

2019

# Use of Force: Perception of Racial Minorities and Police Officers in Southeastern United States

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*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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2019

Abstract

Use of Force: Perception of Racial Minorities and Police Officers in  
Southeastern United States

by

William H. Riter, Jr.

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration – Criminal Justice

Walden University

August 2019

## Abstract

The amount of force used by law enforcement officers has become a highly-charged topic, especially among racial minority citizens and the law enforcement community. While the use of force by police officers is permitted by law enforcement agencies and expected by citizens, the amount and type of force used can trigger or cause problems, such as distrust or loss of confidence for the police agency, if the public perceives the force to be unjustified. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the use of force by police officers and how to improve the relationship between racial minority citizens and law enforcement. Using Rawls' social justice theory as the foundation, the purpose of this qualitative study was to examine how the perceptions of the police use of force differ among racial minority citizens and police officers in a southern state. Data were collected from 20 racial minority citizens over the age of 18 from two southern cities who agreed to participate in my study. Additionally, 21 completed surveys were collected from current or retired law enforcement officers. Interview and survey data were inductively coded and subjected to a thematic analysis procedure. Survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Findings indicate there needs to be more accountability on the use of force by the police, with many citizens feeling the police cannot be trusted. Both groups suggested perceptions are often influenced by the media, which may provide incorrect information. Results of this study may lead to positive social change with racial minority citizens and the law enforcement community by refining police policies and enhancing police training programs on the use of force. If changes are made, the relationship between the law enforcement community and racial minority citizens could ultimately improve perceptions on the use of force.

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## Dedication

I would like to dedicate my dissertation to my wife, Ning and our son, Henry for all the patience that you had with me while I was on this long journey. Ning you always believed in me and encouraged me to continue in this program. I often recall the times that you reminded me that if obtaining a PhD was easy then everyone would have one. Henry since your birth I have been in school and even though you did not understand I read parts of my research to you and you never complained! I love you both with all my heart!

## Acknowledgements

I wish to take this opportunity to thank each instructor that I had during my years with Walden University. I would especially like to thank my committee members, Dr. Heather Mbaye, Dr. Tony R. Smith, and Dr. Dan Jones for their input and encouragement throughout the dissertation process. Without your help and guidance, I would not have reached this milestone.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Introduction**

The amount of force used by law enforcement officers in the Southeastern United States and other regions of the country has become a highly-charged topic, especially among racial minority citizens and the law enforcement community. While the use of force is permitted by law enforcement agencies and expected by citizens, the amount and type of police use of force used can cause or trigger other problems for the community and the police agency. The concern over the use of force and the public's perception can cause criminal behavior within a community if left unchecked (Shjarback, 2016).

Additionally, this research could have an impact on the lives of our racial minority youth, who may decide criminal behavior is acceptable and expected. This belief may be contributed to the perceived injustice they receive from the law enforcement officers who are there to protect them and the criminal justice system that may decide their fate if charged with a criminal offense. According to Hagan and Shedd (2005), many African-Americans believe there is a disproportionate number of African-Americans in the prison system as compared to the entire population. Renauer and Covelli (2011) also pointed out that many minorities perceive they are targeted by law enforcement officers just because of the color of their skin. Overall, many racial minority youths claim they are stopped, questioned, searched, and arrested more often than their white counterparts (Hagan & Shedd, 2005; Wu, Lake, & Cao, 2015). Thus, Hagan and Shedd emphasize the idea that this "perceived injustice" may lead to criminal behavior among young

racial minority citizens (p. 263).

Wu et al. (2015) also state, the relationship between the police and minority youth is sometimes difficult particularly in predominately African-American communities because of mistrust. The lack of trust and misunderstanding from both groups causes this strain on the relationship between the police and minority youth which may lead to criminal behavior or lawlessness (Wu et al., 2015). Furthermore, once the perceptions of the police are in the minds of citizens, it is challenging to change that belief and start building trust between law enforcement and racial minorities (Wu et al., 2015).

Some contend a possible reason for the distrust of the police stemmed from the early 1990s when law enforcement officers strived to control criminal activity by targeting racial minority citizens who live in economically-deprived communities (Wu et al., 2015). Tactics such as stop, and frisk were the norm for many police agencies designed to deter possible criminal activity in the African-American communities (Wu et al., 2015). Most often, racial minority juveniles have the most contact with police officers and are significantly influenced by what happens to their peers, family members, or what they see on television (Wu et al., 2015). Of course, it is paramount that this study includes the perceptions of all racial minority citizens since the youth of today are the policymakers and leaders of tomorrow as suggested by Wu et al. (2015). Without a clear understanding of the perceptions of all racial minority citizens and law enforcement officers concerning the use of force, it is difficult to proceed with any positive

changes that may help bridge the ever-widening gap between racial minority citizens and law enforcement officers.

The general problem lies with the lack of knowledge and understanding of when officers can use force and under which circumstances. If this highly charged topic is not resolved, then conflicts will continue to expand between both parties (Shjarback, 2016). The results of the study can provide information needed to develop or change policies and training standards for law enforcement agencies. The findings could also offer clarifications and a better understanding of law enforcement procedures and policies concerning the use of force. By leaving this topic unchecked, it allows perceptions of both parties to reach conclusions that may not be accurate, which may lead to distrust between racial minority citizens and the law enforcement community.

Additionally, by factually studying this topic and presenting my results, law enforcement administrators and community leaders may have a better understanding of the perceptions of racial minority citizens and police officers, which may help improve those interactions between police officers and minority citizens. This understanding is especially significant when accountability and transparency are the two chief complaints filed against the law enforcement community (Dunn, 2010). Some racial minority citizens perceive that law enforcement officers use an excessive amount of force or deadly force against them more often than White citizens (Shjarback, 2016). Whereas, law enforcement officers perceive racial minority citizens are all against them and must resort to using an increased amount of verbal threats or force against citizens, especially in communities that appear to be high-crime areas (Shjarback, 2016). By

uncovering and understanding the perceptions of racial minority citizens and the perceptions of law enforcement officers along with following the policies that govern the use of force, it could help bridge those inequalities that have become prevalent in today's culture.

However, use of force policies is not always the same among all law enforcement agencies throughout the country (Paoline & Terrill, 2011). Paoline and Terrill (2011) suggest that some studies have shown there is not a standardized use of force policy that is followed by each law enforcement agency in the country. In many cases, use of force policies and training are left up to the individual agency and their administrators (Paoline & Terrill, 2011). However, if law enforcement agencies could develop a standardized use of force policy, it could help establish a more positive relationship between law enforcement and racial minority citizens, especially if everyone had a real understanding of when and how force could be used against a citizen. By not having a standardization of use of force policies it causes misinformation to become prevalent in the news media.

### **Background of the Study**

Law enforcement officers have an ethical and legal obligation to fairly treat the public, regardless of social class, economic status, religion, or skin color. Many racial minorities and cultural critics have alleged racial bias in police treatment of individuals. According to the study conducted by Taylor, Alpert, Kubu, Woods, and Dunham (2011), the amount of excessive use of force complaints increased substantially between 2008 to 2011. Another study revealed that the use of force by the police is disproportionately biased against certain racial and ethnic groups as

opposed to other members of society (Miller, 2015). Furthermore, compared proportionately to the total population of the United States, the average citizen has a relatively small possibility of having an encounter with a law enforcement officer. However, many racial minorities claim that police officers stop them more often than White citizens (Langton & Durose, 2013).

Additionally, Taylor et al. (2011) report that many minorities claim the police treat them more harshly after being stopped for minor traffic violations. Likewise, Lafraniere and Lehren (2015) write that Black and Hispanic citizens are far more likely to be detained for minor infractions as opposed to White drivers. Some citizens believe that police stop minorities for relatively minor reasons or no reason at all; and in some cases, police stop them merely because of their skin color (Epp, Maynard-Moody, & Haider-Markel, 2014). In another study, researchers found that six percent of all racial minority drivers stopped by the police, thirty-three percent report force was used against them and seemed excessive, however, police officers received no corrective action from their departments (Langton & Durose, 2013).

Thus, accountability is also an issue that must be addressed by the police and leaders of our communities. Many citizens feel that police cannot be trusted, and they also believe the police will hide the facts concerning incidents on the use of force (Micucci & Gomme, 2005). One study exposes that even if police leaders investigate a use of force complaint, they will not find fault with the officer; they rule the claim as unfounded (Hickman, Atherley, Lowery, & Alpert, 2015). Micucci and Gomme (2005) also point out that some police supervisors are reluctant to find fault with their officers since they too came up through the ranks and may have



participated in the same type of behavior. Furthermore, research suggests many police use of force complaints or incidents are not documented by police agencies at all (Hickman et al., 2015). When use of force incidents are not recorded, it may cause distrust between racial minority citizens and police officers that may also contribute to negative perceptions (Hickman et al., 2015).

#### *North Carolina Complaints*

A study conducted by Lafraniere and Lehren (2015) indicates that Black citizens and other people of color in Greensboro North Carolina are stopped, searched, and have some force used against them more often than White citizens. Other major cities in North Carolina, such as Charlotte, have also experienced 'use of force' incidents that have resulted in deaths to Black citizens by the police, many of which reached national news (Blinder, 2016). Thus, some racial minority citizens believe law enforcement officers use more force on them than against White citizens.

Nevertheless, their perceived opinions and attitudes regarding that use of force could be influenced by reports from news media, television shows, movies, or the shared experience of another person (Braga, Winship, Tyler, Fagan, & Meares, 2014). Understanding when officers can use force and under what circumstances is only one part of the equation. Wittie (2011) pointed out that there needs to be an understanding of the justification on the levels of force that an officer may or should consider when encountering specific incidents. No one is disputing the fact that officers should be permitted to use force; in fact, most agencies have established

guidelines and policies that authorize officers to use force against citizens (Paoline & Terrill, 2011).

However, if law enforcement agencies had a standardized use of force policy and those policies were made public, then it could have a positive influence on police and racial minority relations. Moreover, use of force policies should include when and under which circumstance an officer was permitted to use force against a citizen as stated in a use of force continuum.

#### *Force Continuum*

Wittie (2011) discusses the force continuum or options the police may or may not follow when encountering a possibly hostile situation. The use of force continuum indicates the first level of force is merely the presence of the officer. The continuum increases the use of force level permitted to be used by the officer, as he or she perceives the threat encountered at that moment (Wittie, 2011). According to Phillips (2010) as the danger or level of resistance rises so does the officer's level of force that he or she can use against the citizen. Even though the use of force continuum is taught to law enforcement officers, starting with officer presence and ending with lethal or deadly force, it should only serve as a guide for officers (Wittie, 2011). If an officer encounters a threat perceived as life-threatening, he or she is encouraged to move to the top of the force continuum.

Then again, some may argue police officers are taught to use the least amount of force to control a situation, and the amount of power they use should comply with their departmental policy, training, and other regulations such as state laws (The Use of Force, 2009). The level of

force should not exceed what is reasonable under the circumstances; however, the officer's definition of what is reasonable may differ from that of the public's definition (Wittie, 2011). Often, the amount of force used is in the form of threats, designed to gain compliance with the police (Phillips, 2010). However, these types of warnings may instead increase the tension between racial minorities and police officers. Furthermore, studies reveal that while a minimal number of citizen/police encounters involve any force, one use of force incident can change the perception of racial minority citizens dramatically (Phillips, 2010).

### **Problem Statement**

The increase in police inflicted injuries and deaths among racial minority citizens raise a significant concern throughout the United States. Despite departmental policies and training, use of force issues continues to rise problematically. Understanding the use of force through the lens of racial minority citizens should be a concern for all law enforcement agencies, officers, and government officials. The general problem lies within the failure to understand what is acceptable when using force against a citizen by the police (see Paoline & Terrill, 2011).

The consequences of leaving the current status quo unexamined are the possible loss of minorities' confidence in, trust in, and cooperation with the law enforcement community. Without this cooperation, police departments may jeopardize their ability to maintain public order, leading to civil unrest and lawlessness among citizens. Police officers may also lose valuable support and assistance in solving crimes (Micucci & Gomme, 2005). Without this public support, law enforcement officers and their agencies cannot function effectively (Micucci

& Gomme, 2005). Furthermore, law enforcement agencies and administrators must also recognize liability issues associated with violations of their use of force policies and mandates (Micucci & Gomme, 2005). By developing or improving procedures and training practices, they could help reduce those liability issues.

The implementation of new and improved policies, along with refined training practices can help improve the relationship between racial minority citizens and the law enforcement community. Another side of this concern is the issue of law enforcement officers who appear to use excessive force, which may seem to be unreasonable to the public (Wittie, 2011). Evidence of this problem exists in the many recent incidents occurring throughout the country, including assaults on police officers and what appears to be excessive force used against racial minority citizens.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to examine the perception that racial minority citizens and police officers have regarding the use of force and tactics that law enforcement officers exercise during their employment in Southeastern United States. Understanding police use of force through the lens of racial minority citizens should be a concern for all law enforcement agencies, the officers, and government officials. Again, the problem facing racial minority citizens and the police is understanding what an acceptable level of police use of force is and under which circumstances can force be used.

The consequences of leaving the current status quo unexamined are the possible loss of minorities' confidence in, trust in, and cooperation with the law enforcement community. Without this cooperation, police departments may jeopardize their ability to maintain public order, leading to civil unrest and lawlessness among citizens. Police officers may also lose valuable support and assistance in solving crimes (Micucci & Gomme, 2005). Without this public support, law enforcement officers and their agencies cannot function effectively (Micucci & Gomme, 2005).

### **Research Question**

How do perceptions of racial minority citizens differ from law enforcement officers concerning the use of force in Southeastern United States?

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study utilized a hermeneutic phenomenological strategy, which allowed me to consider the lived experiences of the participants and to both capture and understand the perceptions of racial minority citizens and law enforcement officers (Moustakas, 1994). Rudestam and Newton (2015) suggest researchers who employ a phenomenological approach may be interested in everyday occurrences, which will provide an insight into the thought process of racial minority citizens and the officers. Rudestam and Newton further exemplify that hermeneutic phenomenological research design is not limited to just interviewing participants in person; in fact, various sources of data include self-reported documents, government publications, and other printed literature (2015).

I employed John Rawls' (1971) social justice theory, which offers the opportunity to investigate and address issues that citizens face, such as excessive force by law enforcement officers or other government agents (Wenar, 2008). John Rawls' social justice theory stresses the idea that all citizens should have the same equal rights as their fellow citizens, regardless of their skin color, religious affiliation, gender, or social, economic status (Wenar, 2008). Lastly, civil disobedience could be explained when citizens perceive or experience unfair treatment by the police, as suggested by John Rawls' theory (Wenar, 2008). Robinson (2010) explains that the whole principle behind social justice acknowledges the fact that citizens will cooperate with authority figures if they are treated fairly and equally by law enforcement, criminal justice systems, and society.

Entertaining the belief that people will be obedient and adhere to all rules is a significant idea behind John Rawls' social justice theory (Robinson, 2010). Robinson (2010), suggests Rawls' position that reasonable citizens would generally follow the rules set forth by the government and society; however, if people are not treated equally by law enforcement officers or government leaders, they may develop negative perceptions of the police and react accordingly.

In contrast, the conflict theory of law helped to illustrate the relationship between racial minority citizens and police officers. Holmes (2000) suggests the conflict theory of law contributes to control crime by targeting minority citizens. The study also suggests racial minority citizens do not trust law enforcement, and it proposes that there is distrust against

minority citizens by law enforcement officers (Holmes, 2000). This study also notes that crime control is politically motivated (Holmes, 2000). This belief is based on the idea that to control society and its members, "powerful groups" must control other groups of people and the possible threats to society (Smith & Holmes, 2014). This control is in the form of the police regulating the activities of racial minority citizens and other perceived threats deemed to be dangerous to society (Smith & Holmes, 2014). Smith and Holmes further cite several studies that indicate possible correlations between crime control and racial minorities and potential threats to society (2014). This same study suggests how ethnic minority communities may pose a perceived threat to law enforcement officers. Therefore, officers may be inclined to use a more significant amount of force against members of those communities (Smith & Holmes, 2014). Additionally, Holmes (2000) cites several studies that suggest racial minority citizens are the victims of police use of force more so than White citizens.

An additional theory that appears to help rationalize why people have or develop different perceptions of others can also be applied to my study. Implicit bias theory stresses the idea that people may have underlying tendencies or beliefs that they are not aware of, and these underlying beliefs may cause them to imagine or acquire an opinion about a person or group of people (Means & Thompson, 2016). This belief may be based on prior experience or created from something they have witnessed in their past (Clemons, 2014). Studies show that when people are exposed to external stimuli throughout their lives, they may foster specific ideas or beliefs they may not even recognize as being part of their personality (Cameron, Payne, &

Knobe, 2010). For example, when people watch movies that feature a race as being extraordinarily violent or portrayed as a criminal, they may accept this suggestion as factual. This belief, in many cases, may not be apparent to that person until they are challenged with a situation as in the case of police officers and the use of deadly force (Cameron et al., 2010). Thus, negative perceptions may surface or be realized in those situations that were not apparent in the past.

The three theories, social justice theory, the conflict theory of law, and the implicit bias theory will be utilized for my research. All three approaches are equally valuable. The social justice theory stresses the idea that all persons should have equal rights and privileges regardless of their race, gender, or social, economic status (Robinson, 2010; Wenar, 2008). The conflict theory of law can help illustrate the relationship between racial minority citizens and law enforcement officers (Smith & Holmes, 2014). This theory stresses the idea that ethnic minorities do not always trust law enforcement or the government (Smith & Holmes, 2014). Individual members of society exercise control on the rest of the population, which many consider are racial minorities or the lower classes of people (Smith & Holmes, 2014). This control is usually defined as crime control and places law enforcement as the leading participant in this relationship between both parties (Smith & Holmes, 2014). The implicit bias theory helps to understand why specific ideas or perceptions come to the surface while there is an encounter between law enforcement and racial minorities that result in excessive force allegations (Cameron et al., 2010).



### **Nature of the Study**

By utilizing a qualitative phenomenological design to study lived experiences of participants, I will attempt to capture those shared life experiences among racial minority citizens and police officers. Moustakas (1994) explains that in a qualitative study, the research is typically conducted in the environmental setting, where people live and carry out their normal activities. Thus, the data collected describes the actions or experiences of the participants, instead of reducing the exposures to numerical data as other methods utilize. Once the data is received, it will be coded and appraised for themes and possible patterns. Lastly, by interpreting and comparing the data, I will present the information subjectively. The data interpretations can lead to action or changes, such as policy reform, new policies, additional or enhanced police training and may help bridge the ever-widening gap between the law enforcement community and racial minority citizens. Thus, revised use of force policies for the police could have an impact on public perception and opinion in the future of how police officers perform their duties.

### **Definitions of Key Terms**

**Discretion.** For this research, discretion is the ability of a law enforcement officer to decide between available actions he or she could take when performing official law enforcement duties (Wolf, Mesloh, Henych, & Thompson, 2009).

**Implicit Bias Theory.** Clemons (2014) describes implicit bias as an association in the subconscious mind that connects or attempts to connect human characteristics with places or ideas. This theory is based further on the assumption that people perceive reality on past

experiences, ideas, or external stimuli, such as the news media, experiences of others, and entertainment (Clemons, 2014).

**Perception.** The impression or awareness that a person possesses that is based on experience or exposure to some stimuli (Donovan & Klahm, 2015).

**Use of Force.** An action taken by a law enforcement officer against a citizen ranging from officer presence to deadly force as taught in many basic law enforcement training programs. Force can include officer presence, verbal commands, or physical controls (Phillips, 2010).

**Use of Force Continuum.** A guide for a law enforcement officers to follow; outlines the type and amount of force that can be used against or to control another person or situation (Wolf et al., 2009).

**Reasonableness.** Whether the application of force was reasonable, at the time; whether the force applied is supported by the totality of the circumstances surrounding the incident, as suggested by U.S. Supreme Court Case, *Graham v. Conner* (1989).

### **Assumptions**

I assumed my participants were truthful and willing to answer my questions and felt free to relate any experience or data concerning the use of force by police officers. I also assumed that all participants understood how important this study was and that it could lead to positive changes within our communities.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

This study was designed to examine the perception of racial minority citizens and law

enforcement officers in Southeastern United States concerning police use of force. Data collection included interview results of both groups of participants.

The confines of this study were racial minority citizens from two cities located in Southeastern United States. Males and females were randomly asked to respond to a questionnaire. Each participant was provided with a cover letter and consent form after introductions. I only approached persons who appeared to be 18 and older.

Additionally, unknown active duty and retired law enforcement officers, representing different agencies were given the opportunity to answer a questionnaire by using the SurveyMonkey.com website. All participants were anonymous, and no identifying demographics were obtained. At the beginning of the survey, I asked the prospective participant not to respond to the questionnaire if they had not worked as a law enforcement officer from the Southeastern area of the United States. They were asked about their perceived opinions of the use of force on racial minority citizens. By utilizing a phenomenological approach, I will be able to look for, and document shared themes and ideas from the participants.

### **Limitations**

One limitation of this study was the inability to examine data on all use of force incidents for law enforcement agencies. There is not a national database that is current and up to date, and most law enforcement agencies are not mandated to submit use of force reports to any collection agency (Hickman et al., 2015). Additionally, not all use of force incidents is required to be reported and documented (Hickman et al., 2015). For example, the use of force could be officer

presence or verbal command, which would not be generally recorded by an agency. Information concerning the use of sprays, electronic control devices, batons, and firearms, which are used to control or maintain control of a person are also limited.

Another limitation of this study is understanding biases that I possess concerning law enforcement officers and their use of force. Reducing those biases was very important to ensure the validity of my research. By recognizing that I have preferences, I was able to distance myself to be an observer and not a participant in the study. After spending almost 30 years as an officer and rising to the rank of captain over internal affairs, I realized I possessed opinions and ideas regarding the use of force. During each interview with racial minority citizens, I disclosed my ties to law enforcement and was yet able to remain objective during each meeting and subsequent final research.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study fills a gap in understanding the perceptions that racial minority citizens and law enforcement officers have regarding the use, level, and type of force that is allowed in the state of North Carolina. The need for this study has correspondingly increased since there appears to be an increasing amount of use of force incidents filed against law enforcement officers. In some situations, law enforcement officers are accused of targeting racial minorities, sometimes leading to the needless deaths of unarmed members of society (Blinder, 2016; Lafraniere & Lehen, 2015). By exploring this dichotomy of perceptions, this study can begin to bridge a gap between racial minority citizens and law enforcement officers.

### **Significance to Social Change**

Moreover, the results of this study may lead law enforcement leaders to develop policy changes for the use of force. This study will attempt to contribute to positive social change by revealing those perceptions through the light of a minority perspective. The perspective of both racial minority citizens and law enforcement officers is necessary for this study since it could confirm or dispel the allegations that law enforcement officers from the Southeastern area of the United States use more force on racial minority citizens than on White citizens. Next, this study can improve and encourage positive social change by opening the lines of communication and enhancing relations between ethnic minority citizens and the law enforcement community. This improvement can lead to a reduction in the use of force incidents among racial minority citizens and police officers.

### **Summary and Transition**

In Chapter 1, I introduce my proposed study on the perception of racial minority citizens and law enforcement officers on the use of force. This study will examine and attempt to understand the viewpoint of both groups. Understanding these perceptions and bringing them into the focus of community and government leaders and police officials can lead to social change by changing or updating policies and training, which may help foster positive attitudes toward each group.

The use of force used by law enforcement officers against racial minority citizens has become a highly-charged topic in Southeastern United States and other regions of the country

(Lafraniere & Lehren, 2015). This issue is especially important when there is the appearance of excessive or unjustified use of force used against racial minority citizens. Specifically, I intended to examine and understand the perceptions of ethnic minority citizens and law enforcement officers in Southeastern United States.

By leaving the status quo unchecked and allowing this situation to continue, law enforcement, and the communities they serve and protect will continue to experience distrust and lack of cooperation. Law enforcement officers are tasked with providing protection and enforcing laws of our communities and the state; but if there is a lack of trust between the police and racial minority citizens, both groups are negatively affected.

By using a phenomenological hermeneutic strategy, it permits me to consider the lived experiences of the participants and to capture and understand the perceptions of racial minority citizens and law enforcement officers. Furthermore, using John Rawls' social justice theory will help me to understand and investigate issues that citizens face such as excessive force by law enforcement officers.

A second theory was beneficial to illustrate the relationship between racial minority citizens and police officers. The conflict theory of law suggests crime is best controlled by targeting minority citizens, who do not trust law enforcement (Holmes, 2000). A final approach that helps to understand biases people may have can also shed light on the perception of racial minority citizens and police officers. The implicit bias theory stresses the idea that people may have underlining tendencies or beliefs, that are not evident until they are faced with an incident

or situation. Studies indicate implicit bias theory could be based on prior experiences or suggestions that a person has encountered.

In Chapter 2, I will present a literature review regarding the use of force by police officers, perceptions of racial minority citizens and law enforcement officers. Additionally, Chapter 2 further examines theories that are presented in Chapter 1, along with providing a brief understanding of what can influence perceptions.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

There needs to be a clear understanding of the perceptions of racial minority citizens and law enforcement officers concerning the use of force in Southeastern United States. The main concern lies with the lack of knowledge and understanding of when officers can use police power against citizens and under which circumstances can that force be applied. Conflicts will continue to expand between racial minority citizens and law enforcement officers if this issue is not resolved. The need for this study has correspondingly increased since there appears to be an increasing amount of use of force incidents filed against law enforcement officers (Reese, 2015). In some situations, law enforcement officers are accused of targeting racial minorities, sometimes leading to the needless deaths of unarmed members of society (Blinder, 2016; Lafraniere & Lehren, 2015; Reese, 2015). By exploring this dichotomy of perceptions, this study can begin to bridge a gap between racial minority citizens and law enforcement officers.

The increase in police inflicted injuries and deaths among racial minority citizens raise a significant concern throughout the United States. Despite departmental policies and training, use of force issues continues to rise problematically (Smith & Holmes, 2014). Understanding the use of force through the lens of racial minority citizens should be a concern for all law enforcement agencies, officers, and government officials. The consequences of leaving the current status quo unexamined are the possible loss of minorities' confidence in, trust in, and cooperation with the law enforcement community. Without this cooperation, police departments may jeopardize their



ability to maintain public order, leading to civil unrest and lawlessness among citizens. In general, law enforcement officers and their agencies cannot function effectively without help from citizens.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

The primary purpose of my literature review was to explore and analyze existing information concerning perceptions of racial minority citizens of law enforcement officers in Southeastern United States, regarding the use of force. As I entered the literature review for my topic, I first searched for articles through the Walden University library to ascertain the significance of the use of force involving racial minorities and police officers. Next, by using published dissertations, journal articles, and magazine articles, I located several sources of information that can provide a basis for a more accurate study. Using Internet data sources such as Google Scholar, I examined other sources of information about police use of force in different locations throughout the United States. The references found in the Walden University library included ProQuest, Sage Publications, and other criminal-justice related search engines. I made every effort to utilize information from within the past five years; however, in some cases, older articles, data, and publications provided much-needed background information on the use of force perceptions of racial minority citizens and police officers.

By using search words such as *perception*, *racial minorities*, *police officer*, *use of force continuum*, and particularly the phrase '*use of force*,' I located a vast number of articles and publications for my study. Many articles deal specifically with the use of force by police officers,

but these articles do not often mention the personal perception of racial minority citizens regarding the use of force by police. I was also interested in locating items that pertained to the knowledge that police officers hold and how they achieve their decision to use police power. Furthermore, after finding each article or source of information, I entered them into a citation management program called Mendeley. This program helped to manage and store each of the sources that I examined.

### *Theories*

The theories used to help clarify and direct my research study on the perceptions of racial minority citizens and law enforcement officers regarding the use of force are explained under the following subsections: social justice theory, conflict theory of law, and implicit bias theory.

#### ***Social Justice Theory***

John Rawls' (1971) social justice theory offers the opportunity to investigate and address issues that citizens face, such as excessive force by law enforcement officers or other government agents (Wenar, 2008). John Rawls' social justice theory stresses the idea that each citizen should have the same and equal rights as their fellow citizens, regardless of skin color, religious affiliation, gender, or social, economic status, especially when interacting with law enforcement officers (Wenar, 2008). Lastly, civil disobedience could be explained when citizens perceive or experience unfair treatment by the police, as suggested by John Rawls' theory (Wenar, 2008). Robinson (2010) explains that the social justice principle acknowledges that citizens will cooperate with authority figures if they are treated fairly and equally by law

enforcement officers, the criminal justice system, and society.

Robinson (2010) describes the viewpoint of Rawls by stating all citizens should buy into the idea that it is their right to be treated fairly and equally, provided of course, that citizens agree with the rules that society has set for them to follow. Robinson further states that Rawls believes reasonable people will coincide with the regulations that are in place and act accordingly. However, if citizens are not treated equally by law enforcement, they may develop negative perceptions of the police and react differently.

Hardin (2015) discusses procedural justice which is based on the social justice theory, in his study of the public and police relationships. Hardin suggests there is a link between police actions and the citizens they serve. Understanding specific procedures and policies that must be followed by the police can help both parties come to an agreement or acceptance on the use of force.

### ***Conflict Theory of Law***

The conflict theory of law may help describe the relationship between racial minority citizens and police officers. Holmes (2000) suggests the conflict theory of law helps control crime by targeting minority citizens. The study also suggests ethnic minority citizens do not trust law enforcement, while it also proposes there is distrust against minority citizens by law enforcement officers (Holmes, 2000). This study also suggests that crime control is politically motivated (Holmes, 2000). This belief is based on the idea that to control society and its members, "powerful groups" must control other groups of people and the possible threats to

society (Holmes, 2000). This control is in the form of police regulating the activities of racial minority citizens and other perceived threats deemed to be dangerous to society (Smith & Holmes, 2014). Smith and Holmes (2014) cite several studies that correlate crime control and racial minorities and possible threats to society.

This same study also notes that racial minority communities may pose a perceived threat to law enforcement officers, so officers may be inclined to use a higher level of force against members of those communities (Smith & Holmes, 2014). Additionally, Holmes (2000) cites several studies that suggest minority citizens are the victims of police use of force, more so than white citizens.

Moreover, Nickel (2015) use the conflict theory of law in his study and critical factors in the use of force. Nickel pointed out how law enforcement officers use coercion to bring about social controls on citizens. The conflict theory of law also emphasizes there is a relationship between the government and citizens and that social order needs to prevail for society remain safe.

### ***Implicit Bias Theory***

The implicit bias theory may help explain why people exhibit or develop different perceptions of others and should also be considered for this study (Fridell & Lim, 2016). Implicit bias theory stresses the idea that people may have underlining tendencies or beliefs, which could cause them to believe or develop an opinion about a person or group of people before even meeting that person or group (Fridell & Lim, 2016; Means & Thompson, 2016).

Individual studies show that when people are exposed to external stimuli throughout their lives, they may develop specific ideas or beliefs that they do not consciously recognize as being part of their personality or external thoughts (Cameron, Payne, & Knobe, 2010). For example, when people are exposed to a movie or some type of media that features a racial minority as being extraordinarily violent or portrayed as a criminal, they may accept this as factual. This belief, in many cases, may not be apparent to that person until he or she is faced with a situation, as in the case of police officers and the use of deadly or excessive force (Cameron et al., 2010). Cameron et al. (2010) also suggest that implicit race biases could be an underlining cause for the discrimination that some people have for others, without them being consciously aware of it.

Categorically, law enforcement officers should always remain neutral when dealing with citizens. However, some may have deep-rooted tendencies or ideas about characteristics of groups of people, based solely on the color of their skin, and these officers may not be entirely aware of those tendencies (Means & Thompson, 2016). Another study emphasizes how citizens may base their opinion regarding the police, before having an encounter with a law enforcement officer (Cameron et al., 2010). Previous knowledge, biases, and ideas are important factors to consider when examining racial minority citizen and police encounters that result in some conflict between the two groups (Braga et al., 2014). Furthermore, yet another study proposes an argument about implicit race biases being the cause of discrimination (Cameron et al., 2010). This argument asks whether a person or police officer should be forgiven if that person or officer discriminated against another person (Cameron et al., 2010).

Clemons (2014) provides an analysis of implicit bias in one study that pointed out how implicit biases can be rooted in a persons' subconscious mind because of past experiences or stimuli. An analogy provided explains how we know something without even having to be told about it again, such as seeing someone crying (Clemons, 2014). We realize the person is sad or something has happened to him or her without being made aware of the circumstances surrounding that person and the exhibited emotions.

Additionally, Deese (2015) uses the implicit racial bias theory in her study concerning African-American males and the police use of force in the United States. In her thesis, Deese uses an example of a white female walking down the street and sees an African-American male, the female "subconsciously clutches her purse tightly or crosses the street to avoid him" (p. 17, 2015). Deese summarizes that implicit racial bias occurs when there is a negative unconscious association attached to a race of people.

Furthermore, many other challenges are facing the entire criminal justice system, such as the disproportionate number of racial minorities citizens locked up in prison, as opposed to white citizens, that was based on some implicit racial biases (Fridell & Lim, 2016). Are people of color being sentenced to prison based more on the skin color instead of the severity of the criminal offense? Do law enforcement officers base their decisions to use force based on the possible threat or the race of the person? Lastly, do implicit biases come to the surface and become unequivocal when law enforcement officers or court authorities interact with people of color?

Clemons explains that explicit biases are the opposite of implicit biases, and they are easier to recognize and control (2014). Understanding and identifying implicit biases are difficult to detect and even harder to control, as suggested by Gadson (2016). However, implicit biases can possibly be uncovered or revealed with tests, such as an "implicit association test," that has been used by psychologists for several years (Clemons, 2014). These psychological tests are designed to measure implicit racial biases by examining the amount of time it takes to link a picture to a word or another image. Reportedly, the slower or faster the response, the more likely the participant has implicit biases against people of color (Clemons, 2014). Another study indicates that participants in an implicit bias test chose to shoot unarmed Black citizens more often than White citizens because of their perceptions of Black people (James, 2011).

Clemons proposes a persuasive argument about implicit biases and stresses the need for further research and possible acceptance by the courts, government agencies, and the law enforcement community (2014). Not recognizing and addressing the problems of race relations among racial minority citizens and the law enforcement community will further erode and divide the relationship between both groups (Fridell & Lim, 2016). Furthermore, additional studies indicate that implicit biases are far more common than explicit prejudices, such as racism, and they are even harder to control (Fridell & Lim, 2016). Reese cites comments made by former FBI Director Comey regarding racism in the U.S.:

"The majority of Whites have an unconsciously or hidden bias toward African Americans which make them act or react differently; White law enforcement officers become cynical

while working in minority neighborhoods that are known as high crime areas, and most police officers are not openly racists, [but] join law enforcement to help serve and protect people in the community". (p. 10, 2015).

When all three theories are combined, they help to explain how perceptions originate and how they are related to my study. By using the social justice theory, John Rawls (1971) explained that all people should be treated equally; however, that is not always the case (Wenar, 2008). Some members of society may perceive there is an injustice in America when it comes to the race of a person. Racial minority citizens believe they are targeted by members of the government, the law enforcement community, and the judicial system. The conflict theory of law helps to describe the relationship between the racial minority population and the law enforcement community (Smith & Holmes, 2014). It stresses the impression that ethnic minority citizens do not trust law enforcement officers and law enforcement officers do not trust racial minority citizens (Smith & Holmes, 2014). The conflict theory of law also suggests crime control is an essential factor in ensuring society is safe from crime (Smith & Holmes, 2014). This theory proposes the only way to control crime is to target racial minorities and their possible threats to society (Smith & Holmes, 2014). This suggestion may provide the foundation for negative perceptions as well.

Lastly, the implicit bias theory offers the idea that many people have developed preconceived notions that are hidden in their subconscious mind and are not readily available to



the person unless faced with an incident or encounter with a member of a different race (Cameron et al., 2010). For example, believing all African-American males are violent and commit crimes against White citizens, which may cause a police officer to use a more significant amount of force against the minority citizen.

### *Use of Force*

It is expected and understood police officers are sometimes required to use force during their law enforcement duties (Prenzler, Porter, & Alpert, 2013). Even so, law enforcement officers must be cognitive of the fact that they must not violate someone's constitutional right against unreasonable searches, seizures, and the use of force (Prenzler et al., 2013). Police officers face many challenges when carrying out their duties, and they may face danger at any moment during their encounters with citizens (Bogats, 2015). Allowing law enforcement officers to use force against a citizen to overcome a hostile situation is paramount to the safety of law enforcement officers and the public they serve (Chapman, 2012). Officers have a legal right, depending on state laws and department policies, to use force against a citizen; however, it is often alleged that some officers exceed the allowable amount of force in carrying out their duties (Klukkert, Ohlemacher, & Feltes, 2008).

Additionally, law enforcement officers are tasked with enforcing the laws of communities and ensuring a safe environment for people who reside there. While the use of force is necessary for carrying out those duties, it is also vital that police officers use only the level of force needed to take control of a situation (Chapman, 2012). Resisting arrest is a significant reason for the use

of force that can cause injuries or death to a citizen or law enforcement officer. If law enforcement officers were not permitted to use force in the performance of their duties, chaos could overwhelm our communities.

There are numerous articles, reports, and scholarly papers that address the subject on the use of force by law enforcement officers (Klahm, Frank, & Liederbach, 2014). Many articles examine the need for the purpose of using force by the police and go to great depths examining when and under which circumstances that allow officers to use that force. Other studies have examined officer characteristics and even suggest what type of officers are more likely to use force while performing their duties. For example, Chapman suggests officers who possess a college degree or have more experience in law enforcement are less likely to use higher levels of force against a citizen (2012).

Even though many studies are assessing the use of force by law enforcement officers, not one single study can address and correct all problems associated with this issue. The police use of force is a very complex and ever-changing topic that cannot be easily explained. It takes many studies collectively to thoroughly understand the issues surrounding potential problems with the use of force, and how racial minority citizens and law enforcement officers view this issue (Brandl & Stroshine, 2012).

Furthermore, studies also suggest that law enforcement agencies that do not regulate the amount of force their officers use, thus law enforcement officers and their agencies could face liability issues and other associated problems (Klukkert et al., 2008). Police department

regulations on the use of force are typically outlined in their policies. These regulations are taught in their basic law enforcement training programs, and they should also be included in mandatory yearly training curriculum programs (Klukkert et al., 2008). However, according to another report, use of force policies are decided upon by each agency and are not standard throughout the law enforcement profession (International Association, 2012). Without some positive resolve on the use of force and policies covering all agencies, the divide between racial minority citizens and the law enforcement community will only become broader and more pragmatic.

### ***Perceptions of Racial Minorities***

The perception that racial minority citizens hold concerning the police is somewhat more negative than that of White citizens, as reported in a study conducted by Peck (2015). In her quantitative study, Peck examined 92 occurrences involving racial minority citizens and law enforcement officers (2015). Peck concludes that Black citizens had a high percentage of a negative perception of the police, with Hispanic citizens possessing a slightly higher opinion of the police (2015).

Hickman et al. suggest there is a significant difference between the law enforcement community and the public's perception regarding police use of force incidents (2015). Some police administrators argue the use of force against citizens is a relatively rare occurrence, based on statistics (Brandl & Stroshine, 2012; Hickman et al., 2015). However, data on the use of force incidents are not readily available, since many departments do not report such information

(Hickman et al., 2015). Consequently, there is not an accurate total of the amount of use of force incidents nationwide. Results of one study suggest that many departments are reluctant to release the use of force reports to the public fearing such information would lead to more significant problems with the public (Hickman et al., 2015). Furthermore, when departments fail to release the use of force reports to the public, added tension between and the police and public is created (Klahm et al., 2014).

Additionally, Hagan and Shedd argue that there are many situations in which African-Americans have just accepted the treatment they receive by the police, believing the use of force by the police against minority citizens is normal behavior or somewhat expected (2005). This belief could be especially true in communities that are predominately African-American and whose members were born and raised in that community; thus, they have become accustomed to the treatment by law enforcement officers (Hagan & Shedd, 2005).

Hagan and Shedd also argue that many young racial minority citizens have an unfavorable perception of the police because of the unfair treatment they have always received from the police and the judicial system (2005). Additionally, Price (2017) argues racial minority citizens are even more likely to receive higher penalties by the legal system as compared to White citizens based on historical practices of the court system. Price further asserts that the race of a citizen plays a critical role in the eyes of a jury when deciding guilt or innocence (2017).

Likewise, Hagan and Shedd studied the perceptions of students living in the Chicago area. The study indicates African-American, and Latino students often receive unjust treatment

from the police regularly. Hagan and Shedd suggest that during the teenage years of African-American and Latino's lives, they become very much aware of how they are perceived by others, especially if they receive bias treatment from White citizens or police officers (2005).

Studies also indicate that African-American and Latino youths are much more likely than White citizens to have an encounter with a law enforcement officer, especially in cities or other urban areas (Hagan & Shedd, 2005). Accordingly, they are more likely to have formed an opinion of police officers, either positive or negative depending on the circumstances surrounding the encounter. Examples of these encounters are vehicle stops or being stopped and questioned by the police while on the street (Davis, Hyland, & Langton, 2015; Jefferis, Butcher, & Hanley, 2011). Huggins also shares the conclusion that racial minority citizens do not trust the police, and they feel police officers treat them differently than the White citizens (2012).

Barrick (2014) holds the same opinion regarding the perception that Hispanics have regarding the police, and how they treat Hispanics. Barrick argues that many studies focus more on Black and White relations and not so much as Hispanic vs. law enforcement. In many studies, the perception of Hispanics indicates they have more confidence in the police as opposed to less faith that Black citizens hold (Barrick, 2014). In a study conducted by Wu (2014), Hispanic and Asian citizens are faced with a slightly different situation involving the police, especially if immigration issues play into the scenario. Studies show that if members of the community are illegal, they are less likely to report crimes, even if they are the victim (Wu, 2014). Additionally,

Wu stresses the fact that language barriers are also a hindrance to the relationship with police for both races, which is not an issue with Black citizens (2014).

Additionally, Gadson (2016) describes how the perception of the police differs among male and female, income level, or social status. Studies indicate people who reside in crime-ridden, low-income areas may hold a negative perception of the police if the officers are tougher on crime (Dunn, 2010). However, the more affluent neighborhoods typically have a greater respect and increased positive perception of their police officers. Gadson additionally argues that the age of a citizen may influence racial minority citizens' opinion of the police and how they carry out their duties. For example, this study describes how more middle-aged African American citizens have a positive perception of the police, whereas the older and younger African American citizens view police officers more negatively (Gadson, 2016). Gadson also argues that most age groups of White citizens have a more positive perception of the police in most cases.

Furthermore, perceptions can change very quickly. For example, if a police officer is suspected of using excessive force against a minority citizen, the other members of that same community may develop a negative perception of the police within a short period of time (Brandl & Strohshine, 2012). Such is the case in 2016 when a Charlotte, NC police officer shot and killed a Black male who failed to drop a weapon when ordered by the police. The man's family claimed he never owned a gun and was unarmed at the time of the encounter (Blinder, 2016). News reports immediately started requesting the videos from the police; however, Police Chief Kerr

Putney refused to release the videos at first, sighting the fact that an investigation was ongoing (Blinder, 2016).

For several nights, citizens rioted in the streets of Charlotte in protest of this incident; consequently, many businesses were destroyed by the unruly crowds (Blinder, 2016). Later in the investigation, it was determined the shooting victim owned a handgun and had it in his possession at the time of the incident (Blinder, 2016). Police video of the event indicates that Scott had a gun in his possession, even though his spouse and other family members insisted he did not own a gun (Blinder, 2016). However, in a domestic violence order acquired by Mrs. Scott, she indicated that her estranged husband owned a handgun. Members of the community based their opinion of the police on that one incident, which caused so much unrest in the city (Blinder, 2016).

Furthermore, if a person or a group is mistreated or is influenced by some stimuli, such as media news reports, they could develop a negative perception of police (Braga et al., 2014). However, if the stimuli are positive, such as a television show or movie, the group could develop a better opinion of the police, and their perception will be entirely different. In the next section, I exemplify how the media and entertainment field can influence the attitudes of people.

### ***Media Influence***

The media or entertainment industry can undoubtedly influence the perception of citizens regarding the law enforcement profession and how they perform their duties (International Association, 2012). Donovan and Klahm (2015) describe how the news media can influence the

perception of people, especially when the press keeps repeating the same top news story. The study also suggests how the entertainment media changes the American public in the way they view police officers and the use of force. Studies suggest the viewing public seeks out movies and television shows featuring police officers fighting crime and dealing with criminals regularly (Donovan & Klahm, 2015).

People expect the police on television and in movies to be successful in what they do and how they solve the crime, all within a short period (International Association, 2012). This belief creates a message in the minds of viewers that the police are the "good guys" and are capable of solving a crime and arresting the "bad guys." Viewers base a great deal of their perception about the police by watching police shows, with an overwhelming 40 percent of the viewers believing the accuracy of the storyline (Donovan & Klahm, 2015). However, the news media frequently provokes a negative influence in the minds of people regarding police, mainly if an officer uses force that the public perceives as being unjustified (Bohrer & Chaney, 2010; Jefferies et al., 2011; Price, 2017). Moreover, Donovan and Klahm argue this distrust of the police is more prevalent among racial minority citizens (2015).

### ***Perceptions of Law Enforcement Officers***

Law enforcement officers develop perceptions regarding the use of force starting with basic training (Bohrer & Chaney, 2010). Most basic law enforcement training programs will have a segment dealing with the use of force and particularly covering situations when police force can be used against a citizen and under which circumstances (Klukkert et al., 2008). Some



research shows that in some cases, police officers believe they have a legal right to use higher levels of force, even after a threat is contained or reduced (Klukkert et al., 2008). Klukkert et al. (2008) note that German police officers who participated in one study were given scenarios regarding the use of force against citizens. Researchers in this study discovered the participants had the perception that they were permitted to use higher levels of force against a violent citizen, even after the person was under control and was no longer a threat to the officers (Klukkert et al., 2008). However, some critics argue that in the heat of the moment a person, particularly a police officer, could lose control of his or her actions and continue to act aggressively (Klukkert et al., 2008).

Perhaps no other determining factor influences the perception of the police as much as the race of an individual. James describes that since more police officers are shot or assaulted by racial minority citizens, police officers may believe ethnic minority citizens pose a more significant threat against them (2011). While this viewpoint may not be the opinion of minority citizens, it can possibly influence the perception of police officers and how they interact with the racial minority community. James also suggests studies show that some police officers believe Black citizens pose a greater threat than other citizens, so police officers feel the need to be more aggressive against Black citizens (2011).

Additionally, Chow's article reports the police in one Canadian city rely on the attitude of the citizens to gauge how they responded to the needs of the community (2012). The perception of the police and the public can be changed or influenced when both parties are willing to work

together, as in the case of community policing programs (Chow, 2012). There needs to be trust between both parties for the police to be successful in their mission and the public can feel at ease. Another study stresses that if the police treat citizens with respect and follow standard procedures, the public will have trust and confidence in their police department (Donner et al., 2015).

Understanding how the public perceives law enforcement officers is only a segment of the equation. It is essential to understand, for my study, how police officers believe the public views them. For example, Montana State University in cooperation with the Montana Highway Patrol conducted a survey of impaired driving laws, that eventually concluded the public had a positive perception of the police and the job they do (Tooley, Linkenbach, Lande, & Lande, 2009). However, the same study reveals that most police officers throughout the country feel they are not trusted by the communities they serve (Tooley et al., 2009). The researchers of this study used surveys that were sent out to different agencies throughout the United States. It is interesting to note that similar results were received from many different officers, who are not familiar with each other; yet they still share the same opinion regarding the lack of trust by citizens (Tooley et al., 2009).

### ***Police Discretion***

Typically, law enforcement officers are given a tremendous amount of discretion regarding how they enforce laws. Department policies, regulations, and training will lay the foundation of how officers carry out their duties and assignments, along with the knowledge of

when they may exercise officer discretion (Nowacki, 2015). Nowacki (2015) argues that officer discretion "represents the flexibility to make decisions on the job" and may be dictated by the "characteristics of the organization" (p. 644). For example, if everyone in the department uses more force than is necessary, especially with racial minorities, then each officer may assume it is acceptable behavior (Nowacki, 2015).

Exercising police discretion is not always an easy decision to make, and there are moments in which an officer depends on a gut feeling to decide which action he or she should pursue. Regoeczi and Kent (2013) suggest police officers make decisions based on several factors, such as the seriousness of the offense and the demeanor of the citizen. The police officer on patrol has some discretion in the way he or she carries out duties, but most decisions are dependent on the leadership of the department (Woods, 2014). Woods (2014) also describes that officers may be limited in their discretionary powers because of limited resources; perhaps a citizen could have been referred to some other type of program, but instead had to be arrested and force was used against him or her.

In the study conducted by Woods (2014), discretion by police officers has, at times, created situations in which a Black citizen was arrested, whereas a White citizen who committed the same crime was released. That scenario has proven to be a very heated issue between racial minority citizens and the criminal justice field. As Woods further emphasizes, this one single issue affects the ethnic minority citizens' perception in a negative way (2014). Nowacki (2015)

argues for combatting this problem more restrictions should be placed on officer discretion to reduce officer biases.

### **Summary**

The primary purpose of my literature review was to explore and analyze existing information concerning perceptions of racial minority citizens and law enforcement officers in Southeastern United States, regarding the use of force. Understanding the use of force through the lens of ethnic minority citizens should be a concern for law enforcement agencies, the officers, and government officials.

After establishing a conceptual framework for this study that will offer lived experiences of my participants, I completed research on the three theories that will help guide my study. The social justice theory provides the basis of how racial minority citizens should be given the same rights and treatment as other citizens (Wenar, 2008). The conflict theory of law helps describe the relationship between racial minority citizens and police officers (Smith & Holmes, 2014). The conflict theory of law also emphasizes how crime control is maintained among citizens (Smith & Holmes, 2014). Following the conflict theory of law, I examined the implicit bias theory, which helps to explain why people exhibit or develop different perceptions of others (Fridell & Lim, 2016).

Additionally, other terms were researched that contributed to my study which included, the use of force by police officers, perceptions of racial minority citizens and law enforcement officers, media influences, and officer discretion. Use of force by the police is taught in basic

training and emphasized throughout the officer's career. How he or she situates that training into practice can be very subjective; in one scenario the use of force is never questioned, but if racial minority citizens conclude the force was excessive, it can end an officer's career or cause problems within the community. Ethnic minority citizens do not always understand when the use of force is allowed and under which circumstance.

Police officers may perceive that racial minority citizens pose a threat to the officer depending on the color of the skin of the citizen or even the community. Because of this perception, the officer may believe they are justified in using a higher level of force against the citizen. Next, I examined how the media can influence the perception of racial minority citizens either by watching television shows or movies. Citizens can also be controlled by the news media and may believe everything they hear or see from the news.

Officer discretion is another topic that plays in the perception of racial minority citizens and police officers. Deciding what to do next is often based on the gut feeling of the officer or even the climate of the department. If other officers in the department are seen using an excessive amount of force against a specific group, then that officer may believe it is acceptable behavior. In chapter three, I introduce my proposed research topic, research question, research design and rationale along with my methodology, the role of researcher and a summary.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

In chapter three, I introduced my proposed research topic, research question, research design and rationale along with the methodology and summary. My study was conducted in accordance with Walden University's IRB guidelines to assure the ethical protection of my research participants (#04-27-18-0450863).

The amount of force used by law enforcement officers in Southeastern United States and other regions of the country has become a highly-charged topic, especially among and between racial minority citizens and the law enforcement community. I felt my study needed to be thoroughly and logically examined for a complete understanding of the perception possessed by ethnic minority citizens and law enforcement officers in Southeastern United States. The results of this study could provide needed information that may help develop or change policies and training standards for law enforcement agencies in the very soon and to help bridge relationships between racial minority citizens and the law enforcement community.

Additionally, by providing a fresh look at this subject through another lens the study may help community leaders to understand better and explore other ways to work with law enforcement agencies and police officers. Accountability and transparency are the two complaints filed against the law enforcement community. By uncovering potential problems with the use of force, there may be fewer inequalities prevalent in today's culture.

The need for this study has correspondingly increased since there appears to be an increasing amount of excessive use of force incidents against racial minorities throughout the country (Lafraniere & Lehren, 2015). These conflicts sometimes lead to the needless deaths of unarmed members of society. Notably, this study will investigate both the experiences and perceptions of law enforcement officers regarding the use of force against racial minority citizens. By contrast, the study will also examine the attitude of ethnic minority citizens regarding the police use of force in Southeastern United States.

### **Research Question**

How do perceptions of racial minority citizens differ from law enforcement officers concerning the use of force in Southeastern United States?

### **Research Design and Rationale**

The conceptual framework for this study utilized a phenomenological hermeneutic strategy, which allows a researcher to consider the lived experiences of the participants to capture and understand the perceptions of both racial minority citizens and law enforcement officers (Moustakas, 1994). Rudestam and Newton (2015) suggest researchers who employ a phenomenological approach may be interested in everyday occurrences, which will provide an insight into the perception of racial minority citizens and police officers.

Rudestam and Newton (2015) further exemplify that hermeneutic phenomenological research design is not limited to just interviewing participants in person. Sources of data can include self-reported documents or other literature found in news accounts or published articles.

Having the ability to capture the knowledge and perceptions of participants is most desirable for this study, which is not as easily obtained by using other research designs. By utilizing a phenomenological approach, I attempted to look for, and document shared themes and ideas from the data that I received from my participants.

### **Methodology**

I conducted my study with current and retired North Carolina law enforcement officers regarding the use of force on racial minority citizens by using questionnaires uploaded to the SurveyMonkey.com website. By using SurveyMonkey, I was able to list many different email addresses that invited participants to answer my survey. Also, I attached a link to a LinkedIn account that directed visitors to SurveyMonkey. No identifying information was obtained that would disclose the identity of the participants.

Additionally, I visited two cities where I randomly approached racial minorities who appeared to be 18 years and older. I selected citizens who were African-Americans, Hispanics, Asian, or other races. No names were taken from participants, and the only demographics obtained were ages, races, gender, and what type of community they were from.

By utilizing open-ended questions in my questionnaires, it allowed me to gather information on perceptions that police officers and racial minority citizens have concerning the use of force. Each survey included a cover letter and consent form explaining my study and the reason behind it. No one was asked to identify themselves on my consent form or questionnaires. Consent was implied if they continued to answer the survey. Asking citizens and police officers



about the use of force issue are one method of understanding the perception of people according to Klukkert, Ohlemacher, and Feltes (2008).

### **Role of the Researcher**

Since my study was qualitative, I felt it was important that I passed out questionnaires to have an opportunity to meet with racial minority citizen participants to ensure a quality survey. Unlike a quantitative study that examines numerical data, I was seeking real-life information from my participants.

#### *Participants of the Study*

After obtaining Walden University IRB approval (#04-27-18-0450863), I opened an account with SurveyMonkey.com to collect data from current or retired Southeastern law enforcement officers. I chose the Survey Monkey.com website because it allowed users to post a variety of email addresses that could be sent to prospective participants. SurveyMonkey.com also provides a link that can be displayed on social media accounts such as Facebook or LinkedIn. After posting my cover letter, consent form, and the questionnaire on their website I attached a link to a LinkedIn account that I had opened for that purpose.

I asked law enforcement officers if they were a current or retired officer and would they consent to answer my questionnaire regarding their perceptions on the use of force against racial minority citizens. I included questions that asked if they believe force is justified or unjustified, how much police use of force should be permitted and other issues. In the last phase of the

questionnaire, I asked the law enforcement participants what their perception of the citizens was that they serve. I have included appendixes following my references that feature the surveys, consent forms, and letters to participants.

Interviews with selected racial minority citizens were conducted at two different locations in North Carolina regarding their perception of police officers and how force was or was not used against them. The interviews were conducted in the uptown area, open to the public, which allowed for easy access to prospective participants. During these interviews, I wanted to ascertain if they have ever had force used against them by a law enforcement officer, and what were the circumstances of these situations. During the interview, I asked participants to describe how they perceive the police officers that serve in their communities, and whether they possess a favorable or unfavorable opinion about police officers in general. Additionally, I wanted to determine whether their views were based on firsthand knowledge or if they derive their opinions from other people, the news media, or television/movies.

Furthermore, before each interview, I presented a full disclosure concerning this study to each participant. I also disclosed that I am a current reserve police officer and a retired captain, who is interested in the perception of racial minority citizens and police officers regarding the use of force. However, since I am not associated with those agencies or work in those selected communities, I have no power or influence over them regarding their responses. Furthermore, each participant will be given the opportunity to examine their answers and comments at the end of the interview.

After collecting the data, I entered everything into an Excel spreadsheet, where I coded and appraised the information for themes and possible patterns. Each questionnaire was transcribed onto a spreadsheet by me to ensure accuracy. Grouping the answers/responses into different ideas helped to determine perceptions of both racial minority citizens and law enforcement officers. All documentation will be kept confidential and under my control for up to 5 years or more, depending on the school and other requirements. After each interview with racial minority citizens, I offered and gave a monetary gift of \$5 for their participation in my study.

### **Summary**

In chapter three, I again introduced my study regarding perceptions of racial minority citizens and law enforcement officers in Southeastern United States. The research question guiding my study asks, how do perceptions of police use of force differ among racial minority citizens and law enforcement officers in Southeastern United States?

The research design and rationale for this study were based on a phenomenological hermeneutic strategy, which attempted to capture the lived experiences of citizens and officers that will lead to an understanding of perceptions of each participant.

My participants were composed of racial minority citizens from two cities from Southeastern United States that had an abundance of people who walked through the area near my location and law enforcement officers who were active duty or retired from law enforcement agencies in Southeastern United States.

After receiving Walden University IRB approval (#04-27-18-0450863) I interviewed racial minority citizens by asking a series of questions using a questionnaire that featured yes and no questions and open-ended questions which allowed me to further gather real life encounters. Furthermore, I posted my questionnaire, consent form and a cover letter for law enforcement officers on SurveyMonkey.com website asking for participants for my study. I also listed various email addresses for law enforcement officers on the SurveyMonkey website, so they would be sent an email asking for their participation.

Additionally, my police background was disclosed to all participants, and all participants were given the opportunity to review their answers at the end of the interview process, if elected. Collected data was coded for themes and patterns and will be kept confidential and under my control for an extended period.

## Chapter 4: Results

### **Introduction**

The increase in police inflicted injuries and deaths among racial minority citizens raise a significant concern throughout the United States. Despite departmental policies and training, use of force issues continues to rise problematically. Understanding the use of force through the lens of racial minority citizens should be a concern for all law enforcement agencies, officers, and government officials. The general problem lies within the inconsistency of each party's view of acceptable use of force.

The purpose of my qualitative study was to examine and attempt to understand the perceptions held by racial minority citizens and law enforcement officers in Southeastern United States, concerning police use of force. The research question guiding my study asks, how do perceptions of police use of force differ among racial minority citizens and law enforcement officers in Southeastern United States?

By utilizing a phenomenological hermeneutic strategy, I attempted to gather the lived experiences of my participants that both capture and understand the perceptions held by racial minority citizens and law enforcement officers, as suggested by Moustakas (1994). To get a clear understanding of those perceptions I met with and passed out questionnaires to racial minority citizens at two different locations so that I would acquire a diversified collection of opinions. I also obtained responses to surveys from law enforcement officers using the SurveyMonkey.com website.

Obtaining an understanding of the perceptions of both groups concerning the use of force was my primary objective in this study. Understanding how those perceptions were different between both groups could help improve relationships between racial minority citizens and law enforcement officers in Southeastern United States. Understanding perception is not something that can be measured, but more explained by the person who it affects. Reducing those answers to numerical data would not provide those lived-experiences that I was attempting to capture. Thus, I tried to catch those perceptions by asking questions that provided more detailed information and feedback.

I entered the results of my questionnaires onto an Excel spreadsheet where I was able to examine the data for themes and commonalities of the results. In this chapter, I have included the setting, demographics, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, effects, and a summary.

### **Setting**

I am not aware of any personal or organizational conditions that influenced participants with their responses. I fully believe participants in my study were candid in their answers to my questions and did not sway my interpretation of the data in any way.

### **Demographics**

Participants in my study were racial minority members of communities in two different locations in Southeastern United States. The participants I targeted were 18 and over who could

consent to be part of my study. The gender of the person, social status, or appearance were not considerations when asking people to be a participant.

The other participants included both retired and active duty sworn law enforcement officers from Southeastern United States.. Being a current or retired sworn law enforcement officer from the Southeast was the only requirement for their participation. There were no other demographic requirements sought for those participants such as age, gender, race, or type of law enforcement officer. By not requiring those identifying demographics I was able to keep the participants completely anonymous.

#### **Data Collection Involving Racial Minority Citizens**

I conducted interviews with racial minority citizens who were above the age of 18 in two different Southeastern cities. I positioned myself in the center of both uptown areas and would invite minority citizens to participate in my study as they went by. In most cases, participants agreed to talk with me, however, in other encounters the person was not interested so I respected the request not to participate.

There was a total of twenty citizens who agreed to participate in my study. The citizens were racial minority citizens ranging from 18 to 74 years of age, encompassing different ethnic minority groups, which included nine Blacks/African-Americans, seven Hispanic/Latinos, one Native-American, and three Asian/Pacific Islander citizens. This group of citizens included 14 females and six males. Ten of the participants resided in a city, 5 reside in a rural setting, and 5 claim they live in a suburban community.

When the person agreed to participate, I introduced myself and showed them my Walden student identification card. After the introduction, I explained the purpose of my research study and asked if they would be willing to continue the interview and answer my questions. I had 2 chairs close by and invited participants to sit down with me. I also offered each participant the opportunity to take the questionnaire along with a stamped self-addressed envelope with them if they wanted to answer my questions later.

Eight participants decided to take my questionnaire, cover letter, and consent form with them to fill out and mail back to me. The other 12 participants agreed to sit down with me and answer my questions. I read the consent form and cover letter to each participant; those forms were given to each person so that they would be able to contact me in the future by email if they wanted a copy of my results. Their agreement to answer my questionnaire was entirely voluntary, and they were informed that they could stop at any time during the interview. I did not obtain any identifying information from the participants. All persons that I interviewed finished answering my questionnaire.

Every questionnaire was the same so that I would ask the same questions of each participant. Each interview took approximately 20 to 30 minutes to complete. At the end of each encounter, I presented the participant with a five-dollar bill. I had initially planned to offer gift cards, but I decided to provide money instead, for simplicity. My interviews were very casual, and each participant appeared to be at ease with my questions.



After the collection of the data, I set up an Excel worksheet with different categories. Categories included age, gender, race, and the community the participant resided in. By using abbreviations for all my questions, I was able to quickly set up each category for each item that I asked on the questionnaire. After I transferred the information onto the spreadsheet it allowed me to examine all responses so that I would have an overall understanding of different racial minority groups.

### **Data Collection involving Law Enforcement Officers**

I opened an account with an online data collection service called Survey Monkey. Once I established the account, I uploaded my questionnaire, cover letter, and consent form for law enforcement officers who are retired or currently employed. I attached a link to a LinkedIn account and was also able to send out direct invitations by email through SurveyMonkey.com. I have been in law enforcement for over 30 years, and I teach at our local community college with other law enforcement instructors, so I have access to many emails which made this process very easy.

After having the account for approximately 3 months, I obtained 21 responses. I have no information on who participated in my study since the study was completely anonymous. Additionally, I did not target any agencies to obtain participants. By keeping identities anonymous I felt that law enforcement officers would be more willing to expand upon their real thoughts and ideas concerning the citizens they are sworn to protect and serve.

Not only were law enforcement participants anonymous, but also the departments they retired from or represented. In the Southeast many different law enforcement agencies exist that may be represented in my study, including local police departments, sheriff's departments, and state agencies, such as the State Highway Patrol, ALE (Alcohol Law Enforcement), or SBI (State Bureau of Investigations).

After the collection of the data from SurveyMonkey.com, I set up an Excel worksheet with different categories. The categories represented the different responses from each law enforcement officer that answered my questionnaire. Those categories included the twenty-two questions that I had on my survey for law enforcement officers along with follow-up responses that participants made immediately following each inquiry. I transferred the information onto a spreadsheet, which allowed me to look at all responses so that I would have a common overall interpretation of the data from different law enforcement officers.

### **Data Analysis Overview**

The questionnaires, cover letters, and consent forms were the only instruments that I used to begin my study. I designed the surveys for simplicity and used open-ended questions that would allow the respondents to answer the questions quickly. As with many questionnaires, not all participants gave a further response. However, I felt answers were adequate for me to draw various conclusions regarding how law enforcement officers perceive racial minority citizens and how ethnic minority citizens view law enforcement officers and the topic regarding the use of force.

### **Data Analysis – Racial Minority Citizens**

I felt someone's perception is not a quantifiable item that can be measured. Gathering data concerning perceptions and someone's thoughts about the subject on the police use of force is very subjective. Thus, understanding lived experiences would provide precious data for my specific study. As I began thinking about what I wanted to know I developed the first three questions for racial minority citizens that inquired the range of age for each participant, the race, and the type of community they lived in. I gathered that information since it could be useful in understanding how people of different ages, races, and communities perceive the use of force by law enforcement. However, I did not necessarily break down that information for my study, even though those generalities may be important considerations for another survey designed to understand positive or negative views of law enforcement officers by racial minority citizens who belong to different communities.

### **Data Analysis – Law Enforcement Officers**

In this section, I will discuss my analysis of law enforcement officers regarding their perception of the citizens they are sworn to protect and serve and when they have used force against a citizen. Again, the use of force by the law enforcement community is a significant topic that concerns many people, including citizens, community leaders, and the law enforcement community. When an officer uses force, he or she must have a valid reason for using that type and level of power that they used against the citizen. In the next several pages I will present the

questions and answers that I obtained from my questionnaires completed by law enforcement officers and apply those responses to other themes that I feel are important for my study.

At the very beginning of the questionnaire for law enforcement participants, I had to establish that the responding person was a current or retired law enforcement officer from this state. Thus, the very first question that I asked prospective participants if they were a sworn or retired law enforcement officer from Southeastern United States. All twenty-one participants answered the question by proceeding to the next question. From there, I ask if the participants several questions that would help to gain an understanding of perceptions of law enforcement officers.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

Each racial minority participant that I spoke with appeared to be very honest and straightforward about their perceptions of law enforcement officers, including the treatment they received from and how they felt about law enforcement officers and their use of force on citizens. I have no reason to doubt their sincerity or opinions. At the beginning of each encounter, I disclosed that I was a law enforcement officer who was interested in their lived experiences concerning their perceptions of law enforcement officers and the use of force on racial minority citizens.

### **Credibility**

I did not obtain names or addresses of my racial minority participants; I only collected demographic information. Furthermore, the identities of all law enforcement participants are also

unknown to me. I made every effort to keep their personalities unknown along with their agencies. By informing law enforcement participants in my first question that if they were not a retired or current law enforcement from Southeastern United States, they were asked not to complete my questionnaire. I assume that all law enforcement participants met that criteria before they answered and submitted their answers to my survey. Moreover, I provided all participants a cover letter and consent form which included my contact information if they wanted to communicate with me in the future regarding my study.

### **Transferability**

This research focused on racial minority citizens and retired or current law enforcement officers. I did not obtain any identities from anyone. However, I was able to personally meet each of my racial minority participants who were between the ages of 18 and older. Any further research conducted on this topic should use the same demographics and questions to ensure transferability.

### **Dependability**

I provided each participant with the opportunity to take the questionnaire with them or answer my survey at that moment. I did not use any coercion or promises in my attempt to interview participants. I was then able to look for themes from the answers that I received from the interviews and questionnaires from both groups.

## **Confirmability**

By utilizing a phenomenological methodology, I was able to obtain, what I believe to be useful and trustworthy data for my study. I sought personal experiences of the participants regarding perceptions on the use of force by law enforcement officers. Their participation was entirely voluntary, and they were not influenced to answer questions in any manner. Those lived experiences did not appear to be false or fabricated; however, there is always a chance of influence by other factors such as the media, television, news, or other people.

## **Results**

Obtaining data using questionnaires was the only method I used to gather information for my study. After collecting my data from racial minority citizens and law enforcement participants I discovered fourteen themes had emerged from the perceptions of the citizens and law enforcement officers. To begin with, I will discuss the impressions of racial minority citizens in the first five themes. The other issues come from the perceptions of law enforcement officers.

### **Theme #1 – Is race a factor in the use of force against racial minorities?**

At the beginning of my fact-finding inquiry, I asked if participants had ever been stopped by a law enforcement officer and what type of experience they had during the encounter with the officer. Thus, the first inquiry that I considered when interviewing racial minority citizens dealt with meetings between officers and ethnic minority citizens and if race was a decisive factor in stopping or having initial contact with a racial minority citizen. Fourteen participants out of the twenty reported being stopped by the police and six people said they have never experienced

having an encounter with a police officer. By asking this question about the meeting, it helped me formulate other questions regarding stops and if they believed the stop or contact was valid or was racially motivated.

I then wanted to know the reason for the stop and if they thought the stop was legal or not. Five participants had no idea why the police officer stopped them, 9 participants admitted the stop was for a motor vehicle violation like speeding or an expired license tag. The nine detained participants felt their stop was lawful, but the other five believed the stop was for another reason such as being racially profiled or basically because of their race. Their experiences and how they felt during the stop were very similar. Twelve reported feelings like being afraid, discriminated against, profiled, mad and scared, and not knowing why they were being stopped in the first place. From there I asked what the officer's demeanor and what was his race?

Seven participants stated the officer that stopped their vehicle was professional, but the other seven felt the officer was rude or arrogant. Out of the 14 participants that had an encounter with an officer, 13 officers were White, and one officer was Black. Seven persons felt the treatment they received was fair; six stated they were not treated fairly by the officer and one person did not answer at all. Several participants made comments at the end of the questions about being mistreated such as, "he accused me of being drunk," the officer had an attitude," and "he wanted to search my car." Two participants told me they received a warning about the

alleged violation. From that point on I wanted to know about their perception regarding the use of force on racial minority citizens.

**Theme #2 – Which race experiences the highest use of force from law enforcement?**

I asked the question, do you believe police officers use more force against Blacks, Whites, Hispanics, Asians, or others? Eleven participants answered Black citizens are more likely to have power applied against them by police officers. Five participants chose Blacks and Hispanics as being more likely to have force used against them. One participant chose Hispanic citizens as the recipient of police use of force. Lastly, 3 participants stated they did not know which group had the most force used against them by the police.

The next question asked participants if they thought force is used more often against minorities as opposed to white people? Again, 11 participants answered yes, 6 participants had no opinion, 2 participants stated no, and 1 reported it depends on the race of the officer. The very next question was somewhat surprising to me. I asked if they thought the police were justified in using force? Fourteen participants believe the police are justified in using force against citizens, 4 persons stated no, and 2 had no opinion. Two citizens further responded yes, law enforcement should be able to use force against citizens. One said yes, sometimes they should be able to use force; the other stated yes, but I do not know when.

I also wanted to know if my respondents feared the police and they responded with 15 no answers, four yes answers, and one stated “sometimes.” The comments that I received for this question were, “because I don’t have a license and I must work”, “the history of the police and



Blacks create fear”, “it depends on where you live”, “if they stop you”, and finally “they stop Blacks more than Whites”. I then asked the question if they trust the police, ten answered yes, two responded no, and eight responded sometimes.

**Theme #3 – Does the news media or television influence perceptions of racial minority citizens about law enforcement and the use of force?**

The third theme that emerged from my study examined what influences perceptions of ethnic minority citizens regarding race and the use of force. Many racial minority citizens who participated in my research mentioned they are changed or sometimes influenced by what they see or hear from the news media, television, and movies.

Unfortunately, the sensationalism that sells news or entices people to watch television may report or feature stories that are not real. As mentioned earlier the influence of the media or tv can persuade the perception of the population. I asked participants if the press or television controls their opinion of the police? Twelve participants stated they are influenced by what they hear or see on TV or the media. Seven participants answered that the media sometimes affected them, and two replied no, they were not influenced by the media regarding the police and their use of force. Even though most racial minority participants agreed what they see or hear from the news or television can influence their perception, all my participants had developed their perceptions from lived experiences. However, there have been studies that many minorities draw their conclusions from what they hear from other members of the community (Warren, 2011)

**Theme # 4 – Are police officers adequately trained in de-escalation techniques?**

The next theme examined the training of law enforcement officers regarding how to deescalate a hostile situation and if they thought police officers are trained to deal with racial minority citizens and aggressive behavior? Nine participants answered they thought law enforcement officers were prepared to deal with ethnic minority citizens and aggressive behavior. However, 11 people responded no, stating law enforcement officers are not trained to deal with racial minority citizens, aggressive behavior, and de-escalation techniques. From that question, I asked if officers should receive more training. An overwhelming amount (18 people) answered they thought police officers should receive more training interacting with racial minority citizens. Only two persons answered no to my question. I received many reasons why they thought there should be more training for police officers. The two primary responses to this question were; there are too many incidents involving the police and racial minorities and the police need to learn how to interact with ethnic minority citizens.

**Theme # 5 – Does the police hide information from the public?**

The fifth theme examined the release of information to the public. I posted the question to my participants asking if they thought law enforcement officers hide information from the public. Thirteen people stated yes, 6 indicated no, and 1 person had no comment. From there I asked if they thought the public should be able to view camera footage. Again, 14 people answered yes, 3 said no, and 2 people had no comment.

Furthermore, when information regarding the use of force incidents are not made public, or the law enforcement agencies are not forthcoming in response to questions, the public may tend to develop their perceptions not entirely based completely on fact, but in part on false information. Additionally, police agencies have not always been accommodating regarding police/racial minority use of force incidents as suggested by the ethnic minority participants, who believe law enforcement agencies withhold or hide information from the public.

**Theme #6 – The use of force by law enforcement officers.**

As a basis for this study the phrase "use of force" can be defined as any action an officer takes when attempting to control another person, such as police presence, verbal commands, hands-on tactics, use of weapons, and deadly force (Phillips, 2010).

I asked participants if they had ever used force against a racial minority citizen. Each participant acknowledged they had used some force against an ethnic minority citizen while employed as an officer, which included police presence, or the other levels of the use of force that are listed. Generally, comments made as a follow-up to this question indicated police force was used for different reasons and at varying levels of authority. Overall, the force applied by the officers was in response to the actions of the person that they had encountered.

In most situations, the participant stated the person was resisting the arrest or was assaulting the officer, or another person and force was the only alternative. Of the 21 participants, 19 officers stated police use of force had to be used in each situation to overcome the threat. Moreover, comments concerning if the officer felt they were justified in using force

indicated a positive response such as, the use of force was warranted entirely; or if the person had complied with the officer, there would be no force needed.

I also asked law enforcement participants if they believe they should have the authority to use a higher-level of force against any citizen if they feel threatened by that citizen?

Overwhelmingly, all 21 participants agreed that police officers should be allowed to use higher levels of police use of force against citizens when needed. A few participants pointed out that their training with the force continuum gives them the necessary information required to make decisions when and where force can be used or increased while interacting with citizens who may pose a more significant threat.

**Theme #7 – Do racial minority citizens understand the use of force regulations and policies?**

The next question asked if participants believe racial minority citizens understand that law enforcement officers can use force against them? Seventeen out of the 21 responses indicated they think minority citizens are aware of that fact. Four participants answered no to this question; racial minority citizens do not understand that officers are permitted to use force against another person. Follow-up responses included, they know, but don't care or they know it is allowed, but do not like it. Some participants stated that many minority citizens feel that any type of force is excessive and don't realize that their actions may result in the officer having to use force.

Additionally, one participant had the opinion that some citizens seek sympathy from the public and media when they have force used against them and tries to get out of trouble with the police. Then again, another participant stated that some racial minority members use the race card to bring attention to themselves to get out of turmoil with the police that they had initially started.

**Theme #8 – Race relations and the issue of trust.**

One factor that could influence perceptions of law enforcement officers inquired if racial minority citizens were sometimes difficult to interact with in certain circumstances? Fifteen participants agreed with this statement; ethnic minority citizens were occasionally challenging to communicate with. Two participants disagreed, and 4 offered no opinion to this inquiry. There were only 4 follow-up responses to this question. One participant commented that other groups are also challenging to control, not just racial minority citizens. Two participants felt ethnic minorities are more emotional or more vocal especially when they are angry. The last one agreed 100% racial minorities are challenging to control or interact with in certain situations.

Even though most of the law enforcement participants felt racial minority citizens were difficult to control, they overwhelmingly agreed they had no problems working with people of a different race. Seventeen participants answered they are comfortable working with different races of people; 4 participants responded they are not comfortable working with different races of people. Follow-up opinions to this question ranged from; I like members of all ethnic groups, we are all the same, and no one is better than anyone else. From each response I saw a common

answer emerge; most responding participants had no reservations about working with racial minority citizens.

I then asked participants if they felt they treated all citizens equally no matter the race of the citizen. Eleven participants agreed they treat all citizens equally no matter the ethnicity of the citizen, 2 disagreed, 6 were neutral, and 2 stated they sometimes treat citizens equally. Two participants felt that every profession has bad apples, even law enforcement; another participant said they try to treat everyone equally. Additionally, 1 person commented that some officers fail to manage their race uniformly as they do other ethnic groups.

The next probe examined the issue of trust between racial minority citizens and the law enforcement community. I asked participants if they thought ethnic minority citizens trusted the police to be fair and respectful to the citizens they serve and protect? Seventeen participants answered yes, they believe citizens trusted them; 4 people answered no, trust is lacking between the two groups. Again, there were a variety of comments offered concerning the issue of trust. Not surprisingly, most agree racial minority citizens trust the police, but some participants believe that reliance is somehow distorted by what people see or hear from the media. Then again, some participants feel that minorities do not trust the police as they did in the past.

I also asked law enforcement participants what their perception is of the citizens they serve? Eighteen law enforcement participants answered they had a favorable attitude of the citizens they serve. One replied unfavorable impression, and 2 offered no opinion. The opinions

provided for this question were; most officers seem to like the citizens they serve and protect.

Another participant added, it depends on how you treat people and how they treat you.

**Theme #9 – Which group is more likely to receive use of force by the police?**

Next, it was vital for me to understand the viewpoint of law enforcement officers regarding which group of citizens, they thought, were more likely to receive some force from the police? Thirteen of the 21 participants felt African-Americans/Blacks are more likely to have police use force used against them more than any other citizen. Two participants answered white citizens are statistically more likely to have more police use of force used against them. That question directed me to probe why any one segment of society was so inclined to have more police use of force used against them and who was more likely to engage in a fight with law enforcement that would result in higher levels of authority.

Seventeen participants believe the younger generation of racial minorities were more likely to fight officers; 1 participant did not have that same opinion and answered White people are more likely to fight officers. Three participants out of the 21 had no judgment regarding this question. There were 2 opinions added for this response. One participant had the conclusion that the younger generation was more active and expressive than the older generation and it was also a cultural event or more usual for them to express their feelings more vocally. The second participant felt there is no respect for law enforcement officers from the younger age group.

**Theme #10 – News media and perceptions.**

As with the perception of racial minority citizens, I also questioned law enforcement participants if they believe the news media or television/movies influence ethnic minority citizens about law enforcement and their use of force? Not surprisingly, 20 participants agreed racial minority citizens are influenced by what they see or hear from the news media or television regarding law enforcement and their use of force. One participant provided no opinion regarding this question. Additionally, there was only one response to this question where the participant blamed the media for highlighting the topic of the use of force. The participant also felt the news media does not tell the whole story from beginning to end, but only part of the story that sells or causes a reaction among the public.

Additionally, I also wanted to know if law enforcement officer participants were influenced by what they see or hear from the news media or television shows regarding racial minorities in any way? There were 10 participants who answered yes, they were influenced by what they see or hear from the news media or television shows. Ten other participants responded they were not influenced in any way by what they see or hear from the news media. There were no opinions offered for this question.

Another respondent expressed the idea that the media reports negatively about law enforcement officers and may cause emotions to rise against the police. Lastly, one response offered the opinion that if someone was stupid enough to confront a police officer with violence,



the officer would have to take appropriate action against that person, no matter the race of the person.

**Theme #11 - Use of Force Policies / Are they too restrictive?**

When I inquired about the use of force policy that departments used and asked if they were aware of that policy and agreed with it, most of the participants answered yes. Only 2 participants answered no, they did not agree with the policy. There were 2 opinions offered indicating the use of the Taser should be allowed earlier on the force continuum. This question led to the restrictions that are placed on officers when using certain types of force against citizens.

When I asked about their use of force policies and if the administration restricted the officers in their use of force, 6 people answered yes, the policy is too restrictive. Fifteen participants answered no, they policy is not too restrictive; however, the use of the Taser was mentioned as being too far up the continuum and does not help the officer. Another participant stated that their use of force policy applies to all citizens and states under which circumstances force can be used. The opinion of another participant believes the use of force policy is adhered to, which is designed to restrict excessive, unnecessary force exercised against all citizens.

**Theme# 12 – Excessive Force against Racial Minorities?**

Next, I wanted to know if law enforcement participants were more inclined to use more force on a racial minority citizen as opposed to a white citizen? There were zero "yes" responses and 19 "no" responses to this question. Again, there were two "no opinion" answers and no

follow-up responses given for this question. Moreover, I wanted to know if participants had ever witnessed another law enforcement officer using excessive force on any racial minority citizen.

Five participants answered yes to this question. Sixteen answered no, they have never witnessed a fellow law enforcement officer using excessive force of any type against a racial minority citizen. This question prompted 8 opinion responses from the law enforcement participants. Two respondents acknowledged seeing an officer using what appeared to be excessive force against a citizen. Another one mentioned witnessing a Black police officer trying to incite Black youths into a confrontation. Still another respondent stated they witnessed what they thought to be excessive force but stated in their opinion the excessive force was not racially motivated.

Another question that raises a real concern for law enforcement is deciding on the type and level of force that should or could be used against a racial minority citizen when in some type of confrontation. Twelve participants agreed that it is difficult to decide on the level and type of force that they could be use against a minority citizen. Eight participants disagreed, they do not have a problem deciding on which level and type of police use of force they can use in a confrontation with a racial minority citizen. Only one person retorted they had no opinion.

This question also stimulated several follow-up responses. One participant expressed the opinion that there is a small concern that even if force is reasonable, some may develop the perception it was excessive. Another indicated that the media has made it extra tricky for law enforcement officers to do their jobs, this may trigger officers to second-guess their decision on

the use of force, which could be detrimental to the safety of an officer. Still another participant expressed the opinion that using the least amount of police force is better and the energy used should be based on the totality of the circumstances, not the race of the person. Finally, one participant explained that the decision to use police force is often made in a split second and is a reaction to a threat or specific behavior.

Consequently, the reaction of the officer to the threat or behavior may not be deemed appropriate. Furthermore, other participants expressed the belief that some officers worry about the consequences of their actions and are more concerned about the perceptions of the public. Therefore, officers may not react to hostile persons if they perceive their efforts will be brought up again and again in the news media.

### **Theme #13 – Crime and Perceptions**

How law enforcement officers view the level and types of criminal activity in racial minority communities was also a topic that could contribute to perception. The statement about minority communities having higher levels of crime as opposed to other communities met with a high number of positive responses. Sixteen participants agreed with the statement that minority communities have higher levels of corruption. One participant disagreed, and 4 were neutral in their opinion. One participant offered an idea that statistics don't lie; racial minority communities have higher levels of criminal activity. Another stated it depends on the many variables such as the race of the victim, the race of the offender, and the location of the crime.

**Theme #14 – Biases**

Next, I questioned law enforcement participants if they were aware of any biases they had against any race? This question was directly related to the implicit bias theory that I felt could influence perceptions of law enforcement officers and the use of force. Five participants could influence perceptions of law enforcement officers and the use of force. Five participants acknowledged they held biases against certain groups of people, but their prejudices were based on criminal behavior and not on the race of the person. Fourteen participants answered they were not aware of any biases they possessed. Participants also felt everyone has preferences of some sort. Additionally, a few participants expressed their belief that they did not have any prejudices and try to treat everyone the same. One last respondent indicated they were biased against African-Americans because they felt more Blacks are abusive and rebellious toward the police.

**Summary**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research study was to examine and attempt to understand the perceptions held by racial minority citizens and law enforcement officers in Southeastern United States, concerning police use of force. The research question that guided my study asked, how do perceptions of police use of force differ among racial minority citizens and law enforcement officers in Southeastern United States?

In this chapter, I explained the reasoning behind using a phenomenological hermeneutic strategy and why I felt there was a need to understand perceptions of law enforcement officers and racial minority citizens regarding the use of force. The primary objective for this study was an attempt to improve relationships between the law enforcement community and the ethnic

minority citizens that they are sworn to protect and serve. Frequently the use of force by the police is misunderstood by racial minority citizens and if left unchecked, may lead to distrust or other chaotic situations such as rioting or civil unrest among ethnic minority citizens.

I recruited racial minority participants in two different cities in Southeastern United States. I asked each participant that approached if they would be willing to answer a questionnaire. Some people declined to participate; however, some citizens agreed to complete the survey at that time, others chose to take the poll with them along with a stamped self-addressed envelope to be mailed back later. I obtained law enforcement participants by utilizing a website called SurveyMonkey. All participants were given or had the opportunity to download a cover letter and consent form for their records. I did not obtain the identity of anyone while conducting my study.

After collecting or receiving all questionnaires, I used an Excel spreadsheet for both groups to help organize my responses. This study allowed me to look for themes and or specific characteristics from all groups. As a result, I felt that I had categorized 14 different issues or themes that I could envision would help illustrate the points I was trying to make in my study.

Thus, in this chapter, I included the setting, demographics, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, results, and a summary. In section 5, I cover the interpretation of my findings, the limitations of my study, and any recommendations that could help improve relationships between racial minority citizens and the law enforcement community, possible implications, and a conclusion.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to gather an understanding of the perceptions of racial minority citizens and the perceptions of members of the law enforcement community regarding police use of force. By using a phenomenological approach, I was able to gather data from real life experiences from my participants.

This study contributes to previous and ongoing studies regarding the use of force by police against racial minority citizens. More directly, my research is primarily concerned about law enforcement officers and ethnic citizens and their thoughts regarding the use of force in Southeastern United States. The police use of force against racial minorities could be described by some, as being pragmatic especially in the current climate of our country concerning force against minority citizens. The perception of the use of force is influenced by many factors including first-hand knowledge, the news media, and by friends or family members who have had a negative interaction with a law enforcement officer.

I interviewed racial minority citizens in two locations in Southeastern United States. I also provided a website by way of the Internet for law enforcement participants to answer questionnaires. Because of the interviews and surveys, I found 14 themes had emerged from within my study. The issues examined perceptions of racial minority citizens and law enforcement officers from Southeastern United States. Most questions were related to their

thoughts and feelings about law enforcement and the use of force. As the process continued, I discovered there are contributing factors that cause a person to develop a perception.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

The discoveries of my study revealed fourteen themes that I felt were important to present in chapter four regarding lived experiences of racial minority citizens and law enforcement officers from Southeastern United States. Because of my interviews with the ethnic minority citizens, I was able to gather firsthand knowledge of what each participant experienced with their interaction with a law enforcement officer. I also received similar experiences as related by law enforcement participants who answered my online questionnaire regarding their interactions with racial minority citizens. Additionally, I received several opinions regarding the use of force by police against ethnic minority citizens.

My interpretation of the findings regarding race suggests that many racial minority citizens perceive race is a reason that an officer may stop them even though many of my respondents felt their stop was lawful. Their comments on how they felt during the stop suggested fear, discrimination, or being profiled. Furthermore, almost half of the racial minority citizens reported the officer treated them professionally and fairly; the other half stated the officer was rude or arrogant. This information could lead someone to believe vehicle stops are based entirely on the race of the driver. However, a study conducted in 2017 indicated Black drivers are stopped, ticketed, arrested, or searched more often than White motorists ((Pierson et al., 2017). The study also indicated the stops were more likely related to driving behavior and not

based on biases of the officer (Pierson et al., 2017). That too is interesting because it backed what most law enforcement participants reported; they were not biased while conducting police business.

When I questioned racial minorities, which group of people were more likely to have force used against them, the answer was African-Americans/Black citizens, with Hispanics being the second largest group. Not surprisingly, law enforcement officer participants also had a very similar response to this same question. Many participants of both groups felt African-Americans are more likely to receive some force from the police as opposed to White citizens, but it also depended on the citizen's actions.

Furthermore, over half of the racial minority participants felt excessive force was used more often against minorities as opposed to White people. Another question presented to ethnic minorities inquired if they thought the police were justified using force, unexpectedly most answered yes to this question.

Therefore, some could assume that many racial minority citizen participants believe law enforcement officers from the Southeast are not using force unnecessarily against any one group of citizens. Even though both groups concur that police use of force is applied more often on one group as opposed to another group, plus they believe racial minority citizens are stopped by the police more often than White citizens.

Furthermore, most law enforcement participants expressed the opinion that racial minorities understand that force can be used against them and acknowledge using force against



an ethnic minority during their careers. Additionally, the law enforcement participants believed their use of force was completely justified because of the actions of the person. Some officers also think minority citizens have the idea that any force used by the police is excessive; however, as stated previously most racial minority participants understand police are justified in using force against citizens.

Next, are perceptions based on lived experiences or are they based on something else? According to my study, many racial minority citizens and law enforcement participants are sometimes influenced by what they see or hear from the news. For example, most use of force incidents involving the death of a person at the hands of law enforcement often become major news stories as we have all seen in the past few years.

However, most of the opinions that I received indicated the experiences of others did not develop racial minority perceptions, but what the person perceived as being true while interacting with a law enforcement officer. For example, when citizens were asked how they were treated by the officer or what they were stopped for and so forth. Then again, some studies point out that unlike White citizens, many Black citizens receive information from others concerning police use of force and then reach their own conclusions (Warren, 2011).

I also asked law enforcement participants if criminal activity in the racial minority communities altered their perception? Most law enforcement officers acknowledged minority communities have higher levels of crime which affects their perception of ethnic minorities.

However, one participant pointed out that there are many variables to consider and officers should base their knowledge on those variables and not on the entire race.

Another interpretation that I made from my themes concerned race relations between racial minorities and the law enforcement community. Many law enforcement participants expressed their interactions with ethnic minorities as being confident with only a few exceptions, such as when a citizen was resisting arrest, or they became extremely upset with a situation or with the police. I also determined most racial minorities felt the cops could be trusted and do the right thing and have no issue with law enforcement at all.

Older racial minority citizens appear to be friendlier to law enforcement and understand the consequences of having a negative encounter with the police that could result in the use of force. Furthermore, it appears many younger racial minority citizens are more likely to have an unfavorable opinion of law enforcement. The younger generation is more involved in social media platforms and what is going on around them and consequently are more vocal in their view of law enforcement and may be more inclined to practice civil disobedience or be involved in movements such as "Black Lives Matter" (Bradley, Kennison, Burke, & Chaney, 2012).

The questions and responses from both groups enabled me to conclude that most racial minority citizens do not fear the police, in fact, many believe the police have a duty to uphold the law and use force only when needed. Most law enforcement participants expressed the opinion that they have a good relationship with the citizens they serve. However, many racial minority citizens stressed the belief that improvements could be made to strengthen the relationship

between the community and law enforcement officers by having additional training on how to interact with racial minority citizens, especially in stressful situations. There were also many comments made concerning the release of information from the police to the public.

My study revealed most racial minority citizen participants believe the police should release information before false information is published by the news media, that could result in negative perceptions. I did not have a question established for law enforcement participants regarding the release of information. However, attitudes can be influenced by the news media if law enforcement does not release information promptly. This failure to release information appears to be occurring more often when police agencies refuse to provide information at the beginning which causes negative perceptions to grow among the public and the news media. When the news media then features stories indicating a racial minority citizen was the victim of police action, it instigates concern and alters perceptions when the information was not entirely accurate.

### **Limitations of the Study**

My study was on the perceptions of racial minority citizens and law enforcement officers from Southeastern United States on the use of force. My participants were ethnic minority citizens from two different cities and comprised of different ages, races, and gender. Some of my participants did not have a lived experience of having an encounter with a law enforcement officer. However, that was not my objective to locate people who had experienced the use force

from an officer. To obtain that information, I would have had to ask a different set of questions which may have yielded an entirely different set of answers or opinions.

The only real limitation that I believe I had was not having the ability to personally ask law enforcement officers follow-up questions about their use of force and the perceptions they had. However, by keeping identities and departments completely anonymous, it provided me the real answers that I sought to understand.

### **Recommendations**

After conducting this study, I would recommend that law enforcement officers receive additional training in the art of de-escalation of combative or resistive situations before resorting to a higher level of force. Additionally, some could argue law enforcement agency leaders can help with the public perception by releasing information to the public before the public has an opportunity to base their opinions on false or erroneous information.

Another recommendation that could help perception is to involve community leaders in discussions with law enforcement agencies regarding relationships between their officers and racial minority citizens. Both groups should also become more involved in the activities of the younger generation since they will become the next generation to face the same obstacles facing us today. However, the public cannot rely on law enforcement to solve all problems and concerns. Nor can the police rely totally on community leaders to solve those problems that we are currently experiencing. It is a collective effort among citizens, law enforcement, and community/police leaders.

If all involved parties make efforts, then perceptions can be improved. When we leave the status quo unchecked, then problems will continually rise. Race relationships will not improve overnight but is a continuation of past efforts by civil rights leaders and our current government and community leaders, law enforcement officers, and all citizens. Together we can make a difference for a positive social change.

### **Future Research**

To improve perceptions and relationships between the law enforcement community and racial minority citizens, a study focusing on new ideas designed to strengthen those relationships could be a basis for future research. It is not something that can be taken lightly. If we expect our racial minority youths to become the leaders of our communities in the future, we should resolve our differences, take a closer look at our young people and cultivate those needed talents and knowledge of how to make our communities safer for everyone.

### **Implications for Social Change**

This study has focused on improving social change by examining the perceptions of racial minority citizens and law enforcement officers in Southeastern United States on the use of force. We can begin social change by coming together and understanding how each of us looks at the issues surrounding the police use of force. The problem did not just occur overnight but has manifested itself to the point that communities have fallen apart, trust in law enforcement has dwindled, and innocent lost lives.

The use of force issue that finds itself in the nightly news and on every social media account can be altered to reflect the facts of each case if law enforcement leaders would take the time to promptly release information instead of allowing false information to fuel perceptions of the masses. It appears everyone has an opinion, but are those opinions based on fact or fiction; it is up to government and community leaders to help get information out as soon as possible.

The task of law enforcement is to provide service to everyone regardless of the color of your skin or economic status. They need the trust and cooperation of the citizens they serve; without it, they cannot provide that service. When the use of force situations interferes with the mission of the police, then everyone loses. However, there will always be a use of force incident. Unfortunately, it is part of police work; it is how we handle those situations that can make the difference.

### **Conclusion**

This research study examined the lived experiences of twenty racial minority citizens and 21 law enforcement participants from Southeastern United States. Through their knowledge, I was able to gather a better understanding of the perceptions they had concerning each other and the use of force issue. Previous studies helped to shape my research by offering a solid foundation. Many studies were quantitative and not so much qualitative as I was attempting to understand firsthand knowledge of my participants.

This study offered me the opportunity to speak with racial minority citizens so that I could get their honest opinions about how they felt or what they perceived to be accurate

concerning law enforcement and the use of force. The results of my research lead to having a better understanding of this group who provided some realistic feedback such as police officers receiving additional training on de-escalation techniques. Furthermore, both groups agreed that people of color are more likely to have force used against them which could open the door for minority leaders to address subjects such as teaching young people, Black and White, on what to do if they are stopped or approached by a law enforcement officer. Resisting arrest or fighting with the officer is not the answer.

Racial minority citizens want to obtain the truth from reliable sources, just like everyone else, so law enforcement leaders should be willing to release information as soon as possible. This release of information will ensure facts are accurate and reliable. Community and police leaders need to open the lines of communication to exchange information on what are the needs of the community and what are the requirements for law enforcement. With open dialog, both groups could come to a greater understanding.

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## Appendix A

### Letter to Participant (Law Enforcement Officer)

Dear Law Enforcement Officer Participant,

My name is William Riter, I am a retired captain and currently an active reserve police officer. I am enrolled in the PhD program at Walden University and in the process of completing my dissertation.

This survey is related to the use of force and how you perceive or feel about your service to racial minority citizens in your community.

It is my desire that by questioning law enforcement officers and members of the racial minority community, my study can help improve or enhance the relationship between the law enforcement community and racial minority citizens. By understanding perceptions of groups, police departments and community leaders can help establish or improve relationships between one another. It may also help each group to become more aware of certain needs such as additional training for officers or community leaders that will take an active positive role in their own community relations with law enforcement.

I ask that you simply answer each question honestly and without fear of being identified. All responses will be kept confidential and will only be shared with my dissertation committee members and IRB (Internal review board) of Walden University. Since this questionnaire is completely anonymous your identity is unknown, therefore your name and the name of your department cannot be identified in any published reports. All responses will remain in my files until such time they can be destroyed.

Thank you for your willingness to participate in my study. Due to the serious nature of my study I will not require your name or agency information, so all responses will remain confidential.

Sincerely,

William H. Riter, Jr.  
PhD Candidate  
Walden University  
School of Public Policy and Administration

Appendix B  
Consent Form (Law Enforcement Officers)  
**Use of Force: Perception of Racial Minorities and Police Officers in  
Southeastern United States**

The amount of force used by law enforcement officers in Southeastern United States, and other regions of the country, has become a highly-charged topic, especially among racial minority citizens and the law enforcement community. While the use of force by police officers is permitted by law enforcement agencies and expected by citizens, the amount and type of force used can trigger or cause other problems for the community and/or the police agency if the public perceives it to be unjust.

You are invited to participate in a research study to help me understand the perception that law enforcement officers hold concerning the use of force against racial minority citizens. The researcher is inviting law enforcement officers who meet the criteria needed for this study. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named William H. Riter, Jr. who is a doctoral student at Walden University. I ask that you examine this document and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to be in my study. This study is being conducted by me and represents Walden University and will help me complete my dissertation.

The purpose of this research is to examine how the perceptions of the police use of force differ among racial minority citizens and police officers in Southeastern United States. By understanding perceptions of both groups, I hope to be able to provide a more in-depth body of knowledge that may help improve relationships between law enforcement and racial minority citizens. It may also help each group to become more aware of needs of each party that will strengthen or establish those much-needed relationships.

**Payment**

Unfortunately, there will not be any thank-you gifts given for your participation in my study.

**Privacy**

Reports coming out of this study will not share the identities of individual participants. Details that might identify participants, such as the location of the study, also will not be disclosed. I will be the only researcher in this study and will not disclose any information about participants or who participated. Additionally, your personal information will not be used for any purpose outside of this research project. All data will be kept secure in my possession for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

**Contacts and Questions:**

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher by contacting me by email at [email address redacted]. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call the Research Participant Advocate at my university at [phone number redacted]. Walden University's approval number for this study is IRB # 04-27-18-0450863 and it expires on April 26, 2019. I will give you a copy of this form to keep for your records.

**Obtaining Your Consent**

Your consent is implied when you decide to complete my questionnaire. You may print and keep a copy of this consent form for your records if you desire. The questionnaire will take approximately 30 minutes or less to complete. Your participation is strictly voluntary, and you also have the right to stop answering my questions if you feel distressed or uncomfortable. The very nature of my questions may cause some people to feel distressed if they have had a negative experience with a racial minority citizen. I am also providing a Crisis Help Line number for you if you would like to speak with a counselor; the number is [phone number redacted].

## Appendix C

### Consent

**Consent is implied when you complete the survey.** Again, results of all questionnaires may help improve the relationship between racial minority citizens and the law enforcement community by understanding perceptions of both groups.

### Questionnaires for Law Enforcement Officers

Are you sworn or retired sworn law enforcement in Southeastern United States?

Yes No

**If you answered no to the previous question, please stop. This study only applies to law enforcement officers of Southeastern United States.**

Please feel free to elaborate on your answers that will help me to obtain an in-depth understanding of the perceptions of law enforcement officers.

- 1) Have you used any type of force on a racial minority citizen while performing your duty as a law enforcement officer? Yes No

Please explain:

- 2) If you have used force on a racial minority citizen, do you believe the force was completely justified and was it the result of the citizen being combative, abusive, or you considered the person to be a threat? Yes No

Please explain:

- 3) Do you believe racial minority citizens understand that law enforcement officers are permitted to use force against them, when making an arrest or controlling the actions of a citizen to preserve the peace? Yes No

Please explain:

- 4) Do you feel comfortable working with members of the community who belong to a different race than you? Yes No

Please explain:

- 5) Do you believe racial minority citizens trust the police to be fair and respectful to the citizens they serve and protect? Yes No

Please explain:

- 6) Have you ever had a complaint filed against you for using excessive force against any citizen? Yes No

Please explain:

- 7) Do you believe police officers should be able to use a higher level of force on any citizen if they feel threaten by that citizen? Yes No

Please explain:

- 8) In your opinion, which groups of citizens are more likely to receive some type of force from the police?

African-Americans White citizens Asian citizens Hispanic citizens  
Native-Americans Other?

- 9) In your opinion, are younger racial minority citizens more likely to fight law enforcement officers as opposed to older racial minority citizens? Yes No

- 10) Do you believe the news media or television/movies influences the perceptions of racial minority citizens about law enforcement and their use of force? Yes No

- 11) Do you believe you are influenced by the news media or television shows regarding racial minorities in anyway? Yes No No opinion

- 12) Are you aware of any biases that you may have against any race? Yes No

Please explain:

- 13) Are you familiar with the use of force policy that your department currently uses or used?  
Yes No

Do agree with the policy? Yes No  
 If not, why?

14) Do feel your department's use of force policy restricts you from using certain types of force against citizens? Yes No

Please explain:

15) Are you more inclined to use force on a racial minority citizen as opposed to a White citizen? Yes No

16) Have you ever witnessed a fellow law enforcement officer using excessive force of any type against a member of a racial minority community? Yes No

Please explain:

17) Do you agree or disagree that it is sometimes hard to decide on the type and level of force that should be used against a racial minority citizen? Agree Disagree No opinion

Please explain:

18) Sometimes racial minority citizens are difficult to control? Agree Disagree Neutral

19) I would rather work with members of my own race instead of working with members of another race. Agree Disagree No Comment Neutral.

20) Minority communities have higher levels of crime as opposed to other communities. Agree Disagree Neutral

21) I feel law enforcement officers treat all citizens equally no matter the race of the citizen. Agree Disagree Neutral Sometimes

22) What is your perception of the citizens you serve? Favorable Unfavorable No opinion

## Appendix D

**Letter to Participant (Racial Minority Citizen)**

Dear Participant,

My name is William (Bill) Riter, I am a retired captain and currently an active reserve police officer. I am enrolled in the PhD program at Walden University and in the process of completing my dissertation.

Thank you for your willingness to participate in my study. Due to the serious nature of this research I will not require your name or address, so all responses can remain confidential, however, if you would like a summary of my results later you may email me at [william.riterjr@waldenu.edu](mailto:william.riterjr@waldenu.edu) and I will send them to you.

The first section of my questionnaire is for statistical information only. The next section is related to the use of force by police officers and how you feel about the force that is used against racial minority citizens in your community.

It is my desire that by questioning racial minority citizens and law enforcement officers, my study can help improve or enhance the relationship between the law enforcement community and racial minority citizens. By understanding perceptions of both groups, police departments and community leaders can help establish or improve relationships between one another. It may also help each group to become more aware of certain needs such as additional training for officers or community leaders that will take an active positive role in their own community relations with law enforcement.

I ask that you simply answer each question honestly and without fear of being identified. All responses will be kept confidential and will only be shared with my dissertation committee members and IRB (Internal review board) of Walden University. All responses will remain in my files until such time they can be destroyed. Again, I am not requiring you to sign or identify yourself.

Sincerely,

William H. Riter, Jr.  
PhD Candidate  
Walden University

## Appendix E

### **Consent Form (Citizens)**

Use of Force: Perception of Racial Minorities and Police Officers in Southeastern United States.

The amount of force used by law enforcement officers in the state in Southeastern United States, and other regions of the country, has become a highly-charged topic, especially among racial minority citizens and the law enforcement community. While the use of force by police officers is permitted by law enforcement agencies and expected by citizens, the amount and type of force used can trigger or cause other problems for the community and/or the police agency if the public perceives it to be unjust.

You are invited to participate in a research study to help me understand the perception that racial minority citizens have concerning the use of force that law enforcement officers use against racial minority citizens in Southeastern United States. The researcher is inviting racial minority citizens who meet the criteria needed for this study. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named William H. Riter, Jr. who is a doctoral student at Walden University.

The purpose of this research is to examine how the perceptions of the police use of force differ among racial minority citizens and police officers in Southeastern United States. By understanding perceptions of both groups, I hope to be able to provide a more in-depth body of knowledge that may help improve relationships between law enforcement and racial minority citizens. It may also help each group to become more aware of needs of each party that will strengthen or establish those much-needed relationships.

I ask that you examine this document and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to complete my questionnaire. Additionally, you may take this form and questionnaire, complete it then mail it back to me in the self-addressed stamped envelope.

#### **Payment**

At the completion of each interview I will offer a cash gift of \$5 for your participation in my study.

#### **Privacy**

Reports coming out of this study will not share the identities of individual participants since no personal information will be taken. I will be the only researcher in this study and will



not disclose any information about participants or who participated. All data will be kept secure in my possession for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

**Contacts and Questions:**

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher by contacting me by email at [email address redacted]. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call the Research Participant Advocate at my university at [phone number redacted]. Walden University's approval number for this study is IRB #04-27-18-0450863 and it expires on 4-26-2019..

I will give you a copy of this form to keep for your records.

**Obtaining Your Consent**

Your consent is implied when you decide to complete my questionnaire. The questionnaire will take approximately 30 minutes or less to complete. You also have the right to stop answering any questions if you feel distressed or uncomfortable. The very nature of my questions may cause some people feel distressed if they have had a negative experience with a law enforcement officer. I am providing a Crisis Help Line number for you would like to talk with a counselor the number is [phone number redacted]. Additionally, you may want to contact that officer's department if you feel the need to discuss the matter further.

Appendix F  
Questionnaire for Racial Minority Citizens

(Please Circle Answers)

1. What best describes your age?
    - a. 18-24 years old
    - b. 25-34 years old
    - c. 35-44 years old
    - d. 45-54 years old
    - e. 65-74 years old
    - f. 75 years or older
  2. Describe your Gender
    - a. Male
    - b. Female
    - c. Transgender
    - d. Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
  3. Please specify your race/ethnicity
    - a. Caucasian/European-American/White
    - b. Hispanic/Latinx
    - c. Black/African-American
    - d. Native American/American Indian
    - e. Asian/Pacific Islander
    - f. Biracial/Multiracial (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
  4. Describe the community you reside in
    - a. City or urban community
    - b. Suburban community
    - c. Rural community
    - d. Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
- 1) Have you ever been stopped or detained by a law enforcement officer?    Yes  
No

- 2) If you have been stopped or detained by a law enforcement officer could you tell me the reason?
- 3) Please describe what occurred during your experience with law enforcement.
- 4) Do you believe the stop was lawful and the officer had a valid reason to stop or detain you? Yes  
No

Please Explain why the stop was not lawful or justified:

- 5) Can you describe how you felt when the officer stopped you?
- 6) Was the officer: Professional Rude Arrogant Other?
- 7) What was the race of the officer? White Black Hispanic Asian Other
- 8) Have you ever been arrested by the police or law enforcement officers?
- 9) Did the officer treat you fairly? Yes No

Please Explain:

- 10) If you have been arrested or detained by the police, did the officer use any type of force against you? Yes No
- 11) Do you believe police officers use force more often against: Blacks Whites Hispanics  
Asians Other?
- 12) Do you believe police officers use too much force against racial minority citizens as opposed to White citizens? Yes No No opinion
- 13) Do you believe police officers are justified in using force against citizens when needed? Yes  
No No opinion

14) Do you fear the police in anyway? Yes No

Please Explain:

15) Do you trust the police? Yes No Sometimes

16) Do you believe the news media or television shows can influence the way people feel about the police? Yes No Sometimes

17) Do you think officers are properly trained to deal with racial minority citizens and aggressive behavior? Yes No

18) Do you believe police officers should have additional training on how to de-escalate a situation? Yes No

19) If yes, why do you feel they need additional training?

20) Do you believe law enforcement agencies hide information from the public concerning use of force situations? Yes No

21) Should the public have the right to view all camera footages concerning use of force situations? Yes No

### Appendix G: Racial Minority Responses

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	
Age	45-54	45-54	45-54	35-44	65-74	18-24	45-54	35-44	25-34	35-44	45-54	18-24	45-54	18-24	18-24	35-44	45-54	25-34	45-54		
Gender	female	female	female	female	male	female	male	male	female	male	female	female	female	female	male	female	female	male	female	female	
Race/Ethnic	Hisp/Latino	Black/AF-American	Hisp/Latino	Hisp/Latino	Asian	Hisp/Latino	Black	Black	Black	Hispanic	Black	Hispanic	Black	Hispanic	Black	Asian	Hispanic	Black	Asian	Black	
Community	city/urban	city/urban	Rural	city/urban	city/urban	Rural	Suburban	city/urban	Suburban	city/urban	Suburban	city/urban	Suburban	Rural	city/urban	Rural	city/urban	Rural	City	Suburban	
Ever Stopped or Detained? Yes / No	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	no	
Reason for stop?	n/a	stopped for speeding	given a traffic ticket	unknown	unknown	n/a	unk.	speeding	license tag	unk.	speeding	n/a	speeding	n/a	no reason	speeding	exp. Tag	speeding	n/a	n/a	
Describe your Experience	n/a	none	officer was respectful.	officer did not allow me to explain or even answer his questions.	good experiences	n/a	mostly positive, did not feel I racially profiled.	we were searched. I was dating a white female at the time.	I had to put hands on steering wheel.	I felt I was being discriminated against.	Racially profiled by the police	n/a	officer was very hostile to me.	n/a	he stopped me b/c I am Black	no ans.	no ans.	afraid	n/a	n/a	
Lawful / Valid Reason	n/a	yes	yes	no	yes	n/a	yes	yes	yes	no	no	n/a	no	n/a	no	yes	yes	yes	n/a	n/a	
How You Felt	n/a	I was calm	I felt bad.	nervous	not bad-cool	n/a	I was scared	scared and upset	afraid	I felt the officer was racist.	harrasean g'y, profiled, disrespectful.	n/a	fearful	n/a	mad and scared	upset	ok was not sure why I was being stopped	afraid	n/a	n/a	
Officer Was: Professional / Rude / Arrogant / Other	n/a	Professional	Professional	rude	Professional	n/a	professional	arrogant	arrogant	rude & arrogant	rude & arrogant	n/a	rude	n/a	arrogant	professional	professional	professional	n/a	n/a	
Race of the officer? W / B / H / A / O	n/a	White	White	White	White	n/a	White	White	White	White	White	n/a	White	n/a	White	White	Black	White	n/a	n/a	
Were you treated fairly?	n/a	no citation given-warned only.	yes	no answer	yes	n/a	yes	no	no	no	no	n/a	no	n/a	no	yes	yes	yes	n/a	n/a	
Explain:	n/a	noticed me speeding	no comment	kept accusing me of being drunk	no ans.	n/a	no ans.	had an attitude like we did something wrong	he had an attitude	no ans.	no ans.	n/a	no ans.	n/a	he wanted to search our car.	gave me a warning ticket	warning only	no ans.	n/a	n/a	
Been Arrested Before and force was used?	no	n/a	no	blacks	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no ans.	no ans.	n/a
Force is often used against BWH/A/O	Blacks	unsure	Blacks	yes	Hispanics	Blacks	Blacks and Hisp.	Blacks	Blacks and Hispanic	Blacks and Hisp.	Blacks	Blacks and Hisp.	Blacks	Blacks	Blacks	Blacks	not sure	Blacks	Blacks and Hisp.	Blacks	unsure
Is too much force used against minorities oppose to Whites	yes	no opinion	yes	yes	no opinion	yes	yes	yes, depends on race of officer.	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	no opinion	yes	no opinion	no opinion	no opinion	no	yes	
Are police justified using force against citizens when needed?	yes	no opinion	no opinion	yes, but don't really know when force is actually needed.	yes	yes, some-times	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	no	
Fear the police? Explain	no	no	no	yes	no	no	yes	no	no	no	sometimes	yes	no	no	yes	no	no	no	no	no	
Trust Police?	yes	sometimes	yes	yes	sometimes	sometimes	yes	sometimes	yes	yes	sometimes	no	sometimes	yes	no	yes	yes	sometimes	yes	sometimes	
Media/TV influence feeling about police?	yes	yes	yes	no	sometimes	sometimes	yes	sometimes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	sometimes	yes	sometimes	yes	sometimes	yes	sometimes	
Think officers are trained in racial and aggressive behavior?	yes	no	no	yes, please	no	yes	no	yes	yes	no	no	no	no	yes	no	yes	yes	no	yes	no	
Think officers need additional training?	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	
Why additional training is needed?	there are too many incidents in the news.	how to detain and deescalate	less force could be used.	1st instinct is to use force, causing escalate situation.	no ans.	unk.	History of the demonization of people of color.	not every situation is the same.	some officers get too afraid	because they don't treat people fairly	lack of training, they should not resort to deadly force.	know laws better know to when to use their weapons.	how to deal with minority citizens	n/a	some okay, but others need more training	training can help them understand citizens.	no ans.	no ans.	more training can help everyone	how to treat ppl of color and understand them.	
Does law enforcement hide information?	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	no ans.	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	no	no	yes	no	yes	
Should the public review camera footage?	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	no comment	no	yes	yes unless it goes to court.	yes	yes	no	yes	no comment	no comment	yes	yes	yes	
considered being LEO?	no	no	no	no	too old	yes	yes	yes, when I was younger	yes	no	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	yes	no	no	no	



## Curriculum Vitae

PhD. Candidate - Walden University  
Public Policy & Administration/Criminal Justice

MA Degree - American Public University System/American Military University  
Criminal Justice

BA Degree - American Public University System/American Military University  
Criminal Justice

AS Degree - Mitchell Community College  
Criminal Justice