SHADES OF BLUE: AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF NON-WHITE POLICE INSTRUCTORS REGARDING HIGHLY PUBLICIZED USES OF FORCE BY LAW ENFORCEMENT

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Abstract

Research over two decades (Correll et al., 2007; Donovan & Klahm, 2015; Fyfe, 1988; Jefferis et al., 1997; Johnson & Kuhns, 2009; Klinger & Brunson, 2009; Perkins & Bourgeois, 2006; Sadler, Correll, & Sim, 2013; Sharps & Hess, 2008; Weitzer, 2015) has documented problems between police and communities of color such as incidents of abuse of authority, distrust, and expectations regarding the use of deadly force. The problems have persisted, if not intensified, over the years and warrant additional examination.

The current context of policing in the United States is centered on racial issues. A quick internet search will locate countless controversial videos highlighting differences between the race of the officer and individuals involved in or present when the officer uses force. Research into race and the use of force by police has led to conclusions that either persons of color are more likely to engage in criminal activity and therefore interact more frequently with the police, or that police hold a biased view persons of color as threatening and therefore seek them out on a more regular basis (James, Klinger, & Vila, 2014). Additionally, Americans who are persons of color are less likely than White Americans to support the use of force by police (Halim & Stiles, 2001; Johnson & Kuhns, 2009; Thompson & Lee, 2004). Missing from these studies are the perspectives of officers of color in relation to these issues. This problem informs this study: police officers of color are uniquely situated in the relationship between law enforcement and persons of color. The purpose of this IPA study was to explore how seven police instructors of color experience the impact of high-profile and widely publicized incidents of the use of force on persons of color.

Key Words: police, high profile use of force incidents, media, persons of color.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

The catalyst for change can occur within a blink of an eye. Sometimes seemingly random events can come together in ways never imagined. For example, in August 2014, two young men entered a local market and liquor store. One of these young men left the store with a box of cigarillos without paying. This petty theft was a minor infraction of the law; however, it escalated when the individual pushed the clerk, turning the theft into a robbery. Ultimately the suspect interacted with a police officer, was shot several times, and killed.

At approximately 11:54 a.m. on August 9, 2014, the man, Michael Brown, and his friend Dorian Johnson left the Ferguson Market and Liquor with the stolen items. Roughly 7 minutes later; the men were approached by a local police officer, Darren Wilson, who observed them walking in the street. Officer Wilson realized the men matched the description of the individuals involved in the theft and positioned his patrol vehicle in the roadway. What happened next has been the subject of significant debate and investigation. The process became a national incident, with the shooting investigated by the United States Department of Justice. The final report, while critical of the local police force, determined that Wilson was justified in his use of deadly force. The shooting, while lawful and justified, ignited underlying racial tension across the United States (Dunham & Petersen, 2017; Federal Bureau of Investigation [FBI], 2017; Lott, 2016; Pegues, 2017; Porter, 2016.

Police officers are tasked with maintaining law and order while protecting life and property. At times, such as those just described, these objectives can collide. One of the most scrutinized aspects of police authority is the use of force, which can be complex and difficult to understand. Media coverage of these incidents can make it seem that they occur more frequently than actual data reveals (McLaughlin, 2015). Weitzer (2015) stated:
A series of incidents that occur in a compressed time period and gain massive traction in the media can tarnish the image not only of the police in the cities where the incidents took place but can also damage the reputation of the police nationwide. (p. 475)

Jefferis, Kaminski, Holmes, and Hanley (1997) examined the effect of a videotaped arrest and noted its role in shaping the attitudes of the general public and minorities towards police. When an incident is highly controversial and publicized, it has a negative effect on how the public views the use of force by police, regardless of race (Jefferis et al., 1997).

While there is no universally agreed-upon definition of the use of force, the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) has described it as the “amount of effort required by police to compel compliance by an unwilling subject” (IACP, 2001). Eith and Durose (2011) conducted the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics’ 2011 Police-Public Contact Survey, which found, among other things, that less than 2% of citizens 16 or older reported force being used against them by law enforcement. Hyland, Langton, and Davis (2015) examined data related to the police use of force from 2002 to 2011 and found that 44 million persons aged 16 or older had one or more face-to-face contacts with police. The police did not use force or threaten to use force in 98.4% of these interactions. The IACP examined data related to 10,000 calls for service in 1999 and determined that police did not use force in 99.9639% of the time (IACP, 2001, p. ii). M. R. Smith et al. (2009) noted that police use or threaten to use force in 1 or 2% of police contacts (p. 1-1). Goff, Lloyd, Geller, Raphael, and Glaser (2016) examined data from 12 police agencies across the United States that served 100,000 to 1 million residents between 2010 and 2015. They noted that while police rarely use force, persons of color are disproportionately affected when it does occur. Fryer (2016) examined the use of force by police related to persons of color and found they were significantly more likely to have force used against them. With
regards to deadly force, however, Blacks were 23.8% and Hispanics were 8.5% less likely than Whites to be shot at by the police (Fryer, 2016, p. 1214).

Despite the minimal use of force, and the even rarer use of deadly force, it remains central to people’s negative perceptions of the police, especially when it is used against persons of color. These incidents can be polarizing between Whites and persons of color and may cause highly misleading perceptions regarding the frequency with which force is used by police. Police officers of color, who are also instructors regarding the use of force, are positioned to provide insight regarding the experiences of persons of color and interactions with law enforcement. Their everyday experiences and perceptions of the use of force can provide an increased understanding of the complexities of interactions between police and persons of color. Documenting their perspectives can contribute to creating a reasonable dialogue around police and community relations that can influence policy, transparency, accountability, and collaboration. All of these are tied to effective and stable law enforcement.

On February 12, 2015, approximately seven months after Wilson killed Brown, FBI Director James Comey spoke at Georgetown University regarding race relations between the police and minority communities. Comey noted the underlying racial tension involved in policing and emphasized that police in the United States enforce the status quo, which at times has been “brutally unfair to disfavored groups” (Comey, 2015). The use of force reflects a myriad of historical and complex tensions between minorities and police officers that can impact everyday policing.

The police are granted their authority from the citizens they serve and need their cooperation to serve effectively and provide security (Wentz & Schlimgen, 2012). Tankebe (2013) discussed legitimacy as it related to police, noting that it can best be described as a
dialogue between the power authority (police) and audiences (citizens). Real or perceived abuses of police authority, especially when the use of force is involved, can have devastating consequences. Civil unrest following the Brown shooting cost taxpayers $5.7 million in damage to property, police injuries, and overtime (Chasmar, 2014). In April 2015, a person of color, Freddy Grey, died in police custody in Baltimore, Maryland. Grey’s death, like Brown’s, led to civil unrest. The financial cost of damaged property in the city and additional related expenses are projected to cost taxpayers $20 million (Wenger, 2015).

Law enforcement is a dangerous and stressful job (Roufa, 2017). Police officers and other first responders have an elevated risk of suicide (Stanley, Hom, & Joiner, 2016) and alcoholism (Willman, 2012). The real and perceived abuses of force by police have contributed to an antipolice mentality, resistance to the police, and the murders of numerous police officers (FBI, 2017; Mac Donald, 2016). This study documented the perceptions police instructors of color have regarding high-profile use of force incidents in order to explore and gain insight into the complexity of the relationship between police and persons of color, specifically focusing on police instructors of color.

These officers are responsible for training other officers of color as well as White officers, putting them in a unique situation within the context of everyday policing, racial tensions, and the use of force. Their collective life experiences provide background for interactions with law enforcement as persons of color while their professional training and experiences provide background for law enforcement actions. As police trainers, they can influence other officers’ actions through instruction.

This is especially important given the split-second nature of some police actions. The information obtained by examining the everyday experiences of police officers of color presents
a specific viewpoint that minimizes the aspect of White police versus persons of color. Their perspectives provide a unique lens with which to analyze race-embedded relations occurring around law enforcement training and practice in the area of the use of force, which is presently polarized in the United States. Thus, this study aimed to increase understanding of the relationship between the police and persons of color, as related to perceptions of high-profile and widely publicized uses of force by police against persons of color.

This study used an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach. Accordingly, this researcher obtained data with the assistance of seven participants. The participants were police officers of color who had served or were currently serving as a uniformed police officer for a minimum of 5 years. Additionally, the participants were firearms or use of force instructors in their agencies for a minimum of 2 years. To obtain data, this researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with the participants. The researcher examined the data obtained to locate emergent themes. The researcher then looked for connections across the observed themes. This process was done independently for each participant, with member checking to ensure accuracy. The researcher then examined the themes across all the participants to develop conclusions. A more detailed outline of this researcher’s methodology is in Chapter 3.

**Problem Statement/Purpose Statement**

The use of force by police is rare, and the use of deadly force is even rarer. However, police officers have contact with citizens every day. Most these interactions are very minor and impossible to quantify. Research over two decades (Correll et al., 2007; Donovan & Klahm, 2015; Fyfe, 1988; Jefferis et al., 1997; Johnson & Kuhns, 2009; Klinger & Brunson, 2009; Perkins & Bourgeois, 2006; Sadler, Correll, & Sim, 2013; Sharps & Hess, 2008; Weitzer, 2015)
has documented problems between police and communities of color such as incidents of abuse of authority, distrust, and expectations regarding the use of deadly force. The problems have persisted, if not intensified, over the years and warrant additional examination.

Policing in the United States can be divided into three eras: political, from 1840 to 1930; reform, from 1930 to 1980; and community, from 1980 to the present (Bond, 2016). The political era was characterized by brutality and corruption and can be tied to slave patrols in the South (Waxman, 2017). The reform era saw better pay for police officers and an emphasis on combating corruption (Bond, 2016). The community era emphasized rebuilding relationships between the police and their community and improving the quality of life for citizens (Bond, 2016). Police can improve the quality of life for citizens by not only reducing citizens’ fears of violent attacks, but also by reducing their fears of being bothered by disorderly persons (J. Q. Wilson & Kelling, 1982). A broken windows approach to policing would have officers enforce minor infractions to indicate that breaking the law is not acceptable. This is based on the psychological view that a building with a window left broken indicates criminal mischief is acceptable and therefore leads to additional windows being broken (J. Q. Wilson & Kelling, 1982). Braga and Bond (2008) conducted field experiments in Lowell, Massachusetts, and determined that crime dropped more sharply in areas where police maintained order by using broken windows principles. However, critics of broken windows have suggested it is racist, as overzealous police enforcement has harassed and criminalized the poor (Kelling, 2009).

The current context of policing in the United States is centered on racial issues. A quick internet search will locate countless controversial videos highlighting differences between the race of the officer and individuals involved in or present when the officer uses force. These incidents have led to a national movement, known as Black Lives Matter, which has in part
focused on the issue of police misconduct and also analyzed larger social issues affecting African Americans in the United States (Rickford, 2016). Ghandnoosh (2015) noted that law enforcement practices such as broken windows or quality of life practices have influenced policing strategies for years yet have only shown a modest impact on serious crimes. Maryland State Attorney General Marilyn J. Mosby and Baltimore Police Commissioner Kevin Davis noted that those policing strategies led to the fewest homicides in Baltimore in decades (Fenton, 2017). However, those strategies have been disavowed and were actually blamed for civil unrest in April and May 2015 despite the current rising homicide rate in the city (Fenton, 2017).

Considering that the essential function of policing is to protect life and property, these dynamics present a problem for law enforcement officials. Proactive policing, such as broken windows, has saved lives; however, it has hurt police-community relations, which is a primary factor in civil unrest and the subsequent law enforcement response and damage to property.

Research into race and the use of force by police has led to conclusions that either persons of color are more likely to engage in criminal activity and therefore interact more frequently with the police, or that police hold a biased view persons of color as threatening and therefore seek them out on a more regular basis (James, Klinger, & Vila, 2014). Additionally, Americans who are persons of color are less likely than White Americans to support the use of force by police (Halim & Stiles, 2001; Johnson & Kuhns, 2009; Thompson & Lee, 2004). Indeed, five decades ago, the 1967 President’s Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice noted lack of diversity within police departments as a problem in policing. Since that time, police departments have become increasingly diverse and accepting of officers of color, female officers, and homosexual officers (Sklansky, 2005). Indeed, in the aftermath of the events in Ferguson, President Barack Obama signed an executive order creating
the President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing, which recommended enhanced diversification “but did little to justify it” (Weitzer, 2015, p. 477). Diversity in police departments is generally accepted as beneficial for the departments and communities (Weitzer, 2002), but diversity alone is not enough. B. W. Smith (2003) examined data from cities with populations greater than 100,000 from 1994 through 1998 and concluded that more diversified departments did not have significantly lower levels of police-caused homicides. However, those findings may only be related to extreme cases of police violence and perhaps do not “capture positive influences of diversity that may be seen in the everyday interactions with citizens or in less serious incidences of use of force” (B. W. Smith, 2003, p. 159). The complexities related to police-community relations and diversity regarding the use of force can be observed in the recent civil unrest in Baltimore and in Charlotte, North Carolina.

In April and May 2015, Baltimore experienced civil unrest following the death of a person of color, Freddy Grey, who was in police custody. At the time, most the police department were officers of color and it was led by a police chief of color (Pollock, 2015). Despite this, Grey’s death led to civil unrest due to perceived racism and injustice (Wenger, 2015). In September 2016, Charlotte experienced civil unrest following the shooting death of Kenneth Lamont Scott, a person of color. Scott was shot by Officer Brently Vinson, also a person of color. Despite the suspect and officer being of the same race, the incident was followed by severe civil unrest that caused the governor to declare a state of emergency (Maxwell & Eversley, 2016).

Scholars from a variety of disciplines and methodological approaches have produced valuable information and analytical insights into the complex and evolving relationship between police departments and communities of color. Lott (2016), for example, examined data on 2,699
fatal police shootings between 2013 through 2015 and found that White police officers were not significantly more likely than officers of color to use deadly force against a Black suspect. Nix, Campbell, Byers, and Alpert (2017) examined data from 990 fatal police shootings in 2015 and found that Blacks were more than twice as likely than Whites to have been unarmed when shot by police. However, the authors noted that most civilians killed during the period they were analyzing were armed with a deadly weapon or actively attacking police; less than 10% of those shot by police were unarmed (Nix et al., 2017). Holmes (2000) examined the FBI’s Uniform Crime Report from 1985 through 1990 and the 1990 United States Census and found that minorities, particularly African Americans, were disproportionately victimized during police encounters. Jefferis et al. (1997) examined the effect of a videotaped arrest on public perceptions and noted that incidents captured on video shaped public attitudes toward police, especially among minorities. They concluded: (a) persons of color held more negative views of the use of force by police; (b) a single highly publicized incident had a negative effect on public perception of the use of force, regardless of race; (c) that effect was greater for persons of color; and (d) public perceptions of the use of force varied by the demographics of the respondents – younger respondents were more critical than older respondents of the use of force (Jefferis et al., 1997). Weitzer (2000) interviewed 169 residents of three areas in Washington, DC, and concluded that officer race had little influence on perceptions of police behavior.

Missing from these studies are the perspectives of officers of color in relation to these issues. This problem informs this study: police officers of color are uniquely situated in the relationship between law enforcement and persons of color. Their perspectives provide an instructive lens that can be used to analyze race-embedded relations around law enforcement training and practice in the area of the use of force, which is presently imbued with polarity in
the United States. Their experiences as persons of color provide insight into community distrust of law enforcement while their experiences as police officers provide insight into law enforcement’s contacts with persons of color. Therefore, police officers of color who are also experienced police instructors can provide context and understanding related to the effects of high-profile and widely publicized incidents of the use of force on persons of color.

Previous research into the effects that using deadly force has on police officers has shown peritraumatic stress among officers (Klinger & Brunson, 2009). Law enforcement is a dangerous and stressful job (Roufa, 2017). Police officers and other first responders have an elevated risk of suicide (Stanley et al., 2016) and alcoholism (Willman, 2012). In addition to all the occupational hazards of policing, Black police officers can face additional resistance from Black residents who view them as traitors (Weitzer, 2000).

The cumulative effect of these high-profile incidents has influenced a national conversation related to police training and technologies, such as wearing body cameras (Otu, 2016). This measure gained support at the national level when President Obama proposed a budget that included $75 million to fund the purchase of 50,000 body-mounted cameras (Henderson, 2014). The use of body cameras is based on increasing transparency for police-citizen interactions (President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing, 2015). Dunham and Petersen (2017) suggested expanding the use of body cameras as a way to reduce police bias in the use of deadly force. Ariel et al. (2016) examined the use of body cameras by police in eight police forces in six jurisdictions, which served over 2 million citizens. They concluded the use of body cameras by police had no effect on the use of force by police but led to an increased rate of assaults on officers (Ariel et al., 2016). Similarly, Lott (2016) found no evidence that body cameras were related to the number of police killings or the racial composition of those killings.
Yokum, Ravishankar, and Coppock (2017) conducted a controlled evaluation of 2,000 Washington, DC, police officers over 18 months and concluded that body cameras had no statistical effect on police behavior.

While the use of body cameras by police is an evolving dynamic of policing, initial research into the area has shown little empirical evidence that it improves relationships between police officers and persons of color. Research into the use of force by police has offered mixed results regarding the effect of the racial identity of the police officers. However, the media influence people’s perceptions of police. What happens in popular media depictions is a bifurcated stereotype of police-community relationships that misrepresents the action occurring on the ground in a defined situation, particularly where the race of the police officer and the identity of the community intersect with complexity (Donovan & Klahm, 2015). As Buvik (2016) and B. W. Smith, Novak, Frank, and Lowenkamp (2005) have observed, the on-the-ground dynamics of everyday policing are misunderstood.

Despite the technological and policy advances that have been made regarding law enforcement practices, the relationship between law enforcement and persons of color remains tumultuous. This relationship is complex and evolving, continually shaped by outside influences such as high-profile incidents, the media, and perceptions of police actions. Thus, in-depth qualitative studies are needed to grasp the experiences of the police officers on the ground and how race affects their interactions in the community.

Police officers are tasked with maintaining law and order for the communities they serve. The use of force is occasionally needed to accomplish organizational missions, protect citizens, and assure the wellbeing of officers. Real or perceived abuses of force by police can create conflict between the police and the community, especially when persons of color are involved.
In addition to the physical dangers police officers face in performance of their jobs, there are additional hazards, such as an elevated risk of suicide (Stanley et al., 2016) and alcoholism (Willman, 2012). Additionally, work stressors associated with policing can negatively affect the health of police officers (Avdija, 2014; Violani et al., 2017; Violanti et al., 2018). This dissertation examined the perceptions police instructors of color have regarding high-profile and widely publicized incidents of the use of force on persons of color.

**Research Question**

The central research question guiding this study was: What perceptions do police instructors of color have regarding high-profile and widely publicized incidents of the use of force by police against persons of color? This has the following subquestions:

**SQ1:** How do police instructors who are persons of color describe the effects of high-profile and widely publicized incidents of the use of force on Blacks and Hispanics?

**SQ2:** What are the effects of high-profile and widely publicized incidents of the use of force on everyday police life, including their perceptions of the consequences these incidents have on them, their peers in the police force, and the broader community?

**SQ3:** How do these police instructors describe the deficiencies they have observed and changes they have made – or are considering making – to training and community relations, in light of these incidents?

**Conceptual Framework**

When investigating something as dynamic, complex, and intricate as the use of force by police and how it relates to persons of color, it is beneficial to use a conceptual framework that provides insight into how perceptions influence decision making in high stress situations. The use of force by police is not linear, in that one thing does not automatically lead to the next.
Examining perceptions of the use of force by police would be easy if every time a suspect did x the officer did y; that, however, is not the case. Rather, nuanced differences between individuals can lead to vastly different results. The individual actions, or inactions, of the people involved can have great influence on their perceptions, particularly of threat, and the sequence of events. Police officers are trained for a variety of situations, including the use of force. However, it is also important to note that they are human beings whose decisions are based on a variety of factors such as life experiences, education, training, and background. For example, an officer with 20 years of experience may handle a call for service differently than a younger officer with less experience.

In the example discussed earlier, Michael Brown was involved in a minor robbery and then observed by a police officer to be walking in the street. Neither action justifies deadly force; however, the subsequent actions of the involved parties led to tragedy. Police officers’ actions are influenced by a variety of factors. When conducting research into the everyday experiences of police officers, including the use of force, the literature lacks documentation of how an officer, facing threat, expands and explains their thought process. Therefore, it becomes beneficial to utilize an adaptive framework that allows for differences in perceptions and experiences when examining these types of interactions.

Attribution theory can provide these analytical tools, given that it outlines a process through which individuals attribute explanations and create their perceptions of the causes of events and of the reactions of others (Kelley & Michela, 1980). It considers what information is gathered and how it is connected to form a causal judgement (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Attribution theory can be traced to Fritz Heider’s 1958 book, *The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations* (as cited in Weiner, 2008). Heider’s approach to research differed from other theorists of the time.
Heider “embraced common-sense and was believed to capture the views of the naive person, or the person on the street” (Weiner, 2008, p. 152).

Heider identified three factors related to performance: ability, task difficulty, and effort (Weiner, 2010). Ability refers to a person’s capacity to complete a task, such as running. Effort refers to the resolution one exhibits while performing a task, such as jogging versus sprinting. These two tasks are internal; they are intrinsic to the person. Task difficulty, on the other hand, is an external factor, such as running a marathon. The length and the route of the course are predetermined and cannot be changed by internal factors. However, the genetic ability and effort of the runner is internal to the person and can therefore have an impact on the outcome of the race. Essentially, internal is about the person and external is about the situation (Weiner, 2010).

Attribution theory was further advanced through E. E. Jones et al.’s 1972 book Attribution: Perceiving the Causes of Behavior, which introduced or expanded upon causal issues related to attribution theory. Some of the main tenets discussed in the book include actor/observer attributional disparities, dispositional attribution biases, verb causality, causal dimensions, causal schemata, and attribution of arousal (as cited in Weiner, 2008).

Heider (1985, as cited in Martinko, 1995) linked the outcome of events to the attributions made by individuals. Simply explained, “attributions are specific causal explanations for events” (Martinko, 1995, p. 9). The evaluation of an outcome can lead in two directions: general positive or negative emotions or causal attribution and dimensions, which lead to distinct emotions (Weiner, 2008). This is known as the cognition-emotion process. Weiner (2010) referenced Thorndike’s 1911 theory of law of effect, which notes that previously rewarded behavior will be repeated while previously punished behavior will be avoided. Additionally, Weiner (2010)
credited Atkinson’s 1957 concept of motivation when developing attribution theory, which was not shared by other expectancy/value theorists. Specifically, Weiner (2010, p. 29), wrote:

- Motivation is determined by individual differences (motives), so that Atkinson’s equation for strength of motivation is Motive x Expectancy x Value. The motive he primarily embraced was the need for achievement.

- Incentive (value) is conceptualized as an affect, pride in accomplishment (here I consider only approach motivation and positive affect). Thus, affects other than general pleasure/pain were incorporated into the conception.

- Incentive (value) is inversely related to expectancy of success so that pride is presumed to be greater given success at a difficult task (low expectancy of success) than at an easy task (high expectancy of success).

Weiner (2010) also cited Julian Rotter’s 1966 work, which examined how individuals perceive their outcomes in relation to their ability. For example, people who succeed attribute their success to ability and effort (internal) while those who fail attribute their failure to perceived luck (external). Weiner (2010) combined this concept with Heider’s three causes (ability, effort, and task difficulty) to propose four main perceived causes of achievement outcomes: ability, effort, task difficulty, and luck.

Weiner (1979) proposed a three-step process of attribution. In the first step, the person perceives or observes a behavior. In the second step, the person must believe the behavior was intentional. In the last step, the person must determine whether the person was forced to perform the behavior (situational) or not (personal). Weiner (2010) captured the “deep structure of a motivational episode: thinking gives rise to feelings which guide actions” (p. 34).
As seen in Figure 1, attribution theory provides a framework that can be used to examine a complex, dynamic, and intricate research problem such as the use of force by police and how it relates to persons of color. For example, police officers are influenced by their training and experience. An officer who has had prior experiences with similar incidents would remember successful or unsuccessful actions previously taken. These factors can influence the officer’s information, beliefs, and motivation. The officer can then examine the incident and the perceived causes, which in turn affect their expectations of someone’s behavior. For example, an officer may point a firearm at an erratic individual and expect them to comply with their orders. Any deviation from the expected outcome would influence the officer’s future decisions. Attribution theory will allow the research participants to acknowledge the deep personal and professional experiences that influence their perceptions of everyday policing.

**Critiques and Debates Related to Attribution Theory**

Researchers have critiqued attribution theory for ignoring the difference between people’s *reason explanations* and *causal explanations* (Locke & Pennington, 1982; P. A. White, 1991) and for overestimating the importance of personal or dispositional factors and
underestimating situational or environmental factors (Efrat, 2003). E. E. Jones and Nisbett (1972) noted a key issue with attribution theory is thatattributors may stress personal causes for behavior instead of potent situational factors. Ross (1977) contended that attributors tend to underestimate situational factors and overestimate dispositional factors. Researchers advocating attribution theory must also be mindful of the wording of research questions. Enzle and Schopflocher (1978) noted that attributional questions may instigate attributional processes that do not occur in the absence of attribution questions because “simple curiosity might not be sufficient to prompt causal analyses” (p. 597). They contended that these leading questions may influence participant response and therefore influence the overall research.

Another critique of attributional research is that individuals may be influenced by outside perceptions, making attributions to seek approval from others (Orvis, Kelley, & Butler, 1976). Overall, many problems related to attributional research mirror problems with psychology in general (Kelley & Michela, 1980). Nevertheless, attribution theory remains a valid research method that provides insight into research problems (Harvey & Weary, 1984), particularly for the purposes of this project. This researcher is particularly interested in the theory’s capacity to attribute explanations for the causes of events and the reactions of others to perceptions. It also allows an analysis of how individuals used available information and relationships when forming casual judgements. This flexibility is acutely needed given the complexity of the case at hand, in which the researcher is asking participants to expand upon the nuances related to the everyday experiences of police officers of color, particularly the intricacies of decision making surrounding the use of force and how perceptions of it affect community relationships.

**Relation to the Study**
Anfara and Mertz (2014) noted that theory provides new insights into and understandings of a phenomenon. Attributional theory as a conceptual framework guided the research and gave participants the flexibility to provide information they perceived as relevant. The life experiences of persons of color who are police officers and instructors can help us understand the intersection of everyday policing and use of force issues with race. Attribution theory served as a lens that allowed the researcher to view the participants’ explanations for interactions in everyday policing in a racially charged context. For example, perhaps a participant was on a call for service with other officers and they were the only officer of color dealing with an individual or a group of citizens of color. The subtle intricacies of the interactions between the involved parties and how the officer perceived both internal and external threat, or how the context affected his or her interactions, provided insight into the research topic. Attribution theory allowed the participant to make sense of those intricacies and understand the outcome as in part derived from their sense making, their perceptions of what did or could have occurred, and how this unfolding of events fit with their attributions.

Attribution theory examines an individual’s attempt to develop explanations for their behaviors and the outcomes of those behaviors (Martinko, 1995). These attributions can become the basis for future interactions. For example, if a police officer improperly conducts a motor vehicle stop on a person of color, that driver may attribute future valid and lawful stops to improper motives by the officer. When a participant interacts with a citizen in an official or unofficial capacity there can be a wide array of attributions made by both parties. Attribution theory guided the study by allowing the researcher and participants to explore the attributions made in everyday policing interactions.
This study documented the perceptions police instructors of color have regarding high-profile use of force incidents, in order to explore and gain insight into the complexity of the relationship between police and persons of color, specifically focusing on police instructors of color. Attribution theory guided the study by allowing the participants to explore their perceptions of high-profile use of force incidents against persons of color. Power dynamics regarding identity and occupation, combined with the overlapping racial tensions, were examined regarding how the participants perceived their everyday experiences. Attribution theory allowed the researcher to gain understanding into these experiences and how they were viewed by the participants.

**Research Overview**

This study contributed to the literature related to the everyday challenges faced by police by examining the perceptions police officers of color have of the effects of high-profile and widely publicized incidents of the use of force on persons of color. Most research into police behavior has used quantitative methods, an approach that has provided tremendous insight into various research topics related to policing, including the use of force. For example, Sharps and Hess (2008) noted that citizens used deadly force in simulated scenarios and demonstrated a very low capacity for distinguishing weapons from random objects. Correll et al. (2007) compared police officers to citizens in simulated use-of-force scenarios and noted that police officers outperformed citizens. However, citizens began improving with training, suggesting that police training and experience may allow officers to override response tendencies stemming from racial stereotypes and therefore exercise proper judgment (Correll et al. 2007). Sadler et al. (2013) noted that police officers experience unconscious bias related to the Black-danger stereotype but this did not influence the ultimate decision to use force. Klinger and Brunson (2009) examined
the use of deadly force by law enforcement and noted the effects of the incidents on the officer at
the time, such as losing hearing during the incident, tunnel vision, and other effects of
peritraumatic stress. Weitzer and Tuch (2004) noted that citizens who were informed of police
misconduct through the television or newspaper believed that police misconduct was more
prevalent than it was.

However, quantitative methods lack the ability to explain why. For example, a
quantitative study on the use of force by police may indicate a disparity in the numbers,
indicating a problem, but may miss certain contextual factors that would provide insight about
what occurred on the ground. Without an indication of why, it is difficult to develop a proper
plan for dealing with a problem.

Creswell (2012a) noted the value of qualitative research in providing unique insights and
different perspectives on research problems, specifically outlining five qualitative research
methods. Qualitative research is beneficial when examining a central research problem that is
complex and dynamic (Creswell, 2012b). Accordingly, this study used a phenomenological
approach to qualitative inquiry, specifically IPA. IPA allows researchers to examine how people
make sense of their life experiences (J. A. Smith, Larkin, & Flowers, 2012). This study
examined the shared experiences of police officers, who are persons of color and instructors, in
relation to everyday policing and the use of force. IPA provides a paradigm for examining the
research problem from a perspective that is not often utilized.

This study focused on the perceptions police instructors of color have regarding high-
profile use of force incidents to explore and gain insight into the complex relationship between
police and persons of color. The participants were certified police officers in the State of New
Jersey who identified as persons of color. Accordingly, they had successfully attended a police
academy and received a full certification from the New Jersey Police Training Commission (PTC). In addition to having received their full-time certification, the participants also served as law enforcement trainers related to the use of force for their respective agencies and held the appropriate certifications, with a minimum of 2 years served as an instructor. Also, the officers served in a policing function for a local law enforcement agency in New Jersey. This ensured that all participants were guided by the same state and federal laws. However, there may be variations within different agencies’ policies and procedures.

The experiences of the seven participants were documented in this study to meet IPA’s standards, without having a sample size that was too small or too large (J. A. Smith et al., 2012). The study used purposive sampling to identify participants who met the criteria. Once the participants were identified, data was collected through the use of long semi-structured interviews, which aligned with IPA analysis (Creswell, 2012a; Seidman, 2013). Prior to the interviews being conducted, a series of open-ended questions were developed and asked in a logical order (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). The interviews were recorded with the participants’ permission, transcribed, and securely stored. The data were analyzed using six steps: (a) reading the transcribed interviews, (b) initial data interpretation, (c) reviewing the development of emergent themes, (d) looking for connections across emergent themes, (e) repeating steps 1-4 with the remaining participants, and (f) examining the themes for patterns across the participants (J. A. Smith et al., 2012).

### Potential Significance

Police officers work in an unpredictable environment and are responsible for responding to incidents that vary in nature and complexity. Officers respond to a wide range of incidents, from medical emergencies to criminal activity to notifying the next of kin of the passing of a
relative. In addition to the nature of the occupation, the hours are often extended and irregular. Many officers work nights, weekends, and holidays, causing them to miss time with their families. The occupation has been proven to place stress on officers, which is compounded by everyday stresses (Hickman, Fricas, Strom, & Pope, 2011). When people distrust the police, they are less likely to cooperate with police officers (Warren et al., 2014). Unfortunately, noncooperation and aggressiveness towards police officers commonly result in the additional use of force (Johnson & Kuhns, 2009). Police officers need the permission and assistance of the public in order to accomplish their fundamental objective: to protect and serve.

Not all citizens who distrust police or question police actions will resist police control or become aggressive towards police officers. Some may simply do their best to avoid police, but police are essential to securing public safety. When victims of crime are fearful of police, they are less likely to report crime and therefore can continue to be victimized (Davis et al., 2001). Therefore, creating trust between the police and the community is vital. This is especially crucial for marginalized sections of society that are victimized by crime at greater rates than others (Sampson & Groves, 1989).

Within this context, this study provided insight into a complex, dynamic problem. It may assist in improving relationships between the police and the community by identifying misconceptions and finding common ground. President Obama created a task force on 21st century policing that made numerous recommendations for law enforcement. One of the recommendations was recruit more officers of color (President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing, 2015). However, police departments have faced difficulty recruiting persons of color (Kaste, 2014). This study gave a voice to officers of color, with the aim of providing insight into ways to improve diversity within police departments. It thus may also help create better mutual
understandings between communities of color and the police, which can increase police legitimacy, public safety, and community cooperation.

**Study Assumptions**

When examining the research problem, it is beneficial to note assumptions made in the research. This study aligned with the philosophical roots of phenomenological research. Phenomenological research aims to study things as they appear to gain insight into consciousness and the human experience (Husserl, 2013). This allowed the researcher to gain insight into the complexities of the research problem. This study examined the perceptions of challenges faced by officers of color in relation to the effects of high-profile and widely publicized uses of force by police against persons of color. Research into this problem could be done quantitatively. A researcher could administer a questionnaire to a large number of officers of color and quantify the responses to draw conclusions. However, this would force participants to choose a specific answer even though they may feel the answer was not representative or their reality is imbued with a great deal more complexity. This study provided the participants with the flexibility to provide information of their choosing and to express uncertainty or clarification. Interactions between human beings can vary from simple to complex, and many times things may not be as they appear. For example, one may witness a motorist commit a motor vehicle violation, such as speeding. The observer may feel this other motorist is reckless and endangering others, which is a valid viewpoint. However, it is possible this motorist was a volunteer fireman driving to the fire station to respond to an emergency. Should those drivers interact with each other, it is likely they would have vastly different accounts of each other. The intricacies of interactions between people is where the rubber meets the road, so to speak. This study allowed police officers of
color to discuss their everyday interactions while acknowledging the influence of their cumulative life experiences.

This study assumed the participants will, to the best of their abilities, be truthful and open with the researcher. Also, this study assumed that a researcher of one race can conduct research into individuals of an opposite race. Briscoe (2005) argued for an inclusive representation of others as long as researchers are careful when representing the experiences of another.

**Limitations/Delimitations**

This study was limited in several ways. First, the participants were police officers in New Jersey. This provides a few limitations. New Jersey is a densely populated state. Many police officers in New Jersey do not work in the rural conditions experienced in other parts of the county. New Jersey ranks third nationally for police officers (389) per 10,000 residents, while Kentucky (174) is last (Reaves, 2011). New Jersey ranks eighth (550) in total number of law enforcement agencies, while Hawaii (seven) is last (Reaves, 2011). The differences in these numbers indicates the availability of backup to police officers in New Jersey compared to other states, such as Kentucky, or of other agencies to assist New Jersey police officers, compared to Hawaii.

New Jersey also has guidelines from its attorney general’s office outlining the use of force and training, which frames officers’ actions. These factors can all influence officers’ actions, especially related to the use of force, and therefore naturally place boundaries upon the information obtained. For example, New Jersey has a statewide guideline that places limitations on vehicular pursuits, while other states allow individual law enforcement agencies to develop their own policies. So, interviewing police officers from New Jersey or Florida would provide different information regarding vehicle pursuits because the officers are trained differently and
operate under different restrictions, or the lack thereof. Also, New Jersey has minimum firearms qualification training standards which may differ from other states.

The actions of police officers in New Jersey are guided by the New Jersey attorney general’s guideline for the use of force. This provides guidance for law enforcement agencies when formulating policies and procedures. The lowest level of force is constructive authority, which is a low as an officer’s presence in uniform giving a verbal command. The highest and most extreme use of force is deadly force. The levels are defined in the Definitions section of this chapter.

An officer’s mere presence in uniform with a firearm speaking to a citizen is an example of constructive authority. If the officer should have to touch a person, that touch would qualify as physical contact. Should the officer meet resistance, such as a suspect pulling away during handcuffing, the officer may use a compliance hold to obtain cooperation and control them. Should the officer need to escalate the use of force they may use mechanical force, such as oleoresin capsicum (often known as pepper spray). Lastly, an officer may need to use deadly force to protect their life or another’s. Table 1 describes the levels of force in New Jersey.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of force</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deadly force</td>
<td>Firing at a person, vehicle, or building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanical force</td>
<td>Pepper spray, expandable baton, K9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical force</td>
<td>Compliance hold, wrestling to the ground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical contact</td>
<td>Handcuffing, escorting a prisoner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructive authority</td>
<td>Officer presence, verbal commands, point a firearm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The data were gathered from a small number of participants, who were persons of color and police instructors. The participants had served in a uniformed capacity for a minimum of 5 years and as an instructor for a minimum of 2 years. While their perspectives and experiences were valuable and informative, they provided only a fraction of the insights into an incredibly dynamic and diverse problem. The data obtained were only derived from the information the participants chose to share. The small specific sample size limits the study and cannot be generalized.

Lastly, this researcher is a White male who is also a police officer. As a scholar-practitioner, the researcher has been influenced by his life experiences. The researcher’s interactions as a police officer have helped inform his understandings and have influenced his thought process when designing the study. Briscoe (2005) argued for an inclusive representation of others and noted that privileged individuals can engage the educational discourse and help the suffering of others. With that in mind, this researcher aimed to give a voice to police officers who are persons of color in relation to the challenges currently faced in everyday policing. While bracketing was employed as much as possible, it would be negligent not to acknowledge the possibility of personal and professional experiences influencing the researchers’ perceptions.

**Key Terms/Definitions**

**Constructive authority:** Constructive authority does not involve actual physical contact with the subject, but involves the use of the law enforcement officer’s authority to exert control over a subject. Examples include verbal commands, gestures, warnings, and unholstering a weapon. Pointing a firearm at a subject is an element of constructive authority to be used only in appropriate situations. (New Jersey Office of the Attorney General, 2000).
**Physical contact:** Physical contact involves routine or procedural contact with a subject that is necessary to effectively accomplish a legitimate law enforcement objective. Examples include guiding a subject into a police vehicle, holding the subject’s arm while transporting, handcuffing a subject, and maneuvering or securing a subject for a frisk. (New Jersey Office of the Attorney General, 2000).

**Physical force:** Physical force involves contact with a subject beyond that which is generally utilized to effect an arrest or other law enforcement objective. Physical force is employed when necessary to overcome a subject’s physical resistance to the exertion of the law enforcement officer’s authority or to protect persons or property. Examples include wrestling a resisting subject to the ground, using wrist locks or arm locks, striking with the hands or feet, or other similar methods of hand-to-hand confrontation. (New Jersey Office of the Attorney General, 2000).

**Mechanical force:** Mechanical force involves the use of some device or substance, other than a firearm, to overcome a subject’s resistance to the exertion of the law enforcement officer’s authority. Examples include the use of a baton or other object, canine physical contact with a subject, or chemical or natural agent spraying. (New Jersey Office of the Attorney General, 2000).

**Deadly force:** Deadly force is force that a law enforcement officer uses with the purpose of causing, or which the officer knows to create a substantial risk of causing, death or serious bodily harm. Purposely firing a firearm in the direction of another person or at a vehicle, building, or structure in which another person is believed to be constitutes deadly force. A threat to cause death or serious bodily harm by the production of a weapon or otherwise, so long as the
officer’s purpose is limited to creating an apprehension that deadly force will be used if necessary, does not constitute deadly force. (New Jersey Office of the Attorney General, 2000).

**Reasonable belief**: Reasonable belief is an objective assessment based upon an evaluation of how a reasonable law enforcement officer with comparable training and experience would react to, or draw inferences from, the facts and circumstances confronting and known by the law enforcement officer at the scene. (New Jersey Office of the Attorney General, 2000).

**Imminent danger**: Imminent danger describes threatened actions or outcomes that may occur during an encounter absent action by the law enforcement officer. The period of time involved is dependent on the circumstances and facts evident in each situation and is not the same in all situations. The threatened harm does not have to be instantaneous, for example, imminent danger may be present even if a subject is not at that instant pointing a weapon at the law enforcement officer, but is carrying a weapon and running for cover. (New Jersey Office of the Attorney General, 2000).

**Substantial risk**: Any discharge of a firearm entails some risk of an unintended outcome. A substantial risk exists when a law enforcement officer disregards a foreseeable likelihood that innocent persons will be endangered. For example, firing a weapon into a confined space (room, vehicle, etc.) occupied by innocent persons exposes those persons to a substantial risk of harm. (New Jersey Office of the Attorney General, 2000).

**Use of force**: The amount of effort required by police to compel compliance by an unwilling subject (IACP, 2001).

**Chapter Summary**

The relationship between the police and persons of color is complex and fragile. Communities of color often face a disproportionate amount of crime (Sampson & Wilson, 1995).
and therefore need the police. To accomplish the basic principles of policing, law enforcement agencies need the support and cooperation of the community (Tankebe, 2013). Police officers possess a great deal of autonomy regarding their daily activities (Phillips, 2016b).

Police officers who are persons of color have unique insight and perspectives into the relationship between law enforcement and communities of color. Because police instructors train other officers, who often function independently, their role in the relationship between the police and the public is critical (Phillips, 2016b).

Policing in the United States has experienced tremendous growth and changes since its origins. This history has been categorized into three eras: political, from 1840 to 1930; reform, from 1930 to 1980; and community, from 1980 to the present (Bond, 2016). While law enforcement has made tremendous progress, additional work is needed. Historical injustices suffered by communities of color remain pertinent to the current relationship between the police and persons of color.

Previous research into the relationship between the police and persons of color has provided mixed results. For example, Lott (2016) examined data on 2,699 fatal police shootings between 2013 through 2015 and found that White police officers are not significantly more likely than officers of color to use deadly force against a Black suspect. Nix et al. (2017) examined data from 990 fatal police shootings in 2015 and found that Blacks were more than twice as likely than Whites to have been unarmed when shot by police.

Research into the perceptions of citizens regarding the use of deadly force has provided insight into the decisions made during deadly force incidents. Correll et al. (2007) examined the decision to use deadly force in simulated scenarios and found that citizens were more likely than police officers to use deadly force against persons of color. Sharps and Hess (2008) also
examined citizen decisions to use deadly force in simulated scenarios, finding that citizens were likely to misinterpret ordinary objects as weapons.

Missing from this research are studies exploring the interactions between the police and the community. Thus, in-depth qualitative studies are needed to grasp the experiences of the police officers on the ground and how race affects their interactions in the community. Accordingly, this study examined the perceptions of police instructors of color regarding the challenges they face within the context of everyday policing.

This study utilized IPA as its methodological approach and attribution theory as its theoretical framework. Attribution theory allowed the participants to elaborate on their perceptions of experiences, which is crucial when examining such a complex and sensitive issue. Attribution theory has been criticized for ignoring the difference between people’s reason explanations and causal explanations (Locke & Pennington, 1982; P. A. White, 1991). Additionally, people may be influenced by outside perceptions, making attributions to gain approval from others (Orvis et al., 1976). However, attributional research remains a valid research method that provides insight into research problems (Harvey & Weary, 1984).

Attributional theory guided the research and gave the participants the flexibility to provide information they perceived as relevant. This study contributed to the literature related to the challenges faced by police in everyday policing by examining the perceptions of police instructors of color regarding high-profile and widely publicized incidents of force on persons of color. It considered a complex and dynamic central research problem using qualitative research (Creswell, 2012b). IPA allowed the researcher to examine the perceptions of police instructors of color regarding the challenges they face within the context of everyday policing. In addition to identifying as persons of color, the participants were certified as police officers in New Jersey
and served as trainers for their agencies. Their perceptions provided insight into the complex and fragile relationship between police officers and persons of color.

Police work can be dangerous and stressful, with officers having an elevated risk of suicide (Stanley et al., 2016) and alcoholism (Willman, 2012). The real and perceived abuses of force by police have contributed to an antipolice mentality, resistance to the police, and the murders of numerous police officers (FBI, 2017; Mac Donald, 2016). When people distrust the police, they are less likely to cooperate with police officers (Warren et al., 2014). However, this noncooperation and aggressiveness commonly results in police officers using force (Johnson & Kuhns, 2009). Figure 2 shows that assaults on officers steadily decreased from 2007 to 2014 and have steadily increased since then. Additionally, assaults on officers using personal weapons (i.e., fists) reached a new high in 2016, accounting for 31.4% of all assaults.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>% injured</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>% injured</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>% injured</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>% injured</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>% injured</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>61,257</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>2,216</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>1,028</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>8,692</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>49,321</td>
<td>27.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>61,087</td>
<td>26.0</td>
<td>2,292</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>958</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>8,466</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>49,371</td>
<td>27.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>58,364</td>
<td>26.0</td>
<td>2,007</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>886</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>7,966</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>47,505</td>
<td>27.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>56,491</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>1,925</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>918</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>7,413</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>46,235</td>
<td>27.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>55,631</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>2,240</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>1,003</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>7,856</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>44,532</td>
<td>28.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>53,867</td>
<td>27.7</td>
<td>2,276</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>909</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>7,435</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>43,247</td>
<td>29.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>50,802</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td>2,299</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>901</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>7,042</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>40,560</td>
<td>30.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>48,988</td>
<td>28.5</td>
<td>1,976</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>966</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>6,976</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>39,070</td>
<td>30.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>50,991</td>
<td>28.4</td>
<td>2,050</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>921</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>7,705</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>40,315</td>
<td>30.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>57,180</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>2,377</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>1,096</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>9,122</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>44,585</td>
<td>31.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: Assault figures published in prior years' editions of Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted have been updated for inclusion in this table.

Figure 2. Table showing Law Enforcement Officers Injured - Taken from FBI (n.d.).
This study examined the perceptions police instructors of color have regarding the effects of high-profile and widely publicized incidents of force against persons of color. Therefore, it gave a voice to those officers and gained insight into what they perceived as the challenges facing them as persons of color and as police officers. This study provided new information that can identify ways organizations can improve in areas such as reducing officer stress or increasing recruitment of persons of color.

This study also has several limitations. The study participants were limited to New Jersey police officers. The population density of New Jersey differs greatly from much larger and less populated states. Also, New Jersey police officers are guided by the state attorney general’s office through directives and guidelines, which vary from those of other states. The study included a small number of participants and the data obtained was limited to what the participants wanted to share. Lastly, the researcher was a White male police officer who employed bracketing as much as possible to limit any potential bias or preconceived ideas.

This chapter introduced the research problem and examined the relationship between law enforcement and communities of color. The researcher stated the research question along with the subquestions. The conceptual framework was identified and its relationship to the study was explored. The researcher provided an overview of the research method for the study and its potential significance. The researcher set criteria for the study’s participants, identified its assumptions, and noted its limitations. Lastly, key terms for the study were clearly defined.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Law enforcement in the United States has a long and complex history. In this chapter, the researcher will examine the history of policing in the United States, noting its origins in English traditions, and traditional perspectives about police organizational structures. This chapter will also provide background for the American criminal justice system and New Jersey law enforcement. Additional attention will be placed on policing’s history with persons of color, including recruitment and hiring, community and race, and high-profile incidents of civil unrest. The researcher will also examine race and politics related to policing along with deadly force representations and perceptions, implicit bias, Black Lives Matter, and the Ferguson effect. Lastly, the researcher will examine the psychology of policing, including peritraumatic stress, training and health effects such as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), alcohol abuse, divorce, and suicide.

History and Structure of Policing in America

Much of American’s common-law tradition, ideas concerning community policing, crime prevention, and origins of modern policing can be traced to its English heritage (Dunham & Alpert, 2015, Walker & Katz, 2013). The English heritage emphasizes individual rights, court systems and methods of punishment, and different law enforcement agencies (Walker & Katz, 2013). This influenced American policing by creating a tradition of limited police authority, local control of law enforcement agencies, and a highly decentralized and fragmented system of law enforcement (Walker & Katz, 2013).

As early as 900, the responsibilities currently assigned to law enforcement were held by regular citizens (Dunham & Alpert, 2015). Citizens were responsible for assisting neighbors who might be victims of criminals and, since no police officers existed, individuals could use
state-sanctioned force to ensure social control (Dunham & Alpert, 2015). The *frankplege* police system was established around 1066, which required males 12 and older to group with nine neighbors into a *tything* that was responsible for protecting, and being protected by, fellow citizens while upholding duties required by law (Dunham & Alpert, 2015).

The police patrol function, which originated hundreds of years ago and is rooted in the French term *patrouiller*, meaning to “tramp around in the mud,” involved making a consistent and repetitive check of an area to guard or inspect it (T. F. Adams, 2007). In early America, some people would serve as volunteers to guard each other’s property while others would hire professionals to fulfill their obligations to the community (T. F. Adams, 2007).

Policing in the United States has been composed of three eras: political, from 1840 to 1930; reform, from 1930 to 1980; and community, from 1980 to the present (Bond, 2016). The political era was characterized by brutality and corruption and can be tied to slave patrols in the South (Waxman, 2017). The reform era saw better pay for police officers and an emphasis on combating corruption (Bond, 2016). The community era emphasized rebuilding police-community relationships and improving quality of life for citizens (Bond, 2016).

**Organizational Structure**

The origins of modern policing are attributed to Robert Peel, who is referred to as the father of modern policing, and the Metropolitan Police Act of 1829, which created the London police (Lentz & Chaires, 2007). The primary mission of the London police was crime prevention, based on the belief that preventing crime is better than responding to crime (Walker & Katz, 2013). To accomplish this, Peel implemented a preventive patrol consisting of fixed areas to maintain a visible police presence and prevent crime (Walker & Katz, 2013).
The London police based their legitimacy on institutional authority: their power was grounded in law and their behavior was determined by rules and laws (Uchida, 1997). Peel used an organizational structure from the military that included a hierarchical organization, uniforms, rank designations, and an authoritarian system of command and discipline (Walker & Katz, 2013).

This organizational structure is known as a straight-line organization, which channels authority and responsibility in a direct line from top to bottom within the structure (Iannone, Iannone, & Bernstein, 2009). Most police agencies use a line and staff organization, which combines specialized units with the line organization so knowledge can be provided by specialists while maintaining channels of responsibility and authority (Iannone, Iannone, & Bernstein, 2009).

While the organizational structure of police agencies has roots in the military, both organizations have evolved from their origins. Cowper (2000) examined the military model in law enforcement and noted several similarities and problems related to law enforcement’s implementation of the military model. While the similarities can be viewed in Figure 3, strict use of boot-camp style leadership in law enforcement organizations creates centrally controlled and highly inflexible organizations that result in isolation from and hostility between police and citizens (Cowper, 2000). Bureaucratic organizations, such as law enforcement agencies, have clearly defined roles and tasks, along with centralized decision making, that limit the flexibility and creativity of their employees (Hatch, 2013). This can be problematic for police officers, who have a great deal of discretion but are guided by federal and state laws as well as organizational rules and regulations.
Conceptual Similarities

Military

- Application of Government Force to Societal Conflicts -
- Apply Organizational Resources to Resolve Crises -
- Use of Problem Solving Strategies, Tactics, Techniques -
- Employ Specialized Units and Individual Experts -
- Continuum of Force Options with Rules of Engagement -
- Primary Operational Role with Logistical Support Requirements -

Policing

Figure 3. Similarities between Military and Police Taken from Cowper (2000, p. 232).

American justice system. The American justice system is a multifaceted and dynamic system that has foundations in English common law. It emphasizes due process, equal protection, judicial review, and constitutional interpretation (Cohen, 1989). While its origins are rooted in the English tradition, the composition of population and cultures has changed over time, influencing the American justice system. For example, American law has Spanish influences in Florida, Texas, and California, while Louisiana has been influenced by the French tradition (Cohen, 1989).

The American justice system is divided into criminal and civil proceedings. For example, a divorce would be handled on the civil side of the American justice system because getting divorced is not a criminal offense. However, if there was a violation of the law, such as a domestic violence assault, that aspect would be handled on the criminal side while the divorce
proceedings would remain on the civil side. Law enforcement mainly interacts on the criminal side, with some exceptions such as evictions, child custody, and child support issues.

In addition to the split between civil and criminal law, law enforcement is separated along jurisdictional lines. The most recent available data indicates there were 17,985 law enforcement agencies in the United States in 2008 (Reaves, 2011). Of those agencies, the majority were local police (12,501), followed by sheriff’s offices (3,063), special jurisdictions (1,733), constables or marshals (638), and the 50 states (Reaves, 2011). Examples of these agencies are: the FBI (federal), California Highway Patrol (state), Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department (sheriff), and New York City Police Department (local). Special jurisdictions are responsible for areas such as public buildings or facilities, natural resources, and transportation networks or facilities, while constables and marshals are primarily in Texas (Reaves, 2011).

While each of these agencies may be involved in civil law, such as an eviction order, their main function is criminal law enforcement within their respective jurisdictions. For example, a local police force investigating the passing of fraudulent currency would contact federal authorities because currency is a federal issue and the criminals are likely to commit offenses in different municipalities or states.

The English influence on the American criminal justice system is observable through its decentralized and fragmented law enforcement agencies. For example, there are 60 different police departments in the St. Louis region, 58 of which are municipal agencies (Police Executive Research Forum, 2015). Some of those agencies employ only five officers and approximately one third of them have jurisdictions that are less than one square mile (Police Executive Research Forum, 2015).
This decentralized aspect can create issues such as: (a) a lack of coordination between agencies, (b) crime displacement, (c) duplication of effort, and (d) inconsistent standards (Walker and Katz, 2013). However, decentralization also provides local control over police power, which aligns with the United States Constitution. Indeed, the Supreme Court has noted the constitution fundamentally rejects a national government and instead relies on the states for the suppression of violent crime and the vindication of its victims (United States v. Morrison, 2000).

**New Jersey law enforcement.** New Jersey is divided into 21 counties and 566 municipalities (State of New Jersey, n.d.). New Jersey is the most densely populated state in the country, with 1,195.5 people per square mile, while the 25\textsuperscript{th} most populated state, Louisiana, has 104.9 people per square mile (United States Census Bureau, 2018). New Jersey has 7,504.8 square miles of land (NJ.gov) and 8,791,874 residents (United States Census Bureau, 2018). Table 2 provides a breakdown of the population differences among the 21 counties in New Jersey.

Table 2

**New Jersey Population Density by County**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Population Density</th>
<th>County/Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>10,509.5/sq mi</td>
<td>Hudson - 654,878</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>6,091.3/sq mi</td>
<td>Essex - 789,616</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>5,173.0/sq mi</td>
<td>Union - 545,236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>3,731.5/sq mi</td>
<td>Bergen - 920,456</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2,564.1/sq mi</td>
<td>Passaic - 505,403</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>2,552.6/sq mi</td>
<td>Middlesex - 824,046</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>2,255.4/sq mi</td>
<td>Camden - 512,632</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>1,614.4/sq mi</td>
<td>Mercer - 369,632</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>1,078.2/sq mi</td>
<td>Somerset - 328,704</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>1,032.1/sq mi</td>
<td>Morris - 497,103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>946.5/sq mi</td>
<td>Monmouth - 629,702</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rank</td>
<td>Population Density</td>
<td>County/Population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>859.2/sq mi</td>
<td>Gloucester - 289,705</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>635.1/sq mi</td>
<td>Ocean - 581,413</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>549.1/sq mi</td>
<td>Burlington - 450,155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>409.8/sq mi</td>
<td>Atlantic - 275,325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>296.6/sq mi</td>
<td>Warren - 107,624</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>289.7/sq mi</td>
<td>Hunterdon - 126,746</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>274.2/sq mi</td>
<td>Sussex - 146,888</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>232.3/sq mi</td>
<td>Cumberland - 157,429</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>175.9/sq mi</td>
<td>Salem - 65,501</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>155.2/sq mi</td>
<td>Cape May - 96,286</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Taken from World Media Group (2019).

New Jersey ranks third nationally in the number of police officers (389) per 10,000 residents, while Kentucky (174) is last (Reaves, 2011). Also, New Jersey ranks eighth (550) in the total number of law enforcement agencies, while Hawaii (seven) is last (Reaves, 2011). These variations provide an insight into New Jersey law enforcement and the availability of backup for officers. For example, Maryland and Massachusetts are similar to New Jersey in size and population. Both states have 280 police officers per 10,000 residents (Reaves, 2011).

New Jersey law enforcement follows a hierarchical approach that mirrors the organizational structure of many law enforcement agencies. The New Jersey Office of the Attorney General dates back to New Jersey being a royal colony in 1704 (New Jersey Department of State, 2011a). The Department of Law and Public Safety was created in 1948 (New Jersey Department of State, 2011a) and modified via the Criminal Justice Act of 1970.

The New Jersey Department of Law and Public Safety’s mission is to “protect the safety, security, and quality of life of the people in New Jersey through an integrated and coordinated structure of law enforcement and regulatory agencies” (New Jersey Office of the Attorney General, n.d.). The head of that agency, the attorney general, is the state’s chief law enforcement officer and legal advisor (New Jersey Office of the Attorney General, n.d.). The New Jersey
Department of Law and Public Safety has complex responsibilities related to law enforcement, emergency response services, civil and consumer rights, alcoholic beverages, and more (New Jersey Office of the Attorney General, n.d.).

To accomplish its mission, the Department of Law and Public Safety is comprised of different divisions and independent agencies. The Division of Criminal Justice coordinates and provides leadership to the 21 county prosecutors and other law enforcement agencies in New Jersey to achieve uniformity within the New Jersey criminal justice system (New Jersey Office of the Attorney General, n.d.).

The county prosecutor is established through the state constitution, which notes that the governor can make a nomination and the person can be confirmed by the state senate in accordance with Article VII, Section II of the New Jersey Constitution. The county prosecutor also has authority via legislation. Specifically, N.J.S.A. 2A:158-5 states:

Each county prosecutor shall be vested with the same powers and be subject to the same penalties, within his county, as the attorney general shall by law be vested with or subject to, and he shall use all reasonable and lawful diligence for the detection, arrest, indictment and conviction of offenders against the laws (County Prosecutor Study Commission, 2011 p. 4).

Therefore, the state attorney general provides guidance and directives to county prosecutors. The county prosecutors then provide direction to the chiefs of the law enforcement agencies within their jurisdictions. The chief law enforcement officer in those agencies then provides direction to the officers in their command. Figure 4 provides a visual representation of the hierarchical system of New Jersey law enforcement, using Mercer County as an example.
The most visible aspect of policing is the enforcement of motor vehicle and criminal laws. In New Jersey, motor vehicle laws are in Title 39 of the Code of Criminal Justice and Motor Vehicle Laws, while criminal laws are in Title 2C. There are other areas where police enforce laws in the criminal code book, such as Title 9, which deals with children and families; however, most enforcement action occurs within Titles 39 and 2C.

The statutory grading of offenses and laws guides jurisdictions within the New Jersey court system. Indictable crimes are handled within the county court system while nonindictable crimes and motor vehicle offenses are handled within the municipal court system. Indictable crimes can be first, second, third, or fourth degree. Nonindictable crimes are disorderly persons
and petty disorderly persons offenses. For example, shoplifting an item valued at $199 or below is a disorderly person offense. If the item is valued at $200, it is a fourth-degree crime.

**Departmental Protocol Recruitment and Hiring Practices**

New Jersey law enforcement agencies are either civil service or noncivil service, with roughly half being guided by the Department of Personnel’s Civil Service Commission under Title 11 (New Jersey State Association of Chiefs of Police, n.d.). The remaining law enforcement agencies are guided by Title 40A:14-118, which allows any municipality to establish a law enforcement agency by local ordinance (New Jersey State Association of Chiefs of Police, 2007). Civil service agencies follow a regulatory process, including testing, to hire from certified lists (New Jersey Civil Service Commission, n.d.).

The general qualifications to become a police officer in New Jersey, as stated in Title N.J.S.A. 40A:14-122, include:

- must be a citizen of the United States;
- must be a resident of the state of New Jersey;
- must have a valid New Jersey driver’s license;
- must be sound in body and of good health sufficient to satisfy the board of trustees of the Police and Fireman’s Retirement System of New Jersey as to his/her eligibility for membership in the retirement system;
- must be at least 18 years of age and not over 35 at the completion of the program (for municipal police officers);
- must be able to read, write, and speak the English language well and intelligently; and
- must be of good moral character and have not been convicted of any criminal offense.
To obtain the position of a police officer, persons must pass a training course approved by the New Jersey Police Training Commission (2012). Generally, there are three ways an individual can attend a police academy: (a) be selected through the civil service process, (b) obtain employment through direct application to a noncivil service agency, or (c) attend as an alternate route recruit (Ocean County Police Academy, 2016). Each of those methods is guided by New Jersey legislation. Civil service agencies are guided by Title 11. Noncivil service agencies are guided by N.J.S.A. 40A:14-122. The alternate route program is guided by N.J.S.A. 52:17B-69.1.

Historically, police departments across the United States did not have recruitment plans, which often led to people with family or political ties gaining employment as police officers (Walker & Katz, 2013). In 1931, the National Committee on Law Observation and Enforcement, known as the Wickersam Commission, examined law enforcement related to prohibition and noted the need for professionalization. This included the elimination of the spoils system for recruitment and hiring (Alpert, 1991). Police departments began merit-based hiring in the 1940s following concerns about law-enforcement behavior and discrimination that drove the use of more scientific methods, such as psychological testing, in recruitment (J. M. Wilson, Dalton, Scheer, & Grammich, 2010).

The 1967 President’s Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice noted the lack of diversity within police departments as a problem in policing. In the aftermath of the events in Ferguson, President Obama signed an executive order creating the President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing, which recommended enhanced diversification “but did little to justify it” (Weitzer, 2015, p.477). Diversity in police departments is generally accepted as beneficial for police departments and communities (Weitzer, 2002) and police departments
have become increasingly diverse and accepting of officers of color, female officers, and homosexual officers (Sklansky, 2005). However, police departments have faced difficulty recruiting persons of color (Kaste, 2014).

**Racial History**

American policing can be traced back to the watchmen who were influenced by the English tradition when patrolling Boston in 1634 (Walker & Katz, 2013) and a communal commitment to guard each other’s property (T. F. Adams, 2007). However, not all of law enforcement’s foundations lie in virtuous objectives. The slave patrol was a “distinctly American form of law enforcement… intended to guard against slave revolts and capture runaway slaves” (Walker & Katz, 2013, p. 28).

Slave patrols are a dark aspect of American history that predate the formation of the United States of America and modern policing. The first slave patrols originated in South Carolina in 1704 (Turner, Giacopassi, & Vandiver, 2006), over 70 years before the Declaration of Independence. In 1837 the slave patrol in Charleston, South Carolina, had approximately 100 individuals, which was larger than any northern police force at the time (Walker & Katz, 2013).

These slave patrols were designed to control the threat of slave insurrection and runaways in an effort to maintain control of the slaves and protect the interests of those in power. To control a slave population that equaled or outnumbered the master class, slave patrollers had the authority to physically punish runaway slaves (Bass, 2001). To justify and legalize these abuses, Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850, which gave state governments broad authority to compel people to join slave patrols and exercise discretion with impunity (Bass, 2001).

Even prior to the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act, state governments created laws to protect the interests of the ruling class. Between 1689 and 1865, Virginia passed over 130 laws
related to the detention and return of slaves (Kappeler, 2014). While these laws were related to the economic and societal benefits of the southern ruling class, they were not restricted to southern states. New York, Connecticut, and other colonies enacted laws to criminalize and control slaves (Kappeler, 2014). Turner et al. (2006) noted that “the literature clearly establishes that a legally sanctioned law enforcement system existed in America before the Civil War for the express purpose of controlling the slave population and protecting the interests of slave owners” (p. 186).

While the end of slavery was a historic moment for persons of color in the United States, the emancipation of slaves did not eliminate the marginalization of former slaves and persons of color. While those in power could not control slaves through force and intimidation, the legislators could. Near the end of 1865, Mississippi and South Carolina became the first states to pass legislation known as the Black Codes (Bass, 2001).

The Black Codes were designed to force freed slaves to work for their former masters and “relied upon broadly defined vagrancy statutes as the central mechanism for regulating the Black workforce” (Stewart, 1998, p. 2259). These laws also controlled persons of color by limiting their legal rights, such as not allowing them to testify in court unless it was a case involving another person of color, and even then the judge would believe a White person first (DuBois, 2004).

Despite progress made in the United States for persons of color, issues with law enforcement have remained an issue. Holmes (2000) examined data from the FBI’s Uniform Crime Report, from 1985 through 1990, and the 1990 United States Census and found that minorities, particularly African Americans, were disproportionately victimized during police
encounters. Police officers of color are in a unique position within law enforcement given the historical problems that have cast lingering effects, still observable in the modern day.

This dark history was noted in speech at Georgetown University by the director of the FBI, James Comey. Director Comey noted the underlying racial tension involved in policing and emphasized that police in the United States enforce the status quo, which at times has been “brutally unfair to disfavored groups” (Comey, 2015). This shameful aspect of American history has contributed to the simmering racial tensions that occasionally erupt.

**High-profile community resistance.** The historical injustices suffered by persons of color in the United States led to the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s, which pursued equality for Americans in all aspects of life. Individuals protested inequality by boycotts of bus services, sit-ins at segregated restaurants, and demonstrations in the streets. These actions often led to confrontation with White police officers, who became the symbol of societal oppression of persons of color (Dunham & Alpert, 2015).

Eventually these protests exploded into violence with a series of riots across the country between 1964 and 1968 (Dunham & Alpert, 2015; Walker & Katz, 2013). Many times, the spark that ignited the explosion was a routine incident when police used force against a person of color. For example, on July 16, 1964, a White New York City police officer shot and killed a Black teenager, resulting in organized protests that turned into riots and looting for 2 days and left one person dead, over 100 injured, nearly 500 arrested, and millions of dollars of damage (Dunham & Alpert, 2015).

However, not all riots started after police used force. On August 11, 1965, police in Los Angeles conducted a traffic stop of a Black motorist who was driving erratically after consuming alcohol (Adam Matei & Ball-Rokeach, 2005). This motor vehicle investigation attracted a
crowd of onlookers, who eventually surrounded the police, increasing the tension and culminating in riots that left 34 persons dead, 1,032 injured, and over $230 million dollars in damages (Adam Matei & Ball-Rokeach, 2005).

The deadliest riots of the 1960s, known as the long hot summer of 1967, occurred in Detroit and Newark (Collins & Margo, 2007). The Newark riots lasted for 5 days and left 23 people dead (Dunham & Alpert, 2015). Detroit’s unrest resulted in 43 people losing their lives and $40 million in damages (Dunham & Alpert, 2015). Beyond the initial damage and loss of life, the riots of the 1960s lowered the home values of Black Americans by 10%, indicating negative effects that lasted beyond the initial eruptions (Collins & Margo, 2007).

As a result of these riots, in July 1967 President Lyndon B. Johnson issued an executive order creating the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, known as the Kerner Commission, to investigate what happened, why it happened, and how can it be prevented from happening again (Emeka, 2013). The commission noted that America was “moving toward two societies, one Black, one White – separate and unequal” (National Institute of Justice, 1968, p. 1) and that the underlying causes of the riots were racism, unemployment, discrimination, inadequate social services, and unequal justice in the criminal justice system (National Institute of Justice, 1968).

Despite many encouraging advances made by police departments since the Kerner Commission, tensions between law enforcement and minorities rematerialized as a severe problem in the late 1990s (Walker & Katz, 2013). Los Angeles experienced riots in 1992 that began after the acquittal of White police officers in the videotaped beating of a Black motorist, Rodney King. Stevenson (2013) indicated that the killing of a Black girl by a Korean store
owner contributed to racial tension in the city, coinciding with the police officers’ trial. The rioting resulted in the killing of 54 people and $1 billion in damage (Cairns & Stevenson, 2014).

In August 2014, police use of force in Ferguson resulted in an 18-year old Black man being killed by a White police officer. The shooting, while lawful and justified, ignited underlying racial tension across the United States (Dunham & Petersen, 2017; FBI, 2017; Lott, 2016; Pegues, 2017; Porter, 2016). Chaney and Davis (2015) noted that the use of force incident was followed by protests, riots, and a subsequent military response that mirrored the catastrophe that occurred in Los Angeles 23 year earlier.

In April and May 2015, Baltimore experienced civil unrest following the death of a person of color, Freddy Grey, who was in police custody. At the time, the majority of the police department was comprised of officers of color and it was led by a police chief of color (Pollock, 2015). Despite this, Grey’s death led to civil unrest due to perceived racism and injustice (Wenger, 2015). In September 2016, Charlotte experienced civil unrest following the shooting death of Kenneth Lamont Scott, a person of color. Scott was shot by Officer Brently Vinson, also a person of color. Despite the suspect and officer being of the same race, the severe civil unrest that followed the incident caused the governor to declare a state of emergency (Maxwell & Eversley, 2016).

**Community policing.** The foundations of policing are rooted in community policing. Citizens were responsible for assisting neighbors who might be victims of criminals and, since no police officers existed, individuals could use state-sanctioned force to ensure social control (Dunham & Alpert, 2015). The frankplege police system was established around 1066, which required males 12 and older to group with nine neighbors called into a tything that was
responsible for protecting, and being protected by, fellow citizens while upholding duties required by law (Dunham & Alpert, 2015).

There is little doubt that modern law enforcement is very different from its communal origins. Technological advances, such as the patrol car and two-way radios, increased the ability of police officers to respond to residents’ concerns and cover a larger area. However, this removed officers from the street and thereby reduced officers’ interactions with law-abiding citizens (Walker & Katz, 2013).

Community policing allows police departments and the community to work together to solve problems, giving citizens a voice on issues important to them (T. F. Adams, 2007). This process can improve the relationship between the police and the public while also empowering residents of the community (R. E. Adams, Rohe, & Arcury, 2005). However, for community policing to be truly successful, police departments need to listen to residents (Schneider, 1998).

Police use of force can occasionally lead to civil disorder and riots. Riots in the 1940s were instrumental in the creation of modern community policing, with some agencies creating specialized units and training on race relations (Walker & Katz, 2013). However, the limited efforts of law enforcement with community policing did not prevent more serious civil disturbances in the 1960s.

The ninth precinct of the New York City Police Department offered insight into the benefits of community policing in the spring of 1966. This area was racially and culturally diverse, with continual tension between police and citizens (Fink, 1968). When the precinct increased communication and lessened bureaucratic boundaries between police and the community, relations improved between the two, allowing that area to avoid the conflict observed in other areas of the country (Fink, 1968).
Gill, Weisburd, Telep, Vitter, and Bennett (2014) examined community-oriented policing and noted its positive effects on citizen satisfaction, perceptions of disorder, and police legitimacy. Communication between the police and the community empowers residents and allows police departments to provide better service. Communities of color have reacted positively to community policing strategies and shown a willingness to work with police, particularly when they know their local officers (Wehrman & De Angelis, 2011). Additionally, “adopting a comprehensive community-policing approach might reduce Black-on-Black homicides” (Diehr & McDaniel, 2018, p. 183).

Community policing appears to have reached its peak in the 1990s, and there has been a reduction in police departments employing full-time community policing officers (Diehr & McDaniel, 2018). Bain, Robinson, and Conser (2014) noted that proactive policing is costly and high maintenance. Additionally, research has indicated that its effects are short term and have little impact on crime (Gill et al., 2014; Weisburd & Eck, 2004). Keane and Belle (2013) noted a focus on efficiency as police resources are being stretched.

**Race and Politics in Policing**

The influence of politics on policing can be traced to its origins and the mandatory service of the frankpledge system, which required males 12 and older to uphold duties required by law (Dunham & Alpert, 2015). Early policing in the United States, between 1840 and 1930, known as the political era, was characterized by brutality and corruption (Walker & Katz, 2013). Politicians controlled municipal agencies (police and fire departments, school districts, courts, etc.) and commonly exchanged employment for political support (Dunham & Alpert, 2015). In addition to the political corruption, the political era can be tied to slave patrols (Waxman, 2017).
The use of slave patrols might be the most blatant form of state sponsored racism. Those interactions between law enforcement and communities of color are an atrocious mark on the history of the United States. That history led to large-scale civil disobedience in the 1960s. Fortunately, the United States government has sought to improve the situation and the relationship between law enforcement and communities of color.

An example of this is the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, commonly known as the Kerner Commission, which found deep hostility between law enforcement and communities of color (National Institute of Justice, 1968). The Kerner Commission made several recommendations to law enforcement, such as changing routine operations, increasing diversity, and improving procedures for handling citizen complaints (Dunham & Alpert, 2015). Due to the political influence of the Kerner Commission, police departments across the United States began to make changes such as establishing special police-community relations units (Walker & Katz, 2013).

An unintended consequence of police professionalization was that it created problems for police-community relations. Modern technology, such as the patrol car, removed officers from the streets, thereby limiting routine interactions between the police and the community (Dunham & Alpert, 2015). The problems of the 1960s and 1970s led to a wave of police reform and began the community policing era (Dunham & Alpert, 2015). In the mid-1970s, New Jersey announced a Safe and Clean Neighborhoods Program designed to improve the quality of life in 28 cities by reducing the number of officers in patrol vehicles and increasing foot patrols (J. Q. Wilson & Kelling, 1982).

The increased use of foot patrols did not reduce crime rates, but citizens felt more secure, believed crime was reduced, took fewer steps to protect themselves from crime, and had a more
favorable opinion of police (J. Q. Wilson & Kelling, 1982). This broken windows approach theorized that increased enforcement of minor quality of life violations, such as vagrancy and public drunkenness, would indicate to criminals that law violations would not be tolerated and they would be arrested (Braga & Bond, 2008). When officers have more opportunities to interact with citizens, they are more likely to hear concerns of residents.

This approach to policing was successfully implemented by William Bratton in New York City, first in the subway system as the chief of New York’s subway system and then over New York City in general as the police commissioner (Bratton & Kelling, 2006, Mac Donald, 2016). Through the proactive enforcement of minor quality of life violations, the crime rate in New York City decreased by 12% in Bratton’s first year and 16% the following year, while the national crime rate remained flat (Mac Donald, 2016). Through the philosophy of broken windows policing, murders in New York City plunged from 2,262 in 1990 to 629 in 1998 (Bratton & Kelling, 2006). Maryland State Attorney General Marilyn J. Mosby and Baltimore Police Commissioner Kevin Davis noted proactive policing strategies led to the lowest amount of homicides in cities in decades but also contributed to racial unrest (Fenton, 2017).

One technique of broken windows policing is for police officers to stop and question individuals engaging in suspicious behavior, such as remaining around a known drug corner late at night or casing a jewelry store in an area plagued by burglaries (Mac Donald, 2016). Between 2003 and 2014, the New York City Police Department recovered 6,927 handguns through the use of a controversial tactic known as stop and frisk (Ferrandino, 2018). The approach is controversial because critics claim that persons of color are overrepresented in police interactions; proponents note the racial disparity mirrors crime statistics (Mac Donald, 2016).
Proactive policing is often criticized for the increased and unwanted interactions between police and persons of color. Soss and Weaver (2017) cited Kelley (2016) regarding the relationship between the police and persons of color, noting:

Our parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents experienced “no tolerance” policing long before that term was in vogue…. Many African Americans were arrested for not yielding the sidewalk to Whites, for lacking a job (vagrancy), using profanity in public, spitting, loitering, violating segregation ordinances, “reckless eyeballing,” and other absurdities. (p. 19)

Interactions between the police and persons of color also occur through motor vehicle enforcement. A proactive approach to motor vehicle enforcement can lead to stops for minor traffic infractions, which drivers often view as illegitimate. Bowling (2018) noted that drivers and pedestrians should only be stopped when there is clear evidence of criminal behavior and that pretextual stops should be rare exceptions because they are intrusive even when brief and polite.

**Deadly Force Representations and Perceptions**

Most of the U.S. population does not have interactions with law enforcement. Every day, millions of Americans go about their daily routine without coming into contact with law enforcement. For those that do have interactions with the police, force or the threat of force is rarely used. However, occasionally police must threaten to use or actually use force to protect life or property and enforce the law.

The use of force by the police is a wide-ranging and complex issue that varies greatly in its implementation; ranging from a compliance hold to deadly force. Within the criminal justice system, a police officer on the street, generally one with less academic credentials than any other
criminal justice official carries a firearm and is authorized to routinely make split-second
decisions that are irreversible, possibly leading to the death of a person (Fyfe, 1988).
Understandably, these decisions are scrutinized within the criminal justice system and by society.
These decisions are especially scrutinized when the person was unarmed or possessing a toy
firearm, as in the shooting of Tamir Rice in Cleveland, Ohio (Stone & Socia, 2017).

Concerns over the use of force by police are not new. Sharps and Hess (2008) examined
citizen perceptions and decisions related to the use of force by police and concluded that most
civilians demonstrated a very low capacity for distinguishing weapons while also not wanting the
police to use force in incidents where they used force. Correll et al. (2007) also conducted a
study to examine citizen performance in use of force scenarios and found that the community set
significantly lower criteria than police officers for deciding to use deadly force.

These dynamic incidents have an impact on the perceptions of citizens related to lawful
force of police misconduct. Perkins and Bourgeois (2006) examined police shootings and found
that as the number of officers decreased and the number of shots increased, the perception of the
misuse of force went up. Additionally, the number of shots per officer significantly predicted

When a use of force incident is highly publicized, such as the arrest of Rodney King by
the Los Angeles Police Department, public support for law enforcement decreases (Weitzer,
2002). Violence is brutal, and when the use of force is captured on video it influences the
public’s attitude towards the police, especially minorities (Jefferis et al., 1997). The most
disturbing uses of force are not easily forgotten, can become deeply rooted in the beliefs of
communities of color, and contribute to resentment and suspicion of police if not complete
opposition to law enforcement (Weitzer, 2002).
An example of this is observable in the shooting of an unarmed person of color by the New York City Police Department in the early morning hours of February 4, 1999. On that date, four undercover police officers approached a Black male, Amadou Diallo, for questioning. One of the officers believed Diallo matched the description of a man suspected of carrying a gun and raping Black women (Ayoob, 2000; Gladwell, 2006). When approached by the police, Diallo ran away, fearing he was being robbed, and reached for his wallet as is customary in his native country. The officers perceived his actions as pulling a handgun and opened fire 41 times, striking Diallo 19 times (Ayoob, 2000; Gladwell, 2006). The officers were White and the shooting was attributed to racial bias (Ayoob, 2000; Dunham & Alpert, 2015).

Gladwell (2006) noted that humans are constantly evaluating information to make a stream of predictions and inferences about what other people are thinking and feeling. This action is quick and unconscious actions occur within a blink (Gladwell, 2006). When the use of force is involved, the unconscious decisions may be influenced by race. Using an Afrocentric perspective on policing, Cooper (2015) noted that “some officers, when dealing with people of color, shoot at the mere flicker of a green light from the deadly force policy” (p. 345).

**Implicit bias.** Kahneman and Egan (2011) noted that human cognition occurs along two paths, referred to as System 1 and System 2 thinking. System 1 “operates automatically and quickly with no effort or sense of voluntary control” while System 2 “allocates attention to the effortful mental activities that demand it” (Kahneman & Egan, 2011, pp. 20-21). An example of System 1 thinking would be suddenly hearing a loud bang and orientating yourself to where it came from, whereas completing your taxes is an example of System 2 thinking.

The first occurs unconsciously and automatically while the other takes mental focus and effort. System 2 thinking can override System 1 thinking, but this requires effort (Kahneman &
Egan, 2011). For example, professional athletes can decide not to respond to fans of the opposing team attempting to distract them (System 2) but they cannot avoid the initial reaction of hearing them in the first place (System 1).

Making unconscious split-second judgments is natural and unavoidable for humans. Our distant ancestors needed to make split-second judgments, such as friend or foe, to gain advantage in a potential life or death situation (McNutt, 2016). These split-second decisions can consciously or unconsciously affect thought-out (System 2) decisions (Kahneman & Egan, 2011).

D. D. P. Johnson, Blumstein, Fowler, and Haselton (2013) noted that errors in judgment can occur on an unconscious level, with the advantage going to the person making the error. For example, if a person swimming in the ocean mistakes a piece of seaweed for a jellyfish, there is no danger to the swimmer. However, mistaking a jellyfish for a piece of seaweed could have the swimmer not react and lead to a painful or deadly sting.

People have needed to balance risks throughout human history and have evolved specific biases that help reduce the cost of mistakes over time (D. D. P. Johnson et al., 2013). These cognitive shortcuts save time and speed decision making when circumstances, such as an emergency, necessitate fast thinking (Gladwell, 2006, Mears, Craig, Stewart, & Warren, 2017). However, unconscious errors can entail incorrect assumptions or inappropriate assessments about certain groups, such as men or minorities (Mears et al., 2017).

Police officers’ interactions with the public cover a wide range of human experiences. These interactions are influenced by the officers and citizens involved. Mears et al. (2017) noted that police-citizen encounters are influenced in a variety of ways. Specifically, the interactions are influenced by officer biases, citizen biases, how those biases interact to shape the encounters,
the effect on future police-citizen encounters, and amplifying forces on interactions (Mears et al., 2017). Figure 5 depicts these symbiotic relationships.

![Figure 5: Officer/Citizen Bias](image-url)

*Figure 5. Officer/Citizen Bias. Adapted from Mears et al. (2017)*

When a police officer faces a dangerous situation, or a potentially dangerous one, the officer must rely on fast thinking. Action always beats reaction, so an officer’s life may depend on their ability to promptly respond to a threat. For example, the suspect could take action and shoot at the officer quicker than the officer could react. However, as noted above, fast thinking can be prone to errors.

Greenwald and Krieger (2006) stated that implicit biases are “discriminatory biases based on implicit attitudes or implicit stereotypes” (p. 951). These biases can yield conduct that deviates from a person’s affirmed or endorsed beliefs or principles (Greenwald & Krieger, 2006). For example, an individual may believe they are unbiased and nondiscriminatory yet still
lock their car door when observing a person of color nearby. When a belief centers on a group, such as Blacks being associated with crime and violence, the cognitive error can lead to an implicit bias against that group (Mears et al., 2017).

Correll et al. (2007) conducted a laboratory study in which citizens and police officers were shown computer simulations and needed to decide whether to shoot a potentially dangerous subject. Their results indicated that both groups exhibited bias against Blacks (Correll et al., 2007). In American society, Blacks are often viewed as criminals, and criminals are viewed as Black (Mancini, Mears, Stewart, Beaver, & Pickett, 2015; Welch, 2007). Welch (2007) noted, “perceptions about the presumed racial identity of criminals may be so ingrained in public consciousness that race does not even need to be specifically mentioned for a connection to be made between the two” (p. 276).

Holmes (2000) examined data from the FBI’s Uniform Crime Report, from 1985 through 1990, and the 1990 United States Census and found that minorities, particularly African Americans, are disproportionately victimized during police encounters. This leads to increased involvement in the criminal justice system. Kang et al. (2012) examined the role of implicit bias in the courtroom and concluded that “all of us, no matter how hard we try to be fair and square, no matter how deeply we believe in our own objectivity – have implicit mental associations that will, in some circumstances, alter our behavior” (p. 1186).

Nosek, Greenwald, and Banaji (2015) conducted an anonymous study using the Implicit Association Test and found that 88% of Whites held a pro-White or anti-Black bias while 48% of Blacks held the same views. These views align with the idealization of light skin color by most Whites and minorities in the United States (Tummala-Narra, 2007). White (2015) examined the relationship between skin tone and police contact, specific to being stopped or arrested, and
found that dark-skinned Blacks and Latinos were stopped or arrested more than lighter skinned members of the same group.

Kahn et al. (2017) examined the effect race has on the use of force by police over time by examining 139 use of force incidents involving White, Black, and Latino suspects. Their results established that Blacks and Latinos received more force early in the interactions while the use of force with Whites escalated with time. The results indicate that officer biases are an influence early in the interactions, when officers had less information available to them (Kahn et al., 2017).

Legewie (2016) examined racial biases of police after relevant events such as the shooting of a police officer by a person of color. The results indicated that the use of force against Blacks increased after a Black suspect shot a police officer but did not when a Hispanic or White suspect shot a police officer (Legewie, 2016). These disparities indicate that officers may be relying on cognitive shortcuts of Black violence that influence officers to use force when they may not with suspects of different races (Mears et al., 2017). These uses of force have created a perception that people of color, Black men and boys in particular, are disproportionally affected and not valued in mainstream culture.

Black Lives Matter. High-profile and widely publicized incidents where force was used against a person of color have garnered the attention of the media and the public. Incidents that have gone viral on social media have led to exceptional levels of public discontent with the police (Weitzer, 2015). The use of force against persons of color has created a perception by some that American society does not value the lives of persons of color (Mac Donald, 2016; Porter, 2016; Rickford, 2016).

These incidents have led to a national movement, known as Black Lives Matter, which has in part focused on the issue of police misconduct while also analyzing larger social issues
affecting African Americans in the United States (Rickford, 2016). Porter (2016) noted that Black Lives Matter was:

[A] social justice movement and social media framework…founded in the United States…after the July 2013 acquittal of George Zimmerman in the shooting death of Florida teenager Trayvon Martin… The movement was further animated by the 2014 shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. (p. 535)

Holmes (2000) examined data from the FBI’s Uniform Crime Report, from 1985 through 1900, and the 1990 United States Census and found that minorities, particularly African Americans, are disproportionately victimized during police encounters. In addition to the use of force by police, the criminal justice system can be unfavorable to persons of color (Mears & Bacon, 2009). Bias within the criminal justice system, even unconscious implicit bias, can exacerbate racial disparities in the criminal justice system, which has many individuals making decisions throughout the process (Porter, 2016).

Spruill (2016) noted that the racist foundations of policing are present in current law enforcement. The Black Lives Matter movement seeks to improve the lives of persons of color in the United States. McKesson (2015) noted the injustices suffered by persons of color and his experiences related to the Black Lives Matter movement. Regarding the use of force by police against persons of color, a movement known as Campaign Zero has started, with the goal of eliminating the use of force by police against persons of color through specific criminal justice reforms, as shown in Figure 6.
The Black Lives Matter movement seeks to take apart the criminal justice system and replace it with a system that is fair and protects persons of all colors (McKessen, 2016). Accordingly, the Black Lives Matter movement has provided a list of demands that would correct past wrongs and create a new just system (The Movement for Black Lives, n.d.):

- End the war on Black people (end capital punishment, end money bail, etc.)
- Reparations (free education for Blacks, guaranteed minimum livable income, etc.)
- Invest – divest (reallocate funds for law enforcement to restorative justice, etc.)
- Economic justice (progressively restructure tax codes to redistribute wealth, etc.)
- Community control (end private education, participatory budgeting, etc.)
- Political power (increased funding for Black institutions, etc.)

*Figure 6. Campaign zero goals. Taken from www.joincampaignzero.org/#vision*
Bailey et al. (2017) examined the disparities between Blacks and Whites in the United States related to structural racism and health inequities and noted that public and private institutions have historically reinforced each other to maintain racial hierarchies that negatively affect persons of color. The Black Lives Matter movement seeks to replace existing unjust aspects of the current system with one that is more equitable for Americans. Given that law enforcement is the face of the criminal justice system, law enforcement officers are on the front lines where the rubber meets the road.

The Ferguson effect. On August 9, 2014, a young Black man was involved in a use of force incident with a White police officer. The Black man was involved in a robbery at a local store before being approached by the officer; the interaction quickly deteriorated into violence. When it was all said and done, the young man was shot and killed by the officer. The shooting, while lawful and justified, ignited underlying racial tension across the United States (Dunham & Petersen, 2017; FBI, 2017; Lott, 2016; Pegues, 2017; Porter, 2016).

The use of force by police, as well as proactive law enforcement practices, became heavily politicized and subject to a national debate. FBI Director Comey discussed this effect and the chill wind towards law enforcement that he attributed to changing behavior (Gillespie, 2015). The head of the Drug Enforcement Administration, Chuck Rosenberg, agreed with Comey, noting that law enforcement leaders he had spoken to discussed changes in their officers’ behavior and reluctance to engage with suspects (Hattem, 2015). St. Louis Police Chief Sam Dotson noted the effect on law enforcement as well as the criminal element feeling emboldened by the political climate (Byers, 2014).

The use of force by police, especially when a person of color is involved, generates much attention from the media and the public. In Ferguson, the officer and department were
investigated locally and federally. The use of force and publicity about the incident led to the officer and department receiving threats; the officer resigned without any compensation (Schabner & Rudra, 2014).

The FBI analyzed attacks against law enforcement officers in 2016, specifically examining 50 incidents where 64 officers were killed (FBI, 2017). The study found the assailants either expressed a desire to kill law enforcement officers prior to the attack or did so out of desire to avoid being taken into custody. The report noted a chill wind towards law enforcement officers, as law enforcement officials felt that political leaders stood against them (FBI, 2017). Those officials noted that politicians’ speech and actions made it acceptable to disrespect law enforcement officers (FBI, 2017).

The issue of an officer using force against a person of color is not new and did not start with the incident in Ferguson. Klinger (2004) interviewed many officers who were involved in using deadly force, observing many aspects including race. In one example, a White officer discussed an incident where a Black suspect shot at them then ran away towards citizens while still carrying the rifle. The officer noted the need to engage in deadly force but reluctance to shoot for fear that the media would “crucify me” for shooting a Black man in the back (Klinger, 2004, p. 215).

That officer is not alone in hesitating to use force when race is involved. James, James, and Vila (2016) found that White officers showed implicit bias against Black suspects but were less likely to use force. This “counter-bias” effect was measured before the events in Ferguson but likely has been “amplified many times over” since then (James et al., 2016, p. 475). This is observable in the following encounters, where the officer’s hesitation resulted in their injury:
• August 2015 – Birmingham, Alabama – police detective pistol-whipped unconscious was fearful of killing an unarmed man (Valencia, 2015).

• March 2016 – Greenville, South Carolina – police officer killed following a policy change to keep firearms holstered except in dire circumstances (Why Did S.C. Officer's Gun Remain Holstered, 2016).


These high-profile incidents also affect the ways officers view their safety and jobs. Morin et al. (2017) surveyed nearly 8,000 police officers and noted that high-profile fatal incidents between Black citizens and police officers have made policing riskier, aggravated racial tensions between the police and Blacks, and left many officers hesitant to completely fulfill some of their duties: 93% of officers reported being concerned for their safety and 86% reported their jobs being more difficult as a result of these high-profile incidents (Morin et al., 2017).

**Psychology of Policing**

Police work has often been associated with stress and danger. Police officers interact with people in a variety of situations, from routine to extreme. Officers can respond to calls for service involving a minor complaint and then respond to a life or death issue in the same shift. The work is dangerous, unpredictable, and varies greatly in a short time period. An officer can have a high of saving a life and a low of making a death notification to parents in the same shift.

One dangerous aspect of policing is the physical violence occasionally involved. Law enforcement is often noted to be among the most dangerous occupations in the United States. At times, policing can be violent. It stands to reason that a murderous criminal will not deliberately
spend the rest of their life in prison or face the death penalty willingly. In some instances, an officer may attempt an arrest that can quickly deteriorate into a life or death situation.

Facing potentially fatal situations, police officers have the same biological responses as anyone else. Humans have cognitive shortcuts that save time by quickening the decision-making process in emergencies (Mears et al., 2017). This process is biologically rooted in self-preservation, with errors in judgment benefiting the person making the determinations (Mears et al., 2017).

**Peritraumatic Stress**

These life or death situations can also influence a person’s subjective reality beyond cognitive shortcuts. Specifically, individuals facing life or death situations can experience peritraumatic dissociation. Galatzer-Levery, Madan, Neylan, Henn-Haase, and Marmar (2011) noted that *peritraumatic dissociation* refers to “acute dissociative experiences that occur during or immediately after a post traumatic event” (p. 558).

Marmar, Weiss, Schlenger, and Fairbank (1994) examined the prevalence of peritraumatic dissociation during the Vietnam War. They used the Peritraumatic Dissociative Experiences Questionnaire – Rater Version, which asks eight questions related to peritraumatic dissociation such as “moments of losing track or blanking out,” “sense of time change during event,” and “event seemed unreal, as in dream or play” (Marmar et al., 1994). They studied 251 male Vietnam veterans and found that 100% of them experienced peritraumatic dissociation. In fact, 238 of 251 reported experiencing all eight items on the questionnaire while the remaining 13 reported experiencing seven of the eight items (Marmar et al., 1994).

Police officers and first responders frequently respond to traumatic events such as motor vehicle collisions, assaults, and domestic violence incidents. Marmar, Weiss, Metzler, Ronfeldt,
and Foreman (1996) examined the effects that responding to a natural disaster, the freeway collapse of Interstate 880 during the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake, had on first responders. Both studies found that working in the dangerous and gruesome environment was related to the first responders experiencing peritraumatic dissociation (Marmar et al., 1996). Similarly, Nobakht, Ojagh, and Dale (2019) examined posttraumatic stress among survivors of a 2017 earthquake in Iran and found the survivors experienced peritraumatic dissociation.

Given the prevalence of peritraumatic dissociation among first responders in emergent situations, it is reasonable to assume that police officers involved in a perceived life or death situation would have similar experiences. Less than 1% of police officers in the United States use deadly force, so the stress of the incident is not something that can be fully practiced (Phillips, 2016a).

Klinger and Brunson (2009) interviewed 80 officers who were involved in 113 incidents where the officer shot a citizen. The researchers broke down the peritraumatic dissociation into three categories: visual distortions (i.e., tunnel vision), auditory distortions (i.e., auditory blunting), and time distortions (i.e., slow motion). Some altered perception of reality was described by 94% of the officers, either before or during the firing of their weapons. These results are shown in Figure 7.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Distortion</th>
<th>Prior to Firing</th>
<th>When Firing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Visual Distortions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tunnel vision</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heightened visual detail</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both visual distortions</td>
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<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Auditory Distortions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auditory blunting</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auditory acuity</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both aural distortions</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time Distortions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slow motion</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fast motion</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both time distortions</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


*Figure 7.* Peritraumatic dissociation. Taken from Klinger and Brunson (2009, p. 127).

These biological responses to high-stress situations have obvious impacts on the involved officers at the time of the event. For example, if an officer is experiencing tunnel vision during a shooting, it is possible they would not see a second suspect, even one a few feet from the initial suspect. These peritraumatic dissociations can create perceptual distortions in police body cameras (Phillips, 2016a).

Experiencing peritraumatic dissociation has lasting consequences beyond the initial situation. Peritraumatic dissociation has been related to PTSD (Galatzer-Levy et al., 2011; Marmar et al., 1994; McCanlies, Sarkisian, Andrew, Burchfiel, & Violanti, 2017; Nobakht et al., 2019). While most police officers are never involved in a shooting, they are repeatedly exposed to traumatic events that have negative impacts on their health and personal lives.

**Health Effects**
Policing is an occupation that requires availability 24 hours a day for 365 days a year. Police officers are available to assist people when needed around the clock for a wide variety of calls. Some of the calls for service may be dangerous (robbery), some may be routine (misdialed 911 call), and others may be tragic (juvenile death). The officers responding to these calls can quickly, or over time, develop health-related concerns.

Violanti et al. (2017) examined the perceived intensity and frequency of police work on the cortisol (stress hormone) levels of police officers. They studied 338 police officers enrolled in the Buffalo Cardio-Metabolic Occupational Police Stress Study and found that officers who viewed their jobs as stressful had an awakening of their cortisol response (Violanti et al., 2017). The study found that more stressful calls produced a greater cortisol response and that officers who did not perceive events as stressful had lower cortisol responses (Violanti et al., 2017).

Police officers are required to respond to a variety of calls for service that can involve risks to their immediate and long-term safety. For example, an officer responding to a structure fire is likely to go inside if possible to help save lives. Officers wear protective equipment such as bullet-resistant vests and utility belts for protection; however, those tools are useless against burns or smoke inhalation. Wirth et al. (2013) examined the epidemiology of cancer among police officers and found that police officers are subject to increased risks of cancer, particularly Hodgkin’s lymphoma, melanoma, and bladder or testicular cancer. The researchers noted the occupation is associated with exposure to a variety of carcinogenic agents and lifestyle and risk factors (Wirth et al., 2013).

The need to provide service around the clock has been shown to be detrimental to the people providing that service. Wirth et al. (2011) examined the effects of long- and short-term shiftwork on the cortisol response among officers. They found that the irregular hours and
rotating shifts associated with policing were associated with a disruption of the officers’ circadian rhythms (Wirth et al., 2011). Police officers working nights, even without dangerous or stressful calls, experience a biological response that can negatively impact their health. Garbarino and Magnavita (2015) monitored police officers for 5 years and found that most had high stress levels that equated to higher levels of triglycerides in their blood.

The saying “working yourself to death” conjures up the image of a professional working long hours in the office and missing important family events such as birthdays, sporting events, and holidays. Regarding policing, the saying has proved accurate. Varvarigou et al. (2014) examined the deaths of over 4,500 police officers from 1984 to 2010. They concluded the risk of sudden cardiac death was 34 to 69 times higher during physical altercations, 32 to 51 times higher during pursuits, 20 to 23 times higher during physical training, and six to nine times higher during medical or rescue operations. They noted that the occupation can trigger sudden cardiac death (Varvarigou et al., 2014). Vena, Violanti, Marshall, and Fiedler (1986) examined 39,462 White male police officers employed between January 1950 and October 1979. The officers had significantly increased mortality for all malignant neoplasms (cancer), cancer of the esophagus, and colon cancer (Vena et al., 1986). Officers employed for 10 to 19 years had significantly greater risks of digestive cancers and colon cancer, while officers employed for over 40 years had an additional risk for malignant neoplasms, bladder cancer, and heart disease (Vena et al., 1986).

In a way, the occupation of policing is like ocean waves slowly turning a rock into sand. Continued exposure to the difficulties associated with policing has obvious negative impacts on officers’ families and officers’ wellbeing. In addition to the cumulative stress, officers can face acute issues arising from a single traumatic event.
**PTSD.** PTSD has been defined as “a debilitating psychiatric syndrome with significant social and professional consequences in the affected individual” (Perrin et al., 2014). Symptoms of PTSD include depression, anger, alienation, isolation, sleep disturbance, flashbacks, poor concentration, memory impairment, and loss of interest in work or hobbies (Burlington County Prosecutor’s Office, 2019). PTSD has been linked to traumatic events; however, not everyone who experiences a traumatic event suffers from PTSD (Kessler et al., 1994).

The nature of policing exposes police officers to traumatic events that can easily be linked to PTSD. PTSD can develop from a single highly stressful or traumatic incident or from cumulative traumatic incidents or stressors (Burlington County Prosecutor’s Office, 2019). Clair (2006) noted that 12 to 35% of police officers in the United States suffer from PTSD and examined the relationship between the frequency of critical incidents, organizational stress and other factors for police officers developing PTSD. One finding was that officers in highly stressful specialized units (e.g., SWAT team, bomb disposal) did not significantly differ from other officers in the intensity of their PTSD symptoms (Clair, 2006).

People involved in highly stressful events experience peritraumatic dissociation (e.g., tunnel vision, time distortion, etc.) and this has been linked to PTSD (Galatzer-Levy et al., 2011; Marmar et al., 1994, 1996; McCanlies et al., 2017; Nobakht et al., 2019). Thus it is reasonable to note that police officers who are continually exposed to high-stress situations are more vulnerable to developing PTSD. However, if it were merely the high-stress situations, officers in specialized units would be more prone to PTSD than other officers.

Friedman (2005) noted that police officers are spiritual beings and that the continual stresses placed on police officers throughout their daily shifts takes a negative impact on their wellbeing. Everyone faces adversity and stressful situations throughout life. However, the
stressors placed on police officers over time deplete officers on three levels: faith in God, faith in humanity, and faith in self (Friedman, 2005). Officers do not take pleasure from informing family members of the passing of a loved one, arresting an abusive spouse in front of their children, or responding to scenes of violence. The emotional toll can become overwhelming.

**Alcohol, divorce, and suicide.** When people, police officers included, face stress they find ways to cope with it. Some people may exercise, some may meditate, and others may find less healthy ways to deal with stress. The occupational stressors combined with social drinking found in the police culture can lead to alcohol abuse (Iannone, Iannone, & Bernstein, 2009; Marx, 2017; Willman, 2012). Ballenger et al. (2011) examined alcohol use in police officers and found that 18.1% of male officers and 15.9% of female officers reported negative consequences from their alcohol use. Additionally, 7.8% of the officers met criteria for lifetime abuse or dependence issues. Female officers abused alcohol at similar rates as male officers and at significantly greater rates than civilian women (Ballenger et al., 2011).

While alcohol abuse among police officers is alarming, it is not the only negative issue that can affect officers while off duty. Police officers can work long shifts, nights, weekends, and holidays. The demanding nature of the job causes officers to miss important family events such as birthdays, holidays, and other family gatherings. These obligations place additional stress on police officers and their families.

Alexander and Alexander (1996) examined the relationship between policing and the families of law enforcement officers. They found that staffing demands (long hours, shiftwork, and canceled leave) caused more stress and conflict on officers’ family lives than the danger and risk of injury that officers face (Alexander & Walker, 1996). In other words, the fear of their spouses being killed at work was less than the family stress of them simply going to work. The
cumulative stress can lead to decreased spousal interaction, decreased communication, and create opportunities for infidelity and divorce (L. Miller, 2007).

Maynard, Maynard, McCubbin, and Shao (1980) examined the effects of police stress on law enforcement families and found that police wives needed to employ coping strategies to manage the hardships associated with policing. The demanding nature of policing often leaves the spouses of police officers functioning as single parents. These occupational stresses can, over time, lead even solid marriages to end (L. Miller, 2007). Janik and Krativz (1994) examined domestic issues and law enforcement officers and found that police officers who reported marital problems were 4.8 times more likely to have attempted suicide.

The high stress of the job, negative coping mechanisms used by officers, family stressors and separation, and the availability of firearms contribute to the possibility of police officers taking their own lives. Statistics on law enforcement suicides indicate that officers are two to six times more likely to kill themselves than to be killed by a criminal (Marx, 2017). Other research indicates that officers are twice as likely to kill themselves as be killed by someone else (Burlington County Prosecutor’s Office, 2019).

Stanley et al. (2016) reviewed suicidal thoughts among first responders (police officers, firefighters, EMTs, and paramedics) and found that first responders have an elevated risk for suicidal thoughts and behaviors. Factors related to these suicidal thoughts were PTSD; occupational dissatisfaction, stress, or burnout; career transitions; marital problems; sleep disturbances; and protective factors (Stanley et al., 2016).

Police officers and their families face the same stressors as civilians, with additional stressors placed on the families due to the nature of policing. These effects over time can be detrimental to the marriage and health of the officer. When police officers do not have effective
coping mechanisms, the officers can turn to self-destructive behavior. When the self-destructive behavior is not recognized and/or properly addressed, officers can look to take their own lives.

Research into policing leads to changes. Research into the risks of alcoholism, divorce, and suicide have led to an increased awareness of the dangers that police officers can pose to themselves. New Jersey Attorney General Gubir Grewal plans to implement a statewide directive mandating that police departments train their officers on resiliency (Levinsky, 2019).

Training

The relationship between training and law enforcement is fluid and evolving yet also based on historical knowledge. For example, training for soldiers improved their shooting accuracy. Grossman (1995) examined the psychological cost of learning to kill and noted that soldiers during World War II had a firing rate between 15 and 20%. While it was not surprising that people did not want to kill others, it was surprising that the soldiers would risk their lives and not fire their weapons at the enemy in self-defense or in defense of their countrymen (Grossman, 1995).

The United States military recognized that it was dangerous and ineffective for its soldiers not to fire at the enemy. A country with soldiers who are not willing to use deadly force would quickly lose the battle, and potentially its sovereignty, to an army of soldiers who are willing. The military adjusted its training techniques to increase the fire rate among soldiers. Through psychological manipulation and other techniques, the military improved the firing rate of soldiers in battle (Grossman, 1995). For example, 55% of infantrymen were firing their weapons in the Korean War, as opposed to 15 to 20% in World War II (Grossman, 1995). The training techniques continued, and by the Vietnam War firing rates between 90 and 95% were observed (Grossman, 1995).
Law enforcement has always utilized the military model, dating back to the creation of modern policing (Cowper, 2000; Iannone, Iannone, & Bernstein, 2009; Walker & Katz, 2013). Similarities between police departments and the military include the organizational structure, titles and rank, chain of command, and strict adherence to following orders. Another aspect of law enforcement that mirrors the military is the after-action review. An after-action review is a review of an incident to analyze what went right, what went wrong, where improvements can be made, and anything else that can improve performance or safety. With new technologies such as training simulators, it is possible and beneficial to promptly review a simulated training scenario to improve performance (Allen & Smith, 1994). For example, it is safer and more cost effective for fighter pilots to practice landing on aircraft carriers in simulators than doing so by trial and error. However, law enforcement continually evolves from real-life training experiences.

Aveni (2003) examined police training and credited a single incident, the Newhall Wake-Up Call, with law enforcement’s emphasis on officer survival. The April 1970 shooting resulted in four police officers being killed and one of the two suspects suffering a superficial wound from the gun battle (Aveni, 2003). Subsequent reviews of that and other deadly force incidents have led to changes in police weapons (e.g., higher caliber bullets) and tactics (Aveni, 2003).

Technological advances have made police training more realistic. Video simulated training allows officers to train in conflict resolution while maintaining officer safety. These use of force simulators usually involve filmed actors who react to the live police officer through the assistance of a police trainer operating the simulator. For example, the police officer may conduct a simulated car stop and the trainer can direct the scenario based on the officer’s actions and instructions. If the officer’s approach is poor, the simulated motorist may shoot at the officer; if it is tactically sound, the training may switch to a focus on verbal commands.
These simulated scenarios allow officers to practice handling dangerous situations in a safe manner. Should the scenario deteriorate into deadly force, the officer can review what occurred (positive or negative) immediately afterwards and adjust their approach in the future. These simulated training scenarios can provide officers with experiences in high-stress situations, allowing them to perform better if they encounter a similar situation in real life.

These simulated scenarios are guided by real-life research and experiences. Blair et al. (2011) examined the effect of police reaction time in response to an armed suspect through simulated training and found that action beats reaction. For example, the suspect could take action and shoot at the officer quicker than the officer could react. Armed with this knowledge that action beats reaction, police trainers can emphasis the use of cover (an object that may stop a bullet, e.g., a vehicle engine block) versus concealment (an object that hides the officer but offers no bullet resistance, e.g., a car door).

Correll et al. (2007) utilized computer training to assess the speed at which officers and civilians could react to an armed suspect. The participants were shown images of suspects of varying races and told to hit a button to shoot or not shoot. The results indicated that all participants exhibited racial bias in response speed but that civilian participants set significantly lower criteria than police in terms of deadly force application (Correll et al., 2007). These results indicate the positive effect that training has on officer reaction and response. Sadler et al. (2013) examined the effect of training on racial bias in police officers’ decisions to shoot and noted that officers experience unconscious bias related to the Black-danger stereotype, but it did not influence their ultimate decision to use force.

When police officers use deadly force against an unarmed suspect, such as a person holding a wallet or cell phone, the officers’ actions are heavily scrutinized and the public
reaction is overwhelmingly negative. The taking of a life is a permanent and irreparable action. Sharps and Hess (2008) conducted simulated training with suspects holding weapons and ordinary objects, such as a wallet or cell phone. Civilians exhibited extreme difficulty in distinguishing weapons from ordinary objects in ideal situations. With training, the citizens began improving in the scenarios, which suggests that police training and experience may allow officers to override response tendencies stemming from racial stereotypes and therefore exercise proper judgment (Correll et al. 2007).

There is a saying among police trainers that you will not “rise to the occasion” but instead “sink to the lowest level of your training.” Policing is a high-stress, dynamic, and evolving occupation that requires officers to react to each incident as needed. Officers are also human beings whose collective life experiences and training shape who they are and how they respond as officers. Police training has been proven to be beneficial in increasing officer safety while nullifying implicit bias. Given that officers are influenced by their life experiences, it is beneficial to examine how their attributions can influence their perceptions.

**Attribution Theory**

Many studies examining law enforcement and persons of color have examined the use of force, with most using quantitative methods such as analyzing police documentation, use of force complaints, questionnaires, or surveys. These methods have provided significant insight into the dynamics of race relations within the everyday complexities of policing but lack insight into the mindset of the police officers as they navigate in a racially charged national context, particularly regarding the use of force. Because street level police officers have a great deal of discretion (Phillips, 2016b), insight into their mindset can be particularly beneficial. The perspective of police officers of color provides a particularly instructive lens for examining the phenomenon.
This study used attribution theory as a theoretical framework to examine the perceptions that non-White police instructors have of high-profile use of force incidents. As discussed in Chapter 1, attribution theory can provide these analytical tools, given that it outlines a process through which individuals attribute explanations and create their perceptions of the causes of events and of the reactions of others (Kelley & Michela, 1980). It considers what information is gathered and how it connected to form a causal judgement (Fiske & Taylor, 1991).

A review of the literature shows little use of attribution theory related to law enforcement. Whiteside and Prytula (1975) examined attributions made by rookie and veteran police officers. Veteran officers attributed criminal behavior to the person and were less likely to accept the role of environmental factors when holding someone responsible for their actions (Whiteside & Prytula, 1975). Rozelle and Baxter (1978) also utilized attribution theory to examine the perceptions civilians had of the nonverbal behaviors (e.g., spatial intrusion) citizens exhibited while interacting with a uniformed police officer. The civilians attributed the spatial intrusion as indicating deceptive, guilty, anxious, or generally suspicious behavior by the citizen (Rozelle & Baxter, 1978).

Both studies using attribution theory provide insight into how individuals attribute people’s behavior with little background information. This aligns with the current study, which examined the perceptions non-White police instructors have of high-profile use of force incidents involving persons of color. However, this study is different from the prior ones in several ways.

The studies that utilized attribution theory were conducted many years ago and did not examine the use of force by police. Additionally, the studies did not examine the involvement of race and policing. The national debate regarding the use of force by law enforcement against persons of color has been reignited after high-profile use of force incidents, such as the Michael
Brown shooting in Ferguson. Also, the studies were methodologically different than the current study, which examined the perspectives of the participants through an in-depth analysis.

**Chapter Summary**

The relationship between police and persons of color has a long and complex history. This chapter discussed numerous aspects of this history. It provided insight into the foundations of the American criminal justice system and the heavy influence of English heritage. Organizational structures of modern police agencies were discussed, including centralized decision making and limitations to problem solving and creativity among employees.

New Jersey law enforcement was discussed, including the decentralized chain of command and local control of law enforcement agencies. New Jersey’s laws guiding police officer employment and departmental protocols and hiring practices were outlined. Included with these hiring practices was the historical emphasis on diversity.

Historical issues related to persons of color and law enforcement were discussed, including the relationship between early American law enforcement and slave patrols. Included in this discussion was the relationship between early law enforcement and the discriminatory laws designed to force freed slaves to continue to work for their masters (Stewart, 1998).

The chapter discussed historical incidents of community resistance, starting with the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s. These incidents led to the creation of a presidential commission to examine the issue and changes to American law enforcement. Despite these changes, tensions between law enforcement and persons of color have remained. Several recent incidents of high-profile community resistance, such as in Ferguson, were discussed.

Historically, law enforcement has responded to high-profile community resistance through the use of community policing. While these programs have assisted the relationship
between law enforcement and persons of color, they appeared to reach their peak in the 1990s due to budgetary restrictions (Diehr & McDaniel, 2018).

The influence of race and politics was discussed, including the influence of law enforcement theories such as broken windows. Positive and negative aspects of this theory were discussed before examining aspects of deadly force and implicit bias. Due to concerns about deadly force, community activists have formed organizations such as Black Lives Matter. The influence of these organizations and law enforcement’s response, known as the Ferguson effect, were examined. Given the permanent impact of the use of deadly force and its being a catalyst of tensions between law enforcement and persons of color, aspects of the psychology of policing were discussed.

Peritraumatic stress and its influence on officer perceptions during a dangerous, high-stress incident were discussed, including the biological responses that occur at the time. The health effects of these incidents, and the police career as a whole, were discussed. This included negative health effects such as PTSD, alcohol abuse, divorce, and suicide.

The chapter discussed training and its relationship with law enforcement. Technological advances such as computer-simulated scenarios were discussed, including their positive impact on implicit bias in police officer response and actions. Finally, the chapter discussed the current study’s theoretical framework, attribution theory, and provided examples of its prior use related to law enforcement. Included in that discussion were the limitations of the prior studies and the differences between those studies and the current one.
Chapter 3: Research Design

This chapter provides a brief explanation of the research design that was used in this study. Specifically, this chapter provides an overview of the methodology, paradigm and strategy of inquiry, research design, population sample and participants, data collection plan, and analysis used in the study. Additionally, it will discuss the steps taken to maintain trustworthiness, the role of the researcher (including his positionality), and the steps taken to assure compliance with human subject protection protocols.

This study examined the research problem utilizing a qualitative approach. Creswell (2012a) suggested that the choice between quantitative and qualitative research is guided by the types of questions the researcher is examining related to the problem of practice. Researchers looking to explore a problem by learning from people involved with the research problem and develop an understanding of a central phenomenon are best served by qualitative research methods (Creswell, 2012a). In contrast, quantitative researchers are guided by specific narrow research questions and a mathematical analysis of the data obtained (Creswell, 2012b). For example, a quantitative study of a restaurant might be centered on the number of customers served, while a qualitative approach might be interested in the customers’ experience. In the first study, a researcher would be guided by specific predetermined criteria, while the second study would be guided by the information provided by the customers. This could uncover an issue previously not thought of by a researcher.

Educational research is guided by the theoretical perspective, or paradigm of inquiry, chosen by the researcher. A research paradigm is a “set of interrelated assumptions about the social world which provides a philosophical and conceptual framework for the organized study of the world” (Filstead, 1979, p. 34 as cited in Ponterotto, 2005, p.127). Qualitative paradigms
such as constructivism-interpretivism can be viewed as an alternate to the received view of a positivist paradigm that seeks a single objective reality (Ponterotto, 2005). Constructivists believe that reality is created by an individual’s viewpoint, rather than being an external singular entity (Hansen, 2004). A constructivist-interpretivist qualitative approach accepts the rationality of multiple realities (Ponterotto, 2005). Butin (2010) noted that a constructivist-interpretivist approach suggests that reality is not absolute but instead is exclusive to anyone’s particular individual meaning. The constructivist-interpretivist approach was useful to this study because it accepts complexities in human interactions and how those interactions may be perceived.

**Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

This study employed interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) as its methodological approach. IPA research aligned well with this study because it allowed the researcher to examine the shared lived experiences of the participants. Many previous studies examining law enforcement and persons of color have examined the use of force, with most using quantitative methods such as analyzing police documentation, use of force complaints, questionnaires, or surveys. These methods have provided significant insight into the dynamics of race relations within policing but lack insight into the mindset of the police officers as they navigate the everyday complexities of policing and community relations in a racially charged national context, particularly regarding the use of force. Because street-level police instructors have a great deal of discretion (Phillips, 2016b), insight into their mindset can be beneficial; the perspective of police officers of color provides a particularly instructive lens through which to examine the phenomenon.

This study used a qualitative methodology, IPA, to examine the perceptions street-level police instructors of color have of high-profile and widely publicized incidents of the use of
force by police against persons of color. Creswell (2012b) noted that researchers conducting qualitative research should employ one of the following five research designs: case study, narrative, grounded theory, ethnographic study, or phenomenological. IPA has theoretical foundations in phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography (J. A. Smith et al., 2012). Its phenomenological foundations are rooted in the work of Edmund Husserl (Dowling, 2007; Larkin, Eatough, & Osborn, 2011). A founding principle of Husserl’s phenomenological inquiry is the examination of human experience: an experience should be viewed within the context of its occurrence (J. A. Smith et al., 2012). The everyday experiences of police instructors of color occur within the context of human experience. The perceptions individuals have as they navigate those experiences can be observed through IPA research.

Hermeneutics, which is the theory of interpretation, has led to writers using the hermeneutic circle (J. A. Smith et al., 2012). The hermeneutic circle, which not been attributed to a specific scholar, centers on the complex relationship between the part and the whole (J. A. Smith et al., 2012). The hermeneutic circle allowed the researcher to view a particular topic within the overall context in which it occurred and to understand the complex relationship between high-profile incidents and their influence on training and the everyday experience of street-level police instructors. Hermeneutics aligned with the study as it allowed the participants to provide context to their individual everyday experiences and perceptions and to make sense of those experiences in relation to the context, in this case their perceptions of high-profile and widely publicized incidents of the use of force by police against persons of color.

Idiography is the third key influence on IPA research. Idiography is concerned with specific individual descriptions of life experiences (Breakwell, Smith & Wright, 2012; J. A. Smith et al., 2012). IPA research is concerned about the nuanced details of the participants’
experiences in order to provide a deep analysis of the research topic (Fade, 2004; J. A. Smith et al., 2012). Also, IPA research is interested in understanding particular experiences from the perspective of the individual, within a particular context (J. A. Smith et al., 2012) and does not aim to provide generalizations applicable to broad or multiple situations. Idiography aligned with this study because it allowed the researcher to gain insight into the perspectives of the participants within the context of the overall research problem, as well as their interpretations of their experiences.

**Research Design**

Initial investigation into law enforcement and persons of color indicated a difference in support for the use of force by law enforcement based on race (Johnson & Kuhns, 2009, Jefferis et al., 1997). Much research into this area has been quantitative, examining statistics of police and incidents where force was used. Other research indicated that police officers become Blue (Weitzer, 2015). This presents an interesting intersection, a dilemma between roles of race and occupation, where parameters are more starkly defined. These officers appear to be balancing community and role allegiances that affect the way they interact with civilians. This dynamic is grossly unexplored in practice and theory. Where both identity and practice are concerned, these relations indicate that their training and experiences as police officers influence their actions (Weitzer, 2015).

As a scholar-practitioner, the researcher has noticed that different people could observe the same viral video and develop completely different perceptions of the incident. Hastorf and Cantril (1954) conducted a case study of a college football game between Princeton and Dartmouth and found the fans viewed the game differently depending on who they were rooting for despite watching the same game. Perception differences in the use of force are easily
observed by reading the comments about any high-profile police use of force. For example, on March 18, 2018, two officers from the Sacramento Police Department were involved in a deadly force incident with Stephon Clark, a young Black man, in which the police said that Clark took a shooting stance and pointed an object towards them that was later determined to be a cell phone (Nestel, 2018). Previous research into the decision to shoot has shown that ordinary objects, such as a wallet, can easily be mistaken for a firearm (Correll et al., 2007, Sharps & Hess, 2008). An online article, with videos from police helicopters and police body cameras, provided details about the incident, but a review of the comments associated with the article show dramatic differences in the opinions of the commenters (Nestel, 2018). These differences point to “reality being constructed in the mind of the individual” (Ponterotto, 2015, p. 129).

This doctoral research study was guided by the principles of qualitative research, using IPA and attribution theory. The decision to use qualitative research was made by the researcher when conceptualizing the problem of practice. The complexities involved cover a wide range of issues. This study followed a regimented research process, as outlined in Table 3. These research steps will be explained in greater detail later in this chapter.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Steps</th>
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| 1     | • Develop pilot interview protocol  
       | • Identify potential participants |
| 2     | • Conduct preliminary interviews  
       | • Obtain consent to record interview  
       | • Comply with IRB protocol |
### Phase 3
- Conduct semi-structured interviews with participants
- Transcribe transcripts for analysis
- Provide transcripts to participants for accuracy
- Preliminarily analyze and code transcripts

### Phase 4
- Examine a transcript for emergent themes
- Look for connections between themes
- Move onto the next participant and repeat the process

### Phase 5
- Examine the information obtained and analyze how it relates to the research question
- Analyze the information obtained against the existing literature and theoretical framework

### Phase 6
- Develop conclusions from the study
- Develop implications for practice and future research

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**Population and Sample Design**

This study focused on the shared lived experiences of police officers of color who are also firearms or use of force instructors in New Jersey. The New Jersey State Statute 13:1-7.2(a)13 outlines the Police Training Commission’s definition of a police officer as:

Any employee of a law enforcement agency, a correctional agency or a juvenile justice agency who, by statute, comes under the jurisdiction of the Commission or any member of a fire department or force who is assigned to an arson investigation unit pursuant to Public Law 1981, Chapter 409.

New Jersey State Statute 52:17B-71.3 more narrowly defines a “policeman” as “any permanent fulltime active member of any police force or organization of any municipality or county, or the State Police” New Jersey Code Title 13:1-7.2(a)13 defines a “police instructor” as “an individual who is employed as a police officer as defined in this subchapter and is certified by the Commission to teach at a Commission-approved school.” A “firearms instructor” is “an individual certified by the commission to teach firearms under the immediate supervision of a
range master at a commission-approved school” (New Jersey Division of Criminal Justice, 2009).

To obtain the position of a police officer, persons must pass a training course approved by the New Jersey Police Training Commission (PTC). The PTC was established under the New Jersey Division of Criminal Justice through New Jersey State Statute 52:17B-70. The powers and duties of the PTC are defined in New Jersey State Statute 52:17B-71; these include the following: to prescribe standards for approval of schools, to develop the curriculum, to prescribe minimum qualifications for instructors, to certify police officers, and to make rules and regulations as necessary to accomplish its objectives. To become an approved police instructor, police officers must pass a training course, Methods of Instruction, developed by the PTC. Additionally, police instructors are bound by the standards of conduct set forth by the PTC.

According to the 2015 New Jersey Uniform Crime Report, the state has 32,438 full-time police employees, including: municipal police (18,330), county police (4,451), university and colleges (409), state police (2,487) and other state agencies (6,761) (FBI, 2013). The PTC has certified over 5,000 police instructors (NJ Office of Attorney General, 2012) which comprises approximately 15% of New Jersey police officers. The researcher used purposive sampling to identify initial participants who met the study’s criteria. The researcher then used snowball sampling with the assistance of the initial participants to identify additional participants as needed. One of the participants, who wanted to participate in the study, worked with the researcher but not in his chain of command. One officer verbally agreed to participate in the study, however, he never had availability and was unable to participate in the study. No individuals declined to participate in the study and none of the officers who participated requested to not be included.
Participant Profile

Participants were police officers in New Jersey who passed training at a police academy and have been certified by the PTC. The participants worked for law enforcement agencies that provide daily service to the residents of their jurisdictions, such as a municipal police department. The participants had served in a uniformed capacity for a minimum of 5 years, thus providing them sufficient experience and interactions with daily policing.

The participants had increased responsibilities within their respective agencies, specifically in the capacity of instructing other police officers. These officers were responsible for instructing other police officers in the use of firearms, which is deadly force, and the use of force. In addition to the 5-year service minimum, participants had a minimum of 2 years as a certified trainer, thus providing them with experience instructing other officers.

Law enforcement has been learning from deadly use of force incidents since a deadly shooting in Newhall, California, on April 5, 1970, that influenced future training (Aveni, 2003). Police training has shown an ability to influence officers’ actions regarding deadly force (Correll et al., 2007). Therefore, the examination of police instructors can provide valuable insight into police tactics, such as the use of force, that can influence officers’ actions. Lastly, the participants identified as persons of color, providing them with a unique perspective on policing.

Most police in the United States are White (Reaves, 2013) men (FBI, 2013). Reaves (2013) noted that racial or ethnic minorities represented 27% of local police officers in the United States in 2013; an increase from 15% in 1987 (Reaves, 2013). However, research into 269 jurisdictions with populations greater than 100,000 residents noted that racial and ethnic minorities were underrepresented by 24% when compared to Census population estimates (Maciag, 2015). Hispanics were the most underrepresented, nearly 11% below Census estimates,
while Blacks and Asians were underrepresented to a lesser degree (Maciag, 2015). Previous research into African American police officers has been concentrated in large metropolitan police departments and researchers have paid little attention to African American police officers in smaller agencies (C. P. Wilson, Wilson, & Thou, 2015). In these smaller agencies, which represent most of the country’s law enforcement, African American police officers are likely to number in the single or double digits, as opposed to hundreds in a metropolitan department (C. P. Wilson & Wilson, 2014).

The participants did not align with most police officers in many ways. First, their status as police instructors put them into a minority within policing. Secondly, being a person of color did not align with most other officers.

**Data Collection Plan**

This qualitative study was systematically approached in six phases. The first three phases relate to the collection of data and will be explained in this section. The last three phases relate to the analysis of data and will be explained in the following section.

In the first phase of the study, the researcher identified seven participants, in alignment with IPA research. J. A. Smith et al. (2012) noted that a sample size between six and eight “should provide sufficient cases for the development of meaningful points of similarity and difference between participants, but not so many that one is in danger of being overwhelmed by the amount of data generated” (p. 51). By using IPA, the researcher was able to obtain a deep analysis of the shared lived experiences of the participants, related to the research problem.

The researcher used professional contacts and personal knowledge to select qualifying police officers. The participants met the study’s criteria and were able to provide insight into the research topic (Devers & Frankel, 2000). They were recruited using the letter found in Appendix
A. This study utilized participants with the following criteria: certified police officers of color, who were also police instructors in firearms or the use of force in New Jersey. This homogeneous group offered insight into the research problem, understanding the perceptions officers of color have of the use of force by police in a highly racialized national context.

The second phase of data collection followed a modified three interview approach to collecting data that: (a) established the context for the participants’ experiences in the initial interview, (b) provided an opportunity for the participants to describe their experiences in the second interview, and (c) allowed for consideration from the participants in the third interview and allow them to make meaning from their experiences (Seidman, 2013). The interviews were structured and fluid, which allowed the researcher to obtain data relevant to the research question while also providing space for the participants to guide the conversation wherever the participants’ reflections took it (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008; J. A. Smith et al., 2012).

The researcher scheduled and completed an initial interview with the participants. During this initial interview the researcher had the participant select a pseudonym to protect their identity and maintain confidentiality (Creswell, 2012a). During the initial interview, the researcher collected demographic data from the participants and explained the study. The interviewer also answered any questions the participant had and established rapport. The researcher obtained informed consent from the participants to record the interview while complying with the guidelines of Northeastern University’s Institutional Review Board (see Appendix B).

The third phase of the process began with the collection of data by interviewing the participants. The interviews were semi-structured with open-ended questions (Seidman, 1989), and the researcher was an active listener (J. A. Smith et al., 2012). The questions, shown in
Appendix C, explored the central research question and the researcher used prompts to encourage the participants to provide details about their perceptions of high-profile use of force incidents as police instructors and persons of color. Upon completion, the recorded interviews were transcribed by the commercial service Temi.com and provided to the participants for their review. This step allowed the participants to elaborate or clarify any points made during their interview, otherwise known as member checking. The researcher responded to any questions or concerns of the participants and offered to discuss their concerns via email, a telephone call, or an in-person meeting. Afterwards, the transcripts were analyzed and preliminarily coded.

Data Analysis

The fourth phase of the process was to examine the emergent themes from the individual participants and look for connections between them (J. A. Smith & Osborn). To examine the transcripts, this researcher followed a six-step systematic process suggested by J. A. Smith et al. (2012). The first step was to become actively involved with the data by reading and rereading one of the transcripts. The researcher noted initial reactions and meaningful observations made during the initial reading. During one of the re-readings, the researcher also listened to the audio recording for accuracy and to observe any changes in voice for emphasis. The researcher made additional notes from the subsequent re-readings and did his best to become immersed in the participant’s world (J. A. Smith et al., 2012).

The second step was detailed and time consuming because it involved the exploration of the verbiage used by the participant and the context of the transcript. The researcher looked for specific ways the participant discussed an experience and expressed their views. The researcher aimed to create a complete set of interpretative notes related to the participant’s data. The researcher noted three types of comments: (a) descriptive comments that referred to the
interview’s content, (b) linguistic comments that related to the verbiage used, and (c) conceptual comments that analyzed the participant’s story.

The third step was developing emergent themes related to the observations. This was done by moving away from the participant’s transcript and analyzing the exploratory comments developed in the first and second steps (J. A. Smith et al., 2012). During this step the researcher became more collaborative as the analysis moved from the participant’s words to the themes created from those words. The objective of this step was to describe and interpret the participant’s explanation of their lived experiences using detailed note taking by the researcher.

The fourth step was to search for connections across the emergent themes. The researcher employed specific techniques to locate patterns and examine connected themes, including abstraction, subsumption, polarization, contextualization, numeration, and function (J. A. Smith et al., 2012). During this progressively interpretative stage the researcher made notes about how the analysis was completed and detailed comments about the analytic process.

After deep analysis of the first participant was completed, the researcher moved on to the fifth step, the next participant. While doing so, the researcher was mindful to bracket the emergent themes observed from the first participant as much as possible. This allowed for another independent analysis instead of searching for themes observed in another participant. Once this process was completed for all the participants, this researcher looked for patterns across all cases in the sixth and final step of this fourth phase of data analysis.

The fifth phase examined the information obtained from the participants and how it related to the research question. Additionally, the information was analyzed for its relationship with the existing literature and theoretical framework. The sixth and final phase of the research
design was to develop conclusions from the study. Also, interpretations were made utilizing insights from theory. Lastly, implications for practice and future research were developed.

**Trustworthiness**

The purpose of this IPA study was to explore how seven police instructors of color experience the impact of high-profile and widely publicized incidents of the use of force on persons of color. Trustworthiness is a concern for qualitative researchers at every stage of the research process (Williams & Morrow, 2009). Krefting (1991) summarized the importance of trustworthiness by stating: “Truth value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality were described as critical to the evaluation of the worth of research” (p. 222). In other words, a study with questionable trustworthiness is virtually useless. The researcher took multiple steps during the research process to maintain trustworthiness and conduct a useful study. These steps, which are explained in greater detail in the subsections, included but were not limited to: (a) sustained engagement and member checking with the participants, (b) thick description to affirm transferability, (c) internal audit procedures to uphold dependability, and (d) reflexive journaling to support confirmability. Yardley (2000) suggested flexible principles to keep with the ethos of qualitative research and conduct a quality qualitative study:

- Sensitivity to context: The researcher was mindful of the emotions and complexities related to persons of color interacting with law enforcement.
- Commitment and rigor: “Commitment will be shown in the degree of attentiveness to the participant during data collection and the care with which the analysis of each is carried out” (J. A. Smith et al., 2012, p. 181).
- Transparency and coherence: The researcher clearly described the stages of the research conducted in the study (J. A. Smith et al., 2012).
• Impact and importance: “The ultimate value of a piece of research can only be assessed in relation to the objectives of the analysis, the applications it was intended for, and the community for whom the findings were deemed relevant” (Yardley, 2000, p. 223)

Credibility

Researchers should be mindful and aware of critiques of their chosen research methods. Positivists have questioned qualitative research given that its validity and reliability cannot be addressed in the same way as in quantitative research (Shenton, 2004). A challenge for qualitative researchers is to be aware of criticisms made by critics but to also be “cognizant of the provisions which can be made to address matters such as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability” (Shenton, 2004, p. 73). Throughout the research project, the researcher validated the work through strategies such as sustained engagement and member checking to ensure credibility (Creswell, 2012a).

Because the participants were persons of color discussing extremely sensitive topics related to race and policing, along with their personal histories and experiences, it was reasonable to assume the interview might evoke emotional responses from the participants. For example, the participants may have become self-conscious or uncomfortable discussing such personal issues with a stranger. It was crucial for this researcher to be aware that these feelings or apprehension may have been present and that he took the time to connect with the participants to build rapport and trust. Therefore, the researcher aimed to create a trusting environment to facilitate an open discussion and collect data. Most of the data obtained came from in-depth interviews with the participants; however, additional data was obtained through the initial introductory interviews, when rapport and trust were also established, and also through follow-up emails or communications, particularly for the purposes of member checking.
Member checking consists of taking data and interpretations back to the participants to allow them to confirm the credibility and accuracy of the information obtained (Creswell & Miller, 2000). After the in-depth interview with each participant, the researcher developed a summary of the interview. This summary, and a transcript of the interview, were provided to each participant for review and to allow them to amend or correct both for clarity or accuracy, if they chose. This member checking gave the researcher the opportunity to address any potential disagreements, confirm the content, and make corrections as necessary (Creswell, 2012a).

**Transferability**

One primary concern of quantitative work is demonstrating that the findings apply or can be transferred to a wider population, however, it is difficult to demonstrate that the findings of qualitative research apply to a wider population because qualitative research projects are often specific to a small number of environmental factors and individuals, particularly in IPA, which is ideographic (Shenton, 2004). Therefore, the researcher utilized a thick description technique, providing rich, detailed, and comprehensive descriptions of the lived experiences of the participants with enough specificity taken directly from the material to allow the reader to determine that the study’s environment and the experiences related are transferable, at least in part, to another situation (Shenton, 2004).

Ponterotto (2006) noted that thick description “involves much more than amassing great detail: It speaks to the context and meaning as well as interpreting participant intentions in their behaviors and actions (p. 541). This study used thick description to reveal the thoughts and feelings of the participants, primarily in their own words, and to carefully and creatively depict the context of the personal and professional interactions of the participants in a way that allows readers to cognitively put themselves into the situations described (Ponterotto, 2006).
**Dependability**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) stressed the close relationship between credibility and dependability, noting that practicing and demonstrating credibility goes a long way to safeguarding dependability. The researcher created an internal audit trail to provide extensive detail about the steps and the process carried out in the research study to address the issue of dependability (Shenton, 2004; Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). The researcher followed the audit trail provided by Thomas and Magilvy (2011):

(a) describing the specific purpose of the study; (b) discussing how and why the participants were selected for the study; (c) describing how the data were collected and how long the data collection lasted; (d) explaining how the data were reduced or transformed for analysis; (e) discussing the interpretation and presentation of the research findings; and (f) communicating the specific techniques used to determine the credibility of the data (p. 153).

This allows other researchers to replicate the research and assess the effectiveness and validity of the methods utilized in this study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004).

**Confirmability**

The concept of confirmability is to qualitative research what objectivity is to quantitative research (Shenton, 2004; Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Actions must be taken before and during the research to ensure that the researcher as objective as possible and that the data obtained reflects the information provided by the participants rather than the predilections of the researcher (Shenton, 2004). Thomas and Magilvy (2011) suggested that researchers take field notes, written or recorded, of personal feelings, biases, and insights immediately after conducting interviews. This reflective research process:
Allows a big-picture view with interpretation that produce new insights, allowing for developing confirmability of the research and, overall, leading the reader or consumer of the research to have a sense of trust in the conduct credibility of findings and applicability of the study (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011, p. 154).

Therefore, the researcher maintained a reflective journal throughout the study. Immediately after conducting an interview with a participant, the researcher took field notes of any personal feelings, insights, or potential biases (Shenton, 2004; Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). By doing so, he was able to make a conscious effort to represent the participant’s thoughts and experiences and limit the influence of his own personal thoughts or beliefs on the research.

**Role of the Researcher**

Tackacs (2002) examined positionality and stated:

> Few things are more difficult than to see outside the bounds of our own perspective – to be able to identify assumptions that we take as universal truths, but that instead have been crafted by our own unique identity and experiences in the world. (p. 169)

In the interest of transparency, trustworthiness, and credibility, the researchers here provides a brief personal and professional background statement. Acknowledging that knowledge is not a universal truth allows me to conduct open, honest research and be exposed to the world’s possibilities (Tackacs, 2002). The unique experience of my life has defined who I am personally and professionally, and it is essential for this positionality to be expressed, analyzed, and bracketed, to the extent possible, so I can carry out rigorous and trustworthy research.

I was born and raised in a small suburban working-class town in New Jersey. My family and I are White; however, the area and school system I attended were characterized by some racial and ethnic diversity. My sister and I were raised by two parents who are still married.
Additionally, my grandparents on both sides lived in the same town, providing familial support before their passing. Bronfenbrenner (1979) discussed modal typologies for development, such as family size, single- or dual-parent households, home care or day care, social class or ethnic background, and the impact of all of these on human development. My mother was a stay-at-home mom until her children were enrolled in school for a few years. When she went back to work, she obtained employment in the school system, allowing her to be off when her children were. Franklin (2014) discussed how ideas of success have been based on the values of middle-class White men. As a middle-class White man, raised by middle-class White parents, I must be cognizant that values instilled in me may not be universal.

Academically, I was enrolled in the public school system until my parents enrolled me in a private Catholic high school. To do so, my father took a second job, working nights and weekends to afford the tuition. During high school, I obtained part-time employment at a grocery store and maintained that employment until 2 days before starting my current career as a police officer. After high school, I continued my education, commuting to the local community college while working nearly full-time hours. After obtaining an associate’s degree, I commuted to a university while continuing to work nearly 40 hours a week. Nearing graduation, and after, I applied for employment as a law enforcement officer. Finding no success, I enrolled in the police academy through the alternate route program. That program allowed individuals who passed a written test, physical fitness test, background check, psychological exam, and drug screening to pay tuition and equipment costs and receive police training, ending with certification as a police officer in New Jersey.

Professionally, I have maintained employment as a police officer with the same suburban New Jersey department for over 16 years. During that tenure, I was assigned to the uniform
services division where I served as a patrol officer, traffic safety officer, and sergeant. While employed as a police officer, I returned to school, obtaining a master’s degree in administrative science. I have continued my education, culminating in this study as part of obtaining a doctorate degree.

Carlton Parsons (2008) wrote about cultural-historical activity theory, noting that human beings are a product of their environment, which may be based on socially inherited knowledge. I believe my background is an example of Carlton Parson’s (2008) explanation of the deficit perspective, which theorizes that all Americans can obtain a better life through hard work and determination. Krashen (2005) noted that hard work in school could overcome socioeconomic status. Andrews (2014) on the contrary, argued that the American Dream, which suggests hard work and determination will lead to success, is not possible for everyone. To make her point, Andrews (2014) used the expression “pull yourself up by your bootstraps” and explained that different people have different boots; some people are inherently advantaged compared to others.

It is crucial that emerging scholar-practitioners study a topic of interest (Butin, 2010; Nganga, 2011). Many police officers, including me, want to help others, especially those who cannot help themselves. Police officers often view themselves as sheepdogs, who want to protect the flock from harm (Grossman, 2008). Marginalized persons may be subordinated by factors such as race, gender, sexuality, or economics (Briscoe, 2005). My knowledge has been formed through the culmination of my life experiences (Takacs, 2002). By acknowledging perceptions and biases, I conducted a fair and objective study (Machi & McEvoy, 2009).

**Human Subjects and Ethics**

The following process was used to ensure the study upheld high ethical standards for the recruitment and participation of human subjects. First, approval was obtained through the
Northeastern University Institutional Review Board (IRB). Following approval from the IRB, the researcher contacted potential participants who met the study’s criteria. Because the participants could offer insight into the research problem of understanding the perceptions of police officers of color in regard to the use of force in a highly racialized national context, confidentiality was critical. This researcher did not subject any participants to any risk. Involvement in the study was voluntary and the participants were provided with an explanation of the study prior to any data collection. The participants chose a pseudonym to aid in the protection of their identity. The pseudonyms will be used not only in the publication of this dissertation, but in any future publications, presentations, trainings or workshops derived from the study. The researcher answered questions, addressed any participant concerns verbally, and obtained informed consent prior to collecting any data.

The researcher conducted an initial interview with the participants to obtain relevant information related to their training and experience as police officers, such as years of service, departmental assignments, and other characteristics. During the initial interview, the researcher built rapport with the participants and advised them to ask any questions or express any concerns to the researcher at any point throughout the research process. It was clearly stated that the participants could withdraw from the study at any time or choose to not answer particular questions, with no consequences whatsoever. The researcher requested permission to record the interviews and explained the purpose for making an audio recording. The recordings were maintained on a computer that was password protected and sent to a private company for transcription using only pseudonyms as identifiers.

After having the interviews transcribed, the researcher provided the transcripts to the participants for their review. The transcripts did not have any information that revealed the
identity of the participant because demographic information was obtained prior to recording. The digital copies of the transcripts were maintained on a password-protected computer. Printed copies of the transcripts were maintained in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher’s office. Backup copies will be maintained in a locked cabinet at the researcher’s home. When the researcher finished using the audio recordings for analysis, they were destroyed. All other data will be destroyed five years after completing the study, including the informed consent documents.

**Chapter Summary**

This study explored the shared experiences of police instructors of color in New Jersey and their perceptions of the use of force in a highly racialized national context. The IPA methodology chosen for the study gave the participants a voice and allowed the researcher to construct meaning from the shared experiences of the participants. Standard IPA data collection and analysis procedures were followed. Due to the active role of the researcher in an IPA study, this researcher maintained controls to limit researcher bias. The participants were protected throughout the research process and beyond. This study provided insight into a dynamic and evolving relationship between the police and persons of color.
Chapter 4: Findings

Over two decades of research (Correll et al., 2007; Donovan & Klahm, 2015; Fyfe, 1988; Jefferis et al., 1997; Johnson & Kuhns, 2009; Klinger & Brunson, 2009; Perkins & Bourgeois, 2006; Sadler et al., 2013; Sharps & Hess, 2008; Weitzer, 2015) has documented problems between police and communities of color, such as incidents of abuse of authority, distrust, and expectations regarding the use of deadly force. The current context of policing in the United States is heavily centered on racial issues. A quick internet search will bring up countless controversial videos highlighting differences between the race of the officer and individuals involved or present when the officer used force. Research into race and the use of force by police has led to one of two conclusions: (a) that persons of color are more likely to engage in criminal activity and therefore interact more frequently with the police or (b) that police hold a bias, view persons of color as threatening, and thus seek them out on a more regular basis (James et al., 2014). The purpose of this IPA study was to explore how seven police instructors of color experience the impact of high-profile and widely publicized incidents of the use of force on persons of color. The central research question guiding this study was:

What perceptions do police instructors of color have regarding high-profile and widely publicized incidents of the use of force by police against persons of color?

The subquestions were:

**SQ1:** How do police instructors who are persons of color describe the effects of high-profile and widely publicized incidents of force on Blacks and Hispanics?

**SQ2:** What are the effects of high-profile and widely publicized incidents of the use of force on everyday police life including their perceptions of the consequences these incidents have on them, their peers in the police force, and the broader community?
SQ3: How do these police instructors describe the deficiencies they have observed and changes they have made – or are considering making – to training and community relations, in light of these incidents?

The purpose of this chapter is to present the data obtained from the participants. Accordingly, this chapter is broken into four sections. The first section is a brief summary of the data that were collected and the steps utilized to analyze it. The second section is the participant profiles, which provide insight into the participants. The third section is the findings of the study, presented through the main themes and subthemes that emerged from the data. The final section is the chapter summary.

Data Collection and Analysis

This study used standard IPA data collection and analysis. The seven participants who met the study’s criteria were interviewed voluntarily, with the interviews being audio recorded for later transcription and analysis. The interviews were conducted in private or semiprivate locations, averaged approximately 54 minutes each, and were professionally transcribed using Temi.com. The researcher listened to each transcript and made corrections to the text when needed. The transcripts were sent to the participants for member checking. Each transcript was initially coded, with the researcher employing bracketing as much as possible. After all transcripts were initially coded, the researcher created a master coding table listing all areas of data obtained from the participants. The researcher analyzed this table and identified data points that referred to different codes. These codes were then grouped together based on similar meanings in the data. The researcher then examined those similar meaning codes to assure the data aligned with the meaning the participant was conveying. Data were moved to other coded
areas, as needed, to align with the participants’ meanings. Lastly, the researcher analyzed the document and identified the overarching themes.

**Participant Profiles**

The participants for this study were certified police officers in New Jersey who were also trained and certified police instructors, specifically firearms instructors. The participant criteria for the study included a minimum of 5 years police experience with a minimum of 2 years as an instructor. The average participant was 42.7 years old and had 17 years police experience and 9.5 years as an instructor. Four of the participants identified as Black, three of the participants identified as Hispanic, and all participants identified as male. See Table 4, organized by participants’ level of experience, for an overview of the participants’ ages, race or ethnicity, years of service, rank, and area of instruction.

**Table 4**

*Participant Overview and Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Years of Service</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Instruction</th>
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<td>P.O.</td>
<td>Firearms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trevor Alexander</td>
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<td>Black</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Sgt</td>
<td>Firearms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Real</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>P.O.</td>
<td>Firearms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juan Smith</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Firearms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Starbucks Mandingo</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>P.O.</td>
<td>Firearms</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**John Wick**

John Wick was a 47 year old Black man who was born and raised in the Northeast. He started his career as a Class II police officer with a police department in central New Jersey, where he worked for 5 years. He then worked for a transit police department for 11 months
before becoming a patrol officer at a different municipal department in central New Jersey than where he started. He served that agency as a patrol officer, detective, sergeant, and lieutenant. He was the division commander of Investigative Services, the community policing liaison, bias incident liaison, and a firearms instructor for 12 years. At the time of the interview he was a Class III police officer with another department in central New Jersey, assigned to the school district.

**Trevor Alexander**

Trevor Alexander was a 42 year old Black man who was born and raised in the Northeast. He attended Morgan State College in Baltimore, where he obtained a degree in physical education. He had been a police officer for 18 years with the same mid-size police department in central New Jersey. At the time of the interview, he was a patrol sergeant who also had additional responsibilities as the traffic sergeant. He had served his agency as a patrol officer and traffic officer. He was a field training officer (FTO) and ran the department’s FTO program. He had been a firearms instructor for 12 years.

**B. Real**

B. Real was a 45 year old Black man who was born and raised in the Northeast. Growing up, he lived in both urban and suburban areas of his state. After being a corrections officer for approximately 6 months, he attended police academy and began working as a patrol officer. At the time of the interview, he had been a police officer for 17 years at the same large police department in central New Jersey. He had been a firearms instructor for over 7 years. He was an evidence technician, was assigned to his agency’s anticrime unit, and was on the SWAT team.

**Juan Smith**
Juan Smith was a 42 year old Hispanic man of Puerto Rican and Cuban descent. At the time of the interview, he had been a police officer for 15 years at a small police department in central New Jersey. He was a patrol sergeant but had served the agency as a patrol officer and detective. In his role as an FTO, he assisted in redeveloping the agency’s hiring process. He had been doing internal affairs for his agency for 8 years and had been a firearms instructor for 6 years.

John Smith

John Smith was a 39 year old Hispanic man who was born and raised in the Northeast. His father immigrated to the United States in the 1950s from the Dominican Republic. His mother was Puerto Rican but was born in the continental United States. He graduated from Rutgers University before attending the police academy. At the time of the interview, he had been a police officer with the same mid-size police department in central New Jersey for 16 years, serving as an instructor for his agency for the last 12 years. He was an FTO, firearms instructor, and CPR instructor. He had been an instructor for 12 years. He also created a company where he taught firearms training to citizens.

Awesome-O

Awesome-O was a 42 year old Hispanic man. His mother was Mexican and his father was Russian/German. His father was Jewish and his mother was Christian. Officer Awesome-O began his career in law enforcement by working as a New Jersey state corrections officer for 5 years. He then obtained a job from a large department in central New Jersey and attended the police academy. He served his department as a patrol officer before being transferred to the anticrime unit. He had been a firearms instructor for over 3 years and was being trained for a position on the SWAT team.
Starbucks Mandingo

Starbucks Mandingo was a 42 year old Black man who was born and raised in the Northeast. He began his involvement in emergency services by volunteering on the first aid squad as an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) in high school. He became a certified paramedic and had worked in that capacity for 20 years, 17 of which were in an urban environment in northern New Jersey. He was also a certified police officer with 13 years’ experience. He began his career at a mid-size police department in central New Jersey. He left that agency for a short time and served as a police officer in a large urban police department in southern New Jersey before returning to his original agency in central New Jersey. He had been a certified police instructor for his agency for the past 8 years. He was an FTO, firearms instructor, CPR instructor, Emergency Medical Services (EMS) instructor, and emergency first aid instructor and was involved with his county’s Crisis Intervention Team. He also created a company where he taught firearms training to citizens.

Findings

This section presents the four main themes. These themes were developed after analyzing the data from each participant individually before analyzing the data in a broader context. These themes were related to the participants’ perceptions and beliefs. The first theme is Beliefs about pop culture, which refers to the participants’ perceptions regarding the influence television, media, and movies have on the public. The second theme is Misleading media, which refers to the participants’ views of traditional media and social media related to the use of force by police. The third theme is Pressure in current policing climate, which refers to the participants’ views of the effects of high-profile use of force incidents. The fourth and final theme is Communication. See Table 5 for an overview of the themes.
Beliefs about Pop Culture

The participants continually referenced their beliefs about how the public views the use of force by police. They often referred to the media or Hollywood as influencing the public’s understandings and expectations. The participants felt that the public’s expectations of police actions were unrealistic, unfair, and excessive. In the theme of Beliefs about pop culture, the participants portray an unrealistic reality. The participants believed that the public has unrealistic expectations of police officers and that some police responses might seem unfair or excessive. This section presents participant quotes supporting both of these areas.
Unrealistic expectations. Many of the participants referenced various forms of pop culture as reasons for public unrealistic expectations. Starbucks showed how watching television can lead the public to thinking police officers can perform certain skills or tactics: “TV’s led us to believe that the police officer can drive by [in] his car, stick his gun out of the window, shoot the gun out of somebody’s hand and the situation is quelled.” John Smith confirmed the belief that people form their opinions of police action and violence from television:

Everyone’s understanding of guns, of weaponry, of fighting, of good versus evil, or justice comes from television and Hollywood, you know. People have this perception that hands up is a position of surrender. It’s not! Hands up can be a fighting stance.

Overall, the participants felt the public had impossible expectations of police force.

Talking about the belief that people had unrealistic expectations of police action, John Smith took an extreme approach: “We would need to be superheroes to be able to perform the way the public would expect us to perform, based upon, you know, television.” Trevor affirmed the extreme belief of the public’s expectation of police by sharing ideas about magic and superheroes:

I just think the community is, they believe that we have a magic wand and we should be able to take somebody into custody without having to punch them, kick them, do whatever we gotta do… I think the community over a bunch of their thinking that we can just subdue people just because we’re the police, they think we’re some special superhero.

These beliefs about pop culture’s representation of policing and the difficulty these representations pose was mentioned by B. Real, who felt “trying to live up to the media’s perception of what police officers are versus the reality can be tough.”
These unrealistic expectations were not limited to the physical aspects of policing. The participants also felt that popular culture influences people’s understandings of the criminal justice system. Starbucks discussed a belief that a fictional television show can influence the public’s expectations for police action and the criminal justice system at a crime scene:

So the CSI effect… [The ability to] swab the DNA from the back of a chair and you stick it in your phone and 4 minutes later they have a suspect description and the fingerprint pop out in the driver’s license. Photo pops up and that doesn’t happen. But if all people are exposed to is TV and CSI and the show, then they have nothing else to compare it to anything because that’s [their] reality.

Juan expanded on the belief that the public’s understanding of the police action is influenced by pop culture:

[The public] formed them [their ideas and understandings] by movies, you know, I would call them armchair lawyers. They sit in their recliners and they judge us because they watched a movie or TV or they watch several movies on TV.

**Unfair or excessive actions.** Because of pop culture and the various portrayals of policing, the participants felt that the public has incorrect understandings about the abilities of police officers as well as about how force and violence work. These incorrect understandings then lead the public to view legitimate police actions as unfair or excessive. John Smith elaborated on his beliefs that the public form their opinions of justice and violence from pop culture. He discussed an incident when he needed to utilize mechanical force, specifically a pain compliance hold with handcuffs, to gain compliance from an arrested person: “I suppose with the public… it’s a dirty move, you know, it’s not necessarily, you know, you don’t, you wouldn’t expect John Wayne to do that.” Trevor believed these incorrect beliefs from the public made
them view common police tactics as excessive, such as having multiple police officers at a single incident: “The public thinks you only need one cop to be able to handle one person.” Juan elaborated on the risks of a single officer handling an incident alone:

If I were to get knocked out, you know, potentially I have, they have guns, they have my gun, they had my police car, they have more ammo that, you know, they knocked me down, they take my gun, they can kill me. Just because you know, uh, suspect per se or a person doesn’t have a weapon, doesn’t mean he can’t overpower you.

**Misleading Media**

The participants held strong opinions about the information people were receiving from media sources. The participants felt the information, especially as related to the use of force by police, was incorrect and flawed. The participants continually referenced a belief that traditional media failed to adequately inform people regarding incidents where police force was involved. In the theme of **Misleading media**, the participants’ beliefs fell into three areas: traditional media’s spin or lack of context, traditional media’s focus on race, and the influence of social media. This section presents participant quotes supporting these areas.

**Spin or lack of context.** The participants felt that the information provided to the public by traditional news outlets was inherently flawed and inaccurate regarding the use of force by police. John Smith did not believe the public received neutral information: “I feel like very few of these media outlets present [a] factual basis that allows the viewer to actually come to a determination on their own.” Instead, the participants felt that media outlets did not understand law enforcement and police training. Juan discussed the media’s failure to understand police training: “A lot of the media that I see don’t have any training in what we do… I think the media in general doesn’t really know what we go through.” John Smith discussed the media’s failure to
understand the context involved in the use of force by police: “They don’t know the parameters of correctly applied use of force.” John Wick discussed his perceptions of the media’s reporting on high-profile incidents:

I don’t think they ever touch on the actual training, the use of force continuum, what the threat threshold is. You know. Our obligation to not retreat. You know, they just talk about, was he armed? Unarmed? Race? And that’s pretty much it.

Juan elaborated on the belief that the media do not understand police training and instead have an interest in profit: “The media portrays what they want, what’s going to sell. They’re not getting trained by police departments. They’re not going into training.” John Wick connected this belief with its application to digital media: “[The] media is looking at this stuff [high-profile use of force incidents] like this is the way to get click bait or boost ratings.” Trevor noted the lack of context in the media’s reporting, explaining that the media did “not look at the whole totality of the circumstances. They just look at, no weapon, Black guy, White cop, that’s it.”

Starbucks discussed his belief that the media’s misunderstanding of force has led to a belief that police officers had to wait until someone directly pointed a firearm at them before using force: “The media narrative that the officer has to wait until someone actually points a gun at them before employing deadly force is a misunderstanding of the law.” B. Real believed that the media’s misunderstandings portray police officers as having a desire to use deadly force:

But it seems that as soon as you pull out a gun and they show it on, you know, on the news channels, it seems like the cops want to use deadly force. And I don't think that's actually the case.

John Wick discussed the media’s reporting on high-profile use of force incidents: “I believe there is a false narrative, um, they [high-profile use of force incidents] are not as frequent
as the media would make you think.” The participants felt this false narrative portrayed by the media had a negative impact on the relationship between the police and the public. Starbucks discussed his perceptions of the media’s coverage of high-profile incidents and noted the negative impact on the relationship between police and the public: “I never see the cops, so they must be everything the media say they are.” Awesome-O expanded upon the media’s misleading influence on the relationship between the police and the public:

I think most of the information that’s given out is just, it’s misleading and it drives that wedge deeper between the police and the public…. I believe that the media spins it how they want you to see it. And for the most part, they spin it that the defendant is the victim and the police are the aggressors… When the video is actually released by the [police] department, the story falls off the wayside… That bad mark is just left there… There’s no, you know, the police were right on this one, or kudos to the police for doing their job.

John Wick believed that many officers feel that the media have a bias against law enforcement, noting: “I think some people would say the media is, not necessarily fabricating these things, but they’re pushing a false narrative.”

The false narrative perceived by the participants was related to the view of police using excessive force. John Wick discussed the media’s coverage of high-profile use of force incidents, noting: “The false narrative sometimes makes it appear like this is a reoccurring situation. I don’t think it is as much as the media would make you think it is.” Starbucks discussed the media’s coverage of high-profile incidents and how context can be lost by the misleading coverage:
And then we hear about it [high-profile incident] on TV for 6 weeks, and they slow it down frame by frame. And the incident that took 0.75 seconds, they just talked about it for over 20 minutes and tell you what [the police] could have done differently.

John Wick discussed the media’s narrative and the focus on police actions while omitting the suspect’s role:

The media doesn't really talk about the resistance part. This guy was actually resisting with the police, you know, and this is where the of use a force continuum comes in and it leads to this. Alright? So there’s a hole, the steps that this reporting process is missing.

Instead of reporting the news in an unbiased, factual, educated manner, Awesome-O felt:

I think for the most part the media puts a spin on it because it makes it a hot topic, especially when there's a high-profile case and it's a police involved shooting and it’s somebody that’s either Black or Hispanic or that you see other than White becomes a high-profile thing. They spin it to get more coverage.

Starbucks believed the media coverage of high-profile incidents leads the public to believe the police use excessive force on minorities frequently: “After a big incident there is media hype and they [the media] would lead you to believe that White police officers kill Black people all the time.”

Focus on race. The participants overwhelmingly felt that the media’s focus on police action and high-profile incidents was heavily centered on race. When discussing high-profile incidents, John Smith noted that nationally police use force daily but the media only focus on stories with a racial aspect: “I don't think the media would have picked it up because at that point it wouldn't have been sensational.” Trevor noted the disparity in media coverage: “[If] a Black
[officer] shoots a White guy, you really don’t hear too much… I don’t think I’ve ever seen [it] in the media.” Starbucks provided two examples of the media focusing on race. In his first example he recalled a Black police chief addressing the media regarding a high-profile incident:

Actually there were five police-involved shootings across the country that day. And we never heard of the other three. The other two were White suspects, shot by White officers; two of them controversial, but they don't get the same narrative.

In his second example, Starbucks recalled the local news reporting on an off-duty Philadelphia police officer who shot and killed his neighbor over a dispute. Starbucks used the example to show how little attention the media pay to a situation that would get widespread coverage if the victim was a person of color:

It was a big story on Action News the first night, a 30-second blurb the next day, and a year later you heard about it again when he was convicted… but just based on the media coverage, I think if it had been the same White officer, shot a Black kid, there would be [an] out-roar and public outcry… but where is the media coverage? Literally it was like 60 seconds one night, 30 seconds the next day, never heard about it again.

Juan noted that the media’s focus when reporting on high-profile incidents is race: “The first thing they say is a Black male got shot by a White cop.” John Wick believed the media exhibited a racial focus on reporting: “I think they [media] sensationalize the color.” Trevor felt that the media were focused on racial aspects of high-profile incidents because “That’s what sells. A White cop shooting a Black man, or somebody of color, especially if the media finds out the person [didn’t] have a gun on them… I think that’s what sells papers.”
Starbucks held a similar belief that the media’s focus and manipulation of high-profile incidents regarding race was profit based: “I think that race relations absolutely plays a part in it because the story is not sexy if there’s no, there’s no media spin.”

**Influence of social media.** The participants revealed the influence of social media on forming the public’s beliefs about police actions. B. Real did not believe the public independently examined incidents but instead noted that: “A lot of people go off the social media, and the media in general, no matter what.” The participants believed social media were just as uninformed and misleading as traditional media.

Awesome-O felt the information available on social media was negative toward police and often portrayed the police as the aggressor and the defendant as a victim: “Most of the stuff on social media is just the first version and is always negative towards the police. It’s always showing the police as an aggressor and the defendant as a victim of police action.” Juan discussed a belief that social media posts related to high-profile incidents were misleading and wide reaching. When discussing the misleading aspect, he explained:

> You can take a 10-minute scene, something blows up in the last 2 minutes, somebody takes out their phone or camera and they post it. But when they post it, they only post 32 seconds of, you know, the person being arrested. They don't get the part of the officer being punched in the face or spit on or the verbal commands not being met.

In regard to the wide reach of social media, Juan noted the ability for a social media post to quickly generate unstoppable attention without any independent information or fact-finding: “It’s like a bowling ball going downhill. You post one thing, it could be out to a million people in 7 minutes, but yet when it's fixed…it’s already too late.”
The participants felt that this misleading information was related to the public’s actions with the police. Awesome-O believed that information spread through social media influenced the public’s interactions during traffic stops: “Because of the actions they see on social media or in the news, they feel like hey, we don’t have to get out of the car for our safety.” Juan noted the speed at which social media dispense information related to the use of force by police: “You get live streams and videos of everything, before you had to wait for the news, now it is instant.”

**Pressure in Current Policing Climate**

The participants believed that the high-profile incidents had consequences for themselves, the public, and their fellow officers. The participants continually referenced various aspects of their lives and careers that had been influenced by recent high-profile use of force incidents. The participants attributed these concerns to areas of citizen resistance, officer hesitation or reluctance, and the racial component of being an officer of color. This section presents participant quotes supporting these areas.

**Citizen resistance.** The participants perceived different interactions with the public following recent high-profile use of force incidents. Specifically, the participants noted a general sense that the public did not respect them and resisted police authority. Juan noted that the public has been distant with the police: “Now it makes everybody a little standoffish.” John Wick noted a significant amount of mistrust of police officers on behalf of the public: “Mistrust. Huge. A huge amount of mistrust.”

The participants felt that this distance and mistrust influenced tense interactions between the police and the public. John Smith felt these incidents negatively influenced the public to resist police officers: “[High-profile incidents have] definitely emboldened the public to not cooperate with the police.” John Wick felt that police officers were facing increased hostility
and resistance: “We’re dealing with more hostility, more questioning. People are generally mad even when they may have been wrong with their, you know, with their conduct, the way they were driving.”

B. Real believed that at times the public was trying to initiate conflict with the police: “They instigate you to try to get you to do something. And then I definitely noticed a lot more people recording you.” Juan noted an increase in people using their cell phones to record interactions with the police they feel are harassing: “They quickly pull out their phone and they start recording and they’re saying they’re being harassed and didn’t do anything.” Trevor perceived changes in the way the public interacts with police: “The public is definitely a lot cockier, especially with filming police.” John Smith felt these interactions were dangerous for the police and the public: “It just makes things more dangerous for us and the people we come into contact with that are behaving in this emboldened fashion.”

In addition to filming police interactions as a way of resisting police control, the participants noted threats of lawsuits. Awesome-O felt that the public would record interactions and threaten officers: “They’ll come out and start to video the police… saying I’m gonna have your job. I’m gonna have your badge.” B. Real felt that people have tried to goad officers into actions that would result in a lawsuit: “I guess maybe they want to get a lawsuit, to get paid, they try to bait you into doing things.” Trevor felt that the public has utilized these tactics to intimidate him: “They’re taping me. I don’t want to get sued… There is a ton of street lawyers out there and everybody’s trying to scare you.” John Smith felt that people were very aware of the high-profile incidents and believed they can profit: “Every person now believes that they are the next Michael Brown and they have the next case and lawsuit.” Juan felt that the fear of being
sued was present even if the officer acted appropriately: “[Officers] are afraid to do their job properly because they can still lose their career and be sued civilly.”

**Hesitation or reluctance.** The participants noted that their officers were very aware of the attention resulting from high-profile incidents. Trevor felt that the current climate placed officers under intense scrutiny: “In today’s day and age, everything that you do in law enforcement is under a microscope. People are constantly trying to dig stuff up and discredit you.” The participants felt that this scrutiny had negative influences on the actions of their officers, especially when the use of force was involved.

Starbucks explained that officers in his agency did not want to use their Tasers because of the negative imagery, despite their success and safety for all involved: “Officers are still scared to use it [Taser]… They are scared of the scrutiny.” Starbucks continued by explaining that when officers don’t use the correct training and equipment, they tend to get injured: “[Officers not using Tasers] and those two times, she [the officer] got hurt and was out of work for 6 weeks and the other time the officer was out for an extended period of time.”

Awesome-O also felt that some of his officers were reluctant to use their weapons: “I know some people would talk about thinking twice before drawing their weapon against a combatant.” Trevor discussed the hesitation of officers and the dangerous aspect of them being fearful of a high-profile incident:

And when you come into a situation where you think you may see something and you hesitate because you’re scared, because you’re worrying about what is going to happen, that you’re going to get prosecuted or you gonna lose your house, you lose your family, you’re going to go to jail. That second of being scared or indecisive, it could take your
life. And I think that's a huge thing… We’re seeing more, I think, you know, uptake of more police officers getting shot or getting hurt because they're not being as aggressive Awesome-O also discussed observing his officers hesitate to use force: “I know some people, you can see it on them, they’re a little hesitant to get physical.”

Starbucks noted the danger posed to officers if they hesitate: “Hesitation again in an incident that could be over in a second; [a] hesitation of a quarter of a second could be too long.” Juan believed that his officers were fearful of losing their jobs due to scrutiny associated with being involved in a high-profile incident and were reluctant to use force when appropriate: “They have more fear of being videotaped and it going viral and losing your job, doing the right thing.” Trevor also discussed his officers not performing as trained due to fear: “They’re thinking about all the consequences instead of just relying on their training.”

**Racial component.** The participants also noted that the high-profile incidents have influenced the public to view police officers, including themselves, as racist. The participants, being officers of color, have interactions with the public that their White counterparts are unable to have. The participants noted that their race did not always matter and that their colleagues were often referred to as racists. John Smith noted the influence of recent high-profile incidents: “They’ll call us racists more quickly than they ever used to in the past… frequently call my coworkers racist.” The participants noted the views that police are racist included themselves, despite their ethnic status.

Juan noted the public’s view of the police was not favorable and he faced additional scrutiny due to his race:

It's not cool to be a cop because now you’re a killer. Now you’re a racist. You know, even if you are a person, a minority, you know, I’ve been told I’m, you know, Spanish,
but I’m not Spanish like everybody else that I’m not Spanish, I’m Blue, that I’m an Uncle Tom.

Trevor had similar experiences with the public referring to his officers as racists: “You guys don’t like minorities. And I even get that, I get called Uncle Tom all the time.” John Smith also noted similar concerns that the public views his officers as racist and himself as a traitor to his race: “They call me racist too sometimes. Maybe racist is a bad term. Maybe traitor is a better one.” B. Real noted the impact of his race on policing and felt the Black community did not trust police: “Most people in the community, don’t see you as being on their side.” In fact, B. Real explained that there were times when Black residents preferred to deal with his White colleague: “Some Black people don’t want to talk to you, they would rather talk to my White partner.” He felt, “It’s tough being a person of color and a police officer, trying to navigate both sides.”

Communication

The participants believed that communication between the police and the public was beneficial. The participants said the emphasis on high-profile use of force incidents has resulted in them communicating with the public more often and their agencies employing more community policing. The participants felt that respectful communication between the police and the public would be helpful. They noted that when police officers fail to communicate with the public, misperceptions can become people’s reality. This section presents participant quotes supporting these areas.

In discussing the lack of communication, Starbucks explained: “Sometimes you have to explain to people what you do because if you don’t, you leave people to write their own narratives.” John Smith echoed this belief, explaining that when talking with the public: “If you don’t have the truth to say to them, their accusation becomes true.” The lack of communication
extended beyond individual officers and included organizations. Juan noted the reluctance of police organizations to communicate with the public, stating: “You know, police departments don’t want to let people in because they’re afraid of the liability.” Starbucks noted how police departments tend to be unapologetic and hold onto a little bit of truth instead of admitting fault, which he felt was beneficial. He discussed recently hearing the commissioner of the NYPD apologize for departmental actions over 50 years ago, explaining: “You know what, as a whole, we as a department, we as a law enforcement culture, have done some things wrong and we’re going to try to do better.”

The participants believed that the recent emphasis on the use of force by police has resulted in them increasing their communication with the public. John Smith stated: “I kind of narrate what’s happening as it’s happening and the person relaxes a little bit.” Starbucks echoed this idea of increased communication: “I take the time or, I try to take the time to explain more often.” B. Real felt that the highly publicized use of force in Ferguson led to officers communicating more: “[Pre-Ferguson] I think officer-wise, we just go into our jobs, we wouldn’t try to explain anything… But now you try to explain a little bit so the public has a better understanding.”

The participants believed that increased, respectful communication between the police and the public would help improve the relationship. Trevor focused on respectful talk in this way: “My biggest thing is just to talk to them, like a human being. That’s what it all comes down to, just treat somebody how you would want to be treated.” Awesome-O referred to respect when training others: “I tell everybody, especially the new guys, just treat people how you want to be respected.” Juan felt that officers should: “Be open-minded. Find out their [the public’s] side, figure out where they come from, their thought processes, and articulate yours.”
The participants noted that community policing promoted increased dialogue between the police and the public. Starbucks referred to his department’s community policing initiatives as a way of “building credits” with the public. B. Real felt that his agency had increased community policing initiatives, especially around the holidays, but also accomplished this in normal patrol functions by “getting out into the neighborhood and building a rapport with the neighborhoods.” Trevor spoke about the results of community policing: “The community is getting better because we’re doing a lot more, reaching out to the community and we’re doing a lot of stuff like that.”

While the participants believed that increased communication improved the relationship between the police and the public, they noted that it would not always work. For example, Starbucks discussed a use of force incident where he used his extensive training on de-escalation and dealing with a mental health crisis but ultimately had to use his Taser to take the person into custody because: “Sometimes words fail… There was nothing we could say.” B. Real felt: “Hopefully, if you talk to somebody and try to explain what’s going on, hopefully bad things will not happen. But it’s not a definite.”

Summary of Themes

In the Beliefs about Pop Culture subsection, the participants described their beliefs that the public has unrealistic expectations of police abilities, especially in use of force situations. The participants felt these unrealistic expectations were formed from watching television. The participants attributed their beliefs that the public viewed legitimate use of force as excessive to unrealistic expectations formed by pop culture. Accordingly, the participants described the role of communication in relation to policing and high-profile use of force incidents. The participants noted their increased communication in light of recent high-profile use of force incidents.
Lastly, the participants believed that increased respectful communication and community policing strategies would help improve the relationship between the police and the public.

In the Misleading Media subsection, the participants described a belief that information the public was receiving from media sources related to high-profile use of force incidents was flawed and incorrect. The participants believed that traditional media outlets did not provide proper context and would spin an incident to provide an appearance that police officers’ actions were improper and that the suspect was the victim. The participants felt the media’s reporting led the public to believe that high-profile use of force incidents between the police and the public occurred more frequently than they actually did. The participants thought that the media have too much focus on the race of the suspect and officer and only focused attention on incidents in which a White officer used force against a person of color. Lastly, the participants noted that social media were used to quickly spread information that did not provide context or information and influenced the public negatively.

In the Pressure in Current Policing Climate subsection, the participants discussed their beliefs regarding the consequences that high-profile use of force incidents had on them, the public, and their fellow officers. The participants noted an increase in the public resisting the police and recording police-public interactions. The participants felt that this resistance and focus on high-profile uses of force resulted in police officers being reluctant and hesitant to use force when needed. Lastly, the participants discussed the role of race in police-citizen interactions related to their White colleagues and they themselves being considered racist by the public.

**Chapter Summary**
The research findings presented in this chapter were based on the participants’ perceptions of high-profile use of force incidents involving the police and persons of color. The participant’s perceptions were observable in four main areas: *Beliefs about pop culture*, *Misleading media*, *Pressure in current policing climate*, and *Communication*. Beliefs about pop culture included their perceptions that the public had unrealistic expectations of police actions. Additionally, they felt the public views legitimate police action as unfair or excessive. The participants felt the media have misled the public by providing information with a spin or lack of context. The participants believed the media were focused on race and that social media influenced the public’s understandings. The participants discussed the pressure associated with the current climate of policing. This included their beliefs that citizens have begun to resist police more, officers hesitate and are reluctant to use force, and difficulties associated with their racial identities. Lastly, the participants discussed the role of communication in policing. This included the lack of communication, the benefits of communication, and programs such as community policing that improve communication. The next and final chapter will present conclusions based on the research findings and offer recommendations for further research.
Chapter 5: Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

Over two decades of research (Correll et al., 2007; Donovan & Klahm, 2015; Fyfe, 1988; Jefferis et al., 1997; Johnson & Kuhns, 2009; Klinger & Brunson, 2009; Perkins & Bourgeois, 2006; Sadler et al., 2013; Sharps & Hess, 2008; Weitzer, 2015) has documented problems between police and communities of color, such as incidents of abuse of authority, distrust, and expectations regarding the use of deadly force. The current context of policing in the United States is heavily centered on racial issues. A quick internet search will bring up countless controversial videos highlighting differences between the race of the officer and individuals involved or present when the officer used force. Research into race and the use of force by police has led to conclusions that either persons of color are more likely to engage in criminal activity and therefore interact more frequently with the police (MacDonald, Kaminski, Alpert, & Tennenbaum, 2001) or that police hold a bias, view persons of color as threatening (Liska & Yu, 1992), and thus seek them out on a more regular basis (James et al., 2014). Other researchers (Halim & Stiles, 2001; Johnson & Kuhns, 2009; S. Wilson & Buckler, 2010) contend that Americans who are persons of color are less likely than White Americans to support the use of force by police.

Research into the use of force by police has found racial variations in causes of and support for the use of force by police. Research into the results of the use of force by police has produced conflicting findings. Holmes (2000) examined data from the FBI’s Uniform Crime Report, from 1985 through 1990, and the 1990 United States Census and found that minorities, Americans, are disproportionately victimized during police encounters. Lott (2016) examined data on 2,699 fatal police shootings between 2013 through 2015 and found that White police officers were not significantly more likely than officers of color to use deadly force against a
Black suspect. Fryer (2016) examined the use of force by police related to persons of color and found that Blacks were 23.8% and Hispanics were 8.5% less likely than Whites to be shot at by the police (Fryer, 2016, p. 1214). Nix et al. (2017) examined data from 990 fatal police shootings and found that Blacks were more than twice as likely as Whites to have been unarmed when shot by police. However, they noted that most civilians killed during the period they were analyzing were armed with a deadly weapon or actively attacking police; less than 10% of those shot by police were unarmed (Nix et al., 2017). Missing from these research studies is the perspectives of officers of color about these situations.

The purpose of this IPA study was to explore how seven police instructors of color experience the impact of high-profile and widely publicized incidents of the use of force on persons of color. The central research question guiding the study was:

What perceptions do police instructors of color have regarding high-profile and widely publicized incidents of the use of force by police against persons of color?

The subquestions were:

**SQ1:** How do police instructors who are persons of color describe the effects of high-profile and widely publicized incidents of force on Blacks and Hispanics?

**SQ2:** What are the effects of high-profile and widely publicized incidents of the use of force on everyday police life including their perceptions of the consequences these incidents have on them, their peers in the police force, and the broader community?

**SQ3:** How do these police instructors describe the deficiencies they have observed and changes they have made – or are considering making – to training and community relations, in light of these incidents?
This study followed the IPA protocols outlined by J. A. Smith et al. (2012). The seven participants were certified police officers in New Jersey, were persons of color, and were a firearms or use of force instructor for a minimum of 2 years. After consent was obtained, data was collected through individual, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews. The interviews were transcribed using the commercial service Temi.com. The transcripts were reviewed for accuracy and corrections were made as needed. The data was preliminarily coded for each participant. The codes were then grouped according to connections and common meanings, and emergent themes were identified. When moving on to the next participant, this researcher did his best to bracket the information gained from previous interview to avoid influencing the next interview data. After all interviews were coded, the researcher looked for themes across the participants.

The analysis of data revealed four main themes. The first theme is *Beliefs about pop culture*, which includes mentions of television, media, movies, or Hollywood and how the participants viewed the influence of pop culture on the public’s responses to them and other police officers. The subthemes in this category are *Unrealistic expectations* and *Unfair/excessive actions*. The subtheme *Unrealistic expectations* includes references from the participants that the public has unrealistic expectations about the use of force by police. The subtheme *Unfair/excessive actions* discusses the participants’ beliefs that the public views legitimate use of force as excessive because of pop culture portrayals.

The second theme is *Misleading media*, which includes mentions of media (traditional or social) and how the participants viewed the information being presented to the public. The subthemes in this category are *Spin or lack of context*, *Focus on race*, and *Influence of social media*. In the subtheme *Spin or lack of context*, the participants shared their perceptions that news media do not present objective information and instead present information about the use
of force by police with a bias against law enforcement. In the subtheme *Focus on race*, the participants believed that the media focus on the use of force by police only when it is used against persons of color. The final subtheme, *Influence of social media*, represents the participants’ beliefs about how social media influence the public’s opinions of the use of force by police and how social media quickly spread incomplete information.

The third theme, *Pressure in current policing climate*, includes the participants’ perceptions of the public’s actions, mentions of officers’ reactions to high-profile incidents, and racial burdens. The subthemes in this category are *Citizen resistance, Officer hesitation and reluctance*, and *Racial component*. The subtheme *Citizen resistance* relates to the participants’ beliefs that high-profile incidents cause the public to resist law enforcement. The subtheme *Officer hesitation and reluctance* represents the participants’ belief that police officers hesitate to use force in appropriate situations for fear of media scrutiny. The final theme, *Racial burdens*, reveals the participants’ understandings that the public views police officers, including officers of color, as racist.

The fourth and final theme identified in the data is *Communication*, which includes the participants’ ideas on ways to communicate with the public. These ideas include communicating with the public during high-profile incidents to counter misinformation. These police officers also mentioned community policing programs to address the lack of communication.

The following sections will briefly present the theoretical framework’s alignment with the study. Following the alignment of the theoretical framework, the researcher will present the conclusions of the central research question and each subquestion. Included in these conclusions are their relationship with the existing literature. Lastly, the implications for practice and future research will be discussed.
Alignment with Theoretical Framework

Researchers looking to explore a problem by learning from people involved with the research problem and trying to develop an understanding of a central phenomenon are best served by qualitative research methods (Creswell, 2012a). Qualitative paradigms, such as constructivism-interpretivism, can be viewed as an alternative to the received view of a positivist paradigm that seeks a single objective reality (Ponterotto, 2005). This study employed IPA as its methodological approach. IPA research aligned well with this study because it allowed the researcher to examine the shared lived experiences of the participants.

The study’s theoretical framework was attribution theory. Attribution theory provided analytical tools, given that it outlines a process through which individuals attribute explanations and create their perceptions of the causes of events and of the reactions of others (Kelley & Michela, 1980). It considers what information is gathered and how it connected to form a causal judgment (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Weiner (1979) proposed a three-step process of attribution. In the first step, a person perceives or observes a behavior. In the second step, the person must believe the behavior was intentional. In the last step, the person must determine whether the other was forced to perform the behavior (situational) or not (personal) (Weiner, 1979). Attribution theory aligned with this study because it gave the participants the ability to attribute the actions of others. For example, the participants noted an increase in the public filming their actions, which they attributed to resistance to high-profile use of force incidents.

Conclusions

This section presents each research question and its related conclusions. For the central research question, the participants felt that the public was being manipulated by the media and blindly following the representations of police in TV and media. Regarding the first
subquestion, the participants felt that pop culture and the media create gaps in the public’s perceptions of the use of force by police. The participants felt this gap led the public to distrust police, which caused them to resist police. Regarding the second subquestion, the participants felt that police officers are fearful of the attention associated with high-profile incidents. These fears cause officers to hesitate to use the appropriate level of force as trained, which is dangerous to them. Lastly, for the third subquestion, the participants felt their agency’s use of force training was acceptable, however, they felt that training related to communication would help improve the relationship between police officers and people of color. See Table 6 for a brief description of the conclusions.

Table 6

Conclusion Overview

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Conclusion</th>
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<tr>
<td>CRQ</td>
<td>- Believe the public is manipulated by media</td>
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<td>- Believe the public blindly follows TV and media representations</td>
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<td>SQ1</td>
<td>- Believe pop culture and media create gaps in public perceptions of the use of force</td>
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<td>- Believe the public does not trust the police</td>
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<td>- Believe this distrust leads to public resistance</td>
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<td>SQ2</td>
<td>- Believe police officers are fearful of attention associated with high-profile incident</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Believe police officers are fearful of using force when appropriate</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Believe hesitation is dangerous to officers</td>
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<tr>
<td>SQ3</td>
<td>- Believe use of force training was appropriate but increased communication is beneficial</td>
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Central Research Question

The central research question was: What perceptions do police instructors of color have regarding high-profile and widely publicized incidents of the use of force by police against
persons of color? The first conclusion is that participants believed the public is being manipulated by media representations of the police force and their interactions with people of color. From the participants’ perspective, use of force incidents with people of color do not happen on a regular basis. As a matter of fact, the participants mentioned that use of force incidents happened with White suspects, but these incidents did not receive the same media attention. John Wick pointed out how the media created a false narrative that high-profile use of force incidents involving people of color were frequent. Starbucks believed the media coverage of high-profile incidents led the public to believe that the police use excessive force on minorities frequently: “After a big incident there is media hype and they [the media] would lead you to believe that White police officers kill Black people all the time.” When discussing the media’s focus on race, John Smith mentioned that the media only focus on uses of force with a racial aspect because those incidents are “sensational.” Trevor felt the media did not cover incidents in which the suspect was White, noting “I don’t think I’ve ever seen [it] in the media.”

This conclusion that the use of force by police is blown out of proportion by the media is not surprising, given the IACP’s examination of 10,000 calls for service in 1999, which revealed that the police did not use force in 99.9639% of those interactions (IACP, 2001, p. ii), and Smith’s (2009) discoveries that police only used or threatened to use force in 1 or 2% of police contacts. Fryer (2016) examined the use of force by police after several high-profile use of force incidents and found that persons of color were less likely (Blacks 23.8% and Hispanics 8.5%) than Whites to be shot by police (p. 1214). In a direct reference to the media’s role in public perceptions, Turetsky and Riddle (2018) examined media coverage of the Michael Brown shooting in Ferguson and found that news organizations contribute to echo chambers through the hyperlinks they embed in online articles. Previously neglected, however, is the role of the media
on the police officers’ perceptions. For the police officers in this study, the media’s attention on use of force incidents involving persons of color also plays a role in the police’s perceptions of the public and their responses to the media’s focus. The qualitative focus of this study, identifying individual officers’ beliefs and perceptions, added something that was lacking from the previous quantitative studies.

The second conclusion about high-profile use of force incidents by police against persons of color was that the participants believed the public blindly follows pop culture (TV, movies, etc.) representations of police abilities. From the participants’ perspectives, the public develops unrealistic expectations about police use of force, which leads to their anger and disappointment when real police do not act like these fictional depictions. For example, Starbucks felt watching television can lead the public to thinking police officers can do exceptional feats: “TV’s led us to believe that the police officer can drive by [in] his car, stick his gun out of the window, shoot the gun out of somebody’s hand and the situation is quelled.” John Smith referred to these perceptions of exceptional feats as superhuman: “We would need to be superheroes to be able to perform the way the public would expect us to perform, based upon, you know, television.”

Trevor mentioned these perceptions were like magic:

I just think the community is, they believe that we have a magic wand and we should be able to take somebody into custody without having to punch them, kick them, do whatever we gotta do…. I think the community over a bunch of their thinking that we can just subdue people just because we’re the police, they think we’re some special superhero.”

B. Real felt that “trying to live up to the media’s perception of what police officers are versus the reality can be tough.”
The participants’ perceptions of the public’s unrealistic, superhuman-like expectations of the police were very explicit. The conclusion that the public blindly follows the unrealistic representations of police abilities in pop culture is not surprising, given J. Miller and Davis’ (2008) discovery that the public forms its opinions of police based on criteria that include television. Pautz and Warnement (2013) revealed that contemporary American cinema influenced moviegoers’ opinions of government and civil servants, such as police officers. Pautz (2016) examined Hollywood’s depiction of law enforcement in popular films and found police were portrayed as good or bad, possibly influencing citizen perceptions. The qualitative focus of this study, identifying the individual officers’ beliefs and perceptions, highlighted something that was missing from the previous quantitative studies. Specifically, the participants believed the public did not understand the logistics of using force, which led them to disapprove of practical, lawful, and legitimate police actions.

**Subquestion 1**

The first subquestion was: How do police instructors who are persons of color describe the effects of high-profile and widely publicized incidents of force on Blacks and Hispanics? The first conclusion is that participants believed that the representations of police in pop culture and the media influenced the public’s perceptions of police use of force actions on Black and Hispanic suspects. The participants perceived that the intense media coverage of police force while engaged with persons of color increased the gap between what police can do and what people expect the police to do. These officers believed this gap in expectations also created a larger divide between the police and the public. Awesome-O described this media-derived process as a deep wedge between the public and the police. Starbucks discussed how the
absence of police engagement and the negative image of police shape public perceptions: “I never see the cops, so they must be everything the media says they are.”

The participants’ perception that pop culture and the media influence what the public believes about police actions with Blacks and Hispanics was not surprising. Over 20 years ago, Jefferis et al. (1997), using a survey of Cincinnati-area residents, found that use of force incidents involving persons of color that were captured on video and reported by the media negatively affected the public’s attitude towards police. In another quantitative study, Weitzer (2002) tracked the public’s support for law enforcement over an extended period and discovered that when the use of force by police against persons of color is highly publicized in the media, public support for law enforcement decreases. The participants in this study aligned with these past findings related to the influence of the media. In a recent quantitative investigation, Donovan and Klahm (2015) examined popular television shows involving police officers and determined that fictional police television shows influenced viewers’ perceptions of police. However, they discovered that the viewers believed the police officers acted appropriately and only used the appropriate level of force when necessary. The difference between this study and Donovan and Klahm’s study is that they only examined fictional police television dramas and not news coverage, which was discussed by the participants in this study. This qualitative study aligned with the aforementioned research in that the participants believed the public formed expectations of police actions from pop culture television shows and movies.

The participants also reported a belief that the public does not trust the police. For example, Juan believed high-profile incidents involving Blacks and Hispanics led the public to become more “standoffish” towards police officers. John Wick explained that after the attention given to the use of force incident in Ferguson, police officers in his agency experienced a “huge
amount of mistrust from the public.” B. Real, Trevor, and Awesome-O elaborated on this distrust and mentioned how people are quick to use their cell phones to record police interactions. The conclusion that participants believe that high-profile use of force incidents involving Blacks and Hispanics negatively impact the way the public views the police is not surprising. Weitzer (2015) uncovered that incidents of this type that have gone viral on social media have led to increased levels of public discontent with the police. Nix and Pickett (2017), using a survey of police officers in a large police department in the southeastern United States, determined that officers believed media coverage of high-profile incidents involving Blacks and Hispanics has a large statistical effect on civilians and on crime rates. The participants in this study also aligned with Marier and Moule (2019), which examined the responses of 12,376 police officers participating in the National Police Research Platform and found that police officers perceived a high amount of antipathy from the public as a result of use of force incidents with Blacks and Hispanics.

Lastly, the participants reported a belief that high-profile use of force encourages the public to resist law enforcement. The participants described how the public’s mistrust of the police led the public to resist law enforcement. John Smith felt these high-profile incidents involving persons of color have “definitely emboldened the public to not cooperate with the police.” John Wick described the resistance as hostile and filled with questions. B. Real felt the public’s actions went beyond resistance to trying to incite the use of force: “They instigate you to try to get you to do something…to get a lawsuit, to get paid, they try to bait you into doing things.”

The conclusion that the participants believe that high-profile use of force incidents involving Blacks and Hispanics have influenced the public to resist police control is not
surprising, given the historical nature of civil disobedience in the United States. American policing has historically faced resistance from the public following high-profile use of force incidents, which have the potential to lead to full-scale riots (Dunham & Alpert, 2015; Walker & Katz, 2013). Tankebe (2013) conducted a quantitative study and found that citizens were more likely to cooperate with law enforcement when they viewed police actions as legitimate. MacDonald (2016) outlined modern issues facing law enforcement after high-profile incidents such as Ferguson and noted that citizens resist police authority. The participants in this study reported an increase in resistance from the public, such as using cell phones to film officers, following recent high-profile use of force incidents involving persons of color.

**Subquestion 2**

The second subquestion was: What are the effects of high-profile and widely publicized incidents of the use of force on everyday police life including their perceptions of the consequences these incidents have on them, their peers in the police force, and the broader community? The participants reported a belief that police officers are aware of the scrutiny associated with the use of force involving Blacks and Hispanic and are fearful of becoming involved in a high-profile incident given the amount of attention given to such incidents. For example, Trevor discussed the extreme attention paid to policing, noting: “Everything that you do in law enforcement is under a microscope.” Juan pointed out the officers were fearful of negative consequences even when acting appropriately. He reported that police officers “have more fear of being videotaped and it going viral and losing your job, than doing the right thing.” Starbucks noted he has seen officers he works with and trains not use their Taser because “they are scared of the scrutiny” associated with using the weapon. Awesome-O explained that he knows officers are fearful of the scrutiny associated with the use of force and has observed
officers hesitating: “I know some people, you can see it on them, they’re a little hesitant to get physical.”

The conclusion that the participants believe that police officers are fearful of becoming involved in a high-profile use of force incident is not surprising. James et al. (2016) used high-definition video scenarios in state-of-the-art deadly force judgment and decision-making simulators and found that officers took longer to shoot armed Black suspects than White suspects and were less likely to shoot unarmed Black suspects than unarmed White suspects. These results indicate that officers are aware of the racial elements of using deadly force. This aligns with the perceptions of the participants in this study, who discussed the prevalence of racial factors in the media’s decision whether to intensely report on a use of force incident and how police officers are keenly aware of these racial issues. Nix and Wolfe (2016) conducted a quantitative study of 510 sheriff’s deputies 6 months after the high-profile use of force incident in Ferguson and found officers were affected by the scrutiny of using force. They also found that police supervisors who used organizational justice as a managerial philosophy were more likely to shield their officers from the negative work-related outcomes that follow high-profile incidents. Fields et al. (2019) conducted a qualitative study to examine the influence the Ferguson effect may have on the culture and perceptions of police officers in local departments and found that negative media scrutiny has led to deteriorating relations between the public and the police. These results align with the views of the participants in this study, who believed police officers were fearful of using force against suspects of color due to the media attention associated with it.

The participants also felt that the officers they train are keenly aware of potential negative consequences associated with using the appropriate level of force as trained and therefore are
fearful and hesitate to use force against a suspect of color when appropriate. Trevor, for example, discussed the fear officers have of using lawful force when appropriate, explaining: “You hesitate because you’re scared, because you’re worrying about what is going to happen, that you’re going to get prosecuted or you gonna lose your house, you lose your family, you’re going to go to jail.” Juan explained: “[Officers] are afraid to do their job properly because they can still lose their career and be sued civilly.” B. Real was concerned about being sued when doing his job, explaining: “I guess maybe they want to get a lawsuit, to get paid.”

Lastly, the participants felt that officers hesitating to use the appropriate and necessary level of force was dangerous to other officers, the public, and themselves, as people can easily be injured or killed as a result. Awesome-O discussed his officers’ reluctance to use their firearms when appropriate, explaining: “I know some people would talk about thinking twice before drawing their weapon against a combatant.” The danger associated with hesitation to act quickly when making split-second decisions in life-or-death situations was discussed by Starbucks, who explained: “Hesitation, in an incident that could be over in a second; hesitation of a quarter of a second could be too long.” Trevor felt that officers being fearful of the negative consequences associated with using force against a suspect of color and hesitating was dangerous, but it occurs given the current climate regarding the use of force by police. He explained:

    That second of being scared or indecisive, it could take your life. And I think that's a huge thing... We’re seeing more, I think, you know, uptake of more police officers getting shot or getting hurt because they're not being as aggressive.

The conclusion that police officers are reluctant to use force on Blacks and Hispanics due to fear of the negative consequences associated with high-profile cases involving persons of color was understandable, but conclusions of this kind are lacking in the literature. Zacarese
(2016) discussed an attack on a Chicago police officer in which she did not shoot her attacker, fearing the media attention associated with shooting an unarmed Black attacker. He noted there was no empirical data to prove or disprove the effects of the media attention but reported the officer did not use deadly force because of her fear of media attention, despite being in grave danger and it being justified. The FBI (2017) analyzed issues facing law enforcement and line of duty deaths following several high-profile incidents. This study cited the incident Zacrese (2016) discussed as one of the effects of the chill wind facing law enforcement. Maguire et al. (2017) conducted a time-series analysis of officers killed in the line of duty from the Officer Down Memorial Page and found no evidence of a Ferguson effect on police officers murdered in the line of duty as of March 2016. However, the participants in this study reported a belief that officers were fearful of using force when appropriate, which they believed was dangerous. Given the reality that action beats reaction, these perceptions are logical and understandable.

Subquestion 3

The third subquestion was: How do these police instructors describe the deficiencies they have observed and changes they have made – or are considering making – to training and community relations, in light of these incidents? These police instructors felt that their agencies utilized current and proper training techniques regarding the use of force. The participants reported that their agencies trained beyond the minimum requirements outlined by the New Jersey Attorney General’s guidelines, such as munitions training using real people and less lethal ammunition (similar to paintball), which they believed was beneficial. However, the participants explained that high-profile uses of force involving persons of color had an impact on their daily interactions with the public. The participants reported increasing their communication when dealing with the public, especially Blacks and Hispanics, as a result of these incidents. The
participants felt that listening to people, respectfully communicating with them, and explaining what was occurring or would occur (when safe and practical) helped relax the person they were dealing with and increase their cooperation. Accordingly, the participants felt that training and programs related to increasing communication between the police and the public would improve the relationship between the police and the public. B. Real, for example, discussed this communicative change after Ferguson, explaining: “Now you try to explain a little bit so the public has a better understanding.” This sentiment was echoed by Starbucks, who “takes the time to explain more often” now, and by John Smith, who makes an effort to “narrate what’s happening as its happening” to calm the individual. Awesome-O discussed the importance of improved communication with the public, mentioning: “I tell everybody, especially the new guys, just treat people how you want to be respected.”

The conclusion that increased communication was beneficial for the relationship between the police and the public is not surprising. R. E. Adams et al. (2005) examined survey data from five agencies in North Carolina that utilized community-oriented policing and noted benefits of community policing, including the public being empowered by increased communication with police. Gill et al. (2014) conducted quantitative research into community policing and noted that community-oriented policing had positive effects on citizen satisfaction and police legitimacy. The participants in this study referenced the benefits of community policing as a way of increasing communication between the police and the public. Todak and James (2018) analyzed 131 police-citizen encounters in fall 2016 (after Ferguson) and found that police officers frequently used de-escalation techniques, such as communication, when dealing with the public. This directly aligns with this study’s participants, who reported police officers increasing their communication with the public after high-profile incidents such as Ferguson.
Implications for Future Practice

The overarching goal of this study was to better understand the perceptions that police instructors of color have regarding high-profile use of force incidents involving police officers and persons of color. It sought to uncover the unique perspectives of each of these participants within the context of law enforcement and racial relations and tensions. Although the literature on the use of force by police is vast, it is mostly comprised of quantitative studies that treat law enforcement agencies as one homogeneous group. Therefore, this study provides valuable insight into the distinctive perceptions of seven police officers of color who are also firearms instructors.

Because these officers focused on the need for increased police and community communication, it is critical that police departments prioritize and foster the ability of their officers to communicate with the public. The participants continually referred to communicating with the public. These references included discussions of individual communication between a police officer and a person, such as explaining the steps of the process to an arrested person, as well as larger conversations between the police department and the community. The participants reported a belief that the current racial climate related to policing and the use of force involving persons of color has negatively influenced the public’s trust in police officers. This distrust influences how officers might perceive the public’s actions, which at a minimum makes their job tenuous, and at a maximum can make their job deadly.

Accordingly, properly implemented community policing initiatives are important to minimize the communication gap between the police and the public, especially communities of color. Properly implemented community policing strategies can increase communication between police officers and the public. A benefit of this increased communication is that the
public can gain an understanding of police officers and their jobs and also be able to voice concerns to their local law enforcement officers.

It is also important that police organizations be aware that their police officers are affected by high-profile use of force incidents involving persons of color, even though the officers were not involved and the incident may have taken place hundreds of miles away in another jurisdiction. The participants felt that police officers are keenly aware of the potential media scrutiny when officers need to use force against a suspect of color to accomplish a legitimate law enforcement directive. They noted that the suspect’s actions are largely ignored and the focus is instead placed on the officers’ actions. They believed this caused police officers to detach from community engagement, become reactive instead of proactive, and hesitate to use the appropriate level of force against a suspect of color when necessary. Failing to use the appropriate level of force was viewed as dangerous for the officers and as a challenge for police instructors.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Research into various aspects of policing has been widely conducted and has provided enormous amounts of data and insight. Within the area of the use of force by police, most studies have been quantitative and focused on large scale studies or statistical analysis of data. While these studies have provided great insight into the use of force by police, it is important to recognize that policing is an evolving and dynamic occupation. Long-standing law enforcement tactics and practices can quickly and forever change after a single incident, such as the Columbine High School shooting. The occupation needs to continually adapt to new challenges.

An issue that did not exist too many years ago but is now a part of the culture is the use of cell phones. The participants discussed cell phones being used to record their actions as a way
for the public to document and challenge their actions. While the officers did not report specific concerns with being filmed, noting their in-car cameras or body cameras would already be recording, they did discuss concerns related to social media. The participants discussed a relatively new phenomenon of the public recording police actions and posting those videos on social media. These videos can go viral and possibly spread a great deal of misinformation. The participants felt that once that message was out, it became embedded in the public’s beliefs, leading to increased scrutiny and officers hesitating to use force.

Missing from the research are studies examining these beliefs. Some research has been conducted into crime rates and officers being killed following high-profile incidents, but missing from that research are studies related to officers’ actions and perceptions. The participants reported a belief that police officers hesitate to use force because of the attention they would receive; however, there is little research to corroborate this belief. Accordingly, additional research into the possibility of police officers hesitating to act and the influence of this on their decision making would be beneficial.

Additionally, future research related to the perceptions of the participants versus their White counterparts would be beneficial. The majority of police officers in the United States are White and research into their views compared to officers of color would be beneficial. Lastly, this study was very limited in size and future research using surveys on a larger population of police officers would provide additional insight.
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March 2019

Dear ,

My name is Ryan Ballard and I am currently a doctoral student in the Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) program at Northeastern University conducting research. The title of my study is: Shades of Blue: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of the Perceptions of Non-White Police Instructors regarding highly publicized uses of force by law enforcement. I am inviting you to participate in this study, given your experience as a police officer and instructor.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in an in-person interview that is expected to last no more than 60 minutes. The interview will ask a series of questions pertaining to your experience and thoughts surrounding the use of force by police. In appreciation of your time, you will receive a $20 Amazon gift card upon completion of the interview.

Your participation is completely voluntary and if you choose not to participate, it will not impact your relationship with your employer.

The study is supervised by Dr. Harvey Shapiro, Assistant Teaching Professor with the School of Education at Northeastern University and has been reviewed and approved by the Northeastern University Institutional Review Board.

If you are interested in participating in the study, please reply to this email. If you would like more information or have questions, please contact me at ballard.ry@husky.neu.edu or via my cell phone (XXX) XXX-XXXX,

Thank you in advance for your time.

Ryan Ballard, MA Ed.
Doctoral Student, Northeastern University
Ballard.ry@husky.neu.edu
Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies

Investigators: Dr. Harvey Shapiro, Principal Investigator

Mr. Ryan Ballard, Student Researcher

Title of Project: Shades of Blue: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of the Perceptions of Non-White Police Instructors regarding highly publicized uses of force by law enforcement.

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask this person any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?

We are asking you to be in this study because of your experience and qualifications as a police instructor of color. In addition, we are looking for diverse perspectives of officers from various racial, national, religious, linguistic, or cultural heritages.

Why is this research study being done?

The purpose of this research is to explore the perceptions of street level police instructors of color regarding the effects of high profile and widely publicized incidents of the use of force on persons of color.

What will I be asked to do?

If you decided to take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in an in-person interview. The interview will be comprised of 16 questions and should last approximately 45-60 minutes.

Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?

The interview will take place in a location of your choosing conducive to an expletory interview. The interview is expected to last no more than 60 minutes.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?

There is no foreseeable risk from participating in this study. However, if at any point, you do not feel comfortable in answering a question, you can choose to move on to the next one.

Will I benefit by being in this research?
There will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in the study. However, the information learned from this study may help police departments change policy, provide an increased understanding between police and communities of color, and increase recruitment of persons of color.

**Who will see the information about me?**

Your part in this study will be confidential. Only the student researcher on this study will see the information about you. No reports of publications will use information that can identify you in any way or any individual as being of this project.

To ensure confidentiality, the researcher will assign a pseudonym to all participants. All data will be identified with the participant’s pseudonym.

**If I do not want to take part in this study, what choices do I have?**

There is no individual risk if a participant declines the opportunity to participate in the study. Their information will be omitted from the final results.

**Can I stop my participation in this study?**

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may quit at any time. If you do not participate or if you decide to quit, you will not lose any rights, benefits, or services that you would otherwise have as a student.

**Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?**

If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, Mail Stop: 560-177, 360 Huntington Avenue, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617-373-4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu.

You may call anonymously if you wish.

**Will I be paid for my participation?**

You will be given a $20 Amazon gift card upon completion of the interview.

**Will it cost me anything to participate?**

There is no cost to participate in this study.

**Is there anything else I need to know?**

You must currently be certified as a police officer in New Jersey, with a minimum of 5 years’ experience in a uniformed capacity. Additionally, you must be certified as a firearms and/or use of force instructor for your agency and have served in that capacity for a minimum of two years.
I agree to take part in this research.

____________________________________________   ____ ______________
Signature of Person agreeing to take part     Date

____________________________________________   ____ ______________
Printed Name of Person above      Date

_____________________________________________   ___ _______________
Signature of Person who explained the study to the   Date
Participant above and obtained consent

_____________________________________________   ___ _______________
Printed Name of Person above      Date
Appendix C: Interview Questions