups (James, 2018). For the purpose of, this study, police misconduct was defined as behavior—perhaps due to an officer’s biased attitude—towards persons of a different culture, race or background, that leads to mistreatment (Guthrie, 2000). The mistreatment of Black Americans by law enforcement in the past has been one of the leading causes of unease between the police and the Black community (Huggins, 2012). Black Americans’ attitudes towards law enforcement can be formed while interacting with the police or by viewing police conduct (Schuck & Martin, 2013). Compared to Whites, Blacks are more cautious around law enforcement and trust the police less (Schuck & Martin, 2013). Other stigma that significantly influence Black attitudes towards the police include media portrayals, the community environment (the level of crime in a neighborhood), police behavior, and interaction with police officers (Weitzer & Tuch, 2005).

Wu, Smith, and Sun (2013) suggests that police discretion, when police are given the right to make a sound judgement when there is no clear-cut solution (Lister, 2014), has a direct impact on citizens’ attitudes toward them. In addition, if a department has unaddressed issues with police misconduct in a community, it can be labeled as being an unjust or corrupt department (Wu, Smith, & Sun, 2013). Furthermore, it reduces the community’s trust in the police, and it hinders friendly relations between the police and the community. An increase in dislike for police can lead to aggressive responses from the community (Wu, Smith, & Sun, 2013).

To improve relations between Black Americans and the police, factors that influence the perception of police misconduct must be comprehended (Vogel, 2011). This research examined the factors that tended to influence the attitude of the Black American community toward police misconduct in the Southeastern United States. While previous research has used other races when reviewing the influence factors have on attitudes towards police, this research will dig deeper and focus only on Black Americans' attitudes. Three factors were reviewed: mass media coverage of police conduct, community environment (the level of crime in the neighborhood), and perceptions of officer behavior—both informal and formal—while dealing with individuals in the community.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative ethnographic study was to gain an understanding of Black Americans' perception of police misconduct, from an Afrocentric point of view, where the data were collected from individuals in the Black American community of the Southeastern United States. According to Creswell (2009), ethnography is a technique of analysis used by researchers to concentrate on a specific group in a community, in a normal setting, over an extended time frame. The data are gathered predominantly by observation and interviews. By documenting the factors that influenced Black American attitude towards the police, this study sought to help researchers, citizens, and police organizations understand how to improve community relations, decrease crime in neighborhoods, and assist law enforcement with decreasing bias and improving Black American experiences when encounters with the police occur.

### **Research Question(s)**

The research sought to examine how Black Americans' perceptions of the police are influenced towards police. Three comprehensive research questions guided this study:

1. How has media coverage impacted Black American perceptions of officer behavior in the urban area?
2. How has the community environment impacted Black American perceptions of officer behavior in the urban area?
3. How have officers' informal and formal behaviors impacted Black American perception of police conduct in the urban area?

### **Conceptual Framework**

The issue of Black Americans' attitudes towards police were examined through a conceptual framework of Afrocentrism. The Afrocentric theory, is defined as a perspective that puts individuals of African descent (African/Black American) at the focal point of the study by focusing on African-American history and culture. An attempt is to offer another point of view instead of the Eurocentric one, which has always been held as being more important (Cornelius, 2014; Tidwell, 2015). Thus, different points of view were offered regarding the social perception of law enforcement and the historical mistreatment of Black Americans by the police that have impacted the attitude of the Black American community in Southeastern United States (Tidwell, 2015; Schreiber, 2000).

The Afrocentric theory is growing quickly as a theory for developing an understanding of Black Americans specifically and individuals within the African diaspora more generally (Pellebon, 2007). Furthermore, from the perspective of addressing racial prejudice, an understanding of Afrocentric theory can help improve the relationship between law enforcement and Black American citizens (Pellebon, 2007). Therefore, to understand and develop knowledge about how attitudes are formed, this study sought to develop, with the help of Afrocentric theory, an understanding of the generalized factors that impact Black Americans' attitudes about the police.

### **Nature of the Study**

This was a qualitative study with an ethnographic focus. An ethnographic understanding is produced through investigation of a few bases of information (Creswell, 2009). An ethnographic approach will allow me to understand the social constructions of the attitudes of Black Americans toward police misconduct. Ethnographer develops data through personal interaction with individuals participating in the research to explain a human social experience by immersing in the research to explain a cultural phenomenon (Katz, 2019). I conducted interviews with members of the Black community in the Southeastern United States to try to understand the attitudes of Black Americans towards law enforcement. Thus, as a researcher, my goal was to pinpoint the general factors associated with the attitudes of Black Americans, aged 20–50, towards law enforcement officers, from an Afrocentric point of view, to help police and the Black community in identifying strategies to minimize the communication gap and shape community relations.

## **Definitions**

*Afrocentricity*: The method of understanding and action in which the center of Black American attraction, beliefs, and viewpoints are the focus. Afrocentricity places Black American at the center of any breakdown of Black American issue. The theory gives Black American a voice within their community (Asante, 2003).

*Police misconduct*: behavior that may be the result have been of an officer's biased or prejudicial attitude towards persons of a different culture, race or background, that leads to mistreatment of those individuals (Guthrie, 2000)

*Black Americans*: A person of African descent. However, that person is born in America making that individual a Black American.

## **Assumptions**

This study was based on the following assumptions:

1. Participants are willing to share information.
2. The sample size of 30 participants will be enough to form a conclusion about understanding Black American perceptions of police.
3. Participants who share information will have had some dealings with the police.
4. Participants will be open and honest about the information shared.

## **Limitations and Scope of the Study**

This study sought insight into Black Americans and their perceptions of the police. However, there were some limitations that could have hindered the research. 30 Black Americans were sampled for this study in the Southeastern United States. This

limited the bigger picture of understanding Black Americans' perception of the police. Another constraint was that only Blacks born in America participated in the study. This study left out Blacks of other descent, such as Africans, Jamaicans, or any other ethnic groups who are Black and have African roots but not American. Finally, being that I am Black and American to control this unintentional bias I sought to remain neutral so that the research was not compromised.

### **Significance of the Study**

To further understand and address the problem of Black American attitudes towards the police. It was important to obtain the perceptions of Black Americans who had encounters with the police. The negative perceptions of Black Americans often lead to unfavorable encounters with the police (Johnson, 2018). As Wiley and Slocum (2018) stated, supporters, believe there is a need for police reform in the way police interact with individuals in the community, especially with Black Americans. Thus, a conversation from the Black American point of view needs to be heard to develop policies and procedures that will develop change in the Black American community. When people have a favorable opinion about the police, the community tends to be cooperative and comply with police (Wiley & Slocum, 2018). Huggins (2011) stated, that many citizens feel the effects of racism that has occurred over the past. However, Black Americans perception of the criminal justice organization and their actors still are critical and trust the police less (Huggins, 2011). Hence, using critical ethnography, I was able to provide detail information from the Black Americans point of view on factors that have influenced their attitudes toward the police.

Results from this study will add further knowledge to the criminal justice field on Black American attitudes toward police. Along with criminal justice, public policy and administration field along with public safety could provide valuable information to those fields. The knowledge gained from the Black American voice about their views of the police can be used to develop ways to address the perception of Black Americans when there is an interaction with the police. Furthermore, the findings will provide information for improving police and the Black Americans relationship with both coming together to improve community trust.

### **Summary**

This ethnographic qualitative study explored Black Americans' perception of the police. The purpose was to understand the source of the perception towards the police. This study was needed because of the past and present relationship between the Black American community and the police. Previous research has focused on the attitudes of police by identifying the approval of police through demographics and by developing themes (Weitzer & Tuch, 2002) (Weitzer, R., & Tuch, S. A., 2004) (Weitzer, R., & Tuch, S. A., 2005). In addition, Black Americans approval of the police has not been understood with only using the Black American population to include factors that may influence their dislike of the police (Huebne, Schafer, & Bynum, 2004). This study sought to understand the factors that influence the perception of police within the Southeastern United States. Developing an understanding may result in an intervention that could build a stronger relationship between the local Black American community and the police.



In Chapter 2, I will take a look at the literature review. Then, we will move into chapter 3 which will review research method and research design along with the methodology. Chapter 4 will include results of the study. Lastly, chapter 5 will discuss and interpret the findings of the study.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

The main reason for gathering published information on the study was to identify a gap in the literature about the subject being studied. The existence of a literature review helps confirm any philosophies, beliefs, or particulars that the scholar may bring to light while conducting their studies. Furthermore, the literature review is proof that a study has been carried on (Hollowell, 2008).

This study sought to evaluate how Black Americans view the conduct of police and the factors that have influenced their attitudes towards police. The purpose of this ethnographic qualitative study is to offer an Afrocentric voice. Therefore, Black Americans will be the center of the research to provide an understanding of Black Americans' attitudes toward police. However, public perception of the police dates back to the 20<sup>th</sup> century of Augusta Vollmer (Granados, 1997). Vollmer developed a scale to evaluate police officers. Unfortunately, the study of police conduct did not begin until the late 1960s, when demonstrations in the urban ghettos increased (Brown & Benedict, 2002). As stated earlier, Whites hold a higher satisfaction of police unlike some Black Americans (Weitzer & Tuch, 2005).

The literature will be organized as follows: (a) I explain the importance of the Afrocentric theory, (b) I map out the factors that are linked with Black Americans' attitudes towards the police, (c) I review the past and current history between police and the Black American communities. But first, the literature search strategy will be described.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

The Afrocentric theory is used mostly in the African American or Black Studies, which is different from any other study in the field of public policy (Tidwell, 2015). Therefore, the research will focus on factors that tend to influence the perception of police to understand how Black Americans are pretentious. In addition, the study may assist with understanding the factors that can improve police policy and training, and enlighten community members, police, researchers, and leaders on issues that influence Black Americans' attitudes towards the police; this will be studied from an Afrocentric point of view.

The search method used has varied among the use of books, articles (Google Scholar, Sage Journals, Thoreau and National Institute of Justice), and online search strategies to find material for the research study. Therefore, using peer-reviewed journal articles to gather data will support the research in understanding factors that are relevant to Black American perception. The majority of the research material was gathered through internet sites (Thoreau and Google Scholar). The research study also used the Criminal Justice Database, Political Science Complete, SocIndex, Taylor and Francis online, Bureau of Justice Statistics and SAGE Journal (formerly SAGE Premier) for research information. When using these online resources, keywords were entered to find articles related to the study, such as *Black Americans attitudes towards police, police misconduct toward citizens, White Americans, sample size, racism, triangulate, minority, African-American and police, race, class, perception, ethnography, Afrocentric,*

*Afrocentricity, minority, qualitative study, sample size, racial profiling, racism, police, justice* and any other keywords related to police and Black American citizens.

While conducting research on Black Americans attitudes toward police, there were several articles related to citizen's perception or attitudes that is essential in assisting with covering some of the gaps in this study.

This chapter features a dialog of important literature on forecasters of Black Americans' attitudes towards the police. Therefore, the first review will consist of the Afrocentric theory, and then focus on the previous exploration that used Afrocentric theory. The study will next examine Black Americans and the perceptions of the police. The review will move on to factors: mass media coverage of police conduct, the community environment], and perceptions of officer behavior – both informal and formal. That have been recognized by researchers in the past to shape perspectives of the police within Black American community. The first section will cover the conceptual framework of this study.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this research is Afrocentricity theory. Afrocentricity theory is a guide to assist with understanding and improving issues such as wellbeing, finance, governmental awareness, ethnic, and mental issues in the Black American community, by making them the primary voice of their story (Asante, 2003). Therefore, in this research, the data collected made the Black American community the main focus of the study, using ethnographic interviews that deal with factors associated with the police. Also, interviews assisted with the factors that can cause cultural sharing

patterns in the Black American community (Tidwell, 2015). Likewise, the negative perception held by Black Americans towards the police is not new; however, it continues to be an issue in the Black American community. The next couple of segments will define Afrocentric theory and give information about the key philosophers of theory. Then, previous studies that used the Afrocentricity theory in their research will be displayed. Lastly, the information will cover the characteristics and factors that shape Black American perceptions of police in this literature review.

When directing a study on themes that might be seen as current and hypothetically subjective, it is imperative to conduct an analysis of the literature which gives experimental, qualitative confirmation for any assertions it has about the study or backings, in combination with qualitative study and past documentation. Thus, Afrocentricity is a word that is utilized in the Black American community that describes the ethnic morals of the African ancestry. Likewise, Afrocentrism tries to stress the importance of removing cruelty and religious isolation from the Black American community, created by Eurocentric concepts (Schiele, 1996). There have been two key philosophers of the Afrocentricity theory – Molefi Asante and Maulana Karenga (Asante, 2003). Both were key figures in moving Afrocentricity from theory to practice, and in influencing research on Black American people. The authors proclaimed two fundamental aspects of the Afrocentricity theory – innovation and tradition. The fundamentals are important in part because of past historical processes to improve the nation. Therefore, the fundamental purpose by Black American researchers is to foster the generation of the new in order to use the theory and share older cultural ideas through

the voice of Black Americans, which has not been told correctly through the Eurocentric viewpoint (Asante, 2003; Tidwell, 2015).

Thus, Afrocentricity is a theory that will be used to guide this research in understanding the Black American voice. Furthermore, having an African focused mentality, shared through Black Americans, should be seen as more of a subject rather than an object, through the Black American voice that will help to complete gaps in understanding the attitudes of Black Americans towards police misconduct (Asante, 2003).

### **Afrocentric Theory and Its Important Philosophers**

Afrocentric theory is defined as being concerned with Black Americans' epistemological significance, which views problems from a Black American's perspective rather than from a Eurocentric view (Asante, 2003). Afrocentricity is used in Black Studies to evaluate data. The theory of Afrocentricity commands that Africans (Black Americans) be observed as humans other than things; examining this philosophy, belief, and realm gives Africans a superior comprehension of how to translate problems influencing the Black American communities. Hence, Afrocentrism is a theory that tries to place Black people at the center of the study (Asante, 2003).

This study will, therefore, use this theory to focus on the attitudes of Black Americans. No research has used the Afrocentric theory to study the factors that tend to influence Black Americans attitudes towards police. Likewise, past studies have viewed citizen's perceptions from a quantitative approach to focus on citizen's perceptions in general, and Black American perception has not been the focus. Thus, this qualitative

study will concentrate on Black Americans as the focus to examine the attitudes developed about the police, using an Afrocentric perspective that will be explained from the Black American point of view, while being understood by all Americans (McCollum, 1993). The next section will discuss the philosophers behind the Afrocentric theory, and offer insight as to why this theory will be used to understand Black Americans attitudes towards the police.

The main scholarly standard in the exploration of Black American experience during the previous two eras has been through the use of Afrocentricity. There were several key philosophers of the study – M. Kete Asante, A. Mazama, L. James Myers, M. Karenga, and R. Reviere. Afrocentricity has been the main way to evaluate the Black American experience while viewing issues in the Black American community (Ferreira, 2009). M. Kete Asante is considered the primary philosopher of the Afrocentricity theory. He arrived at this theory when he realized that it was unreal for a Black American man to have a White person's name (Pellebon, 2007).

Asante (2003) believed that the Afrocentric theory is a way of providing solutions to all ethnic, financial, governmental, and community questions that pertain to the Black American society. Likewise, Karenga, who worked on the Afrocentricity theory in the 1960s, was an influence on Asante. Due in part, Karenga worked to modernize Black American history, which had an impact on Asante's expansion of the Afrocentricity theory (Pellebon, 2007). However, Asante believes that White Americans falsified the history of Black Americans. Therefore, the learning of Black Americans history through Afrocentricity is the main focus for Black American development, which is an ongoing

public debate because of the Black American experience in the United States. Consequently, after not having a voice, Black Americans struggle to protect our humankind, to protest for rights, and to take in the mistreatment of Black Americans by Whites. Afrocentric speakers have developed a theory that will give Black Americans a voice to be understood (Jackson, 2004). Additionally, there are certain general characteristics of Afrocentrism that should be used in order to address problems in the Black American community (Asante, 2003).

Asante (2003) offers five general characteristics of the Afrocentric methods:

1. The Afrocentric method deliberates that no phenomenon can be captured without the actual phenomenon first. There has to be a study and investigations of the phenomenon in order to psychologically establish a relationship for allotment and capacity. This is the best way to explore the mind-boggling interrelationships of a society.
2. The Afrocentric method views phenomena to be assorted, in order for an individual to take transcripts precisely and record the area of wonders of phenomena even in the midst of change. Therefore, the researcher has to understand which side they are standing on during development.
3. The Afrocentric method is a type of social feedback that analyzes elements of words or language. This permits us to cross thoughts with activities on the premise of what is imaginative, and can change at the governmental and financial level.



4. The Afrocentric method reveals the truth behind the abuse of language in order to understand how main folklores generate a dwelling.
5. The Afrocentric method finds the creative structure of an arrangement of government, economics, and perception of attitudes from groups, course, and a phenomenal understanding in the research (Asante, 1998; Mazama, 2003).

These characteristics are key methods that will shape the understanding of Black Americans' attitudes towards police misconduct, in building an understanding of the research through the Black American voice.

### **Historical Research Using Afrocentric Theory**

Researchers have used the Afrocentric theory to understand different issues in the Black American community. However, the main focus has not been on understanding the Black voice about issues in their own communities. For example, Bent-Goodley and Smith (2017) took a view of Black American communities and law enforcement using the Afrocentricity theory. The qualitative study studied the challenges that Black Americans and law enforcement have been faced with due to Black American perceptions of police. Furthermore, they evaluated eight key elements (interconnectedness, self-reliance, fundamental goodness, language and oral tradition, thought and practice, spirituality, communalism, and self-knowledge) that could help improve the relationship between Black Americans and police by using an Afrocentric theory. However, the study had no discussion with Black Americans (e.g., police administration, professionals, preachers, etc.).

This is a qualitative study, and the articles covered were related to the use of Afrocentricity in Black American communities, and the study of Black American perception of law enforcement in previous research. Furthermore, this qualitative review will focus on research dealing with Afrocentricity in the Black American community and the perception of Black Americans' attitudes of the police. The literature review will be analyzed based on when the study was conducted, its accomplishment, and its methodology. This review will demonstrate the importance of this study.

In the field of social psychology, Blair, Judd, and Fallman (2005) organized four experiments which stereotyped people based on race. The study started with giving only a biographical narrative of a person. Next, the individuals were revealed for study through a sequence of pictures of individual faces, and the applicants were told to evaluate the likelihood that the faces studied were the ones being labeled. The results of the study were that Afrocentric featured individuals – those who had Black American features or similar – were stereotyped more than others without those characteristics. Hence, the study viewed that there were two forms of stereotyping – racial category and Afrocentric facial features. Thus, this research will define stereotyping in this instance as putting groups based on race into categorization.

In this quantitative study, Blair et al. discovered that applicants verified that stereotypes controlled how they felt about different cultures a lot. However, the individuals in the study were uninformed about the Afrocentricity theory (features) to make a rationale decision about the stereotypic implications. As noted, the applicants were even given clear information in regarding the Afrocentric features, but they could

only establish and identify pertinent features (Blair et al., 2005). Furthermore, the study concluded that despite using Afrocentric theory (features) stereotyping even with the knowledge that humanity has about race, people still use judgements about an individual's appearance (Blair et al., 2005).

Hollowell (2008) wrote a dissertation titled "Control and resistance: An Afrocentric analysis of historical and current relationship between African Americans and the police" by using the Afrocentricity theory to explain Black Americans and police relationship, thus explaining that Black Americans have been challenged with having a relationship with the police since being brought to the United States. This research is a qualitative study that views the data collected through the Afrocentric lens. The study reviewed programs and organizations that uncovered the rate of police misconduct (Results Oriented Management, Inclusivity/Transformation Model of Evaluation, Citizens Against Police Abuse [CAPA], The October 22<sup>nd</sup> Coalition, Copwatch, Communities United Against Police Brutality, The Police Complaint Center, The National Police Accountability Project, Refuse and Resist). The study examined Black Americans and their relationship with the police. The author exposes the fact that Americans wanted to control Blacks. Therefore, this created the need for current policing of Black American in the United States. The entire study is led by the Afrocentric theory. According to Hollowell (2008), "[i]n this study, the main focus is on the various methods of resistance that Blacks have utilized, with special attention paid to alternatives to the behavior of control by police departments" (p. 5). Hence, the results of the study concluded that there was an issue of trust between the Black American communities and

the police. Likewise, underprivileged and employed Black Americans display a huge mistrust for the overall police department (Hollowell, 2008).

The use of the Afrocentricity theory will add to this study by filling in any misunderstandings in the literature that does not have Black Americans as the main focus of the exploration. There are several studies that discuss Black Americans; however, there is a lack of direct communication with Black Americans using their voice in the research study. The unique part of this study is that the Black American voice will be heard and add to the study aim to understand the perception towards police. Furthermore, it is important for Afrocentricity to be used because the focus will be on Black Americans, and this has not been the main focus of literatures in the past (Tidwell, 2015).

### **Race and Perception of the Police**

Racial difference has been the main focus of previous studies that are related to how citizens feel about the police. Black Americans have been a target for study for many years out of all minorities. Hence, Black Americans' attitudes have been less favorable towards the police than White Americans (Brown & Benedict, 2002; Wu, 2009). Many incidents have occurred that led to hostility towards the police, such as riots, police beatings of minorities, the acquittal of an officer, plus the influence of media coverage and stories about police brutality (Brown & Benedict, 2002).

Scholarly researchers have described Black Americans' perceptions of the police as less favorable than Whites due to more interactions with the police, unlike White Americans' perceptions that are formed through media, and not having direct contact with the police (Schuck, 2005). For example, (Kamalu, 2016) one of the studies that is

offered have shown that racial profiling exists. Therefore, due to the notion that most drug offenses are committed by Black Americans, police tend to target this group in order to fight drugs. This leads to more arrests of Black Americans, causing them to have high police contact – especially in the lower level Black American communities. Many studies have demonstrated this regarding innocent Black Americans, who have been a prey to police due to racial profiling, leading to a high contact with them.

Many Black Americans feel that there is a sense of injustice in the criminal justice system. Thus, there is clear indication that Black Americans feel that courts and police discriminate in part due to a person's skin color (Hagan & Albonetti, 1982; Mann & Wilbanks, 1996; New York State Judicial Commission, 1991; Wilbanks, 1987; Wortley, Macmillan, & Hagan, 1997). Black Americans overpopulate the criminal justice system due to unequal treatment by the police. However, the results can vary depending on the location and the main focus of the research. Black Americans are targeted by police because they are viewed as a threat for more being more likely to commit a criminal act (Crutchfield, Fernandes, & Martinez, 2010). Undeniably, studies have shown that most Whites are in favor of the criminal justice system. Whites believe that the criminal justice system shows no favoritism. However, Black Americans view the criminal justice system with a more prejudiced or racial perception (Wu, 2009).

The research shows that world is unjust when it comes to the Black Americans and the criminal justice system. There has been an overwhelming increase in the incarceration system of Black Americans. For example, between 1979 and 2009 in America, the correctional institution increased its population to over 430%. Also, the

crime rate increased to about 3%. There are over 2.2 million individuals behind bars – Black Americans, Whites, and others. However, Black Americans are under supervision 10 % more than any other race (Donnelly, 2017; Glaze & Herberman, 2013). Thus, a change has to occur in order to stop the unequal percentage of Black Americans in the criminal justice system (Donnelly, 2017). The high level of incarceration of Black Americans in the criminal justice system brings serious questions about the equality of police in America (Wu, 2009). Hence, Black Americans think of the police as individuals trying to satisfy their quota and oblige individuals of higher authority (Cashmore, 1991; Wu, 2009). Furthermore, when driving as a Black American there are problems with the police () that should concern police organizations and discrimination of some White officers (Wu, 2009).

Black Americans are more likely to be pulled over by the police than Whites. However, the data needed to confirm this information is limited. A survey was conducted of law enforcement interaction with citizens by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (2001), which found that Black Americans were less likely to report being stopped by police. Likewise, Whites were more likely to report being stopped and report the use of force from the police, in a survey conducted in 1999 (Weitzer & Tuch, 2002). Hence, Black Americans were less likely than Whites to have their vehicles searched. This creates unease in the Black American community. Therefore, a Black American perception is formed that creates distrust among the Black Americans towards the police. Studies have indicated that Black Americans stopped by the police report leaving the scene feeling

displeased or irate at the end (Weitzer & Tuch, 2002). Furthermore, Black Americans are critical of the police, and that continues to create a gap in their relationship.

Race still plays a vital role in Americans, influenced by criminal and cultural studies. Prejudice and segregation has been a part of the American past. Therefore, many Americans feel that past events of race and discrimination have led to a difference in the perception of how police officers are viewed. The issue of race has major effects in the criminal justice system (Huggins, 2012). Hence, Black Americans feel that police hassle and treat them differently. Huggins (2012) conducted a study, in the North Carolina community, of individuals being pulled over by the police for insignificant traffic violations. In this quantitative study, data was collected on Black Americans and Whites to understand the citizens' perception of the police. Likewise, traffic stops were believed to be a main focus of how citizens drew their conclusions about the police (Huggins, 2012). The research included factors like the race of the officer, the race of the citizen, and if paired, with the race of both. The number of individuals surveyed were over 80,000 citizens from the state of North Carolina. However, no matter the race the police were reviewed in a different way. Most of the citizens reviewed the police in a positive way, while Black Americans still viewed police officers more negatively than Whites (Huggins, 2012).

Many researchers believe that how Americans respond to certain manners is due in part to the make-up of how humanity is built to label individuals as offenders. Hence, there is no avoidance in the association between the queries of race and crime (Esmail, Penny, & Eargle, 2013). For all these reasons, Black Americans are labeled as criminals,

due in part to being at the bottom of the social and economic class. Stereotypes are formed when individuals are placed into labels. This is partly due to Black Americans being more likely than Whites to be put in jail by the police. Likewise, Whites who commit similar crimes go to jail at a lesser rate, as statistical analysts suggest (Esmail et al., 2013). For example, Black Americans are overrepresented in the criminal justice system. In 2014, Black Americans male prison population was 59% (De Giorgi, 2016). The criminal justice system is unevenly populated because Black Americans ages 18 and over make up 10% more of the prison population than whites (De Giorgi, 2016). Hence, Black American men between 30 and 39 who are in prison compared to Hispanics, and whites of the same age group; Black American men make up 6% more of the prison population than any other race (De Giorgi, 2016). Furthermore, the racial disparities of Black Americans in prison should be a concern to the criminal justice system and the practice of police organization.

The incident in Ferguson, Missouri, brought about a race war between White Americans and Black Americans, along with the police. Michael Brown, a young, unarmed Black American male, was shot and killed by a White, male police officer, Darren Wilson. A national poll (New York Times/CBS News) was conducted to see how White Americans and Black Americans viewed the police – especially the incident of the unjustified shooting of Michael Brown (Carter, Corra, & Jenks, 2016). In respect to this case (Michael Brown), White Americans were seen as being more likely to believe that the shooting of the unarmed teen was justified. Likewise, Black Americans were more likely to believe that the shooting was unjustified. However, both groups wanted justice



to be handed down at the end (Carter, Corra, & Jenks, 2016). Hence, there have been several studies on White attitudes toward racial issues about the police. Furthermore, studies wanted to know if their trust in the police was geared from believing that the police were justified in their actions, or determined by racial attitudes (Carter et al., 2016).

There has been a great deal of focus into following public attitudes toward the police in America (Apple, & O'Brien, 1983; Carter et al., 2016; Rosenbaum et al., 2005; Weitzer & Tuch, 2005). According to Carter et al. (2016), in order to understand citizens' opinions toward the police, there are three views to consider first: a) the police render services to the citizens and can replicate a precise description of the duties of the police; b) in order to do their job, the police need to have a positive interaction with the public to provide safety to the communities; c) studying attitudes is also helpful in comparing attitudes. Finally, the Americans' attitude has been seen to be positive, overall, towards the police.

The above statement is not for all Americans, however. It is a general expression toward the police and is not uniform across all ethnic groups. Thus, when evaluating the police, females (older) who are educated and have a higher income tend to support the police more, unlike their male colleagues in this study. The study associated race and ethnicity when evaluating the police. Hence, in the evaluation established that whites show more positive opinions than any other minority group (Carter et al., 2016). Furthermore, the study showed that Black Americans, along with other minority groups,

lacked the trust in the police due in part to an edgy relationship between the Black American community and the police (Carter et al., 2016).

The study revolved around racial resentment, which racial attitudes are compressed by the tenacity of undesirable racial distress. Therefore, racism is developed in the early stages of life. Researchers claim that while old-fashioned bigotry is decreasing, undesirable racial affect is not, and is still a basis of race associations in the United States (Carter et al., 2016). Moreover, the purpose of the information was to show the impact of racial resentment on Whites' attitudes toward the use of force by police in Ferguson, Missouri. The information shed light on the racial divides between Black Americans, White Americans, and the police. Furthermore, the study concluded that more research was needed on the racial resentment of whites' attitudes toward police (Carter et al., 2016).

The influence of past studies would suggest that not Black Americans dislike the police unlike the Whites, who show favorable perceptions of the police. Moreover, Whites trust the police in the area – such as how the police treat citizens fairly, and that equality is provided by the criminal justice system (Langan, 1994; Wu, 2009). Hence, there have been limited studies which concluded that race is the overall result of the citizens' assessment of the police. Avdija (2010), for instance, said that ethnicity was not the predictor of citizens' attitudes towards the police. However, the study showed that sex, race, public relations with police, police performance, and fear of criminal revenge were indicators of how perception was created by citizens.

There are several incidents that can affect the attitudes of the public. Thus, the perception by Black Americans or citizens can be affected by anything that occurred in the past, and over a certain period of time. Hence, research has shown that the views about police have been steady overall (Tuch & Weitzer, 1997; Yuning, 2009). However, public opinions of the police from Black Americans may differ in certain citizens regarding their reason for their dislike towards police, but their attitudes about police are usually similar. For example, Howell, Perry, & Vile (2004) studied Black Americans and believed that the majority of Black Americans felt the same about the police. In addition, the researchers viewed that Black Americans' attitudes about the police were consistent across the board. Hence, an incident of police misconduct seen by the media in two cities can have a different outlook from Black Americans in both cities, but this incident will have the same reaction from Black Americans towards the police in both cities (Chermak & McGarrell & Gruenewald, 2006).

### **Factors that Shape Public Perceptions of Police**

The opinions of citizens about the police vary among the public. In addition, factors (i.e. mass media coverage of police conduct, community environment [the level of crime in the neighborhood], and perceptions of officer behavior – both informal and formal) have an outcome on the perception towards the police (Yuning, 2009). However, Black Americans tend to have similar factors that influence their overall perception towards the police. The color of skin and factors (i.e. mass media coverage of police conduct, community environment [the level of crime in the neighborhood], and perceptions of officer behavior – both informal and formal) tend to be an indicator of

Black Americans' dislike of the police and other criminal justice organizations (Weitzer & Tuch, 2004). However, there is much to learn about the factors that only tend to influence Black Americans' attitudes toward the police (Weitzer & Tuch, 2004). Most information is geared towards individual demographics and not on the nondemographic factors, such as mass media coverage of police conduct, community environment (the level of crime in the neighborhood), and perceptions of officer behavior – both informal and formal – while dealing with individuals in the community (Weitzer & Tuch, 2004). Furthermore, the research will examine whether these factors influence Black American perceptions towards the police.

### **Mass Media Coverage of Police Misconduct**

Studies have documented the coverage of mass media's impact on the views of citizens towards the police. This impact depends on the information that is provided by the media to captivate a particular audience, which can be influenced by the media organization's message (Chermak, McGarrell, & Gruenewald, 2006; Weitzer & Tuch, 2004). Therefore, the media may be the main basis for people's attitudes of police validity. For example, researchers debate that media typically concentrate on the negative aspects of how the police handle crime, and not on the positive valiant actions of the police (Chermak et al., 2016). Researches identify an indicator that persuade attitudes toward police, and that indicator is that the intake of negative information by the media can have a negative effect on the perception of citizens, especially Black Americans, about the police (Chermak et al., 2006). Weitzer and Tuch (2005) establish that Black Americans were limited about the positive aspects of police. In addition, studies have

shown that race plays a major role in the perceptions towards police due to the effects of media publicity (Chermak et al., 2006).

### **Community Environment**

Traditionally, the relationship between Black Americans and the police has been a problem. Hawkins and Thomas (1991) explain how the current policing tactics that are used to keep Blacks in the projects (ghettos) in the nineteenth and mid-twentieth century were used in Europe. Similar police methods are being used in the U.S.A. to keep Black Americans under control and to protect the investments of the rich. Therefore, over policing in the Black American community has always been an issue in Black American neighborhoods in recent years. Scholars argue that communities that are in poverty have a likelihood for a surge in police brutality. Furthermore, today's policing uses the same techniques due to the fact that the bulk of Black Americans still live in poverty-ridden neighborhoods and have heavy police presence (Robinson, 2017).

Most Black Americans in these communities are dissatisfied with the conduct of policing officers. Furthermore, in lower poverty communities Black Americans are faced with violence, drugs, and a high crime rate (Turner, 2012). Hence, Black American communities tend to have increased patrol in their communities. An increase in police force tends to lead to less favorable reviews about the police – not because of police presence, but due to unethical conduct such as illegal stops and searches, verbal abuse, disrespect, and excessive forms of police misconduct going reported and unreported in high crime communities (Turner, 2012). For example, police view Black Americans and Whites in a different way when patrolling. Many studies propose that Black Americans

are more of a threat to the communities than Whites (Cronogue, 2014). In addition, Black Americans are policed more violently. The theory that Black Americans are more violent has caused the police to increase their level of force in the community, leading to police misconduct (Cronogue, 2014). When there is a lack of trust in the Black American communities, it is developed from the lack of confidence in the police providing protection in the community. Furthermore, due to the lack of trust from Black American communities and police misconduct, police will lack the support from the Black American community to assist in police investigations and follow laws (Chenane, Wu, & Song, 2017).

### **Black American Perceptions of Officer Behavior**

Police deal with citizens on an informal and formal basis in the Black American community. Many people tend to shy away from interactions with the police, which sometimes are understood and come with the territory. Black Americans living in neighborhood conditions with high crime rates tend to need the police. However, they are less reluctant to have close dealings with police (Hahn & Jeffries, 2003; Yung, 2009). The influence of police interaction with the public can have a negative or positive influence on the public perception of the police. A negative experience with the police has a stronger influence than a positive experience (Weitzer, 2004).

When citizens are treated unfairly and rudely, it leads to unfavorable assessments of the police. Hence, there is a difference by race of assessments about the police, when there is a negative encounter. Black Americans feel that reporting a negative encounter with the police will not change the police. However, Whites feel that reporting negative

experience will lead to change (Weitzer, 2004). For example, Black Americans are stopped by the police at a higher rate than Whites. Black Americans who were stopped and had been cited or searched by the police were more likely to report police misconduct, unlike whites who were stopped (Weitzer & Tuch, 2002). Furthermore, this research also seeks to answer if police interaction has an influence on Black Americans' attitudes about the police.

### **Summary**

The majority of Americans are in favor of the police. However, Black Americans are the less likely to hold favorable opinions and attitudes towards the police. The factors that have been included in the literature view have been some structural factors of Black Americans' attitudes about the police. However, Black Americans alone have not been involved in a study that represents them, to understand if these factors influence Black American satisfaction of the police. The factors that have been included have an influence on the American population. Hence, the factors discussed are strong indicators of how Black American perceptions are formed.

This research uses the Afrocentric perspective to gain an understanding of the factors that influence the perception of Black Americans' attitudes, in a study only about Black Americans. Thus, the new study motivates an understanding of Black American perception about the police. This research will study how Black Americans' attitudes are influenced by the factors in their communities. The information will be led by members of the community; the research will assist in providing information to guide awareness and possible solutions for improvement in perceptions between Black Americans and the

police. Chapter 3 will provide information on the research design and the basis for the research.



## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

The review of the literature has shown that most of the studies about Black Americans' attitudes toward the police have been written by White researchers. There is limited information written from a Black American point of view. Thus, the purpose of this ethnographic qualitative study was to develop a voice for the Black Americans. The data being collected from the interviews is vital to understanding Black American attitudes about the police. Norman and Yvonna (2012) have suggested that the only way to interpret and explain the lived experience of a culture is by gathering information through interviews, observations, and other observers' written interpretations. The main aim of this study was to evaluate Black Americans' attitudes toward the police and to identify factors that can influence those attitudes. The research questions were kept open-ended to allow the questions to be expanded, if needed. In this chapter, I will discuss the research design and rationale, ethnography, my role as a researcher, the rationale for selection of the participants, the instrumentation used, the procedures for the pilot study, the data analysis plan, and issues of trustworthiness.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

This section consists of the research questions and the ethnography research design rationale.

### **Research Questions**

This research sought to examine how Black Americans' perceptions influence their attitudes toward the police. Three comprehensive research questions guided this

research.

1. How has media coverage impacted Black American perceptions of officer behavior in the urban area?
2. How has the community environment impacted Black American perceptions of officer behavior in the urban area?
3. How have officers' informal and formal behaviors impacted Black American perception of police conduct in the urban area?

### **Rationale for the Ethnography Design**

Ethnography has been used in qualitative studies for over a century. It emerged in the Western world as a specific type of information about diverse cultures (Silverman, 2016). Ethnography is a qualitative practice that includes the investigation of human conduct inside a cultural setting, which is a method for portraying a culture's or a specific socio-cultural group's lifestyle. Moreover, ethnography has expanded its meaning from those types of research that follow a methodological perspective to a great degree (Silverman, 2016).

According to McGranahan (2014, p. 24), "The word ethnography comes from Greek - *ethnos* means 'folk/the people' and *grapho* is 'to write.'" Ethnography is an old term that has been used for decades. It implies methodical investigation of faith, culture, traditions, lifestyle, and habitations of different people – everything that belongs to their internal and external life. Anthropologists believe that Bronislaw Manlinowski is the founding father of ethnographic study, because of his relationship to the people he

observed and to the individuals he studied. He has published several books and kept dairies of his accounts of cultural anthropology through the twentieth century (Hoey, 2008). On reading Manlinowski's dairies, researchers have gained a better understanding of cultural ethnography. Furthermore, using ethnography, researchers can create an understanding of culture through adumbration along an emic viewpoint (Hoey, 2008).

Ethnography provides information on community collaborations, manners, and perceptions in cultural groups that can be researched to provide helpful understanding of individual views and actions. Thus, it is labeled as the interpretation of different communities of people (Brown & Casanova, 2014). An ethnographic study is conducted through in-depth observation and interviews (Reeves, Kuper, & Hodges, 2008). The central idea of using ethnography is that it will provide insight on a social phenomenon – for instance, the existing Black Americans' attitudes toward the police (Reeves, Kuper, & Hodges, 2008).

The main purpose of this study is to evaluate Black Americans' attitudes toward the police. The research questions will examine how the factors associated with Black Americans' attitudes about the police has influenced their perception or negatively impacted their estimation of Black Americans from an Afrocentric theoretical approach. The purpose of undertaking a qualitative research is to administer impartial and trustworthy information in a layout that is pertinent and significant to the target group (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Kruth, 2015). The target audience in this study is the Black American community in Southeastern United States. Moreover, a qualitative approach, such as the ethnographic approach, allows the researcher to become submerged in the

study, to share in the cultural involvement and to add a personal view (Kruth, 2015).

Thus, scholars select this type of strategy partly for the adaptability of the study (Creswell, 2009). Likewise, the qualitative approach purposely seeks a thorough understanding of the significance, perceptions, meanings, traits, images, codes, and descriptions of – in this case – the phenomenon of how Black Americans view the police officers in the Southeastern United States in a negative or positive manner.

There is a common definition used for ethnography, as the branch of anthropology that pertains to the study of a particular culture by providing detailed information about it (Pelto, 2016). That definition mirrors a past time in sociologies. There was, in fact, a period when the word ethnography was coined primarily in the field of anthropology. Many sociologists have developed a better understanding through recognized studies such as the ‘Chicago School’ (Pelto, 2016).

The Chicago School studies about the life of humans using ethnography, which is comparable to anthropological research in some significant respects. Ethnography has been used to gather information about individuals’ social life to study patterns of life in a case study (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Hence, the Chicago experiment changed how sociological work was influenced by the ethnography theory. Furthermore, anthropologists around the globe have started including the ethnography method in their study to assist with the study of a group’s culture (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007).

This design has been chosen because previous studies have produced similar information, but not from the Black American view point. Likewise, the Black Americans and the police have struggled to connect within their respective communities

due to current and historical issues (Johnson, 2016). In this study, ethnography is a precise qualitative custom that will assist with the unfolding of the way of life of a specific cultural group (Silverman, 2016). Kappeler, wrote that, “The birth and development of the American police can be traced to a multitude of historical, legal and political-economic conditions” (Johnson, 2016, para 4). The police used to control the behavior of Black slaves. Therefore, during the American Revolution, laws were created to control slaves and not to protect them (Johnson, 2016). Likewise, Black Americans today have to address and face the challenges of being killed by the police without reason or being held accountable for their actions (Johnson, 2016). Furthermore, the Black Americans only want to seek the same equalities that are enjoyed by the White Americans.

Many approaches can review Black Americans’ attitudes toward police. Hence, there are five main qualitative research designs that can explore Black Americans’ attitudes about police misconduct – narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case studies. Each one of them are backed by unique traditions that can support the research. Narrative research can provide personal stories from within a culture or group (Lewis, 2015). Phenomenology is a philosophy that puts principles back into being which allows the researcher to examine the circumstance not of the researcher own knowledge, but wants the researcher to have an open mind without using their own assumption that already exist (Schwandt, 2014). Grounded theory can provide information on intervention methods to assist with issues within the community (Lewis, 2015). A case study is used for success stories or unsuccessful stories within a group to

show accomplishment or downfalls of certain programs (Lewis, 2015). Ethnography can be used for information and understanding a particular group to assist with rectifying the issues in a culture (Lewis, 2015). Furthermore, the reason the researcher choose ethnography is to inform the police and the community about understanding the attitudes of Black Americans toward the police.

Ethnographic research relies on using the self to understand another culture or understanding your own experience. Hence, the researcher becomes the instrument for the study (McGranahan, 2014). Thus, ethnography will be used in this study to explore Black Americans' attitudes toward police misconduct in the Southeastern United States to assist with understanding this phenomenon. The critical principal of ethnography is to comprehend an alternative way of life within a culture from a different viewpoint (Spradley, 2016). Furthermore, the aim of the interviews and the observations for the study is to better understand Black Americans' attitudes toward police through an Afrocentric view point.

### **Role of the Researcher**

The role of the scholar in gathering and understanding data is essential to ethnography (Plowman, 2016). Ethnography is used in research to provide open-ended interviews and individual observations in their community about their lived experience (Plowman, 2016). My intention is to look into Black American experience when faced with certain factors that can influence their perceptions about the police. Like any other ethnographers, the researcher plans to rely heavily on interviews, observation, and field notes taken from formal conversations for data that will be placed into categories or

themes (Abdulrehman, 2015). The researcher will try to contact participants through different means – e-mail, telephone, and face-to-face conversation. The information will then be transcribed, coded, analyzed, and interpreted by the researcher. Also, friends and family of the researcher will not be included this study. The focus will be on community members in the Southeastern United States. In ethnographic study, the ethnographer is the instrument for research that includes his/her social skills and knowledge, which are the key components of information gathering (Abdulrehman, 2015). However, when you are representing individuals, it is difficult because the information has to be accurate and represent their culture, allowing them to share their viewpoints (Madison, 2012).

In ethnographic studies, staying objective is the best. As stated by Lahlou, Bellu, and Mariani (2015), subjective evidence-based ethnography captures overt behavior through first-person point of view. Subjective evidence deals with providing only the information gathered from the data collected while leaving my own opinion out. The researcher will need to remain neutral to the study in order to provide useful information to my readers on the issue. The researcher will need to let the data speak for itself and provide the correct information, and not assume or judge any information provided by the participants. Also, the researcher will have to treat all participants with respect and keep all information confidential. Furthermore, anyone consenting to participate in this study upon approval of the research will be sent an email of the findings.

### **Methodology**

Critical qualitative approach can be used to study the life experiences and its connection to authority and truthfulness. Critical ethnography is a qualitative technique

that empowers the scholar to not just consider and comprehend culture, but gives the chance to experience that life through the scholar's research (Harrowing, Mill, Spiers, Kulig, & Kipp, 2010). Critical ethnography is grounded in hypotheses presuming that the society is organized according to class and position, and also by culture, society, sex, and sexual orientation to keep up the persecution of relegated groups. Thus, it has the responsibility to address moral issues, inequality, and discrimination within a specific culture or group (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). Yet, critical ethnography enables the members in the community by questioning the circumstance and tends to focus on the present power and control structure in America (Thomas, 1993; Tidwell, 2015). Thus, critical ethnography will allow me to concentrate on the Black American community with reference to their attitudes toward police misconduct. Furthermore, it will allow me to challenge past studies, policies, and any other unethical events that have created tension in the Black American community against the police. In order to understand what created the tension between the police and the community, the circumstances have to be understood in order to have a positive social change to transpire (Tidwell, 2015).

### **Participant Selection**

In this ethnographic study, the researcher will provide information on the following subsections: participant selection logic, instrumentation, procedures for recruitment, participation, data collection, and data analysis plan. The target population for this study has been Black American men and women ages 20 - 50. The target has been purposefully culturally centered to Black Americans to understand their attitudes toward police conduct to address the gap in the research. Thus, the Black Americans who



fit the standards are the following: being male or female, living in the Southeastern United States, has dealings with the police, are between the ages of 20–50. The study will put no limit in terms of economic status or profession. However, this information will be provided in the final studies of the participant demographic. The research will exclude Black Americans not living in the Southeastern United States, but will not include all Black Americans who are American-born. However, all Black Americans will not be able to be identified in order to concentrate on understanding the issue of Black Americans' attitudes toward police conduct (Tidwell, 2015). Furthermore, the research will not include all African descendants (i.e. Haitians, Africans, and so on), but will focus only on American-born Black citizens and will try to limit any outside influence.

For the selection of participants, the researcher will find local malls and community events, where the researcher can hand out surveys to elicit participants for the study from different communities. This will be done by seeking the consent of gatekeepers (Creswell, 2009). There will be a letter written, addressing these gatekeepers for the study. Once the letter is approved by the institutional review board (IRB), the information will be sent to the gatekeepers for access into the community. The researcher will purposefully seek out individuals who were involved with the police in the Southeastern United States. This is key to establishing relevance and to ensure diversity in the research developed from the criteria (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013). The participants will be selected from the following criteria: they have to be male or female, aged 20–50, must have interacted with the police, and live in the Southeastern United States. In purposive sampling, the selection of informants is based on the criteria

needed to be research informants (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013). The participants will be selected after the criteria stated for the selection of participants for the research. The participants will receive a \$5.00-dollar gift card to Starbucks for their participation in the study after the data has been collected.

The reason for the age range is that the median age of men and women in Southeastern United States is 34 (Current Southeastern United States, Population, Demographics and Stats in 2016, 2017). Hence, the age range chosen is for having enough diversity in the sample, who have interacted with the police. Given the median age, the researcher believes that these are the ages Black Americans may possibly have interactions with the police. My focus is to comprehend these age group's attitudes toward the police to understand the factors that influence the perception of Black Americans toward police conduct. This will assist in understanding how these factors impact the communities of Black Americans. For this study, the participants need to be American-born Black citizens who understand the culture and struggles of Black Americans (Tidwell, 2015).

The research questions will guide these ethnographic interviews when interviewing the participants. With this research, the researcher wants to study only the Black American experience in understanding the factors that may influence Black Americans' attitudes, from personal experience or reaction to what they have heard or seen about the police. The sample size will be 30 participants. This number may allow the researcher to reach the "saturation" point, and the research will have then reached the point of being non-productive (Mason, 2012).

### **Instrumentation**

Studying Black Americans is important as it can provide a broader framework for more accurate understanding and can lead to better relationship between Black Americans and the police. The understanding can bring about a wide-range assessment of Black American experience through ethnographic interviews (Owiti, Palinski, Ajaz, Ascoli, Dejongh, & Bhui, 2015). According to Whiteside (2005), the ethnographic process is a good way to ask open-ended questions and to complete semi-structured interviews that can be answered through emic validity. The use of semi-structured interviews in this research is for the purpose of understanding Black American participants in their environment and interpreting the language of reply from the interview questions that will aid the comprehension of the issue (Whiteside, 2005).

The semistructured interviews can use an open-ended format. The interviewer is free to change the format of questions or topics in order to explore areas for the research, in other words, the interview does not have to follow rigorous guidelines (Pearson, Barr, Kamil, & Mosenthal, 2002). The researcher was able to cover all areas of interest for the study using semistructured interviews. This format will enable me, the interviewer, to examine other problems that have not been considered earlier in research. Furthermore, the interview participants will be comfortable with the format, allowing them to engage in dialogue and provide more information during the interview (Pearson, Barr, Kamil, & Mosenthal, 2002).

The plan was to set up interview questions that can explain the attitudes of Black Americans from an Afrocentric viewpoint. Therefore, the use of critical ethnography

creates a balance in removing bias, adding to comprehension, and providing an explanation for the research (Dey, 2002). My plan is to develop interview questions that will be based on answering the research questions. The elements of the questions will come from the literature found in Spradely's study (1979). There are several ways to conduct interviews. However, for ethnographic interviews, the researcher can have a friendly exchange that involves observing cultural rules for asking questions (Spradely, 1979).

When structuring questions for the interview, it is necessary to seek information that will provide as much data about the research topic as possible. Hence, the researcher should have the capacity to illustrate the points and goals of the research. In ethnographic interview, the effective questions should be open-ended, which can be answered with more than a yes or no (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008). The best way to receive information is with easy questions. This can help the participants be comfortable so that they can provide rich information that will build up the research (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008). Furthermore, to stay on track without having set standards, the Spradley (1979) model will guide the interview questions.

The Spradley (1979) model has three steps to guide ethnographic interview questions, which are descriptive, structural, and contrast questions. It will assist in developing questions that will lead to quality, informative data when questioning the participants (Berg, 2004). In order to receive accurate information, the questions should have a general focus on the investigator and the stakeholders, to help understand the purpose of the research (Berg, 2004).

The first set of questions will ask the participants age, the area that the participants are located, the age of the participants, sex, number of prior criminal offense (do not need to know specific offense), and educational background. The second set of questions will be descriptive in nature. A descriptive question will generally evoke a basic, provoking reaction within thin limits to encourage investigative reflection. This type of question allows a researcher to gather a recurring sample of participants' verbal communication (Spradley, 1979). Regularly, the appropriate response appears as a solitary story, unfolding the participant's lived experience (Magilvy & Thomas, 2009). Hence, descriptive study or questions may be a model for the upcoming research that may assist other researches consisting of a survey (Magilvy & Thomas, 2009). The use of descriptive questions will provide accounts from Black Americans about their experience or views of police interaction, and how different factors influence their perception (Tidwell, 2015). Descriptive questions and tour questions interrelate, because these questions allow recall and verbal breakdown of the Black American perception from an Afrocentric point of view. The simplest form of questioning is asking descriptive questions in interviews (Spradley, 1979). Furthermore, the use of descriptive questions and tour questions will lead to openness in Black Americans' responses to the study.

Structural questions will be used in this research to follow the Spradley model. These questions empower the ethnographer to find data about areas – the fundamental units in a participant's social knowledge (Spradley, 1979). Structural questions allow the interviewer to have a meticulous agenda, with the questions asked in a precise order. With the use of structured questions, every effort is made to guide how the questions are

asked to participants. This becomes helpful when trying to remove bias from the information gathered from participants (King, 1994). Structural questions enable us to discover how participants have sorted out their insight (Spradley, 1979). This will hopefully put participants at ease, to allow valuable data to be gathered for the research.

The last of Spradley model questions for guiding the interview is contrast questions. The researcher needs to grasp what a participant implies by the different languages utilized as a part of the cultural idiom. Contrast questions assist the researcher to find the importance of the information provided, to recognize situations that have occurred in their reality (Spradley, 1979). The contrast questions will hopefully assist me to empathize with the Black American voice through an Afrocentric point of view in exploring their attitudes toward police misconduct (Tidwell, 2015).

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

The procedure used to find and select participants in ethnographic qualitative study is central for controlling bias and for effectively acquiring a sample. In a complex culture, participant recruitment needs to be carefully thought out (Arcury & Quandt, 1999). The Black American community will be the focus of this study, from an Afrocentric point of view rather than a Eurocentric point of view. Creswell (2002) has developed an outline for choosing participants for a research project: (a) receive approval from the IRB, (b) identify key informants, (c) identify a site where I can use purposeful sampling techniques, and (d) assure the safety and protection of information and participants.

### **Institutional Review Board**

The IRB was founded in the United States to protect the rights of human subjects (Domenech, Corralejo, Vouvalis, & Mirly, 2017). There are certain ethical principles that have to be followed to assist with guiding the research project. There are three principles that researchers have to consider when conducting research: respect for human participants, beneficence, and justice. Therefore, to make sure that the guidelines are followed, the researcher will provide consent information, the reason for the study, and the reason for selection of the research participants (Domenech, Corralejo, Vouvalis, & Mirly, 2017). Lastly, the researcher will communicate with the IRB on reaching a common goal in order to provide understanding of Black American perception toward police that will only benefit the communities and assist with moving the research forward upon approval (Domenech, Corralejo, Vouvails, & Mirly, 2017).

### **Identification of Key Informants**

It is important that as a researcher, the key informants (gatekeepers) are identified in order to gain access to the communities in which the researchers is about to embark on (Creswell, 2002). There can be challenges in the recruitment of participants. Thus, building a rapport or receiving support from gatekeepers is important. Community leaders (gatekeepers) will have an important role in gaining access to the Black American community that the researcher otherwise may not have access to (Namageyo-Funa et al., 2014). My intentions will be to seek out members in the Black American community through meeting, personal letters, emails, or professional conversation, and recruitment of participants through purposeful sampling that will aid my research in understanding

Black Americans' attitudes toward the police. Once the gatekeepers are identified and the approval is given, the researcher will use the surveys to identify participants and select them through purposeful sampling. The participants have to fall under the following criteria: they have to be male or female, aged 20 -50, have interacted with the police, and live in the Southeastern United States. The semi-structured interview questions will be asked at a private location that is convenient to the participants.

### **The Safety and Protection of Information of Participants**

This research will be guided by strict IRB criteria. For the participants in the research, the researcher will provide a written letter that will include why the location has been selected, the information that the researcher intends to gather, the time needed to collect the information, if there is any potential danger to the individuals participating, and how the researcher intend to use the information in the community (Creswell, 2002).

My plan is to use a consent form for the study that will be given to the participants and the gatekeepers. The consent form will be scanned to a file on my computer and will have a password linked to it. All information and data collected will be stored in a password-protected external hard drive (Nosek, Banaji, & Greenwald, 2002). To protect participants identity real names was not used, only alias of the participants. This will protect their identity and uphold their confidentiality.

### **Data Collection**

This is a qualitative study; therefore, it will use qualitative methods including field notes taken from conversations that will be placed into categories or themes. Hence, the categories or themes will aid in providing information about the research to inform



the stakeholders. Also, this will include observations about the Black American communities, taking descriptive notes of what is occurring. It will also include one-on-one semi-structured interviews with participants, in which they will be asked open-ended questions, which will be recorded for accuracy. The participants will be asked to meet at a library or private area where there is privacy to conduct the interviews and convenient for the participant. All information about the participants will be gathered by the researcher to be used in the research.

### **Data Analysis**

Ethnographic analysis transforms information that is collected through written documents that comes from gathering thoughts about the culture while being active in the field (Thorne, 2000). Thus, ethnographic study includes filtering and dealing with bits of information to distinguish and translate categories, scan for irregularities and logical inconsistencies, and create decisions about what is occurring and the reason for the issue (Thorne, 2000). The emphasis of the study will be to concentrate on the research questions: (a) How has media coverage impacted Black American perceptions of officer behavior in the urban area? (b) How has community environment impacted Black American perceptions of officers in the urban area? (c) How has officers' informal and formal behaviors impacted Black American perception of police conduct in the urban area? My hope is that the interviews will help me understand Black American culture through viewing relationship patterns among the Black American community. The study will use an ethnographic approach, which involves a thorough exploration of the focus group. The researcher will analyze open-ended interview responses and use coding to

help bring meaning to the information gathered. Coding will be accomplished using the NVivo software, and the data will be gathered and interpreted using manual coding.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

Clemente (2003) has stated that culture is a crucial component in a person's life since it builds a variety of opportunities accessible under decided principles, characterized through separate opportunities, the conduct of which is restricted by laws and includes cognizant decision, which can give significant meaning to a person and is a common sign of individuality. Social contract is something that exists not in unbiased realism, but rather because of human collaboration. Social contract theory exists, since people agree that it exists. Social construct theory addresses concern about justice and fairness. Social construct theory is not one to develop in a particular culture or to run a particular government. Rather, the controlling thought is that the principles of justice for the essential structure of civilization are the object of the original contract (Rawls, 2009). Furthermore, the focus of this research is to have a voice of the Black American community through an Afrocentric viewpoint in understanding Black Americans' attitudes toward police misconduct, which will help both the police and the Black American communities toward resolving the issue.

Triangulation can be used in different techniques or data sources in a qualitative research to create an understanding of a circumstance. It is used to test legitimacy of the data collected (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014). The practice of triangulation needs to happen when a researcher looks to merge and authenticate data – in this case, for a qualitative study, which will ensure dependability and conformability of

the data collection. Thus, it can assist with interviews and observational data to measure achievement (Smith, 2017). The collection of data in qualitative research is carried out through interviews, field notes, and observations (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014). Furthermore, the data collected will be guided by triangulation to reduce bias and verify that it is accurately described (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014).

### **Ethical Procedures**

The executing of Black Americans, usually unarmed, has been met with frustration from Black Americans due to the lack of accountability by the criminal justice system in police-involved incidents. The lack of response by the government and limited action by the legal system exhibit how Black Americans are treated differently by law compared to the White Americans (Staggers-Hakim, 2016). However, the study of Black Americans in relation to the justice system cannot not have a positive outcome because Black Americans are viewed as individuals who are incapable of goodness and reason (Madison, 2012). All citizens should have value in the criminal justice system. However, the lack of value has been shown throughout the century toward Black Americans (Madison, 2012; Tidwell, 2015). Black Americans will be the center of this study, with the use of an Afrocentric approach. The use of critical ethnography will make sure that the data collected will put Black Americans at the center and that they are treated fairly.

There are ethical concerns related to recruitment materials. The researcher will use surveys to recruit participants for the study, once approved by the IRB. The researcher will have the participants sign consent forms for the study. All forms and notes

taken will be scanned to a secure hard drive that will be password protected. The information will be destroyed once all information has been stored in a secure hard drive. The consent forms and surveys will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home to protect all information. Once the researcher has the IRB approval, a number will be provided. The participant's information and data collected from them will remain anonymous. Also, the researcher will use alias or initials in the study to protect the identity of the persons involved in the study. The main concern will be to protect information of all participants and to make sure that documents are kept secure in a hard drive through password-protected software.

### **Summary**

This chapter discussed the qualitative method and process that will be deployed in this research. Then, the ethnographic methodology that has been chosen to explore the attitudes of Black Americans, aged 20–50, toward police misconduct in the Southeastern United States has been discussed. The researcher hopes that by exploring this topic, the information gathered will effect a social change in law enforcement (Thomas, 1993). This chapter discussed the research design and rationale, research questions, the ethnography research design rationale, role of the researcher, methodology, participant selection, data analysis, issues of trustworthiness, and ethical procedures. The researcher hopes that using critical ethnography interviews, the researcher will be able to gain information from Black Americans through an Afrocentric point of view that will allow me to completely tell the story of Black American perception of the police.

Chapter 4 will present the results gathered from the data collected from the interviews and data analysis.

## Chapter 4: Results

### **Introduction**

This ethnographic study focused on Black Americans' perceptions of police misconduct via in-depth interviews. According to Creswell (2009), ethnography is a technique of analysis used by researchers to concentrate on a specific group in a community, in a natural setting, to seek that community's viewpoint. The goal of this ethnographic study was to gain an understanding of Black Americans' perception of police misconduct through an Afrocentric lens. The research questions that guided this study were as follows:

1. How has media coverage impacted Black American perceptions of officer behavior in the urban area?
2. How has the community environment impacted Black American perceptions of officer behavior in the urban area?
3. How have officers' informal and formal behaviors impacted Black American perception of police conduct in the urban area?

To answer the research questions, data were collected from Black American born citizens through surveys and interviews with female and male participants aged 20- 50. This study offers an account of the Black American experience with, and resulting attitudes toward, police misconduct in the Southeastern United States. The significance of this study is that it will not only provide insight into the perceptions that Black Americans have of their local law enforcement, but it will also provide insight in how

police departments could develop an organizational and cultural change to improve relations between the two groups.

In this chapter, I will cover the following topics: setting, demographics of the participants, data collection process (including methods used to gather and analyze the data), data organization, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, primary research questions and findings, and lastly, summary of the study.

### **Setting**

After the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the study (Approval No. 05-17-18-0542147), surveys were distributed at The University Mall and at local fraternity and sorority Greek functions. Sixty surveys were passed out and collected in order to identify those participants who qualified for the semistructured interview. When a potential participant was approached, I explained that this was a voluntary study and that they were under no obligation to participate. If the candidate met the research criteria by answering the survey questions, he or she was then invited to participate in the study. All candidates were notified that the information they provided would assist in gaining an understanding of the research topic. Moreover, the information was expected to help work towards building a better understanding between the police and the Black American community.

Overall, out of the 60 surveys answered, 53 participants were identified as having met the criteria for the study. According to Mason (2012), saturation is the point in the research where the study is being non-productive. Subsequently, participants were then contacted to participate in a semi-structured interview. If an individual could not

participate, another individual was chosen from the reserve list of qualified participants. Selected qualified participants were contacted either by email or by phone to set up an appointment for the interview. To protect their privacy, interviews were conducted by phone or at another location if a participant was unable to meet at the library. In order to ensure accuracy, all participants agreed to be recorded for interpretation purposes only.

The researcher made certain that participants were comfortable so that they felt at ease to speak freely. Specifically, this was done so by asking participants to elaborate on their answers. At the conclusion of each question, they were also asked if they had anything else to say regarding the question. I did not set a timeframe for each interview to avoid rushing the participants. Despite the length of each interview, proper methodological protocol was followed.

### **Demographics of the Participants**

The study utilized purposive sampling strategy to select participants who were used in this who represented the Black American community in the Southeastern United States. Of the 30 participants, men and women were represented evenly at 15 each with all residing in the Southeastern United States. Further, all participants identified as Black American, ranging from 20 to 50 years in age, and deriving from a wide variety backgrounds experience. Table 1 provides the breakdown of the participants in the study. The table will indicate the participant's initials (to protect identity), age, residential area, and gender.



Table 1  
*Participant Demographic Breakdown*

Participant	Age	Residential Area	Male or Female
BB	46	Riverview	Male
RW	47	Apollo Beach	Male
AR	43	Temple Terrace	Male
AC	31	Wesley Chapel	Male
DW	33	New	Male

Table 2  
*Participant Demographic Breakdown*

Participant	Age	Residential Area	Male or Female
CG	26	Riverview	Male
MD	42	Wesley Chapel	Male
GC	39	New Port Richey	Male
CM	42	St. Petersburg	Male
KH	42	North	Male

Table 3  
*Participants Demographic Breakdown*

Participant	Age	Residential Area	Male or Female
JR	50	Seminole Heights	Male
YW	38	Carrollwood	Male
MH	21	Ruskin	Male
DC	47	Riverview	Male
CI	34	Valrico	Male

*(table continues)*

Table 4  
*Participants Demographic Breakdown*

Participant	Age	Residential Area	Male or Female
CB	32	Largo	Female
KK	30	Tampa	Female
SR	38	Ruskin	Female
LD	42	Temple Terrance	Female
SR	38	Temple Terrance	Female

Table 5  
*Participants Demographic Breakdown*

Participant	Age	Residential Area	Male or Female
BA	39	Ruskin	Female
TR	35	Temple Terrance	Female
TW	29	Wesley Chapel	Female
RW	48	New Tampa	Female
SR	38	Temple Terrance	Female

Table 6  
*Participants Demographic Breakdown*

Participant	Ages	Residential Area	Male or Female
JC	27	Brandon	Female
VC	49	Temple Terrance	Female
GF	29	Plant city	Female
CD	38	Wesley Chapel	Female
SC	38	North	Female

Table 1 through 6 displays biographical characteristics of the participants, which includes age, residence, and gender. As one can see, ages and residences varied among participants; however, opinions regarding law enforcement were similar. The population sample included only Black Americans and not individuals of African diaspora (Jamaicans, Africans, Haitians, etc.). The main location for the study was set up through a gate keeper at a local mall and the Black American Greek organizations in the Southeastern United States.

### **Data Collection**

Participants were identified through survey responses that were passed out at two locations with prior approval from gatekeepers (Appendix A). Participants were selected based on the researcher's own criteria. The data collection consisted of 30 individual interviews of Black American born citizens—15 men and 15 women, ages 20 -50. Interviews were conducted in privacy either at a particular location selected by the participant or by phone. Moreover, interview times were selected based on each participant's schedule. The semi-structured interviews lasted between 40 minutes to an hour. All participants agreed to have his or her interview recorded by giving verbal permission. The recordings of the interviews were used solely to ensure accuracy during transcription.

In addition, prior to the interview, all participants were given an informed consent form to sign either by email or through personal contact. The informed consent form provided the participant with an overview of the study, procedures, sample questions, voluntary nature of the study, risks and benefits of being in the study, and privacy

(Appendix B). All information gathered followed protocol procedures outlined and approved by the IRB. Furthermore, all information collected throughout the study was kept secure on a password-protected computer that could only be accessed by the researcher.

The interviews were designed as semistructured interviews. As such, the interviews were formally set up with each participant and the researcher used an interview guide to ensure that all relevant topics were covered. However, the interview format provided opportunities for the researcher to diverge from the interview guide and ask additional questions to further explore certain topics. Since the interview was being recorded, the researcher went back after and transcribed the responses to provide an accurate account of the interview. The researcher used the same set of interview questions and followed the same procedure when conducting the interviews to also ensure accuracy.

As previously mentioned, the interviews were conducted either in-person or by phone. Twenty-three of the interviews were conducted by phone and the other seven were conducted in-person. The in-person interviews were conducted in places selected by the participants where they felt most comfortable. Examples of these places include a restaurant, office, college campus, home, and library. Allowing the participants to choose a comfortable location for their interview put them more at ease to develop a rapport with the researcher. Specifically, the environment allowed for the participants to speak freely about this controversial topic. As a result, the researcher was able to gather valuable data

through both nonverbal and verbal communications, which provided additional information to understand a phenomenon (Lindlof & Taylor, 2017).

### **Data Analysis**

The data were collected through ethnographic semi-structured interviews. Initially, participants were required to answer three questions in reference to their demographic background to determine if they qualified for the study (Appendix A). Specifically, the demographic questions enabled the researcher to identify individuals who are Black American in order to interview them about their perceptions of law enforcement. The three questions are as follows: (a) When and where were you born? (b) Are you an American born citizen? (c) When and where were your parents born? These questions were informed by the study's three central research questions: (1) How has the media coverage impacted Black American perceptions of officer behavior in the urban area? (2) How has community environment impacted Black American perceptions of officers in the urban area? (c) How have officers' informal and formal behaviors impacted Black American perceptions of police conduct in the urban area?

The interview questions consisted of descriptive, structural, and contrast questions. The questions were developed to understand the research topic of Black Americans' attitudes about police. According to Spradley (2003), the structure of these questions is to make sure that communication between individuals becomes more natural and has no set standard. Furthermore, all questions were developed for the intended purpose of understanding the Black Americans' life experiences with law enforcement and how those experiences shape their perceptions of them.

The researcher used NVivo 12 qualitative data analysis software to transcribe all 30 interviews. All recordings were put into the system manually. NVivo assisted in the coding of text, developing of themes, and storing of documents. During the first two weeks after concluding the interviews, the researcher focused on identify keywords throughout the text. As the data was encoded, themes began to emerge. Subsequently, after nodes were created, remarks from participant interviews were added to the nodes to identify similar words. Hence, the NVivo software was able to identify common words and experiences among the interviews. Furthermore, the NVivo software was used to assist the researcher in identifying every interaction, expression, term, and idiom shared by participants. These will be included when themes are addressed. Overall, once information was observed to be repetitive it was assumed by the researcher that saturation had been met.

### **Emerging Themes**

Themes were developed from patterns found in the transcribed interviews. The following section will present direct responses from the critical ethnography interview questions. As previously stated, all participants were asked a sequence of questions that were made of descriptive, structural, and contrast questions. The themes are organized according to the order by which questions were asked to the participants.

The attitudes of Black Americans towards police and their conduct were defined in the first question. Specifically, participants were asked open-ended questions that allowed them to express in-depth their thoughts. For instance, answers to the first question resulted in the first theme, which defined police misconduct. Overall, the

majority of participant, for the most part, had a negative experience with the police. Still, some admit that although they have had negative experiences, they believe not all law enforcement are bad. This theme will be addressed in a later section. Still, the next section will provide descriptive, structural, and contract questions the help guide this critical ethnography's interview questions.

### **Themes and Breakdown of Critical Ethnography Interview Questions**

The first set of questions (all questions are set in italics) established a basis to explore Black Americans' perception of law enforcement. The participants are identified by their initials, which can be found in Table 1. Moreover, participant initials are used to attribute the source of each quote. The coding allowed the researcher to place similar thoughts and ideas together in order to share similarities in responses or thought processes.

#### **Theme 1: Different Treatment**

*Police misconduct for this research is described as behavior that may be the result of an officer's biased or prejudicial attitude towards persons of a different culture, race or background, that leads to mistreatment of those individuals. With that being said, please describe your understanding of police misconduct?* Responses to this question varied among participants; however, the common theme among these responses were how law enforcement treated Black Americans unequally. For example, RW stated:

I believe it starts how they treat people. I see very simple offense incidents result in fatalities. Which most of the time it is left up to the officer's discretion. Then you look at the video and see that the person did not do anything before they were

killed. I know it plays itself out in court. However, you can have the same person the same age, the same crime with the same criminal history and the black person gets more time than a White person. Then, if a White person gets pulled over. They will give them every benefit of the doubt, but me retired from the military get asked do you have any drugs in the vehicle. This is just how we are treated. There have been many times when they can deescalate the situation and they don't.

CM made another point about mistreatment and police conduct,

When an officer pulls someone over that is of a different race and mistreats that person because of their race and the way, they appear. It is what I deemed to be a case of police misconduct.

RW further described,

Treating a person of a different race differently if they do not look like you. They have issues with mistreating people that don't look like them. They abuse their power to get individuals to do what they want them to do. It is unethical behavior.

All participants defined police misconduct in their own way. This was the first question that established how participants felt about police misconduct.

## **Theme 2: Violence in the Community**

*Please describe to your knowledge of police misconduct, if any, in the Black American community?* A consistent theme in the response to this question was the concern Black Americans have over the killing of unarmed Black men and women by the police. Specifically, when asked this question, all participants mentioned that the



continually killing of unarmed Black men and women was an example of how law enforcement treat Black Americans harshly compared to White Americans. CD stated:

I see this every day. There are so many different stories that we see in the media and news of how police mistreat Black Americans. Even in the way that they handle Black American citizens opposed to our White counterparts. If a White officer arrests a black male, it is a different type of treatment. They are made to sit down on the ground spread your legs and this is different treatment when they are handling White males. Also, the tone of voice that they have when dealing with Black Americans is different when they have dealings with White individuals. If you are Black and driving you get pulled over, it is no telling what might occur or what is going through that officer's mind. There are a lot of things I have personally seen in the community that is upsetting. Even the killing of unarmed Black males.

GC indicated that there have been several cases in the Black American community such as Eric Garner, who was put in a chokehold. He said:

It is happening too often in our community that we are hearing of killings of Black Americans by the police and nothing is being done about it. If this continues to happen, it will be hard to repair the relationship between the Black American community. In general, I am not saying all police are bad but police have to police themselves in order for us to move forward.

Furthermore, another participant TW mentioned the killing of Black Americans in their statement. TW noted,

Blacks are targets, and there have been a lot more killings in the Black American community, especially with the White officers killing. She said that Black Americans are scared over a simple traffic stop.

BB mentioned that police are not held accountable. However, he referenced the killing of Black Americans in their own community. BB stated,

Police are not held accountable for what they are doing in the Black American community. The police are held responsible by their judicial system, and none are being held accountable for any killings in the Black American community.

BA stated something similar but went a different way but came around to similar points and thoughts about the question. BA shared a similar thought, she said from watching the news, CNN, she lived in Philadelphia and the people were upset about Trayvon Martin. However, when she moved to Florida people were outraged by the killing of Trayvon Martin and what the police were doing. She said she had not seen a young White male brutalized by police in American, but I have seen a lot with Black men. She said she could not remember where this occurred but a young black guy was sitting on a wall and the police just beat him up. Now the video does not show why they did it but they did. She said they were all White police officer beating up a Black male. She advised she does not think that they would handle their own people like that.

### **Theme 3: Lack of Change**

*How do you think police misconduct over time has evolved over the years since the Watts Riots of 1965?* The majority of participants noted that although police misconduct has continued over the years, rioting has decreased from previous decades. In

addition, several participants held that social media has had a significant influence in creating a chasm in the relationship between Black Americans and law enforcement. Now, because of social media, everyone can get up-to-the-minute information regarding any disturbance between police and Black Americans. Lastly, participants feel that police treat Black Americans differently because they know they will not be punished by the criminal justice system. BB responded,

I don't think too much has changed. I believe that the more police change, the more they stay the same. I believe that social media has shown more things that the police have been doing. However, I do believe that rioting has calm down. I believe when we riot now we try to make a statement rather than tearing our city down. As far as police brutality, I do not see any change in the police. They continue to commit acts that are brutal to American citizens, and it is just wrong.

Participant JC believed that due to the new movement of Black Lives Matter movement with their peaceful protest has caused the police to fear Black Americans. JC stated,

I don't feel that it has gotten better but worse towards Black Americans. When you have Black Lives Matter gather the police fear them and use riot gear because they fear Black Americans. However, when the KKK get together, you do not see any riot gear. They treat people of color different. I don't believe it has gotten any better.

SR stated,

It has remained the same because most of the communities that I have lived.

When the police come into the community it has always been physical when the

White police officer come into the neighborhood. I could remember as a child growing up in the projects the police would come into the neighborhood and strike fear in the community. I can remember police getting geared up because of a riot in the community on how they mistreated a person in the community. I never had any good thoughts or saw the police do good in my community.

GF gave an eye-opening response when speaking about the only difference between how her grandparents were treated by law enforcement during the civil rights movement and how Black Americans are treated today. She mentioned,

Police misconduct has not changed. It has been highlighted a little more then what it was because we have more access to technology that provides us with a little more information. Officers feel that since it has been going on for so long that they still think that they can get away with it. She believes it has not changed but has gotten worse and more light has been shed on police misconduct.

Participants like MH, VC, CI, RW, and YW feel as though there has been little change in how Black Americans are treated by the police. According to a few participants, Black Americans riot is that they demand change to improve in their community and within the police departments.

#### **Theme 4: Anger and Stress**

As previously stated, all participants were asked structural questions. Specifically, the questions highlighted in this section explored the participants' experience with the police. Out of the 30 participants, when asked the following question, only two

participants reported a positive encounter with law enforcement: *Can you explain to me about a time when you had an encounter with the police?*

YW stated,

In Chicago, a couple of times he was pulled over coming back from the gym with his younger brother. In Chicago having sound and music was the thing in the area. The officer could not identify where the sound was coming. He accused them of playing the music too loud. I had the pop out deck, which was not inside the car at the time. The two officers approached and pulled both out and handcuffed them and put them both on the ground. He advised that they proceeded to impound their car. They had to catch the bus. They finally went to court. The judge dismissed the case because the officer was not for sure that it was them. However, he had to pay a lot of money to get the car out over \$700.00. Also, in Chicago, he was turning into the block where he lived. He had a particular car a 2001 Oldsmobile at the time with rims. He was pulled over right as he was parking, at his neighborhood block. He said the police rushed him. They started questioning him. Asking where he was coming from? They frisked him and tried to search his vehicle. He believes in both incidents he was targeted because of his color and the vehicle he was driving

YW was asked a follow-up question: *Can you describe how this affected you?* He replied,

I was embarrassed by the situation. I was angry. It certainly keeps him on edge when he deals with the police. When he sees the police, he is skeptical of the

police because of what has happened to him. He said that he has family members who are police officers and it is personal to him.

DW shared a similar experience stating,

Back in 2006, I was auditioning, and we were coming back from North Carolina. It was about 2 a.m. in the morning, and we noticed the blue lights behind us. He walked to us and asked us where we were going. He said that tint was dark and had us step out of the vehicle. He searched the vehicle. He advised he guessed he was looking for drugs. He said I believed he stop us because we were Black.

Again, DW was asked the same follow-up question: *Can you describe how this affected you?* DW replied, “My dad was being polite and he did nothing wrong. He felt like it was racial profiling, and I was angry.” Another participant, AC had a similar experience while he was in college. He expressed an anger due to the lack of respect the police showed during this particular incident. Specifically, the police actually placed their hands on them without warning. Mr. AC stated,

Yes (responding to the question), I was walking around with my fraternity brothers around campus. We were going to visit another campus when the police pulled up and slammed one of my fraternity brothers on the vehicle. He said there were a group of guys that were running from a dorm and they thought that it was us. They did not ask any questions they just started harassing everyone without questioning anyone. When all, we were doing is truly walking to another dorm to socialize.

*Can you describe how this affected you?* “It was scary not too many blacks go to school in that area,” AC replied.

CM was asked the same question about his encounter with the police. CM also stated this about his experience,

I was traveling with several of my fraternity brothers to a funeral. We left about midnight from Tampa to South Carolina we drove through the night. We made one or two stops one in Georgia to switch off drivers and another exchange when they first got to South Carolina. This was Memorial Day weekend of 2016. I was going to Myrtle Beach. There was a large group of African American people headed to the beach for Spring break. We exited 95 and, on the exit, we were supposed to get off. There were several troopers on the exit. We was pulled over by a White male state trooper. The trooper appeared to be about 25. He approached the passenger side of the vehicle where I was sitting and we road down the window. The first question he asked did we know why he stopped them. The driver says “No.” He said you made an illegal lane change. He said that we just got off the exit. How did we make an illegal lane change? He said the singled to get over. They were headed to a restaurant for breakfast. He said they sit there for what felt like a good 30 minutes. He asked me for my license, and I was just a passenger and not the driving. He asked several questions about drugs, guns and any illegal activity. He asked for everyone’s driver license. He said that it was a little unsettling, to say the least. They were headed to a fraternity member

mother's funeral. He asked him for his driver's license, and he said he gave it to him because the vehicle was in his name.

*Can you describe how this affected you?*

I was upset and angry anytime you consider yourself a law-abiding citizen and to be stopped and questioned about drug activity can be upsetting. It was very upsetting.

### **Theme 5: Influence of Components**

There are many factors that can influence the perception of Black Americans about the police. However, the factors that were mentioned in this research are media coverage, community environment, and informal and formal behaviors. These factors were asked to all participants, and how they felt about them before asking them to share their opinion on each factor: *Can you describe how your attitude is affected by factors associated with police misconduct?*

GF stated,

If I have any dealings with the police since I do not like them anyway. Any involvement with the police bothers me because of past experiences that I have had. Whether it is be viewing things from the media, in our community or personal encounters bothers me.

MD stated, "Since the history of Black Americans dealing with the police, everything that occurs between Black Americans and police will influence the perception of Black Americans."

RW stated,



Yes, they are killing Black males for selling loose cigarettes. Some factors played a part in that situation. First of all, he (Eric Garner) was black. He probably did not care for the police because of his experience. In the end, he was killed for selling cigarettes. I hate senseless killings, and this was one of them. My attitude is influenced by how the police treat us or respond to us.

Participants felt that attitudes are determined through different components when dealing with the police.

### **Theme 6: Impact of Media**

The responses to the next few questions and the themes that emerge are the foundation for this study. Overall, participants believe there are multiple factors as to why the Black American community has a negative attitude towards law enforcement. The open-ended questions allowed participants to extend their thoughts on past and current killing of unarmed Black Americans. The following question was asked to all participants, *“In what ways, if at all, do you feel that factors such as media coverage impacted Black American perception of police misconduct in the Southeastern United States?”*

The following participants believe that the media make us aware in some type of way DC stated,

I believe it increases the awareness; increase citizens type groups, and builds a coalition. These groups are created to formulate to fight the issue. I believe that as long as the media continues to increase coverage of police misconduct the

perception among Black American will remain the same regardless due to media coverage.

RW noted,

I believe that the news and social media are given exposure to the problem going on in the Black American community. Police are being filmed, and it is showing how we are being mistreated. However, they continue to get away with criminal acts regardless of media coverage.

CI replied,

I think it has opened the eyes up of many people to see what Black Americans have been going through. The media has brought attention to what we knew what was going on to share with the world of police misconduct.

AW noted,

She can't say in our area, but the media has shown us in other areas where cops are mistreating Blacks. She said before any of these incidences she thought the cops were good. However, watching the media she feels like there is a chance she could die.

LD mentioned, "I believe media coverage outrage Black American because it makes us bitter inside, we see the mistreatment of Black Americans. It is only going to get worse with time." In addition, three participants spoke about the media's coverage of the killings of unarmed Black Americans.

RW stated,

I think it is good in a way. We can see what is happening with the community and the police. Also, it serves as a record of what is occurring in America. Up until then, police were killing and shooting Blacks and saying that they feared for their life. However, they did not fear for their life. Media serve a purpose because they are showing Black Lives Matter. I believe media puts it out there for people to see.

KK noted,

I feel that it has brought more things to light that we already knew what was going on. There was a shooting of Black man involving a White guy in Florida with the stand your ground law. It opened up my eyes that we can be shot by regularly individuals and the cops will side with the White person.

DW stated,

Yes, I believe that that media has some influence on Black Americans. When I see a Black man that looks like me get shot is tragic. The media brings out the shortcomings of the police. I believe that media influences how we view the police. We see so many people being killed by the police by watching the media and nothing is being done.

Participants GC, AR, BA, CM, TR, TW, JC, MH, CD, GF, AC, JR, and VC believe that abuse from law enforcement has damaged their relationship with the Black American community. Moreover, the relationship has been further damaged because the media and social media cover these incidences of mistreatment incessantly so it is always on the mind of the public. This mistreatment of Black Americans at the hands of the

police only heighten their negative attitudes towards law enforcement. Responses by participants CB, YW, SC, CG, and SR suggest that Black Americans have known all along that the police treat Black Americans unequally compared to White Americans and other minorities. For instance, participant MD stated,

I believe it a huge factor because not all police are bad. Police can do nine things right and one thing wrong, and the media will show the negative. The people will believe that all police are bad. Therefore, perception is form Responses by participants CB, YW, SC, CG, and SR suggest that Black Americans have known all along that the police treat Black Americans unequally compared to White Americans and other minorities do through the media to Black Americans about police.

Participant KH provides a different outlook on the media. He believes that media glorify thug attitudes or images. "Police watch what they see rap artist do on television and think that it is us." Moreover, he believes hip-hop increases the negative attention towards Black Americans. "White police officers, in general, see their perception of Black Americans from rap thug music and videos." According to BB,

I believe it depends on which media outlet you view. CNN and other provide helpful information to the Black American public. However, FOX news always provides the one side story of the Black American people. They try to make us appear to be thugs and rappers. Some media outlets betray us like that, and other betray us as American citizens.

**Theme 7: Impact of Community Environment**

All participants with the exception of one reported that their environment influenced the negative perception of law enforcement within the Black American community. These responses pinpointed that how police conducted themselves when they entered their neighborhoods was a major contributing factor of their perception. In this section, participants describe how the lack of Black American police officers patrolling their neighborhoods is another issue. The following question was asked to the participants: *In what ways, if at all, do you feel that factors such as community environment has impacted Black American perception of police misconduct in the Southeastern United States?* YW stated,

Right now, in the community, the cops are looking for a cause to pull you over. However, police have done a horrible job of not putting people that look like Black Americans, police officers, in their community to bridge the gap. Also, the police lack the communication or representation within the Black community in order to try to build that community trust.

CB stated,

If the police would have a proactive approach to the community like that police officer on Instagram, who tries to get out and talk to people in the Black community. You cannot relate to the community if you do not know people in the community. The people in the community will respect officers more if they would get to know the people in the community. If the people only see you when something bad has happened all the time and not being part of the community.

Then, they are less likely to respect police officers. If they provide positive interactions, then this could build a bond between police officers and the community.

Overall, participants VC, RW, LD, and SR believe that police are more aggressive in predominantly Black American neighborhoods than any other neighborhood. As a result, this has given the police a negative image throughout their communities. It is that aggressiveness that these participants believe is the reason Black Americans do not respect law enforcement.

Moreover, participants KK, TW, DC, AC, SR, AW, CI, GC, and BB all agreed that even though they do not live in lower socio-economic communities anymore there is a difference in the community where one lives. Those same participants said that police actually live in the community in their new community. Still, the participants believe that there is a major difference in perception of police when they patrol the neighborhoods, they live in compared to officers patrolling neighborhoods they do not live in. It all leads to participants feeling that Black Americans do not see enough positive images of law enforcement.

Participants CG, CD, and KH had similar thoughts about the community environment. They believe that the community is doing its best to repair the relationship with law enforcement. However, they also believe that police do not treat Black Americans the same as others when they patrol their communities. Specifically, they believe that the police are not treating Black Americans equally compared to White Americans or other minorities.

Participants SR and DW stated that the past has affected their communities due to the mistreatment of Black Americans during civil rights era. Hence, the past has caused police to be more on edge in the Black American community. According to DW, “Half of the Black American men are in jail and the other half in lower economic level on drugs. Therefore, police have the attitude when they come into the community, they fear them already. The mindset the police have is get them before they get me.”

Participant MD shared a different point of view. According to MD, “I believe people see police only in a negative light and not in a positive light. I believe that White Americans commit the same amount of crimes as minorities.”

### **Theme 8: Encounters with the Police**

As with the previous questions, the responses are coded by patterns of similar word usage. When participants were asked the following question, the majority responded with words such as “high alert,” “scared,” “fear,” “racist,” “mistreatment,” and “respect”: *In what ways, if at all, do you feel that factors such as informal and formal behaviors impacted Black American perception of police misconduct in the Southeastern United States?* RW stated,

When I see the police, I get nervous. I have friends that are part of the police department. I am not scared of my people. However, when I meet the others, I am scared, and if he pulls me over, I am thinking how I am going to respond.

VC mentioned,

I believe that you couldn't help but feel scared when the police pull you over or approach you because of all the bad things that are going on in the media. Black people are scared because they do not know what is going to happen.

SR stated,

The Black American community is scared and nerves they are trying to find ways not to be killed or be shot. Police are walking to the cars, and the Black American community is scared because we don't know what is going to happen. It is a sad time because we should see them as individuals to help us not hurt us. Due to incidents, Black Americans are scared because of the fear of being shoot. We know that all officers are not horrible but the few that are put a bad taste in your mouth. She believes that one bad apple should not spoil the bunch.

Participants TR, AC, CG, BA, DW, and GC shared similar thoughts that people are scared or feared the police. Specifically, they feel that Black people experience some level of trepidation when they encounter law enforcement. As a result, Black Americans are hesitant to contact the police during an emergency because of the fear that, instead of resolving the matter, they met harm them in some way. These participants all stated that they fear the police despite living in a nice neighborhood.

Participants AC and CB shared that due to recent conflicts with law enforcement Black Americans need to stay on high alert. Ms. CB stated,

Yes, now people are stopping to make sure and recording the police in any situation especially when it comes to a Black person being pulled over. Now,



since the past occurrence of police misconduct, Black Americans are on high alert and will continue to be on high alert until there is some change.

AC replied,

Blacks fear the police period because of what has been said you do not trust them period. Blacks are always on high alert. I believe anytime a Black person has seen an officer they are on edge because of things are done in the past to Black Americans.

Participants MD and GF mention the word racist in their response to the question.

They believe that some police tend to have racist views when they have encounters with Black Americans.

MD stated,

Blacks have a short rope, so they are on a short leash because of things that have occurred. He said Black Americans have to be on edge because they do not know if they will get the racist police officer or the one that is coming to do his job.

Black Americans always have to be on edge when dealing with the police.

GF stated,

Again, it's due to research and based on what we see it is a racist mindset that some police officer has. In other words, no one is doing their jobs but following what everyone else does. She believes that officer can come to do their job, but it is one officer that tends to push the issue, which causes Black Americans to believe that they are not for them.

Participants SR, TW, YW, JR, MH, and CM expressed their displeasure how the police do not create a positive influence on their communities.

SR stated, “Since we don’t get positive informal and formal interaction with the police, we don’t see them in a positive light.” Moreover, Mr. MH stated, “Police are never seen in the Black American community informal or formal in a negative light. They are constantly in our neighborhood arresting and harassing others.”

Participants CI, DC, LD, and SR agreed with that assertion by highlighting the fact that they have all witnessed police hanging out in White neighborhoods and talking with the people in a friendly and joking manner. Conversely, these same participants said that when police come into their community they act with aggression and are combative.

Participants AW and JC shared similar thoughts in that police have a lack of respect for Black Americans. Ms. AW mentioned, “I believe like any other interaction between people they need to have some respect. When police approach Black Americans most of the time, it is not with respect. To get respect, you have to give respect.”

### **Theme 9: Perception of Factors**

*What is your perception of police misconduct and the factors associated with police misconduct have had on the Black American Community?* This question was the final structural interview question. Here, participants shared their viewpoints on police misconduct. Notably, participants BB, CG, CM, CB, AC, DC, KH, KK, SR, RW, RW, and VC worded their answer similarly when responding to the question. Moreover, they also provided their thoughts about how a law enforcement can change for the positive how they are perceived among Black Americans. Participant AW believes that the lack of

respect is the main factor for Black Americans to hold a negative opinion of the police. AW stated, "She believes that factors promote violence in general. It also penguin hole Black Americans that they act out violently to get justice and respect when there is known given." BB further stated,

Point blank and simple there are too many killings occurring. We have to address these issues along with the factors that appear to me to influence how we view the police because we are tired of being scared of the police when they are supposed to be there to serve.

Participant SR believes there are a number of factors that influence Black Americans' attitudes towards law enforcement. However, she believes the police's poor attitudes towards Black Americans is the largest influence on attitudes. SR stated, "I feel that some of the factors influence us. However, I believe that police officers attitude affects the Black American community." Participant AW believed these factors influence violence in the Black American community. AW replied,

She believes that factors promote violence in general. It also penguin hole Black Americans that they act out violently way to get justice and respect when there is known given.

Participants DW, AR, and MH shared similar words and thoughts in their responses to this question. They believed that the only time you see the police in their community is when there is a negative incident. As a result, this factors only increases their perception. DW stated,

Like I said before, we only see the police in a negative light because that's when we only see them. I believe that this is the only time we can view the police and factors which we discuss increases our views of them.

### **Theme 10: Effectiveness of Policy and Procedures**

After the structural interview questions, participants were asked contrast questions. According to Spradley (1979), contrast questions assist the research in finding the importance of the information provided, to recognize situations that have occurred in their reality. Here, participants were asked three questions. Participants shared their thoughts on police code of conduct in their community, changes that law enforcement should consider in an effort to improve relations with the Black American community, and suggestion to how the Black American community can improve its relationship with law enforcement. The first question is as follows: *How effective is police code of conduct policy and procedure when working within the Black American Community?*

Participants AW, BB, CB, KH, SR, LD, DW, GF, TR, RW, KK, and YW believe that the policies and procedures that guide the police code of conduct are ineffective in the Black American community. YW mentioned,

It is completely ineffective because the code is not enforced. Regardless, of what community that you are living. The reason I say this is because any police that is accused of making the wrong decision is not being held accountable. No one wants to take the blame for the action of police officers. Judges are not coming in and holding law enforcement accountable.

*What could be changed, if any, to better relate to the Black American Community?*

It can be two-fold. Police need to come into the community with the approach that not all of us are criminals. He believes until that a change will not happen until that occurs. Police need to do outreach programs that have them not always enforcing the law. He knows you can't work the neighborhood that you live. He believes that having diversity in the community needs to be reviewed. He understands that police don't need to police where they live. However, he said that should be looked at again to maybe having those officers in their neighborhood. It was something when you had a doctor in your neighborhood you would talk to them. It was also something when the local bus driver was in your neighborhood that you would speak to them. No one has a relationship with police officers anymore, and he believes that needs to be improved. If police are not living in that area they tend to be harder on crime in that area and that's mainly in the Black American community.

A majority of participants mentioned that Black Americans need to respect the law and be held accountable as well. They agree that if one breaks the law then he or she must answer for their crimes. However, they also mention that law enforcement needs to be fair to everyone as well. Specifically, when the government has the right to govern itself, it also needs to be equal in how it treats its citizens. Participants feel that the criminal justice system is broken and that there are too many minorities in the prison system. All participants feel that this inequality in the criminal justice system needs to be reviewed. For instance, AW believes that the criminal justice system is ineffective. Moreover, she believes that the police do not follow appropriate policies and procedures when dealing with Black Americans. Furthermore, AW believes that police departments

need to bring in new trainees who are educated in dealing specifically with the Black American communities.

Participants CM and RW believe that poor leadership is the root cause of police not following proper protocols. As a result, participants believe that with the proper training and leadership officers can better serve their communities. Still, none of that matter if the leaders are not supervising and assessing the officers. For instance, some participants feel that the bad officers will continue to act poorly if they know that their supervisors are not watching over them. They will continue to abuse their powers if they know that there will be no repercussions. Moreover, participants believe that police departments need to improve the training of their officers in how they react within the Black American community. They feel that properly training officers will help mend the relationship between the police and the Black American community. AR further explains,

I believe there is a lot of things that could be changed to improve policy and procedure. I think it is going to take all agencies to look at their policy and procedure to change perception or even the reality of police misconduct. *What could be changed, if any, to better relate to the Black American Community?* I believe by changing policy and procedure; it will allow them to hire more officers that will influence change and the dynamics of the police organization.

AC made a similar statement,

I believe policy and procedure are important and citizens should know their rights to help them better understand what is going on in their community. We better understand because now it is a matter of life and death now. *What could be*

*changed, if any, to better relate to the Black American Community?* We have to educate ourselves. At one point in time, the police were part of the community. Now, instead of being the community and the police they are now separated in a sense. There is no relation between the two anymore. I believe by understanding police as well will help them better understand each other and the law.

Participants DC, MH, JR, and VC believe that the policy and procedure were effective to a certain extent. DC stated,

I believe that it is somewhat effective, but it is also holding officers accountable. It is to hold them accountable, so they won't just be out there doing things out of the sit of their pants. The code of conduct in his opinion is designed that all police officer abides by the same rules. *What could be changed, if any, to better relate to the Black American Community?* The word diversity training or the topic on diversity training sometimes gets watered down, but he believes that those types of training especially about learning of other ethnic groups could improve the community if officers get to know their community. For example, a young man riding a bike might be going for a bag of chips. That does not mean that he is riding his bike to do a drug deal. Another example, if we would go into a Muslim neighborhood as black men, we would have to know and understand their community to relate. He believes that more understanding of Black Americans can improve how police do their jobs and bring down Black American perception. They will learn then that what they see on TV is not us, just like in any other culture they have to learn their way.

Participants BA and MD have a more balanced attitude towards law enforcement. They believe that there are certainly police officers out there with bad intentions. Conversely, though, they know that the majority of law enforcement are good and follow proper protocols. Still, it is those bad officers that they feel treat Black Americans with disrespect and make no effort to serve and protect their communities. As a result, they feel that the police arrest more people from their community because they do not want to take the time to handle the situation differently. Overall, participants believe that the police need to focus on building a rapport with the Black American community in they want the relationship to improve.

### **Theme 11: Recommended Improvements to Understand Factors**

*What changes should be considered by policymakers to help change the attitudes of Black Americans when dealing with factors associated with police misconduct?*

Participant responses varied when answering this question. Common words that appeared across responses included “education”, “policy review”, “prosecute police”, “involvement in the community”, and “let the police do their job”. Participants AW, AC, CM, and CB mentioned the importance of educating themselves and the police about each other. AW stated, “I believe the Black community need to get together to have an educational seminar. Black Americans need to educate themselves about the police. The police need to educate themselves about the Black American community.” *How would these changes help the Black American Community?* “This will slowly build the relationships in the community once they both understand each other. AC also supported that assertion,



The education needs to come from the police. I believe the police fear the community. Therefore, we have more killings of Black Americans. I believe it needs to be better training on their part to build a stronger relationship between the community. Also, police need to educate themselves about the community to have a better working relationship with the community. How would these changes help the Black American Community? It would give a little more ease in the community because the police will be in the area and know how the community works.

Participants TW, BB, CG, DW, and SR believe that police need to review their policies and procedures. According to DW,

I believe it has to start at the top and go from there to improve policies that relate to and fit Black Americans and others. If you are writing tickets in a poor neighborhood, they are going to have warrants because they can't afford to pay for them. I believe they have to be smart about policing and changing that is a good start. There should be other programs that help people pay fines. How would these changes help the Black American Community? It will give the other options that will increase trust in the system and provide another avenue for change. Also, it will relieve stress, so that families can provide for their family. It will allow families to stay together.

Participants YW, LD, SR, AB, MD, SR, TR, AW, and SC feel that police should be charged when they have committed an offense against a person. Davis stated,

If they prosecuted more police officer when they commit a crime, it would help. *How would these changes help the Black American Community?* If Black American see that we are being treated equally then, Black Americans would not have to feel that they have to take matters into their own hands.

TR offered a similar sentiment,

When the police officers are in the wrong something, there should be some repercussions to penalize the police. They should lose their job or something.

*How would these changes help the Black American Community?* It will help put a voice in the Black American community and bring everyone together because there will be cooperation in the Black American community. They will see trust in the criminal justice system; unlike now, there is no trust.

Participants BA, CI, GF, KH, and KK believe that the police need to have more involvement and make a concerted effort to build a strong rapport with the Black American community. CI stated,

They need to get out in the community. People want change, and they need to get out and talk to people. They know there are issues in the community and they are not doing anything to fix the community. They need to been seen and get information from the community on how to build the trust and relationship. *How would these changes help the Black American Community?* It will build trust in the community and help the police with a better understanding of the Black American community.

In the same respect, BA furthered what CI said,

They have to change the narrative of how police are perceived in our neighborhood. This will never change if they keep on killing us. Police have to get involved in the community and be approachable to Black Americans. They need to have more events to make them feel safe about relationships with the police. *How would these changes help the Black American Community?* Those images of police playing with kids in the community, talking to people, and having community events are going to shift the narrative.

Participant JR believes that Black Americans have to let law enforcement do their jobs and not get mad when police commit a violent act. Moreover, many participants agreed that Black Americans need to be mad about all criminal acts made by the police and not just when it happens in the Black American community. Furthermore, participants believe that in order to change the perceptions of police Black Americans need to be willing to change first.

Participants DC and MH insist that police are present in order to protect and serve the community. Also, they believe that police need to help the Black American community understand the police. DC replied,

Policy makers should create a better means to help Black American understand LEO's (Law Enforcement Officers). LEO's have a job, and that is to keep the peace no matter what. He said we appreciate them as long as things are being done correctly. Like anybody, Black American want to feel protected and safe. Also, there needs to better means to understand LEO's and better means to jobs for the Black American community for our area. *How would these changes help*

*the Black American Community?* The suggestions made will be a start to develop a connection between the Black American community and the police.

Participants RW and VC shared similar insight about building trust and providing better training for officers who patrol in Black American communities. For instance, RW stated,

They need to stop telling the Black community that police misconduct is not what they think. Police need to stop it and tell the truth of what the problems that they are facing. Then look at changing rules of engagement. I believe sometimes you need to update and train police officers better to understand what is going on. I hear police say this is how we are trained and the same thing continues to happen. Maybe, they need to train better on how to deescalate the problem. *How would these changes help the Black American Community?* It will not build trust overnight. However, over a certain period, it will start increasing trust, knowing that you will not be killed on site. If they could learn how to de-escalate many incidences, it will help the community with understanding the police.

### **Theme 12: Improving Relationships**

*How would you suggest Black American Community become more politically organized to improve community relationships between police and Black American community?* In response to this question, participants AR, BA, CG, RW, CB, JC, and KH believed that organizations needed to get involved in working out the issues between the police and Black American community. BA stated,

I wish that the Black Panthers would come back. They were organized and did a lot of good in the community. We need to have more organizations in the community that will do good and give back to the Black American community.

CG stated,

Take some of the churches, different sports groups, fraternity and sorority organization to teach police conduct classes and the police also help Black Americans understand their policy and procedures in the community.

Participants AW, DW, GF, JR, and YW believe that Black Americans need to be more involved in their own community in order to build relationships between the police and the Black American community. JR stated,

We should be getting involved in different activities when dealing with the police. We should not see them in a negative light if we would participate in different functions that support the African American community because this is the only way we can try to improve the relationship.

Moreover, YW stated,

We should be getting involved in different activities when dealing with the police. We should not see them in a negative light if we would participate in different functions that support the African American community because this is the only way we can try to improve the relationship.

Participants DC, LD, and GC feel that Black Americans need to support each other in order to build a stronger relationship first within the community then next with the police. Participants shared similar thoughts that if Black Americans start getting

together and supporting each other then they can overcome a lot of wrongdoing by the police. This in return will lead to a stronger community that relates better to police organizations.

Participants BB and VC mentioned that it would be a good start if the police educate themselves on the issues of racism and the promotion of equality. In general, participants agreed that police want to go home at the end of the day. However, they use similar stories that Black children and their parents want them to come home at the end of the day, as well.

Participants CM, MH, and RW feel that Black Americans need to be proactive instead of reactive. Participants believe that Black Americans should look to improve their community instead of waiting for something to happen and then respond. Black Americans as a whole have to speak up and speak out, according to a majority of participants. There are many times when a Black American breaks the law and his or her community backs them. Many participants agreed that one should be punished if he or she commits a crime. Moreover, they feel that Black Americans have to show ownership for themselves. Conversely, law enforcement has to respect Black Americans. Participants emphasized that police should not go into their communities with the intent to disrespect the Black Americans.

Participants CI, AC, SR, TR, and SC all shared similar statements that police and Black Americans need to meet and educate themselves about one another. For instance, CI stated, "They need to have a town hall meeting where both parties can come and talk

about their issues. If not with the community with the community leaders and police leaders to try and fix the issue within the community.” SC echoed the same,

It is going to take more education, more workshop courses, community resource, bringing other officers in the community. Provide community liaisons to assist with efforts in the Black American community to see the issues, and what is needed in the Black American community. This will help to close gaps and build relationships in the Black American community.

Participants KK, MD, TW, and AW focus their response on how Black Americans need to get out and vote in order for real change to occur. TW stated, I think that we need to groom legislatures. When it’s time to vote and to try to get individuals elected we have to have an edge in the community. We need to train individuals in the Black American community to start training leaders of our own to be a voice in the community.

MD stated,

I think that we need to groom legislatures. When it’s time to vote and to try to get individuals elected, we have to have an edge in the community. We need to train individuals in the Black American community to start training leaders of our own to be a voice in the community.

Participants had several suggestions like bringing organizations together to get more involved, identifying racism in departments and calling attention to it, taking a proactive approach in educating the community on how to interact with law enforcement and vice-versa, and, most importantly, increase voter turnout in political elections.

Overall, participant responses highlight the fact that education and communication are needed to create social change

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

This Afrocentric study research concentrates on Black Americans' perceptions of police misconduct and, importantly, to share their thoughts and ideas about preventing police misconduct. In Chapter 3, trustworthiness was described through social contracts which allowed this Afrocentric study to develop. The most important task was the selection of participants, which was done through surveys that identified individuals that fit the criteria for the study. Specifically, the use of surveys allowed the researcher to identify individuals who are Black American, which was essential to this study's research question. The participants were selected through purposive sampling. Subsequently, critical ethnography interview questions assisted with guided participants in the study. The use of critical ethnography is more than the moral accountability to address the injustice within the Black American community (Madison, 2012). However, the part of this critical ethnographer within an Afrocentric standard was to understand that every society has their own struggle in order to endure their past time. Unfortunately, all people are not treated equally. For instance, White Americans are given a privilege that is not offered to any other ethnic group (Zack, 2015). The injustice that Black Americans have experienced and observed has eroded their trust in the police. Thus, the aim of this study was to collect the voices of Black Americans and to document their thoughts and feelings regarding the strained relationship between their community and law enforcement. Furthermore, the researcher, as social scientist ensured that he did not insert his thoughts



or biases in the conversations with the participants in order to record their true feelings and experiences.

### **Credibility**

Social contract theory assisted with establishing credibility and transferability in this research. Credibility (internal validity) is the sureness that can be placed in the reality of the research findings (Alagona, 2008). Transferability (external validity) is providing the readers with proof that the information being provided fits the condition and community (Koppelman & Wilmot, 1982). The participants were given a consent form to read, which allowed the researcher to build rapport and trust. The form provided the researcher's name and the background information about the research, procedures, sample questions, voluntary nature of the study, risks, benefits of being in the study, and contact information for the researcher and university. Participants were asked at the end of reading the consent form if they have any questions that needed to be clarified. When asking participants critical ethnography interview questions, the researcher made sure that the participants were heard and able to speak freely without any interruptions of bias, opinion, or feeling into their response. To make sure that the research was credible, the researcher made sure that my research questions aligned with my research topic. All participants agreed to be recorded for accuracy and clarification of their responses. Moreover, the recording of participants assisted with the credibility of this study.

### **Transferability**

Transferability (external validity) is providing the readers with proof that the information being provided fits the condition and community (Koppelman & Wilmot,

1982). The findings were specific to participants in the Black American community in the Southeastern United States. This study can be replicated in other areas of the state with the use of the same methodology to compare with the data from this study. The study sample was significant for the current study's results, particularly exploring Black Americans' attitudes about police misconduct. The present study was conducted with enough participants to guarantee that the semi-structured interviews provided in-depth responses that gave a rich account of the experience and thoughts of Black Americans regarding police misconduct. The implications are that the study results would assist with understanding the Black American community's perception of the police. Therefore, the information gathered from this study can be used to assist the Black American community and police with reviewing policies and procedures in order to implement effective practices. Overall, the aim is to improve relationships in the Black American community.

### **Triangulation Analysis**

Creswell (2003) recommended utilizing triangulation, for participation checking, explanation of scholar prejudice, repeat monitoring from the location of the research, and participants' association in different periods that could build legitimacy. According to Golafshani (2003), the validity and reliability of the research study can be proven using triangulation. Triangulation for this study was accomplished through interviews with the use of voice recording devices and notes that documented participants' experiences, attitudes, and opinions about the police. The in-depth interviews were conducted to gain insight into their perspectives about the police. All participant responses were

documented and reviewed by recording the responses; hence, the recordings were used for accuracy to provide detail information about Black Americans' perception about the police from an Afrocentric viewpoint.

Next, themes and codes were developed from the interview questions and participant responses, which enhanced the validity of the study. Participant recordings and documentation of responses assisted with the triangulation of the data in this study. The themes were aligned with the research questions to help support the findings of Black Americans' attitudes towards the police. In addition, with the variety of responses given, participants' viewpoints were formatted through coding and themes in order to compare similarities and commonalities. According to Mathison (2014), triangulation is a fundamental approach that will assist with the removal of prejudice and opens the door to allow the explanation of that social phenomenon occurring. Hence, triangulation assisted with making the researcher alert to any biases and differences in the study.

### **Primary Research Questions and Findings**

The responses to these interview questions assisted with understanding the primary research questions, which consisted of: How has media coverage affected Black American perceptions of officer behavior in the urban area? How has the community environment affected Black American perceptions of officer behavior in the urban area? How have officers' informal and formal behaviors affected Black American perception of police conduct in the urban area? The use of critical ethnographic interviews expresses their opinions on what the factors are that influence their negative opinion of law enforcement. Responses from the interviews allowed the researcher to identify several

factors that influence the opinion of the Black American community in some shape, form, for fashion.

Participant responses to media coverage as being a factor that affected Black Americans perception of officers' behavior proved vital information. Participants responded that the media alerts the public to when the police abuse their power. Moreover, participants believe the media only characterizes the Black American community in a negative light. Further, participants responded by saying that the media makes one aware of the issues that are going on in the Black American community; such as opening Black American eyes up to police misconduct. Participants noted that the media displays the misuse of power in the Black American community by reporting on the killings of unarmed Black Americans. One participant suggested that when you see an unarmed Black male or female in the media being killed by White officers, it makes one sad and aware of what is going on in the community. Participants feel that the media only illustrates negative behavior in the Black American community, which affects how the police respect and treat them.

Participant responses were, in general, mostly negative towards law enforcement. The influencing factors that formed these perceptions varied, such as the negative relationship between the Black American community and the police, the aggressive behavior of the police when patrolling their neighborhoods, and the perceived inequality of treatment of Black Americans than White Americans or other minorities. All of the participants provided a firsthand experience of a negative encounter with the police.

The aggressiveness of the police in their tactics and approach and the documented inequality of treatment causes the Black American community as a whole to fear law enforcement. As participant RW mentioned,

I believe it goes back to fearing the Black man that cause them to act the way they act in the community. Therefore, they have this attitude when they come into our community police fear us already. The mindset I am going to get them before they get me.

Hence, this response is an example of how the participants view the police not in a positive light, but in a negative light. Participants also mentioned that their personal interactions with police influenced their negative perception of law enforcement.

A theme that ran through many of the responses was the feeling of fear when participants encountered police officers. The feeling of fear puts the participants on high alert with law enforcement regardless if it is in a formal or informal setting. Moreover, a number of participants mentioned that they have lost respect for all enforcement because of the killing of so Black men and women, such as Eric Garner and Shandra Bland. Locally, the trust of the criminal process, in general, has eroded for participants due to the shooting and killing of Markeis McGlockton, a Black man at the hands of Michael Drejka, a White male. Although Drejka was not a police officer, the circumstances surrounding the case only worsened the relationship between Black Americans and law enforcement. At the time of this research, Drejka had not been charged with the killing; however, he has since been charged with murder. Still, the length of time it took Drejka

to be charged made participants question, not just law enforcement, but the entire judicial system. One participant summarized the feelings of their community,

Black Americans have to be on edge because they do not know if they will get the racist police officer or the one [is] that coming to do his job. Black Americans always have to be on edge when dealing with the police.

Several participants recommend ways in which law enforcement can improve their relationship with the Black American community. First, police need to commit themselves to establish a positive rapport with the Black American community in order to build trust. According to Jackson (2015), “When the public trust and respect police they are more likely to call on them for help, to cooperate with them in critical situations, and work together to solve community problems” (pg. 2). Many participants believe that the police need to review their policies and procedures and how they follow them.

Participants feel that the police, when in their neighborhoods, often break their own policies and procedures. Thus, a review of the policies and procedures, and how they adhere to them, might improve their relationship with the Black American community.

Next, participants feel police officers should have cultural sensitivity training.

Specifically, police officers should be trained in how to deal with different minority groups and learn how to embrace diversity instead of aggressively approaching them.

Lastly, the Black American community believes more organizations such as the NAACP, fraternity and sorority organizations, and police organizations need to come together and have workshops and town hall meetings. The purpose of these meetings is to educate the Black American community in the understanding of police policy and, in turn, the police

can understand the factors that influence the negative perception they have among Black Americans. Overall, the goal for these meetings is to improve the relationships between the police and the Black American community.

Black Americans overall response to the semi-structured interview questions; were that Black Americans believe that the police treat them unfairly. Black males felt that they are constantly harassed by the police, and are more likely to be killed by the police than Black females. However, Black females feared the police, but are more worried for Black males because of the stereotypes that are placed on them. They believe this causes police to overreact, which puts Black males' lives in danger. Hence, Black men believe they are in danger by the police compared to Black women, but Black women tend to carry the burden when Black males are killed by the police.

### **Summary**

The main objective of this study is to understand of Black Americans' perceptions of police misconduct through in-depth interviews. Specifically, the ethnographic study entailed interviews with 30 Black Americans living in the Southeastern United States. The age range of the participants was from 20 to 50 years old. The focus of the study revolved around the growing distress between the Black Americans and their local law enforcement. These tensions have been strained over the recent trend of killings of unarmed Black men and women at the hands of police officers. The interviews revealed that Black Americans are hesitant to trust the police due to their personal interactions with them. Moreover, participants revealed that their perceptions of police are strongly influenced by the media and what they see on social media. These channels of

information provide Black Americans with the latest information about police misconduct. As a result, their trust in police has eroded to new lows.

Still, not all is lost, as many participants expressed ways in which the police and Black Americans can mend this broken relationship. Participants admit that Black Americans need to do a better job at improving the relationship. However, they feel law enforcement have a long way to go to make things better. Some participants urged police departments to provide better training for those officers who specifically patrol in Black American communities. Building a better relationship is only going to happen if the police and the Black American community are both committed to the change.

Chapter 5 will include why the study was conducted, interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, implications, and the conclusion.



## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### **Introduction**

The objective throughout this study was to give Black Americans a voice through the use of critical ethnographic interviews in an effort to understand the factors that influence their perception of police misconduct. The interviews offered a method of understanding the Black American community and their attitudes toward the police. Three research questions guided the study: a) How has media coverage impacted Black American perceptions of officer behavior in the urban area?; b) How has the community environment impacted Black American perception of officer behavior in the urban?; and c) How have officers' informal and formal behaviors impacted Black American perception of police conduct in the urban area?

The overarching goal of this study was to gather this information from the community to build community trust and promote justice. In alignment with this goal, the Spradley Model was used to guide understanding of the factors associated with Black Americans' attitudes toward the police by using descriptive, structural, and contrasting questions to describe their individual perspectives.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

The study findings indicated that several factors influence the Black Americans' perception of the police. I obtained the necessary information with the assistance of semistructured interviews given to 30 participants drawn from the local Black American community. Thus, combined with the knowledge gained through sample size and critical ethnographic interviews, the emergence of statistical demonstration and the redundancy in codes formed a reliable tool that provided relevant and significant information for

social research (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013). This study allowed community members to share their perspectives and attitudes regarding the police. Three central research questions assisted with understanding these attitudes and the factors that influenced members of the community.

I identified 12 themes through coding and the use of semi-structured interviews that represented the experiences and thoughts of Black Americans regarding police misconduct and the factors that influence those perceptions. The coding followed the interview questions and provided in order as the questions were asked to the participants. Thus, by creating themes from coding, Black Americans were given a voice to express and disseminate their feelings regarding their treatment and the influence various factors bore on their perception. The goal of this research is to share this information through the documentation of the semi-structured interviews to report only the thoughts and feelings of Black Americans. Each theme was developed from the responses the participants gave to critical ethnography interview questions. Through the use of social contract theory, I was able to address concerns about the injustice facing the Black American community that ultimately hinders the development of a productive relationship with the police. The following information was gathered from the answers provided by participants throughout the course of the study.

### **Theme 1**

The participants, and by extension, the Black American community, defined police misconduct as the mistreatment by the police of a racial demographic dissimilar in

appearance from the police officers themselves and the generally unjust attitudes that surround or underpin such treatment.

### **Theme 2**

When asked about the level of knowledge regarding incidents of police misconduct in the Black American community, participants expressed a belief that there were a significant number of killings of unarmed Black men and women in their community. Furthermore, the police enter the community, behave unjustly, and are not held to account for their actions. Ultimately, the Black American community lacks confidence in the police due to this lack of accountability.

### **Theme 3**

When asked about police misconduct over time and the Watts Riots specifically, Black Americans felt that there had been no reduction in police misconduct. Instead, it has simply been exposed to a greater degree than in the past. However, Black Americans believe that riots have been supplanted by vastly improved strategies that prevent damage to their community while achieving social change.

### **Theme 4**

The Black American response to police encounters was not positive. This pattern has been maintained by the belief that Black Americans are at a disadvantage due to their skin color. This belief, in turn, causes them to fear encounters with the police.

### **Theme 5**

Black American perceptions regarding the police can be linked to media coverage, community environment, and police interactions. Black Americans feel that

any encounter with the police can cause anyone to be negatively influenced, especially where there is an abuse of power perpetrated by the police against a given race.

### **Theme 6**

When asked about the impact of media coverage on the Black American community, the participants felt that the media make them aware of the issues affecting the Black American community with regard to police misconduct. The recent media coverage of shootings involving unarmed Black men has influenced the community's perception largely due to its connection to their historical mistreatment at the hands of the police. The media coverage has forced Black Americans to relive their traumatic past beginning with slavery and continuing through the Jim Crow era to today.

### **Theme 7**

Participants believe that there is a disconnect in the Black American community due to the aggression demonstrated by police officers in the community. In turn, this aggression can be attributed to a lack of rapport between the police and the Black community.

### **Theme 8**

The participants felt that police encounters, whether formal or informal, cause Black Americans to fear the police due to endemic racism.

### **Theme 9**

Participants felt that such factors as the media, community environment, and police interactions within the Black American community could lead to negative opinions regarding the police and the subsequent promotion of anti-police violence.

**Theme 10**

Participants believed that the police were ineffective in performing their duties among the Black American community due to the disparity in treatment between theirs and any other community. Any effectiveness in policing is an outgrowth of policies and procedures that hold police officers to a set of standards. Once again, however, this effectiveness is undermined by the endemic lack of accountability. Hence, Black Americans feel that all police organizations must review their police codes of conduct and hold police officers accountable for their actions.

**Theme 11**

Participants suggested that policymakers could improve the community's attitudes towards the police by reviewing policies internally and educating the Black American community regarding those policies. Moreover, this education must reach all Black American communities and strides must be made to improve the effectiveness of prosecution in cases of police misconduct.

**Theme 12**

Participants suggested that Black Americans could improve their political organization with the goal of improving community relationships between police and the Black American community. Such mobilization could help to identify racism within the department, encourage a more proactive approach to policing in the community, and help to educate both the police and Black American communities. Ultimately, community political engagement and voting should be encouraged.

### **Limitations of the Study**

For this study, I used qualitative ethnography research to explore and understand Black Americans' attitudes toward police misconduct in the Southeastern United States. However, the study did not include all Black American communities in the United States. The focus was to understand Black Americans from an Afrocentric viewpoint. Thus, I did not include other minority groups such as Jamaican Americans, Haitian Americans, and Black undocumented immigrants. Moreover, my motivation behind including only participants born in the US was to provide the reader with an understanding of long-held or generational Black Americans' attitudes toward the police. I believe that using other ethnic groups would dilute the Afrocentric perspective I sought to document among members of the community born in the country. However, I believe the information provided in this study offers significant insight into this particular topic. The 30 participants I interviewed asserted that the media, community environment, and successive encounters with the police all influence Black Americans' attitudes. The participants shared their thoughts and opinions through semi-structured interviews. Thus, the most significant restriction inherent in this culturally sensitive critical ethnographic interview was the exclusion of other American demographics and various age groups within the Black community itself.

### **Recommendation for Further Study**

The use of the critical ethnographic research method combined with the application of Afrocentric theory offered additional value in understanding Black American culture. The information given during each interview represents personal

experiences and thoughts from the Black American community that were amplified through an Afrocentric voice to make the Black American community the focal point for this research. Nevertheless, the sample population was small. Based on the findings generated from the semi-structured interviews, I must emphatically recommend continued research. For such research, I would recommend the use of the same recruitment tool to gather participants for the study. I believe that opening the study to a much larger Black American population, and, by extension, its constituent Black communities, gathered from among different counties within the state of Florida rather than a single location is a necessary next step in the development of this research topic. Furthermore, there is a need to continue the work of understanding the factors that influence Black American perception regarding police misconduct. Finally, research can be extended through a quantitative study that employs an Afrocentric voice and secures a larger sample size to provide a deeper understanding of the factors that influence Black American perception and relations with the police.

### **Implications**

There has been a recent increase in race-related incidents covered by the media involving the killing of unarmed Black Americans. Current technology, including the prevalence of camera-equipped smartphones, reveals the ongoing conflict between Black Americans and the police. A poll conducted by Pew Research Center found that Blacks and Whites differ in their opinions regarding the police and the progress of police conduct over the course of time. 48% of Whites believe there has been an improvement

in police conduct. By contrast, only 38% of Black Americans feel that the police have not progressed in a positive direction with police misconduct (Drake, 2015).

Following the Ferguson shooting, 80% of Blacks compared to 37% of Whites believe that there is an issue of race when discussing how police treat Black Americans. Furthermore, Blacks and Whites view the police differently in terms of their performance. Blacks believe that the police are not held accountable in cases of misconduct that affect the Black community compared to 27% of Whites who believe that police *are* held accountable (Drake, 2015). This information aligns with the data that was collected from the semi-structured interviews regarding Black Americans' attitudes toward police misconduct. Black Americans believe that factors associated with how Black Americans perceive the police have emerged from factors which influence how they *feel* about the police.

Finally, the founding fathers wrote that "all men are created equal." However, Black Americans have been treated alternately as property and thugs and subsequently imprisoned, dishonored, and defamed by American society. A major shift in this treatment could have occurred with the election of the first Black American president. However, the outrage among the most bigoted Americans revealed the ugly truth surrounding the racial tensions experienced by Black Americans. As American citizens, we must treat each other as equals and actively engage in protecting the rights of all citizens. The police work for all American citizens, whether born or naturalized, and should thus treat them equitably (Held, 2016). While the police *do* perform brave deeds,



they must seek to improve their relations with Black Americans by working together as equals to earn the community's trust.

To reiterate, this study was limited to Black Americans; no other ethnic group was involved. Black Americans had to form the cornerstone of the study in order for a positive social change to occur. Several factors cause Black Americans to develop negative opinions regarding the police. This issue continues to affect Black Americans and has caused a great deal of concern across America. However, the findings from this study can assist with other Black American populations with similar issues regarding their perceptions of the police to gain an understanding of how to improve community relations.

### **Conclusion**

To further understand Black American perception of police misconduct and the factors that influence that perception, it was vital to document voices from the Black American community. The results collected from the community show that factors such as the news media, community environment, and police interactions influence Black American perception of the police. Hall et al. (2016) documented a divide between the Black American community and police due to the killing of unarmed Black civilians. The authors included in their work factors that influenced the racial tension between the police and the Black American community that closely aligned with those in this research study. Hall et al. (2016) also suggested solutions similar to those offered by participants in this study that promise possibilities for social change.

Hall et al. (2016) recommended societal solutions to improving community relations between the police and Black Americans that addressed racial prejudice and community policing. Racial prejudice must be addressed at an early age. The research suggests that children under the age of 10 are more receptive to lessons about biases and stereotypes than adults (Hall et al., 2016). This assertion is similar to that of participant JC who stated, “Children at a young age need to be introduced to the police and taught not to fear the police, but to respect police and other people.” She mentioned that children are taught to have biased opinions against other people. Therefore, we must create plans for elementary schools to teach students about racial differences before they become adults. The research also included recommendations for understanding and improving the relationship between police and the Black American community by changing the prevailing practices in police departments. There is a need to diversify police forces, institute diversity training, and increase accountability (Hall et al., 2016). Harrison et al. (1998) suggest that the police must diversify their organizations to improve community policing for all communities. In order to have an effective police department, you must have diversity within the organization. To that end, superior recruitment strategies must be employed to gather diverse candidates. This is not only related to race but gender, religion, and sexual orientations. Participant YW stated, “There is diversity needed in police organizations and in the community. It was something when you had a doctor in your neighborhood that you would talk with or the local bus driver. No one has a relationship with the police anymore.” Diverse police departments truly reflect the communities they have sworn to protect.

Several participants suggested that police receive more diversity training.

Bezrukova et al. (2014) established that diversity training has a positive impact and develops awareness among police organizations. A police organization whose officers mirror the diverse demographics of the community that they protect and serve can be vital in decreasing negative perceptions about police (Fridell et al., 2001). Fridell et al. (2001) assert that hiring a racially diverse police force:

a.) conveys a sense of fairness, especially in the Black American community; b.) assists police with understanding issues affecting minority communities and to communicate effective ways to assist them; and c.) improve the probability that officers will understand different cultural points of view through their everyday encounters with them. This can increase Black American trust in their local police organizations

Fridell et al. (2001) go on to state “Leadership is to inspire to a higher purpose and to energize the organization toward achieving its goals. The executive sets the tone by word and deed, articulating the mission, policy and procedure, and style of operation for all to understand” (p. 35). Leadership has to hold police officers accountable for their actions. In many instances, police are not being held accountable for their unethical conduct. Participant YW stated:

Regardless, of what community that you are living in. The reason I say this is because any police that is accused of making the wrong decisions is not being held accountable. No one wants to take the blame for the actions of police officers. Judges are not coming in and holding law enforcement accountable.

If police leadership is dedicated to change, there must be a shift in their handling of unethical police conduct. Leadership must develop better policies and procedures that hold police officers accountable for their actions in order to earn trust in the Black American community.

Finally, this study offered a platform for Black Americans to express themselves through an Afrocentric point of view. Participants were eager to express their thoughts and ideas regarding the research topic because they were already aware of police actions through factors that were discussed in the study. The perception regarding the police continues to trend in a negative direction. The police are the most visible representation of the power to provide safety and security to the American public. Police are sworn to protect all citizens unbiasedly. However, Black Americans continue to give unfavorable responses when voicing their opinions of the police. There must be a conscious effort made by police leadership to use the information in this research to improve their relationship with the Black American community. Police departments will need to develop a better understanding of the community so that positive social change can occur. While this study does not provide all the answers to the problems of understanding Black American perception about the police, it nevertheless offers an effective resource for police organizations willing to understand and address issues in the Black American community. More to the point, it will take Black Americans and the police working together to address negative police perception in their community.

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## Appendix A: Survey Questionnaire

Survey No. \_\_\_\_\_

**Survey Questionnaire**

1. What is your age?
  - A. 18 to 34 years
  - B. 35 to 54 years
  - C. 55 to 74 years
  - D. 75 years or older
  - E. Can not choose/Refused
  
2. Are you male or female?
  - A. Male
  - B. Female
  - C. Unknown
  
3. What is your ethnic background?
  - A. Black American
  - B. African
  - C. Chinese
  - D. Haitian/Black American/African
  - E. Other
  
4. How many times have you had dealings with the police?
  - A. 1 to 10
  - B. 11 to 20
  - C. 21 to 30
  - D. 31 to 40
  - E. 41 to 50
  
5. How may I contact you to further participate in the research study? Email or phone contact?  
Email: \_\_\_\_\_ or  
Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B: Critical Ethnography Questions

### **Critical Ethnography Interview Questions**

1. Hi, \_\_\_\_\_ . How are you? Thank you for your time and please know that everything we discuss will be confidential, and I ask that you be candid with your answers. If you feel, you need a break through while speaking to me on the phone, please let me know and we will take a break. Let's get started.
2. Well, as I told you through email and correspondence, I am interested in understanding your perspective on Black American attitudes about police misconduct and the factors that influence the attitudes.

### **In person Face to Face interview**

3. Hi, \_\_\_\_\_ . How are you? Thank you for your time and please know that everything we discuss will be confidential, and I ask that you be candid with your answers. If you feel, you need a break at any time, please let me know and we will take a break. Let's get started.
4. Well, as I told you through email and correspondence, I am interested in understanding your perspective on Black American attitudes about police misconduct and factors that influence the attitudes.

### **Background question**

1. When and where were you born?
2. Did you grow up in this location?
3. What part of town do you live in?
4. What was the most common cultural group in your area?
5. Are you a Black American born citizens?
6. Where your parents born in America? If so, where?

7. Last background question, have you had any dealings with the police?

### **Descriptive Tour Questions**

The focus of this study is an exploration of the attitudes of Black Americans aged 20 to 50 towards police misconduct in the Southeastern United States.

8. Police misconduct for this research is describe as behavior that may be the result have been of an officer's biased or prejudicial attitude towards persons of a different culture, race or background, that leads to mistreatment of those individuals. With that being said, please describe your understanding of police misconduct?
9. Please describe your knowledge of police misconduct in the Black American community? If any.
10. How do you think police misconduct overtime has involved over the years since the Watts Riots of 1965, which was riot spurred from an incident on August 11, 1965 when Marquette Frye, a young African American motorist, was pulled over and arrested by Lee W. Minikus, a White California Highway Patrolman, for suspicion of driving while intoxicated. As a crowd of onlookers gathered at the scene of Frye's arrest, strained tensions between police officers and the crowd erupted in a violent exchange. The outbreak of violence that followed Frye's arrest immediately touched off a large-scale riot centered in the commercial section of Watts, a deeply impoverished African American neighborhood in South Central Los Angeles. For several days, rioters overturned and burned automobiles and looted and damaged grocery stores, liquor stores, department stores, and pawnshops, to now in the 20<sup>th</sup> century?

### **Structural Questions**

11. Can you explain to me about a time, when you had an encounter with the police? Can you describe how this affected you? Or when you have witnessed an encounter with the police?
12. Can you describe how your attitude is affected by factors associated with police misconduct?
13. In what ways, if at all, do you feel that factors such as media coverage impacted Black American perception of police misconduct in the Southeastern United States?



14. In what ways, if at all, do you feel that factors such as community environment has impacted Black American perception of police misconduct in the Southeastern United States?
15. In what ways, if at all, do you feel that factors such as informal and formal behaviors impacted Black American perception of police misconduct in the Southeastern United States?
16. What is your perception of police misconduct and the factors associated with police misconduct have had on the Black American Community?

### **Contrast Questions**

17. How effective is police code of conduct policy and procedure when working within the Black American Community? What could be changed, if any, to better relate to the Black American Community?
18. What changes should be considered by policy makers to help change the attitudes of Black Americans when dealing with factors associated with police misconduct? How would these changes help the Black American Community?
19. How would you suggest Black American Community become more politically organized to improve community relation between police and Black American community?