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The Lived Experience of African American Women Leaders in Georgia Law Enforcement: Advances, Barriers, and Impact on Performance

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THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN LEADERS IN GEORGIA LAW ENFORCEMENT: ADVANCES, BARRIERS, AND IMPACT ON PERFORMANCE

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ABSTRACT

THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN LEADERS IN GEORGIA LAW ENFORCEMENT: ADVANCES, BARRIERS, AND IMPACT ON PERFORMANCE

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Law enforcement is a male-dominated field that has been slow to accept and promote African American women to positions of authority. As of 2016, there were only 3.1% Lieutenants and Sergeants, along with 1.6% Captains or higher that were African American women in the United States (Gomez, 2016). More recently, there has not been much change, as women are reportedly only 12% of the sworn officers and 3% of law enforcement leadership in the United States (Tumulty, 2023). Of that number, only 1% of African American women hold the position of Lieutenant or higher (Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives [ATF], 2023). There are subtle barriers that women and minorities experience that keep them from moving up in the management hierarchy of law enforcement. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of African American women law enforcement supervisors related to the barriers encountered during their career, especially with promotion, and vital skills necessary for job performance. The study assessed advances, impacts on performance, peer intimidation, sexual harassment, discrimination, and other barriers that African American women face while pursuing top-level positions in law enforcement. The study included interviewing eight African American women law enforcement officers in Georgia, active duty and retired, that have held the positions of Commissioner, Chief, Captain, Lieutenant, Detective,

Sergeant, and or Corporal. The following five themes emerged as a representation of their perceptions: (a) “Obstacles”: Operation Stumbling Blocks, (b) “Sabotage”: Monkey Wrench in the Works, (c) “Jealousy”: The Green-Eyed Monster, (d) “Overlooked”: Privy Passover, and (e) “Combative/ Overly Aggressive”: Angry Black Woman Syndrome. This study also has implications for lawmakers, departmental leads, and all level agencies of law enforcement to eliminate barriers, increase diversity, and practice equality for the advancement for African American women. This dissertation is available in open access at AURA (https://aura.antioch.edu/) and OhioLINK ETD Center (https://etd.ohiolink.edu).

Keywords: African American women, law enforcement, leadership, bias, barriers, discrimination, diversity, Georgia, women police officers, performance, angry black women, race, gender

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my Heavenly Father, my Lord and Savior, and the gift of the Holy Spirit that has carried me through this journey to completion. It is in You that I live, move, and have my being. Therefore, I know the strength, confidence, and resilience that it took for me to accomplish this is ALL YOU working through me. I give You praise for purging and pruning me into the woman that I am so that I am fully prepared for the inevitable blessings and opportunities You have planned for me.

To my husband, Roy Hughes III, you are truly the wind beneath my wings. Thank you for constantly pushing me to move forward and never give up. Your belief in me, your prayers for me, and your unwavering commitment to cover me has made all the difference in my life. On the days when I felt weary and got off track, you were the steady hand that guided me back to focus on the task at hand. You spoke life to me and picked up the slack whenever there was a need so that I could complete this process. You never let our home or family experience lack. I truly thank God for you.

To our sons, Roy Hughes IV and Royce Jeremiah Hughes, I love you both more than you will ever know. You have been the motivation that kept me determined to finish this educational endeavor. I had to be the example of what I require you to be. It has been a rule of mine that you never quit, that you finish what you start no matter how difficult it may be. We are not quitters. We are believers in God's truth that we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. Thank you for your patience, encouragement, prayers, and love. You two are truly my blessings from God. Now go be greater than me.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

A diverse mix of voices leads to better discussions,

decisions, and outcomes

for everyone.

— Sundar Pichai

African American women in law enforcement have not advanced to the scope of non-African American women. Although changes have begun nationally, in Georgia the story of their lived experiences has yet to be told. Although an African American woman may achieve a higher-ranking position, it does not come without hardship and that is what this study will explore. The advances, barriers, and impact on performance is the center of this research.

Through the years, women have fought to work past stereotypes or assumptions, and some have achieved top positions in law enforcement, but African American women hold less than 10% of all United States law enforcement jobs (Archbold & Schulz, 2012; Gomez, 2016). Additionally, African American women in law enforcement leadership roles fall behind other races (Primus, 2015). Legal commissions and recruitment endeavors have increased, but the entrance and advancement of African American women in this profession remains slow-moving (Prenzler & Sinclair, 2013). Research shows that discussions regarding the underrepresentation of women procuring supervisory and leadership positions generally aggregate all women and their experiences together. Consequently, African American women and their lived experiences are overlooked (Gamble & Turner, 2015).

My own lived experience, as an African American woman in legal / law enforcement for over 15 years, provides context to what it is like striving to advance in this profession. I know first-hand that there are barriers we face, unspoken rules we learn to live by, and the unfair trope

of an angry Black woman placed upon us when we stand for any form of equality. Interoffice complaints overlooked, grievances filed, and retaliation that led to Equal Employment Opportunity Commission investigations were a reality that I dealt with for several years. Even after winning grievances, I experienced retaliation and the tension of a hostile work environment, which continued to burden me until my career ended, short of reaching the level of leadership I desired. Several of my female co-workers experienced much of the same and to be promoted from within the organization was non-existent. It is the "glass ceiling" barrier that has been erected in law enforcement agencies and practiced since the 1900s that keeps African American women bound in their quest for higher executive and managerial positions (Primus, 2015). Glass ceiling is the term used to describe the invisible, yet unbreakable limits that are placed upon women of color (Harris, 2014). Societal and cultural reasons for these barriers exist but gender and racial bias imposed by men in positions of power, specifically white males, is what consistently denies women of color advancement opportunities (Gossett & Williams, 2008).

Preceding the 1970s, police administrators relegated female police officers to entry level positions that society and cultural forces had dictated and that the women themselves viewed as appropriate (Harris, 2014; Martin & Jurik, 2007). Women continued to accept these roles because both genders believed a woman's place was with the women's bureaus. This belief evolved, and modern policewomen began to have different attitudes supporting a unisex approach to policing, but because women made up less than 2% of the United States sworn officers, very little changed (Harris, 2014). Women who entered policing in the 1970s and 1980s paved the roads toward equality. Although women were making new strides by entering the law enforcement field, they continued to experience limitations that hindered their opportunities for

promotion (Primus, 2015). There were subtle barriers that women and minorities experienced that kept them from moving up in the management hierarchy of law enforcement (Primus, 2015).

Since joining law enforcement in the 1820s, when white women played limited roles as jail keepers and inmate overseers, women have struggled with inequalities and workplace discrimination at every organizational stage, attributed to their lack of physical and emotional stamina (Primus, 2015; Richard, 2001). As discussed in the Glass Ceiling Commission (2013), in most agencies, a disproportionately higher number of sworn law enforcement positions are held by Caucasian males. From 1998 to 2010, the growth rate of women in United States law enforcement had only increased from 3% to 14.7% (Primus, 2015; Zhao et al., 2011). There is a disparity of treatment, even for the well-educated and highly qualified women that have been able to occupy executive positions (Noland et al., 2016). With women in possession of 50% of the bachelor's degrees and 42% of the advanced degrees, workplace discrimination was obvious (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). According to Cotter (2009), the educated women who were able to occupy executive positions were compensated with low pay and lower authority levels. Although there were memorialized laws that forbade discrimination, African American women in law enforcement occupy less than 10% of the United States agency jobs (Gomez, 2016).

The National Center for Women and Policing (NCWP) assessed 176 of the largest United States law enforcement agencies and revealed that there were only 13.8 % of sworn law enforcement positions held by women (BOJS, 2015). The study further revealed that many of those positions held by women were obtained after mandatory court orders requiring agencies to hire women or discrimination suits were filed by women (Richard, 2001). Tilley (2008) states that to reduce the undermining and underrepresentation of women, especially African American women in law enforcement leadership, improvements have been made. However, the reality is

there are only 3.1% lieutenants and sergeants, along with 1.6% captains or higher, that are African American women in the United States (BOJS, 2015; Gomez, 2016). Empirical research on the advancement of African American women in organizational leadership has been conducted in several studies, but the perceptions of African American women among law enforcement leaders are meager (Marshall, 2013; Matthies et al., 2016). This study explores the struggles, promotional path, and leadership of six to ten African American women in law enforcement leadership roles.

At the turn of the century and on the heels of the fallout from the senseless murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor in 2020, the visibility of women in law enforcement increased. Statistical evidence shows that there has been a slight improvement in the number of African American women in law enforcement. For example, Yvette Gentry was appointed to lead the Louisville Police Department as interim police chief in 2020. In 2021, Elaine Bryant was appointed as police chief in Columbus, Ohio and C.J. Davis was appointed police chief in Memphis, Tennessee (Davis, 2022). History was made in 2023 as two Black women were appointed as permanent police chiefs for the very first time in two major cities: Pamela Smith in Washington, DC and Jacquelyn Gwinn-Villaroel in Louisville, Kentucky (Barros Leal and The Associated Press, 2023). This would suggest that things have gotten better in the United States as a whole, including a bit better in the state of Georgia, but it is smoke and mirrors because it is misleading. The accomplishments of a few do not provide a true representation of African American women in policing. It also does not provide an explanation for the reasons why the increase in their leadership positions is still stalled. That is what this research is about. This study examines the qualitative experiences of African American women and how those experiences affected their abilities to advance to high-ranking leadership positions in Law Enforcement.

Statement of the Problem

The problem addressed by this study is the underrepresentation and marginalization of African American women in law enforcement leadership and the disparity of treatment they encounter in their pursuits to be promoted. The industry of law enforcement has been slow to make changes around accepting women in positions of authority. According to Gomez (2016), the United States Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs discovered that women were only averaging between 12% and 15 % of staffing across the nation at the local level. Recent reports show that number has not increased but remains at 12% of all US sworn officers (Department of Justice, 2010; Tumulty, 2023). The importance of having women in positions of authority relating to gender diversity in organizational leadership is slowly being recognized, yet African American women continue to occupy minimal executive and top-level positions in law enforcement (Primus, 2015). However, there is very limited research or theoretical studies that give an account of the experiences of women, especially minority women, in law enforcement (Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2011). Effective public administration needs to be reflective of the community, which leads to the need for research regarding the underrepresentation of African American women occupying law enforcement leadership positions (Gomez, 2016; Webby, 2008). By virtue of their diverse cultural identity, the perceptions of African American women in law enforcement provide a unique contribution to societal norms (Cotter, 2009; Primus, 2015).

Due to a scarcity of research, there is a need to evaluate leadership effectiveness, compare gender-based leadership styles, and discover harassment and discrimination (Harris, 2014; Richard, 2001). This study is essential for researching the possible barriers or lack of opportunities that exist for African American women in law enforcement, a group that has been underrepresented in previous studies on women in law enforcement. Existing research identifies

the need for studies that add to the limited body of knowledge that exists for women in law enforcement, especially minorities (Richard, 2001).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study/inquiry was to explore the lived experiences of African American women law enforcement supervisors related to the barriers encountered during their career, especially with promotion, and vital skills necessary for job performance. In the pursuit of lived experiences, perceptions, feelings, and opinions (Creswell, 2007), the study was geared toward examining the patterns of response (Richard, 2001) from African American women in law enforcement who have advanced to upper-level management positions. Through guided open-ended interview questions, observations, and follow-up focus groups, the participants also provide an opinion (Creswell, 2009) of their own effectiveness in law enforcement.

Conceptual Framework

As noted, a woman's acceptance by her male peers has always been marginal (Hirsch, 2008; Primus, 2015). Women attempting to achieve rank have often faced systemic discrimination that belies the legal equity they have achieved, even though the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) has never been ratified. One interpretation for women's lack of advancement is that women face a "glass ceiling" barrier (Morrison & Von Glinow, 1990; Weinberger, 2011). The most prominent and well-developed theoretical explanation for the resistance to women's influence and leadership is the Social Role Theory (Eagly, 1987, 1997, 2016). This theory maintains that the root cause of the sex differences in behavior is due to differences in the social positions of the genders.

According to the Social Role Theory, gender differences in social influence and other behavior stem from the societal division of labor between the sexes and the different norms and expectations associated with these social roles (Eagly & Wood, 2016). Gender-specific skills and behavior styles come from men's and women's typical economic and family roles as breadwinner and homemaker (Cromartie, 2020). These gender roles describe not only expectations about how men and women are likely to behave but also beliefs about how they should behave.

Women's communal and lack of agentic qualities have served as obstacles to the promotion of women in management and other high-power positions (Eagly, 2016). Social Role Theory says that women are likely to be employed in relatively low status positions with little power and limited opportunity, while men tend to be employed higher in hierarchies of status and authority with greater opportunity (Eagly & Wood, 2016). The theory also claims that people expect greater competency in men than women. According to Primus (2015), even though people appear to set lower minimum standards of competence for women than men, they require more evidence from women than men to infer high ability. This expectation is reflected in the greater perception of men's competence and the different standards that are applied to evaluating men and women's performance, creating a double standard (Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2011). Women must perform better to be considered equally competent, regardless of whether the group members evaluate themselves (Eagly et al., 2000). This double standard creates disadvantages in promotions for women, especially when they are being evaluated by men (Carli & Eagly, 2007; Primus, 2015). Women must demonstrate clearly superior competency to overcome this double standard.

Gender differences in participation, interaction style, and perception of competence are plausible explanations of women's lack of advancement in organizations (Carli & Eagly, 2007). Through attention to interpersonal relations and group harmony, women have achieved some recognition as social facilitators, for example, as clerical, dispatchers, and office administrators, but less recognition as leaders with authority. "To the extent that women informally take on the role of social facilitator and not the role of task leader, they may be less likely to rise in organizations" (Eagly, 2016).

Nature of the Study

This study employed a qualitative hybrid methodology using phenomenology and case study design that explores the sensitive nature of discrimination by analyzing factors that contribute to the underrepresentation of African American women in law enforcement leadership. The probable barriers that exist through observing response patterns, guided open-ended questioning and participant follow-ups are also revealed. The core of the study consists of a combination of previous scholarly research, participant interviews, questionnaires, observations, and notes to phenomenologically depict the patterns and themes of African American women in law enforcement leadership roles.

This hybrid qualitative method is most suitable for this study as it answers the questions concerning factors and contentious patterns impeding the advancement of African American women leaders. The interviews were conducted and examined in September and October of 2023 in Georgia, utilizing the interpretive patterns found from open-ended interview questions, the researcher's observations and the opinions provided by the participants in follow-up communication.

Research Questions

The following questions guide this study to display the probable areas of contention relating to the advancement of African American women in positions of authority in law enforcement within the United States. As stated by Chenail (2011), the focal point of the research questions is to address the overarching question as well as steer the direction of the study. The overarching question for this qualitative study is, What are the perceptions of the lived experiences of African American women law enforcement leaders in their quest to advance and attain positions of leadership? From this research question, the following sub-questions materialized to guide the research:

RQ1: What barriers, if any, do African American women law enforcement supervisors experience during their careers?

RQ2: What are the experiences of African American women law enforcement supervisors with regard to promotion?

RQ3: What skills and experiences do African American women law enforcement supervisors identify as vital for their careers and effective job performances?

RQ4: What barriers, if any, do African American women face as they seek to move from entry-level positions to supervisory ones?

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study are significant to enhancing the existing knowledge of African American women leaders in law enforcement. Important information derived from this study will hopefully contribute to the promotional progress and the overcoming of barriers for African American women leaders in law enforcement. Additional information has been generated from

the experiences of the African American women questioned and observed in this study that resulted in ways to overcome these existing obstacles.

Clearly, there is a need for greater diversity in leadership and to provide greater opportunities for African American women to advance in law enforcement. According to Burke (2008), women face a myriad of obstacles in their efforts to advance. From peer intimidation to sexual harassment, the discrimination of women throughout all United States law enforcement agencies is hindering their pursuits to top-level executive positions (Gomez, 2016). This study provides evidence to what has been hidden and brings a voice to the African American women who silently fight through the discrimination to advance. The researcher now adds to the limited body of research that has been done so that law enforcement organizations will make much needed changes and thereby the numbers of African American women in law enforcement leadership roles will increase in federal and local agencies throughout the United States.

Definitions of Key Terms

The following terms are defined for the purposes related to this research and relevant to law enforcement.

African American Women – Refers to any woman who has ancestry in any of the Black ethnicities of Africa (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Barriers – An obstacle or anything that hinders the promotion of a person (Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2011).

Career Defining Moments – The moments of decision-making in an individual's career that defined the trajectory of his or her career path (Richard, 2001).

Discrimination – Denying someone employment (or promotion) or firing a worker because of his or her gender, race religion, and/or sexual orientation (Portillo & Block, 2012). (Sexual harassment is also defined as gender discrimination.)

Disparity of Treatment – The different or unfair treatment of an employee in the same or similarly situated class as others presumably based on a protected characteristic (Noland et al., 2016).

Diversity – Differences in a limited subset of demographical characteristics that include but are not limited to age, race, and gender, or the differences between the individuals' traits that help establish a view of how people perceive one another (Simons & Rowland, 2011).

Five Exemplary Leadership Practices – The five behaviors of leadership that enable a leader to accomplish great organizational feats: model the way; inspire shared vision; challenge the process; enable others to act; and encourage the heart (Kouzes & Posner, 1987).

Glass Ceiling – Obstacles that slow down (or block) the occupational advancement of working women in their professions (Weinberger, 2011).

Law Enforcement – A profession that requires the certification of its respective state (like Georgia) to perform the duties and responsibilities of maintaining the order of the public, preventing crime, enforcing criminal and civil laws, protecting and preserving life and property, and other related duties of the sheriff's or police department (Harris, 2014).

Law Enforcement Agency – For the purposes of this study this term refers to a local agency responsible for enforcement of the laws. Examples include city police departments, county law enforcement agencies, and university departments employing full-time licensed and sworn police officers (Banks et al., 2016).

Leader – One who moves the status quo by inspiring others to act. They command a group or organization through influence to cohesively accomplish an objective. The one who leads is prepared to put the needs of their followers ahead of their own, meet challenges, and explore ways to improve the organization (Primus, 2015).

Leadership – "The process of influencing others and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives" (Schermerhorn et al., 2010, p. 306). Leadership positions in law enforcement for this study consisted of the rank of sergeant and above (Gomez, 2016).

Rank – The level occupied by an individual in a law enforcement or military hierarchy consisting of corporal, sergeant, lieutenant, captain, major, colonel, commander, deputy, chief deputy, sheriff, or chief of police (Gomez, 2016).

Sexual Discrimination – The harmful and unequal treatment of individuals because of their sex (Primus, 2015).

Social Role Theory – The theory that helps to explain the distribution of labor by defining gender differences in societal social roles, such as principles relating to the specific tasks related to men and women (Gomez, 2016).

Underrepresentation – Groups of individuals who have a low amount of representation when compared to other groups (Gomez, 2016).

Summary

African American women in law enforcement do not enjoy the same opportunities as their white male counterparts in law enforcement (Weinberger, 2011). The problem addressed by this study is the underrepresentation of African American women in law enforcement leadership and the disparity of treatment they encounter in their pursuits to be promoted. Participants

volunteered for interviews, observations, and focus groups. This study is significant because African American women supervisors are underrepresented in law enforcement and overrepresented in the obstacles they face, as they advance on the climb to upper-level management. Those experiences were uncovered for the purpose of helping to minimize discrimination, provide new leadership opportunities, and increase the number of African American women in law enforcement leadership roles.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review focuses on the disparity of treatment by gender and racial inequality that African American women leaders continuously face in their quest to elevate into supervisory positions. Perceptions on barriers, promotions, and performance effectiveness are discussed. Professional women, specifically women of color, are not receiving promotions at the same rate as their white, male counterparts, in law enforcement. Their lived experiences are not being explored regarding the barriers they face. Understanding the existing dynamics of sex roles and the career advancement of African American women in law enforcement leadership roles may prove to be difficult but, there are factors and new information that contribute to the promotional progress and overcoming barriers for African American women leaders in law enforcement. There is also a need for greater diversity in leadership and for providing greater opportunities for African American women to advance in law enforcement. This review of the literature explores the issues of diversity, uncovers the barriers, addresses the underrepresentation, and discloses the history of the opportunities for advancement for African American women in law enforcement.

Women only accounted for 2% of the United States policing law enforcement workforce in 1970 and only increased to 14.7% by 2010 (Zhao et al., 2011). The women working in policing were assigned to specially designed positions while close to all the officer positions were being occupied by Caucasian males (Martin & Jurik, 2007). According to Gilfillian (2012), the most recent finding by the United States Department of Justice (2023) , it is recorded that women only average 12% to 15% of staffing at the local level. It was only after the requirement of mandatory court orders from lawsuits about discrimination, that agencies hired these women. The lawsuits were filed by women who were acquiring many of the positions that are represented

in these statistics (Gilfillian, 2012; Richard, 2001). Very little has changed since Richard (2001) reported the National Center for Women and Policing's NCWP's findings of only 13.8% women in 176 of the largest U.S. law enforcement agencies hold sworn law enforcement positions. As recent as 2015, staggering statistics still record women, especially African American women, as majorly underrepresented in the law enforcement arena. According to the most recent data from 2015, out of the 14,000 U.S. police departments assessed there were only 219 African American women serving as Chief of Police (Karush, 2008; Primus, 2015; Testa 2005).

Law Enforcement Leadership

A close look into law enforcement leadership shows that there are multiple conceptualized perspectives (Villarreal-Watkins, 2008). A substantial amount of literature supports the broad range of ideologies that leadership in law enforcement means different things to different agencies, organizational structures, ranks, and bureaucracies (Richard, 2001). Problematically, all branches of law enforcement have been grouped together in studies regarding the lived experiences of those in leadership roles. Commissioners, Chiefs, Captains, Lieutenants, Detectives, Sergeants, and Corporals, whether members of national military branches, federal, local, or state governmental agencies, they have been represented as the same when ascending through the ranks of leadership (Yu, 2020). Broadening the scope of understanding about law enforcement leadership requires research that fully evaluates the prerequisites for advancement of each branch, as well as their culture of leadership and practices.

For years, leadership was viewed as the process by which an individual would take authority over other individuals and exercise their ability to persuade them to act in a desired manner (Bennis, 1959). A few decades later, as expressed by Cribbin (1972), the definition of

leadership began to vary due to the operative style implemented by each leader. It was believed that the leader brings life to the word leadership when other people begin to follow and rely on that leader to influence their behaviors, attitudes, and thought processes. Then, Kouzes and Posner (1987) held to the meaning of leadership as relying on a head man to take advantage of opportunities sought out from a zeal to challenge the existing state of affairs. While there are many types of leadership, the roles in law enforcement leadership tend to differ from the basic definition of leadership (Gomez, 2016). According to Yukl (2006), the general meaning of leadership is the process of exerting power or influence intentionally over another person or people to guide organizational relationships and activities. So, when leadership is male-dominated or white-dominated, the exercise of leadership has led to the lack of African American women in law enforcement.

Yet, Yu (2020) notes that within the limited amount of research conducted regarding women in law enforcement leadership roles, all branches and sectors of female law enforcement officers had been grouped together. As a very necessary part of a personal and organizational leadership plan, the theories and concepts of cultural diversity and values have a major impact. The personality, working habits, behaviors, emotions, race, age and sex all have an effect on the ethical practices of each organizational team member. To understand the importance of leadership in a culturally diverse organization, there must first be a clear understanding of what diversity really is. Along the lines of gender, race, socio-economic status, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, ideologies, physical abilities, or political beliefs; diversity means understanding individual differences and uniqueness. Exploring, accepting, and respecting these differences in an environment that is nurturing, positive and safe is what diversity is all about (Harris, 2014). Gender, ethnicity, and religion are three ways that diversity will impact an

organization's environment as well as leadership style. For gender diversity, a leader must recognize the importance of having women in roles of significance within the organization.

History of Women in Law Enforcement

Historically, the law enforcement profession has been a male-dominated field and women have been stereotypically categorized as keepers of the home and children (Gomez, 2016). Dating back to the 19th century, when the first police force was formed, women were restricted from joining until 1910 (Horne, 2008). In that limited number of women, the roles and positions that they procured were assigned by men, restricting them to social workers and caregivers with no arresting power (Horne, 2008). Even as women began to join the ranks of law enforcement, they have had to fight gender-based stereotypes and obstacles (Burke, 2008). Though they were allowed entry, women were paid much less than men and were restricted from engaging in the process for promotion. Long-term male chauvinistic practices established a culture in policing that discouraged women from elevating to positions of authority and perpetuated hostile work environments (Dempsey & Forst, 2012). According to Carlan and McMullan (2009), women law enforcement officers experienced high levels of emotional exhaustion from the encouraged subordination by their male counterparts and the barriers to advancement, despite performance self-efficacy.

By the 1950s, law enforcement began to experience an influx of women across the United States and by the 1970s demands for equal opportunities and fair treatment arose (Harrington, 2014; Patrick, 2011). The conditions that women were subjected to work under eventually led to them filing lawsuits against the police departments (Wells & Alt, 2005). Those lawsuits resulted in court-ordered opportunities for women to apply for and procure supervisory positions. The recruiting and hiring process changed to include efforts toward diversifying the

pool of applicants, no longer excluding the entry of women into departments normally supervised by men only (Horne, 2008; Wells & Alt, 2005). Though integrated by women, men acting as gatekeepers to the existing police culture still did not embrace women rising in rank, thereby making it more difficult for competent women to advance to higher positions (Davis, 2013; Hassell & Brandl, 2009).

Research has shown that the perceptions of men in law enforcement regarding women entering the profession have long influenced police training, recruitment, and eligibility criteria for women. Those antiquated viewpoints held women back but there had been no substantial proof to validate them, so a study by Davis (2009) was conducted to analyze how male police officers perceive women working in law enforcement. In this quantitative study, data was collected from 100 sworn male law enforcement officers in the South, through survey, to identify their perceptive reasons for the underrepresentation of women in law enforcement. Overall, those surveys revealed that male police officers did not consider a woman's marital status as significant, but a woman's age did matter in the consideration of her ability to perform policing duties (Davis, 2005; Primus, 2015). Those findings indicate a woman's age may render her incapable of carrying out certain duties, thus affecting the recruitment, training, and hiring of women in law enforcement.

The ongoing battle for women to gain acceptance, equal pay, and opportunities for acceleration in law enforcement reveals the need for policy changes and impartiality within all law enforcement agencies and recruitment organizations.

African American Women in Law Enforcement

It was the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that made it possible for African American women to integrate into the law enforcement work force (Gomez, 2016). African American women also

filed lawsuits in large cities like Los Angeles and Philadelphia to bring more attention to the unequal access to employment for African American women in law enforcement (Gomez, 2016). The act was not solely for the purpose of opening the door for women of color to gain access to law enforcement employment, but it turned out to be the gateway because of its bar against employment discrimination (National Archives and Records Administration [NARA], 2012). The implementation of the act, specifically in Title VII, made it illegal for employers to discriminately deny any person employment, terminate their employment or prejudicially affect their chances at promotion due to race, religion, sex, national origin, or color (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission [EEOC], 2012). Though the lawsuits and legislation made it possible for entry and for an increase in the number of African American women in law enforcement, according to the U.S. Department of Labor (2010), underrepresentation continues.

The normal practice from law enforcement leaders, regarding the climb for African American women to positions of leadership, has been to silence the voice of the Black woman. There has been an account about the African American woman's plight provided by her male counterparts, who had a distorted picture of their situation and their potential. Research shows that women of other races have shared their lived experiences in policing, and it has been represented as the voice of all women. African American women's particular experience has been omitted.

A study was conducted on the perceptions of women in law enforcement supervisory positions, but it failed to include African American women (Richard, 2001). The researcher had a small sample size that consisted of six Caucasian women, two Hispanic women, and one Asian woman. The exclusion of African American women in the Richard (2001) study and the limited research conducted on the experiences of minority women in law enforcement since that time has

left a need for the perceptions of African American women occupying supervisory positions in law enforcement to be recognized.

Effects of Racial Discrimination in Law Enforcement

There are a variety of studies that have disclosed the existence of racial discrimination in upper-level or senior management within corporate organizations (Shelton, 2008). Those racially biased discrimination practices are centered around recruitment, task assignment, performance evaluation, salary decisions, and informal interoffice selections (Primus, 2015). Unequal access to privileges and facilities for African Americans in law enforcement is largely attributed to racial discrimination and biased practices (Gregory, 2008; Primus, 2015). These practices erected barriers that have been challenging for African Americans to overcome or maneuver in Caucasian-dominated organizations (Beal, 2022). Law enforcement, a historically Caucasian male-dominated field, is rooted in the institutionalized racism and discrimination of slavery, in particular, the slave patrols where American policing originated (Cromartie, 2020; Primus, 2015). As reported by McGlowan-Fellows and Thomas (2004), the period of United States slavery still influences employment and opportunities for growth for African Americans in law enforcement (Cromartie, 2020).

The 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries of slavery shaped the treatment of all Americans and their frame of mind regarding the perceived placement of African Americans in the world (Gomez, 2016; Yancy, 2000). The abduction of Africans from Africa, stripping them of their identity, and selling them into slavery had a demoralizing psychological effect on the development of African Americans (Watkins, 2000). Though the sum total of the atrocities suffered by those enslaved cannot be fully captured with words, the negative stereotypes that were created by Caucasians continue to influence the placement of African Americans in society

(Collins, 2004; Cromartie, 2020). The political, social, and economic order was set by the slave owners, dominant white men, who designed the social structure to keep African Americans in subordinate roles (Collins, 2000). These set ideologies traditionally placed Caucasian males at the top of the societal power pyramid and African American women at the bottom (Smith & Stewart, 1983).

Oppression and decades of racism left African and Caucasian Americans with unresolved relationship wounds (Gaudiano & Hunt, 2017). As previously mentioned, this division of race created biased practices, organizational barriers, and institutionalized racial discrimination that psychologically shaped the minds of all Americans and continues to affect the entry of African American women into law enforcement and all upper-level white male-dominated organizations. As reported by the National Archives and Records Administration, more than one-third of African Americans reported that because of their race they were overlooked for a job or promotion (Cromartie, 2020; NARA, 2012). These reports of lived experiences by African Americans caused controversy regarding the underrepresentation of Blacks in law enforcement and whether it is the result of Whites being in authoritative control (Cole & Smith, 2008). This lends credible evidence to the reports of Caucasians getting better job assignments, higher positions or assignments, and greater rewards (Dovidio et al., 2005; Primus, 2015). As mentioned earlier, this constant hardship in police culture especially created barriers for African American women since they were placed at the bottom of the power pyramid (Marshall, 2013). The experiences and behaviors of African American women in law enforcement is incomparable to the experiences of any other race or group, hence the need for this study (Brock, 2011; Cromartie, 2020).

Although there have been countless initiatives toward aiding African American women in having equal access, experiences, and career opportunities like their male and female counterparts, they are still denied, demeaned, and discriminated against (Jackson-Dean, 2014; Jones, 1997). They are historically and presently the subject of racism as they continuously experience obstacles when it comes to receiving the same services and employment opportunities as Caucasian Americans (Cromartie, 2020). According to Dodge and Pogrebin (2001), African American women law enforcement officers report that they had to work harder than Caucasian women to gain equitable recognition for their efforts.

Effects of Gender Discrimination in Law Enforcement

Expectations of the roles that males and females are to fulfill in law enforcement have been shaped by males of superior rank (Shelton, 2008). The presumption and expectation of the female gender role is communal etiquette, while the male gender role is assertively influential behavior (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Richard, 2001). Women have assumed the duties that keep them in step with domestic matters, restricting them to social workers, caregivers, and in-house administrative jobs with no arresting power (Horne, 2008). On the other hand, men have taken on what is considered masculine jobs. These jobs have given them authoritative control, such as arresting power, management, travel, and financial independence (Eagly et al., 2000; Harrington, 2014).

Although women have incessantly worked to change the perceptions of the gender-based hierarchy in law enforcement so that equal treatment and advancement opportunities are afforded, they are still discriminated against and branded as the weaker sex in a macho profession (Harrington, 2014). These traditional gender roles, that are considered normal within the law enforcement culture, encourage bias that has long contributed to the underrepresentation

of women (Primus, 2015; Shelton, 2008). According to Harrington (2014), the gendered barriers that women face in police organizations lead to what is known as gender-related stress. Division of labor, social organizational structure, gender-related cultural bias, and hostile working conditions are some of the stressors that have caused many women to experience burnout and eventually resign (Davis, 2013; Kurtz, 2006).

As women have become more educated and visible in the political arena, the perception about women's roles in organizations have had to change (Northouse, 2010, p. 303). When it comes to diversity in ethnicity, successful organizations create programs, projects and training classes that cater to the ethnical diversity of its employees and the ethnic community. This is known as multiculturalism. Unfortunately, the profession of law enforcement is behind because as it is known and well documented, the inequity and underrepresentation of African American women in law enforcement is due in part to the standards, practices, policies, and procedures being written by men (Thomas, 2001).

Other gender-based hindrances that female law enforcement officers have identified as stress induced discrimination are related to maternity policies and accommodations (Bochantin & Cowan, 2008). The Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978 says that if a pregnant woman is willing and able to carry out her duties the employer cannot force the woman to take disability leave (Davis, 2013). Policing agencies have used that interdiction to their advantage in restricting women from positions that require, what they consider, strenuous work. Penalizing limitations are placed on all women because running after or restraining suspects, working long inconsistent hours, encountering hazardous dust from firearm usage, high speed chases, and physically aggressive arrests can cause extreme exertion that a female officer may not be able to perform at certain stages of the pregnancy (Czarnecki, 2003; Davis, 2013; Kruger, 2008).

All women in law enforcement are discriminately looped into this inadequate maternity disability policy whether they choose to become mothers or not (Davis, 2013; Kruger, 2006). Consequentially, for those female officers who had pressed their way through to those strenuous law enforcement positions, other forms of elusive discrimination were experienced when they became pregnant. According to Kanoff (2009), women in the Department of Corrections reported that when they reached the stages of advanced pregnancy they were required to work in those strenuous, sometimes dangerous, positions until they left for maternity leave. Some female officers said that as they gained pregnancy weight they were required to pay for uniform alterations, yet male officers who gained weight were accommodated with free brand-new uniforms.

Intersectionality of Discrimination in Law Enforcement

African American women face a duality of racial and gender bias which requires them to have to fight twice as hard to excel. It is extremely difficult because women of color do not experience one form of discrimination apart from the other. They come as a package deal and those barriers influence not only the manner in which African American women are driven to succeed, but also the imposed stereotypes that hinder their promotion (Davis, 2012).

Intersectional theory, better known as intersectionality, is a term that was coined by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw in 1989 (Howard University School of Law, 2023). Crenshaw is a leading scholar of critical race theory and an American civil rights advocate who recognized that all aspects of women's identities bring value to their lived experiences but also compounds the various forms of oppression that they encounter (Howard University School of Law, 2023). Therefore, Crenshaw provided a framework to apply to all marginalized situations that women

face because there is no way to separate the numerous injustices they experience. Women experience those injustices intersectionally.

The intersectionality framework is an analytical paradigm that explains the various dimensions of social and political identity systems and how they combine to create overlapping systems of discrimination, such as racism, ageism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, genderism, LGBTQ, disability, and ethnicity (Cromartie, 2020). There are many other categories of intersectionality and while African American women often experience several at once, for this particular research, the focus is the intersection between race and gender. In law enforcement, African American women are forced to view themselves through the double lenses of race and gender because they are often judged by both (Cromartie, 2020; Griffith, 2014).

Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010) state,

> White women may experience gender discrimination, whereas African American women may experience both gender and racial discrimination. The joint possibility of gender and racial discrimination makes it impossible for African American women to make accurate causal attributions concerning potential discrimination if they are passed over for leadership development opportunities.

Frances Beal, an early Black feminist, called this double jeopardy (Beal, 2008; Griffith, 2014). In the workplace, specifically in law enforcement, African American women's experiences are shaped by repeated disadvantages that demean and deny them equal access and opportunities (Cromartie, 2020). They are able to gain entry-level positions but have difficulty advancing to top-level positions, not because they are not qualified, but because those who hold the power judge them as being different from themselves (Cromartie, 2020). As mentioned

before, in law enforcement, Caucasian white men hold the real power of authority in law enforcement.

Performance Effectiveness

Despite being objectified and oppressed sexually, physically, and economically, African American women have persevered (Brown & Bear, 2012). As wives, mothers, and within the slave community, they have survived cruel treatment and maintained their roles by focusing on their goals (Collins, 2004). Although law enforcement is a white male institution, the tenacious efforts of African American women to overcome barriers of sex and race has established an undeniable place and need for them in this profession (Cromartie, 2020). Still, a great hindrance to their acceptance and advancement to leadership positions lies in the attitudes, policies, and practices within the dominant white male social structure (Primus, 2015; Rice, 2010).

The constant attempts by men to prevent the recruitment, promotion, and retention of the most talented African American women in law enforcement is strategically done to block their effectiveness in the profession (Primus, 2015). To keep them ineffective and powerless, men refuse to accept them as equal or offer them the same opportunities to execute their assignments (Gregory, 2008; Primus, 2015). Nonetheless, African American women persistently perform to show high capabilities in executing their tasks, successfully handling their duties, and exceeding the criteria required to expand their positions in law enforcement (More, 2008; Primus, 2015).

Summary

This Chapter II review of the literature delved into the historical modus operandi of law enforcement leadership and the underrepresentation of African American women leaders since the entry of women over the last 100 years. Though entry into this male-dominated profession was extremely difficult for all women, African American women were and are currently

experiencing considerable hardships in their quest to solidify their careers and elevate to top level leadership positions in law enforcement (Primus, 2015; Wells & Alt, 2005). The need for this study was exhibited in the findings of this literature review regarding the disparity of treatment that African American women experience in comparison to their male and female counterparts. It has been reported that law enforcement agencies have, over a period, been used in the oppression of African American women in law enforcement, such as promotion, gender discrimination, and sexual harassment, as they fight to gain respect and ascertain higher level promotions to various ranks (Zipf, 2005).

Lyness and Thompson (2010) state that it is African American women who experience the greatest barriers in attaining leadership positions. This literature review amassed the history of women in law enforcement, the effects of racial and gender discrimination in law enforcement, the intersection of discrimination, and how the entry, performance, and advancement of African American women in law enforcement has been affected.

Chapter III presents the methodology that was used in the research study to credibly ascertain the lived experiences of African American women law enforcement leaders in Georgia. The study used a qualitative approach to evoke the barriers, advances, and impacts on performance that African American women leaders experienced during their entry into the law enforcement profession and throughout their career pursuits to top level positions. In addition to the selection of sample participants, data collection and data analysis, other sections included are assumptions, limitations, and delimitations. The chapter concludes with a section on ethical awareness.

CHAPTER III: RESEARCH METHOD

The research methodology of this study was purposed to answer the questions concerning factors and probable contentious patterns relating to the advancement of African American women leaders in law enforcement. The study examines the responses of African American women in law enforcement, primarily in South Georgia, by utilizing the interpretive patterns from open-ended interview questions, observations, and the opinions provided by participants in follow-ups (Creswell, 2007; Richard, 2001).

This research was designed to divulge the perceptions and lived experiences of the African American population of women in law enforcement leadership positions. The goal was to explore the probable barriers that contribute to the underrepresentation of African American women in law enforcement leadership and through observing response patterns, guided open-ended questioning and participant follow-ups.

Research Methodology and Design

This study benefits from the use of primary and secondary data collection. Both are used to better ensure validity (Cowton, 1998; Rabianski, 2003). Additionally, a combination of previous scholarly research, participant interviews, questionnaires, observations, notes, and recordings to depict the patterns and themes of African American women in law enforcement leadership roles are used in this research.

Primary data is collected through first-hand experience (Cowton, 1998; Creswell, 2009). The methods of research that best define primary data collection are observations of responsive body language and facial expressions during face-to-face interviews with respondents. The nature of primary data can sometimes lead to error because it allows witness

perceptions and interpretations (Rabianski, 2003), yet it is necessary to gain an in-depth and knowledgeable understanding of the focused population (Densombe, 2012).

Secondary data is collected or gathered from other individuals or sources (Cowton, 1998; Creswell, 2009; Frankfort-Nachmias et al., 1992; Stewart, 1984). Collecting data from newspaper articles, journals and other witness accounts would be methods of research that supply secondary data (Creswell, 2009; Miller & Salkind, 1991). Secondary data exists as a result of the primary data, because one source's primary data becomes another researcher's source of secondary data (Rabianski, 2003).

Population and Sample

There were no random selections in the creation of the population sample for this study because its focus is on high-ranking African American women leaders in law enforcement. This study utilizes a qualitative case study approach because, according to Creswell (2009), it is most appropriate for gaining new insight and in-depth understanding from a small group. This information was gained through the lived experiences of each participant in the small group. As a result, maximum variation sampling, which is the approach of using two qualitative sampling strategies for the purpose of gathering a wide range of perspectives about a specific topic, was used for this study. Snowball sampling in conjunction with purposive sampling guided the selection process.

Snowball sampling is a referral-based type of sampling that is utilized in qualitative research with a small number of participants, a few of whom may be hard to reach due to the high degree of trust necessary to make contact (Balter & Brunet, 2012). A very effective research tool for reaching additional participants in different places is snowball sampling (Balter & Brunet, 2012; Van Meter, 1990) because each participant can refer the researcher to other

potential participants (Creswell, 2009). For this study, only African American women in law enforcement supervisory positions were purposefully selected, but they were all asked about their pre-supervisory experience.

Purposive or non-probability sampling, which is when the researcher relies on their own judgment to choose members of the population that best qualifies to participate in their study, is used to acquire a small and specific character group for research (Brus & de Gruijter, 2003). As described in snowball sampling, should there be recommendations made by respondents, these potential participants were carefully evaluated by the researcher (Richard, 2001). Concentrated solicitation of six to ten African American women established the participation group, sought through referrals of subjects that meet the criteria of race and supervisory ranking (Richard, 2001). If the targeted number of participants had not reached, as a backup, quota sampling would have been used.

Quota sampling, also known as judgmental sampling, allows the researcher to focus on specific traits or characteristics that meet the criteria for the study (Simkus, 2023). There are two types of quota sampling; controlled and uncontrolled. Controlled sampling limits the researcher's selections. Uncontrolled sampling does not impose any restrictions on the researcher. Participants are chosen at will. So, for this study's requirements, controlled quota sampling is sufficient.

Case Study Method

The flexibility to collect data through various ways and use them at various points in the research is a major benefit of the case study method. The relationship between context, phenomena, and people can be captured as the researcher gathers in-depth information from multiple sources over a period of time. Three techniques that case studies tend to focus on for

qualitative data are interviews, observations, and analysis of primary and secondary sources (Davis, 2013). In the data collection process, it is vitally important to use two or more methods of obtaining data to ensure a broader, more in-depth view. Other sources, such as audiovisual materials, archival records, questionnaires, and reports can be examined to make complex social and life science phenomena easily comprehensible (Gall et al., 2007).

According to Creswell (2007), the case study method is best used when an individual or a group of people within a bounded system, such as law enforcement, are observed to gain understanding through comparison of similarities and differences of that system. So, in a study involving law enforcement participants, the researcher collects information about the system through historical documents, interviews about the lived experiences of the participants, and by on-site or face-to-face observations (Davis, 2013). An effective case study will complicate or challenge existing assumptions and theories, provide unexpected insights, offer practical courses of action to resolve problems, and open new avenues for future research (Creswell, 2009).

To reiterate, through the case study approach, this research sought to answer questions regarding contentious patterns and probable barriers contributing to the underrepresentation of African American Women leaders in upper-level law enforcement. Six to ten participants were interviewed via Zoom. They were each assigned pseudonyms for anonymity purposes and to ensure beneficence. The participants were chosen through snowball sampling with the assistance of purposive sampling to ensure all participants met the criteria for participation. In case the population number that was desired did not materialize through the snowball sampling referrals, quota sampling would have been applied.

Data Collection and Analysis

There are significant limitations in qualitative research (Patton, 2011) and challenges are probable in areas such as reliability, validity, and generalizable study outcomes (Creswell, 2009; Harris, 2014). A more noted limitation in qualitative research is that those exploring research tend to more frequently review quantitative studies because qualitative research is assumed to be less valid in its approaches and findings. In other words, the consensus about the qualitative researcher is that their research is often guided by their interpretations and judgments (Creswell, 2009; Ellis & Levy, 2009). Patton (2011) makes mention that this limitation, though reflective of the researcher's knowledge, can also risk opinion-based results that are subjectively biased. However, in all fairness, quantitative research has its limitations because it tends to only skim the surface of its study. Whereas qualitative research goes much more in-depth.

Gaining specific information that illuminates cultural behaviors, values and opinions that can be utilized in furthering studies is what qualitative research examination excels at (Carr, 2006). Analyzing the data by coding it links the fragments and concepts together (Rettie et al., 2008). The process of data analysis coding requires skilled perception (Thompson, 2002). The careful reading of all data in order to familiarize, explore, and record (Creswell, 2009) is purposed for the development of analysis codes. Reviewing participant experiences, quotes, theories, and the literature review uncovers themes and gaps that need explicit rendering for the problem that exists (Creswell, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Miles and Huberman (1994) divide analysis coding into stages of reduction, display, and conclusion. Creswell (2009) divides coding analysis into four stages: content analysis, constant comparative method, explore relationships' meanings, and confirmation or verification. It is recommended that these steps be

followed in order before moving on to the next phase of drawing data conclusions (Creswell, 2009).

The triangulation stage, referred to as such because it is an approach that utilizes multiple data sources to develop a comprehensive understanding of the research, will be analyzed to find the credibility and validity of the findings (Creswell, 2007, 2009). The multiple data sources illuminate or clarify a perspective of the information collected (Creswell, 2007). Research includes more than two cross verification methods or sources such as theories, investigations, or theories of observers to increase credibility; then the convergence of the methods of the same phenomenon takes place (Denzin, 2009; Flick, 1992). Triangulation strengthens the study's validity when utilizing two or more methods with offsetting prejudices and the results corroborate with one another (Jonsen & Jehn, 2009; Scandura & Williams, 2000).

Finally, the transferability stage is all about enabling the reader to participate in the process by making transfer comparisons (Creswell, 2009). In this study the reader is provided with a description that helps them to transfer findings to other settings or matters (Creswell, 2007; Sinkovics et al., 2008). Similarities between the two situations allow the researcher and the readers to determine whether the findings are parallel to their own experiences and where they are not (Creswell, 2007, 2009; Sinkovics et al., 2008).

Assumptions

Fundamental assumptions of qualitative research are uniquely essential to the design of the research (Wargo, 2015). The logic of methods relatable to establishing the groundwork governing the research also establishes the relationship between the researcher's observations and the theories constructed about the phenomena (Gelo et al., 2008). The following are a few of the methodological assumptions of qualitative research: (a) the purposeful selected participants

have the same phenomenon experiences based on their meeting the same prerequisite criteria (Wargo, 2015); (b) the researcher must commit to fieldwork and go to the actual establishment or setting of the participant(s) to accurately observe and record interactive behaviors (Atieno, 2009); (c) qualitative research paradigms are superlative to other research models because their methodology suggests a more in-depth comprehension and description (Sechrest & Sidani, 1995); (d) participants in qualitative studies will be honest and forthcoming when answering interview questions (Wargo, 2015); (e) the researcher is interested in the steps of process and understanding gained through descriptive meaning by way of pictures, words or concepts (Atieno, 2009; Harris, 2014).

Limitations

There are significant limitations in qualitative research (Patton, 2011) and challenges are probable in areas such as reliability, validity, and generalizable study outcomes (Creswell, 2009; Harris, 2014). A more noted limitation in qualitative research, as mentioned above, is that those exploring research tend to more frequently review quantitative studies because qualitative research is assumed, by some academics, to be less valid in its approaches and findings. In other words, a common view about the qualitative researcher is that their research is often guided, sometimes distorted, by their interpretations and judgments (Creswell, 2009; Ellis & Levy, 2009). Patton (2011) makes mention that this limitation, though reflective of the researcher's knowledge, can also risk opinion-based results that are subjectively biased.

This research aimed to gain deep understanding about the perceptions and probable barriers African American women face in climbing the ladder of leadership in law enforcement. Qualitative research methods are suitable for discovering realities in phenomenon for which little research exists, and theoretical frameworks are essential (Atieno, 2009; Patton,

2011). Gaining specific information that illuminates cultural behaviors, values and opinions that can be utilized in furthering studies is what qualitative research examination excels at (Carr, 2006).

Delimitations

The selection of eight participants was conducted using snowball sampling; no attempts were made to select from a random sample of upper-level law enforcement women in the United States. The original goal sought six to ten participants. After securing proof of eligibility and consent, eight participants were secured. The findings from this study are personal in nature and cannot be generalized to the larger population of women law enforcement supervisors, but can result in grounded and well-reasoned conjectures.

The sample group for this study is limited to African American women who hold or have held positions of Captain or higher in municipal, superior, federal, county, state, or campus law enforcement agencies. Many other types of law enforcement agencies currently employ women and future studies without such limitations may yield further information, however these limitations allow the research to create in-depth conversations with eight participants that facilitate a deeper understanding. While no restrictions to age, education, or other backgrounds are made, time constraints and geographic limitations prevent the research from expanding to Native Americans, or Pacific Islander participants. For the purpose of this study, all participants are from the state of Georgia. Seven of them are from South Georgia, between Dougherty and Houston Counties. The remaining two are from North Georgia, in the Metro Atlanta region.

This research not only sought to uncover barriers, advancements, and effects on performance but also any disparity of treatment between South Georgia African American women and North Georgia African American women in law enforcement. The interviewees'

participation was voluntary, and they received no monetary payment. Observations were limited to the interviews and this study intended to address cognitive and emotional responses to questions.

Ethical Assurances

The need to protect and respect the basic human rights of participants is at the forefront of this research. Seeking to ensure the validity of the research requires ethical considerations and practices (Creswell, 2009). The personal nature and sensitivity of information collected through participant interviews and observations warrant integrity, reliability, and validity from the researcher (Burke, 2008; Toit, 2013). Two categories of ethical convictions govern the respect for all participants. Anonymity for confidentiality and beneficence for protection are ethically moral practices that guide the qualitative research of human subjects outlined in the Belmont Report of 1978 (The National Commission, 1979). Participants feel safe and empowered to honestly share their truths when ethical measures are taken to safeguard them against any possible harm or backlash.

Autonomy in research acknowledges the choices, opinions, and well-informed mental competency of the research subjects (Orb et al., 2001; Primus, 2015). Thoroughly and truthfully informing participants about the study affords them the option to choose whether they would like to be participants or non-participants (Orb et al., 2001). Failure to provide uninhibited information to potential study participants is considered a lack of respect for the subjects and obstruction to their abilities to make well-informed judgments on how the study might affect them, and it also violates Institutional Review Board (IRB) rules (Protection of Human Subjects, 2018).

There are three principles of ethical practices that govern the development of qualitative research while respecting and protecting the human subjects of research. The Belmont Report explains those principles as informed consent, beneficence, and justice (The National Commission, 1979). Compliance with the Institutional Review Board (IRB) requires that the federal regulations for prohibiting violations of human rights be satisfied (Davis, 2013; Protection of Human Subjects, 2018). Those IRB federal regulations, which are the same as the Belmont Report's principles, are to (a) maintain confidentiality of data, (b) protect the identity of participants, and (c) safeguard the welfare of a vulnerable population (Harris, 2014; Orb et al., 2001).

Informed consent is the first federal regulation and principal practice of research that must be developed so that the participants have an opportunity to assess the risks and benefits to their participation (Harris, 2014). Satisfying informed consent requirements demands three key elements. Those elements are information, comprehension, and voluntariness (Harris, 2014; United States, 1978). Prior to the research, essential information must be disclosed to the participants about the purpose of the research, involvement requests, risks of harm, and withdrawal options (Gomez, 2016; Locke et al., 2007). To ensure the information is comprehensible to the potential subjects, it must be thoroughly explained. Presenting the information in a manner that is sufficiently digestible for the mental capacity of everyone is a necessity (Harris, 2014). The thoroughness in which the information is displayed on the informed consent form contributes to the level of comprehensibility provided to potential participants (Office for Human Research Protections [OHRP], 2014). The form should include the following: (a) research purpose, (b) participation benefits, (c) participation risks, (d) confidentiality guarantee, (e) assurance to participant that withdrawal is permissible at any time,

and (f) names of contact persons for all questions (Creswell, 2009; United States,1978). Translation for language and vernacular appropriation, along with time for subjects to consider participation are also major components of the comprehension principle (Harris, 2014; United States, 1978). After disclosing adequate information on a comprehensible level, subjects can voluntarily participate by valid consent. Voluntariness affords participants the opportunity to engage in activities of research without coercion or undue influence (Harris, 2014; United States, 1979).

Beneficence is the assurance that every measure is taken to ensure that the well-being of participants is secured. The Belmont Report expresses this as a mandate to not harm subjects, minimize all possible harm, and maximize every possible benefit (The National Commission, 1979; Protection of Human Subjects, 2018). As appropriate, the researcher's plan provides monitoring for the data collected in the study so that the information is confidentially maintained, and the subjects are safely protected (The National Commission, 1979). Assigning pseudonyms is a great way to keep the anonymity of participants, secure their identity, and ensure their privacy; thereby dispensing beneficence (Gomez, 2016). The use of beneficence in this study not only allows participants to share what they feel comfortable sharing but also displays the ethical practices utilized by the researcher to protect the research and participants.

Justice, the ethical practice governing the research, prefers no population or individual one over the other. Equitable distribution of burdens and benefits are proposed and demonstrated by the researcher to eliminate the injustice of entitlement or imposition (The National Commission, 1979). Just ways guide equal distribution of burdens and benefits to participants. (The National Commission, 1979). Ensuring that there is no bias or disparity of treatment allows

the participants to feel comfortable in disclosing information and taking part in the study's research (Harris, 2014; Orb et al., 2001).

Summary

In Chapters II and III of this study it was clearly established that law enforcement is a male-dominated field and women only make up a small percentage of the entire workforce. As recent as 2023, women are still very underrepresented. African American women only make up 8% of high-ranking law enforcement leadership in the United States. In addition to the analysis of the data collection process, the interpretation of the data received is also disclosed. The participants voluntarily submitted to the process of data collection with full vignette disclosure. They each signed Informed Consents with all elements of the study. Prior to the interviews, there was a review of the Consent Form and each participant's questions were answered. The face-to-face interviews and observations addressed emotional and cognitive responses to questions. Those observations were recorded in a journal and audio recordings were saved on an electronic device. The personal findings for each participant contributed to the assessment of promotional factors, barriers, and perceptions of effective leadership for women in law enforcement.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative research was to explore the lived experiences of African American women law enforcement supervisors related to the barriers encountered during their career, especially with promotion, and vital skills necessary for job performance. Though there has been research done on the perceptions of women in law enforcement, and even on the perceptions of African American lesbians in law enforcement, there has been no research strictly focused on the perceptions of African American women leaders in Georgia law enforcement. Chapter IV discusses the results of data collected from the one-on-one interviews with qualifying participants. To uphold authenticity in the illustrating of the findings, direct quote excerpts from the interviews will be included. As disclosed in Chapter III, the original goal sought six to ten participants through the snowball technique. After securing proof of eligibility and consent, eight participants were secured. The data collected from those eight participants was intended to address the overarching question of the study: What are the perceptions of African American women law enforcement leaders in their quest to advance and attain positions of leadership? The research sub-questions are as follows:

R1. What barriers, if any, do African American women law enforcement supervisors experience during their careers?

R2. What are the experiences of African American women law enforcement supervisors with regard to promotion?

R3. What skills and experiences do African American women law enforcement supervisors identify as vital for their careers and effective job performances?

R4. What barriers, if any, do African American women face as they seek to move from entry-level positions to supervisory ones?

The results of this chapter were organized into five sections for the purpose of exploring the research questions and unveiling the thematic analysis from the perceptions of the participants. This first section introduces the chapter and restates the purpose of the research. Secondly, the theoretical overview of the study is explained. Next, the participants' profiles and interview process are shared. Fourth, the findings and themes discovered are explained. The fifth and final section summarizes the chapter, highlighting the commonalities of the participants' perceptions of their lived experiences on the climb from entry level to supervisory ranks in law enforcement leadership.

Participants' Profiles

The eight participants secured for this qualitative study were welcomed based upon their status as African American women law enforcement officers who have held or are currently holding positions of leadership ascending from Sergeant to Chief of Police in the state of Georgia. Each participant, by referral, was contacted via e-mail, text message, or direct telephone call. Once interest was expressed and an agreement to receive information was communicated, an introduction letter to potential participants and a criteria questionnaire was emailed (see Appendix A). The women completed and returned, via email, the criteria questionnaire to ensure they met the research study criteria. With the small sample size, careful effort was made to maintain confidentiality. Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant with a number attached to differentiate and organize the responses of each woman.

Education, age, rank, length of tenure, agency size, and number of people responsible for managing were additional independent variables included in the criteria qualifications for this study. The ages of the participants ranged from 40 to 59. Although not required for promotion, educational experience for all participants ranged from some college to a master's degree. Only

one participant did not complete college, listing some college as her highest level of education. Another participant completed a bachelor's degree and the remaining six participants all earned master's degrees. The length of time with their respective agencies ranged from 1.3 to 30 years and the length of tenure for the women in their supervising capacities ranged from 1.5 to 23 years. The agency sizes, or number of employees assigned to each location, ranged from 1 to 1000 people and the participants for this study have supervised in the range of anywhere from 1 to 99 full-time employees at a time.

Some of the participants were active and some were retired. Though there were several potential interviewees recommended and contacted, most of those who were in active duty did not finalize by signing their consent forms. After several follow-ups and responses from the potential participants, it became clear that the ones who continuously deferred were doing so because they were in active-duty positions and may face backlash within the department for participating. One of the retired participants shared that she probably would not have participated had she still been actively employed with her former agency. The following section of this study includes information that is specific about each participant, from their law enforcement career path to their current rank and nature of their role(s).

Participant 1: The first participant retired from her 30-year career in law enforcement and re-entered the field of law enforcement 10 months prior to the interview. She returned as a Major, second in command, in the campus university police system. She was recruited by the Chief of Police, someone that she previously supervised at another agency. At the time of this interview, September 2023, Participant 1 is between 50–59 years of age. She holds a master's degree and is currently in school to earn her doctorate. She has spent more than 23 years of her 30-year law enforcement career in leadership. Prior to her retirement, in her position as Captain,

she managed between 51–99 people. The administrative budget that she was accountable for was upwards of $500,000. At that time, there were 101–500 employees in total at that agency.

When she entered, she held a bachelor's degree, which opened the door for her to move into the position of Corporal within 2 ½ years. Three years later, she made Sergeant and stayed in that position for 5 ½ years. Next, she was promoted to Lieutenant and held that position for 7 years, until she attained the rank of Captain for the next 12 years. She stated that on the climb she found that none of her successes have been easy, and she has been fighting for 31 years. The hurdles that she recognizes she had to overcome should not have been because she believes that when there is an organizational system with protocols in place, we should all simply go by the process "without drama." She notes that it is unfortunate that although African American women may have the education and qualifications, they still must deal with politics, racism, sexism, etc. However, because she learned to participate and deal with all of those obstacles, she was made better and more valuable as a law enforcement officer.

Participant 2: Participant 2 is a retired third-generation law enforcement officer. Growing up with parents who were both in law enforcement sparked her interest in law enforcement. She began as a dispatcher and was there for 2 years. She then decided she wanted to be more involved and hands-on in enforcing the law. So, she became a police patrol officer for the next 11 years. After a few sabotaging incidents of being intentionally passed over for promotional opportunities, which are later discussed in the Themes segment of this research, she found alternative routes to promotional opportunities and was able to skip a couple of ranks. At the time of this research, she is between the age of 40–49 and retired from law enforcement. She holds a master's degree and spent 18 years with the agency that she retired from. Seven of those years were in leadership. She retired as an Assistant Chief Investigator after serving 3 years in

the position. She was responsible for directly supervising 26–50 people and accountable for an administrative budget of $100,000–$499,000.

Participant 3: Participant 3 is a retired Assistant Chief Probation Officer II. She worked as a regular Officer for 19 years. The last year of her time, she served in leadership as an Assistant Chief, managing between 1–4 people and being accountable for an administrative budget of $100,000–$499,000. She says that operating as a supervisor for that year was not difficult at all. She performed the tasks and requirements easily because she had already been operating in that capacity prior to taking the exam to officially be promoted and paid for her services. Participant 3 recounts the former supervisor always coming to her first for her opinions and feedback on field related protocol and when new officers were hired, she would train them. Although she holds a master's degree, she says the most daunting part about her road to promotion was overcoming her own insecurities about whether she was qualified or capable of taking on that role.

Once she expressed her desire to apply for the position, her supervising Chief encouraged and guided her on what to do. She had to go to training for four weeks. The first week of training was textbook. A written exam followed in the second week. Once she passed the written exam, in the third week she had to prepare for an oral presentation. Had she not passed the written exam she would have had to start the process all over again by re-applying, go through the textbook course and re-take the exam. There was no option to simply re-take the exam. In the fourth week she gave an oral presentation before a board of superior officers. She passed and was then hired as the Training Officer for that agency. She retired after only one year in her higher-ranking leadership position because she was injured during a training session and could no longer perform her duties. She was considered disabled and forced to retire as a result.

Participant 4: The fourth participant to be interviewed is Chief of Police in the campus university police system. At the time of the interview, she had been in that position for 1 year and 3 months, which is the total length of time she had been working at the university. She recounts that when she came into law enforcement it was not originally what she was interested in. Prior to law enforcement, she was a dispatcher for an alarm system company. Her entry into this field was because she applied to be a dispatcher for the city and while she was there, one of the ladies at the intake window asked her if she had ever considered being a police officer, to which she said no. Law enforcement was not an interest of hers, but she was interested in being a lawyer at one point. She is between 40–49 years of age. She gave no account for a budget amount that she was responsible for but, she reports that she manages 5–9 people out of the 1–100 employees that work in that division. She holds a master's degree but says that a degree in higher education was not a requirement. She only needed a high school diploma.

She applied and then had to take a physical agility test. Once she passed the agility test, she had to go to the police academy. The academy was a 10-week program that, as she described, was like being in school because you must learn all of the laws. The two main requirements were the passing of the firearms range in week three, and the Emergency Vehicle Operation Course (EVOC) in week seven. As she recalls, most people fail out of the program during the firearms course in week three. She says that in week seven there are many who fail the EVOC because there are three parts, and you must pass all to continue.

Participant 4 mentioned the difficulty in that course by sharing that she had failed it twice. Her saving grace was that they were not being fired during that time for failing EVOC, only for failing the range, so she passed on her third try. While she awaited her opportunity to retake EVOC, she came back to her precinct and worked at the front desk. To ascend to the Chief

of Police. She says she interviewed with a panel. The panel narrowed the applicants down to two candidates. She and another candidate were then required to return for a second interview with a PowerPoint presentation. After the presentation, she was hired for the position and moved forward with training.

Participant 5: The fifth participant's job title with the Georgia Bureau of Investigations (GBI) is Special Agent in Charge (SAC), which is the equivalent of Chief of Police and is responsible for running all the sub-offices in the area. At the time of the interview, she had been with her current agency for 27 years and in her leadership positions for 14 of those years. She holds a master's degree and out of the 505–1000 employees in her area, she directly supervises 10–25. She is responsible for an administrative budget of $100,000–$499,000. She served as Lieutenant and Captain prior to becoming SAC.

She joined law enforcement as an entry-level narcotics agent through a very strenuous process. After serving in that position for one year, she began another very competitive application process to be considered for Special Agent. This strenuous process included a very large pool of 1000 applicants. Out of the 1000 applicants, only 40 would be able to go to the GBI Academy. Other requirements, such as physical and mental evaluations and one-on-one oral reviews before a board of rating superiors, were very challenging.

Participant 6: Participant 6 retired as Assistant Chief Director for her agency. She is between 40–49 years of age. She has some college experience but not a 4-year higher education degree. She worked for her agency for 20 years and 15 of those years were spent as a manager. She was directly in charge of supervising 51–99 employees. At that time, there were 1–100 employees at the agency. The administrative budget amount that Participant 6 was accountable for was $100,000–$499,000. During her time in law enforcement, after ascending from entry

level officer, she was able to serve in different areas of leadership, such as Lieutenant, Sergeant, and Assistant Chief.

Her entry into law enforcement came by way of necessity. She says that she lived in a small town where good career-oriented jobs were somewhat non-existent. She was a young single mother in need of good benefits and insurance. Law enforcement was considered one of the higher paying jobs at that time. Becoming an officer afforded her the opportunity to attain those things she sought for her and her child. She applied, was hired, and remained in the entry level officer position for 5 years before applying for a supervisor position. Once she became a Sergeant, she went through various training courses to become a certified instructor training officer. That position opened doors for her to continue to move up the ranks into the Lieutenant position. She was able to accomplish these things within a 7-year period. Not long after, before applying for the Director position, she served as the Administrative Lieutenant, governing the training and scheduling of all staff.

Participant 7: The seventh participant is between the ages of 50–59 years. She holds a master's degree and holds the appointed upper-level management position of Special Agent in Charge (SAC). She has been a commander of a section, zone, area, specialized unit, and or precinct. She has been working at her current agency for 30 years. She has been a manager for the agency for 21 years. Ten to 25 people directly reported to her, out of the 501–1000 employees working for that agency. The administrative budget that she is accountable for is upwards of $500,000. She is now the main person in charge of her office after serving in the positions of Detective for 9 years, Lieutenant for 9 years, and Captain for 12 years.

Her road to law enforcement was not her initial pursuit. She notes that she did not prepare for attaining employment in her field after graduating from college. So, she returned to her

hometown and a law enforcement official, who was a friend of the family contacted one of her family members and sent word for her to come and see them at their office. She complied and that official offered her a job at a local agency. She took that job and while working there, someone else came in and told her about a position that was becoming available at her current agency. By that time, she knew she wanted to work in law enforcement but did not want to remain in her small hometown because of the lack of opportunities they provided. At the advice of the person, she contacted someone at another location, learned what was expected of the current agency she is with. After making a lasting impression with that contact, they reached out to her former employer. A glowing recommendation was made, and they scheduled her for an interview. She successfully interviewed, was hired, and 20 years later she is at the highest level.

Participant 8: Participant 8, who is between 49–49 years of age, has been working for her current agency for 22 years. She spent 11 years as a support staff employee, 5 years as a Sergeant, 4 years as a Lieutenant, and 2 years as Captain. She holds a bachelor's degree and at the time of the interview, she has served a total of 11 years in leadership as a manager. Her current title is Deputy Sheriff Captain. Out of the 501–1000 employees that work for her agency, she manages and directly supervises 51–99 people. The administrative budget amount that she is accountable for is upwards of $500,000. She recollected coming into law enforcement as a civilian with hopes of further her education to become a lawyer. After entering the agency and fully understanding what needed to be done, she realized working in this field was a part of her purpose in life. She felt she needed to be in law enforcement to make a difference in society.

Table 1

Demographics for African American Women Participants

Pseudonym	Title	Education	Years in Leadership	Retired/Active
Participant 1	Major	Masters	23	Retired/ Re-Entered
Participant 2	Asst. Chief Investigator	Masters	7	Retired
Participant 3	Parole Officer II	Masters	1	Retired
Participant 4	Chief	Masters	1.5	Active
Participant 5	Special Agent in Charge	Masters	14	Active
Participant 6	Assistant Director	Some College	15	Retired
Participant 7	Special Agent in Charge	Masters	21	Active
Participant 8	Deputy Sheriff Captain	Bachelors	11	Active

Interview Process

As previously mentioned in the Participants' Profile portion of this chapter, each potential participant was required to complete a criteria evaluation to ensure the authenticity and eligibility of each interviewee. In addition to their educational background and law enforcement career total tenure, factors included in the criteria evaluation form were the amount of the administrative budget they were responsible for, the length of time spent in all positions that they held, and the number of people they are or were responsible for managing.

After the criteria assessment was completed and approved, each participant received the informed consent formed by email (see Appendix C). The consent form thoroughly explained the study and the interviewing process. Each interview participant was required to sign and date the form electronically, then return it via email. Reminders were sent via email to each confirmed participant, providing them with a private Zoom interview link, and their scheduled interview date and time. Once in the Zoom interview room, prior to each interview, assurances were reiterated to each participant, such as the confidentiality and privacy protections that pledge anonymity by way of assigning pseudonyms to protect their identity. The name on the Zoom screen for the interviewee was then changed to the pseudonym assigned. Potential risks and benefits were readdressed and an opportunity for participants to ask questions was offered.

Each participant was asked the same 10 interview questions, with follow-up questions when needed, to collect answers for the four research sub-questions. Those answers were then used to ascertain the answer to the overarching research question, "What are the perceptions of African American women law enforcement leaders in their guest to advance and attain positions of leadership?" As understood and consented by each participant, the interviews were recorded via Zoom visual and audio. An advising statement was given to each participant after their interview to provide them with information about what will take place afterwards. They were reassured that they were anonymous, and that the transcription of their interviews would be completed within one week. An emailed copy would be sent to them and they had one week, if they had any questions or feedback about the transcript, to request changes or additions to what they shared.

The Zoom software did not automatically transcribe, so the audio file generated was downloaded into the Otter Voice software for transcribing. Each participant's interview was

emailed to them, affording them the opportunity to review and request any changes that they may have detected. No requests for changes were made.

Findings

As the questions were asked during the interviews, an atmosphere of naturally organic and free-flowing conversation was cultivated that encouraged the participants to speak openly. Interviews lasted anywhere from 30 to 60 minutes. The participants were given ample time to ask questions for clarity and to express themselves by expounding on their thoughts as the conversation progressed. Interview responses showed that some findings were consistent with previous research. For example, Gomez (2016) states, all participants in that study agreed that professional development, formal education, mentoring, and networking are key elements that assisted them in obtaining their leadership positions in law enforcement. All participants in this study agreed that professional development courses and training, networking, and mentoring were the keystones to them even being considered for the law enforcement leadership ranks that they ascended to. All but one participant agreed that formal higher education was essential to their elevation. However, findings also suggest the opposite of what many previous studies say about the perceptions of women in law enforcement.

Notably listed as one of the needs for this research, the voice of African American women was not adequately reflected in previous studies about the perceptions of women in law enforcement. Either men were speaking for the women, it was the perspective of open lesbian African American women, the women were not in higher ranking leadership positions, or African American women were completely excluded from the study all together. So, as theorized in Chapter III, the findings of this study discover that there is indeed a double standard when it comes to the qualifications, communications, and expectations of African American women in

their pursuits to advance in law enforcement leadership. The consensus of the participants in this research is that African American women must not only exceed the standard performance level but, they must do so while overcoming the barriers that are, most times, set before them by their male and female Caucasian counterparts as well as their male African American counterparts.

As African American women law enforcement leaders face a very misogynistic male dominating system, they also must contend with the disparity of treatment in salary and wages, lack of community respect and support, as well as the arena of policing verses politics. To maneuver and matriculate up the ranks in law enforcement, African American women leaders have had to master communication and leadership skills that others do not. Participant 2 explained how she had to conduct herself in certain situations to make others believe they had a domineering and controlling position over her so that she could ultimately get what she was working to attain. She said that her mother, who was second generation law enforcement, taught her a valuable lesson that she implemented as she worked toward her goals. She said, "Sometimes you have to be quiet to be heard, because when you fight every fight people see that you are a fighter, but they don't see the battle that you are engaged in. So, just document and be quiet." Many of the responses and findings in this study uncover themes that required them to apply their wits and unwavering persistence to tread lightly during the war in order to win the battle of ascension into leadership.

Themes

As a tool to keep track of impressions, thoughts, and possible themes that emerged during the interviews, I immediately wrote memos, specifically highlighting notable points from each participant. Those notable points were then categorized by the commonalities of the majority of the responses and descriptions of the lived experiences of the participants. From those categories,

five themes materialized: (a) Obstacles, (b) Sabotage, (c) Jealousy, (d) Overlooked, and (e) Combative/ Overly Aggressive. Much like Harriet Tubman used code words, songs, owl calls, and symbols to communicate with the slaves, there are certain key phrases that African Americans have come to understand relating to the unfair treatment, hidden agendas, and misrepresentation of our community. These phrases are attached to the themes they describe in the following section, along with a discussion of how they emerged in this study.

Theme 1: Operation Stumbling Blocks (Obstacles): Interview question number 4 was a multi-part inquiry beginning by asking the participants to give their own definition of barriers (see Appendix D). All of them, in different variations of their descriptions, defined barriers as obstacles or blockages that get in the way to stop you from moving forward. All but one of the participants gave vivid accounts of obstacles and stumbling blocks that had been imposed upon them by their superior officers to stop them or cause immense delay that would either sabotage their chances for advancement or increase their level of discouragement so that they would give up their pursuits. Notably, all the supervisors credited for the stumbling blocks were males. Most of them were Caucasian males but a couple of them were African American.

Participant 1 described her barriers as obstacles or blockages, and different types of hurdles, seen and some unseen, that she had to overcome. She said, although she had the education and was qualified, politics, sexism, and racism put her in "a different configuration with barriers" that she had to anticipate and deal with. She expressed,

> With certain processes in place, the steps to advancement should be pretty much without drama. Unfortunately, I've had a lot of barriers, but it actually made me better. It made me think more. It's made me more valuable as a law enforcement officer.

When asked to share some of her specific barriers she stated,

> the main thing is I'm a female. Also, I'm an outspoken African American and geographically from up north. So, coming down south, the way I articulate myself made some uncomfortable.

She shared that she would get a great deal of snide comments from Caucasian males because they seemed surprised about the way she spoke correct English. Often, she would receive comments like, “Ooh, you’re so articulate. I love that.” Then she would notice that she would not be allowed to cross into certain areas, as if they were going to teach her how to stay in her place. She says that she came to expect that from the Caucasian males but what was most surprising and disappointing to her is that some of the obstacles that she faced came from African American males in leadership.

The Caucasian males would attempt to stop her because they were angered and seemingly surprised that she would dare to be so bold as to compete with them for positions. However, she said it saddened and hurt her heart to see some of her own African American brothers come against her. As she declared,

> They would recognize my talent and see that I deserve promotion, but rather than lift me up they would stab me in the back to try and stop me from getting ahead of them. Now that was not the majority of the African American males I worked with. The majority of the pushback came from Caucasian males, but still, the couple of African American males that I had had negative experiences with hurt me because they didn’t realize that I wanted nothing from them, and I wasn’t trying to control them. I desired to make things better for us all.

Participant 2 said that she would experience hardship from those who simply did not respect African American women, so they created barriers to deny her advancement. Her experience was that these people did not want the positions they were standing in the way of. She said,

> In my position there would be people who don't even want the position, but don't want you to have the position. These people, who don't feel like you deserve the position and who don't respect Black women, or don't respect authority in general, are the barriers to not receiving those upper-level positions.

When asked to clarify who the people were, she said her Caucasian male Lieutenant and Major, as well as some Caucasian male and female subordinates, mostly the white female subordinates. I then asked her to provide details of some of the obstacles she faced. She detailed,

> When I went for prime assignments I was denied and instead given what was left over. I would not give up and eventually, when I started to get a little bit of seniority in terms of time, they would move the goal posts. So, when good off days became available, and they knew that I was next in line, the criteria would change. The white females and some of the white male subordinates would create barriers in the form of sabotage, but the Black male subordinates would help by making me aware of what was happening so that I could do what needed to be done in advance. White males and females would basically try to trip me up on technicalities, so with them, I had to explicitly document everything and leave very little room for verbal interactions because I was determined to lay the foundation and remove any possible opportunities for misunderstandings.

Participant 4 spoke about how she experienced many barriers within her department, even after she started to excel in leadership positions. She said those barriers were imposed upon her by those that worked alongside her in leadership as well as those that she was subordinate to. At one time in her leadership career there were several vacancies because the previous administration had made such a mess. Several officers were inexperienced and only hired because they were friends with those leaders abusing their power in those positions of authority. Those officers were eventually terminated and other officers, who had the potential to be assets, left because of the scandals taking place. An interim Chief was moved to that agency, but she would not show up to work and it left Participant 4 having to perform several duties that were assigned to at least four different positions. As she fought to perform the duties of several positions as a new leader, she began to recognize that she was being taken advantage of. She was only being paid for the one position that she was hired in, but she was doing the job that her supervisor, the interim Chief, was supposed to be doing, along with some of her fellow counterparts.

After everyone saw that she was determined to succeed and she would work hard to not allow the department to suffer, she said it was as if they expected her to do what she was doing and even began to add more and more to her plate. It became obvious that they wanted her to fail. That made her work even harder to succeed, but she began to recognize the intentional barriers that were being set in her lap. As she matured, she saw what was intended for her failure as the key to her success because she was hands-on in learning every position from entry level to the top. Of her barriers she stated,

> I know people would think of barriers as something that may stop them from getting to a place they want to go, but I believe it is something that just takes you a little bit longer to get to where you are going. My barriers have all just been something that I needed to go around. When I think about my career and some of the things that I experienced, there have been barriers all the way through, but I just had to deal with and flip them to get what I needed to get from them. In hindsight, those things that were my barriers or my roadblocks ended up being my steppingstones. That's how I have to look at them.

Participants 5, 6, 7, and 8 each provided germane to the theme and similar to one another by definition. Examples that they provided were more of the same types of experiences shared by Participants 1, 2, and 4. However, Participant 8 said that she had been faced with so many barriers, obstacles, and hurdles in her attempts to achieve more and advance, that she also began to be a barrier to herself. She said that her agency and superiors had done so much to block her through the years that she began to question herself. She had to fight against believing that she must not be good enough because of what they had done to her through the years. Her words were,

> I had to get to the point where I knew or felt like I was enough and not being under the thumb of somebody else defining me. So, making that change within myself and not feeling bad about them not promoting me was what I had to do. I said to myself, don't worry about that. Don't let that stop you. And once I came to that conclusion, or the realization that I am enough, I was determined to make the best of my situation.

She said she began to stay in her own little bubble while making moves. She went back to school and got her degree. Then she started taking other classes and preparing herself for the shift that (by faith) was about to happen in her life. Now she is reaping the benefits, heading up projects, and following up on Commanders that were once over her.

The one participant who did not say that she was blocked by her superiors stated that she was her own stumbling block because many times she questioned if she was good enough to occupy the positions she desired. When asked to elaborate, Participant 3 said that she had to keep telling herself, "I can do this. I can do this." She said that she experienced anxiety when she thought about the different tests that were required to advance because she was not confident with test taking. As she recollected, once she got it in her head that she really wanted to try and do it, she went to her Caucasian female Chief and told her. She said her supervisor's response was, "Hey, I just been waiting on you."

Theme 2: Monkey Wrench in the Works (Sabotage): All but two participants spoke of some form of sabotage that they faced at the hands of their Caucasian male superiors. Most of those participants had very similar accounts of how they constantly had to combat the "monkey wrenches" that were being thrown in their endeavors to advance. Attempts to deliberately coordinate the obstruction or destruction of their careers started to be expected each day. One of the participants shared that the small number of Caucasian males and females that they supervised began to try and trip her up by complaining about her instructions being unclear or that she commanded something that she never did. So, because she recognized what they were doing, she started putting everything in writing and those memos would be circulated to every

officer in the agency. She also said that when the African American male subordinates recognized what their Caucasian counterparts were doing, they started banding together to protect her and make her aware of everything that they learned so that she would be fully prepared for whatever she may encounter.

Participant 2 specifically spoke about being sabotaged by higher ranking officers when she was attempting to climb the ladder into supervising leadership positions. She stated that the Majors and Lieutenants were responsible for providing information necessary for her to prepare and study for tests for leadership positions but intentionally withheld the information until the last minute so that she would not have time to prepare.

Participant 4 had so much dumped on her at one time that she realized she was being set-up to fail. She was covering four different positions while only being paid to do one. When she wanted to apply for a higher leadership position to be paid for all the work she did, she was told that she did not qualify. Then, when she tried to move to a lateral position to alleviate herself from being used, mistreated, and underpaid, she was told that she was too valuable in the position that she was in to be moved into another position. She was managing the budget and doing the hiring, emergency management, dispatching, and part-time security but was being told by her male superior she could not be paid an additional $6,000 for all that she was doing. At the same time, she watched that same supervisor change the title of one of her male co-workers, who barely reported to work each day, and increase his pay. She realized they were trying to make her quit.

Participant 6 says that as she moved up the ranks to upper-level management she began to experience difficulties from those that she once worked alongside. She says that she did not

have any issues from new hires, who were required to answer to her but, her male subordinates that she once held the same position as, began to cause problems for her. She also stated that the same positions she was now occupying, several of them had also applied for. As said,

> They were fine with me as long as we were all on the same level, but when I became the Assistant Director, that's when things went way left for me. I was one step away from becoming the Director of the entire facility and rather than those officers celebrating me, they began to mistreat me.

She said they started talking against her and even filing complaints against her in an attempt to sabotage her career. She said investigations were launched and she was cleared but the attempts to tear her down got so bad that it was difficult for her to function. She said she was really hurt to the point that she considered not continuing in the position.

Theme 3: Green-Eyed Monster (Jealousy): Envy and jealousy became apparent for many of the participants once they began to advance. They shared stories of how both men and women showed disdain for their success. It did not matter that they worked hard to advance. The only thing that seemed to matter was that the participants had excelled to a rank in leadership that was above their positions. Most of the people that showed themselves green with envy also began to create obstacles and attempt to sabotage the participants. Several of those examples were detailed in the above sections, Theme 1 and Theme 2.

Additionally, Participant 6 stated,

> When everybody was on the same level, everybody got along. We were like one big happy family but once I became a leader and doing new things, it became hard for them to handle. I started making enemies once I became a leader. I hate to use that word (enemies) but it is true. You really see people's true colors once you become a leader.

She went on to share that she started having problems with some of the female officers complaining about the fact that she no longer had to dress like they did, as regular officers. They complained about her being able to wear earrings and them not being able to, or how she could wear her hair in different ways and fingernails. To rebel, some of them would not come to work because they knew it would cause them to be short-staffed and Participant 6 would then have to take on the added work herself.

Participant 2 also described her experiences with African American women within the agency that became jealous of her after she became a leader. She said it seemed that they became threatened by her when it came to the attention and support that she received from the African American males. She heard of comments being made like, “Okay, so I guess she's the queen bee and everybody's flocking to her.” She expressed that it became somewhat weird because it was like the women became territorial with the men. They did not work against her, but they didn’t necessarily work with her either. They took a non-supportive, passive role. To sum it up she stated, “When I took on a position of authority, they became intimidated and jealous rather than supportive.”

Participant 1 says that she believed many of the Caucasian male superior officers still did not know that we had won the Civil War, because their level of racism and sexism was at an all-time high. The African American male superior officers also revealed their fear and jealousy when they realize that she is an educated Black woman, working on her fourth degree. She went on to say, *“Fear and jealousy must be married but they are an ugly combination, and I don’t know how they make it together.”*

Theme 4: Privy Pass-over (Overlooked): The experiences of most of the participants in this study has been that they have been overlooked by their male superiors and or their male counterparts at some point in their careers. They give an account of being deliberately ignored or excluded from opportunities that others in their same positions, but of a different gender and race were made privy to.

Participant 2 shared that as she set out on her promotional path, within her organization applicants were required to take a test and if they passed the written test they would go before an interview board. They would then have to make what is called the short list, as a result of a highly successful interview, to be considered for promotion. Once placed on that list for a maximum length of two years. If not chosen from that list within that two-year period, the prospects were removed and would have to start the process all over again. She found out that she had been passed over several times because her male Caucasian supervisors, who were in charge of disseminating the testing information would make her aware of the opportunity far too late for her to apply and test, whereas her Caucasian male and female counterparts were supplied with the information and resources to adequately prepare far in advance.

Interestingly, as Participant 5 recounted her journey, she mentioned that though many African American women may have applied or wanted to apply for the higher-level position that she holds, only two African American women had ever held it. In 2007, when she attained the level of Assistant Special Agent in Charge (ASAC), only two other women had ever been in that position since the history of the organization as a state police agency that had been born through legislation in 1974. She expressed the consistent overlooking and intentional passing over of viable African American women in the past is one of major reasons underrepresentation exists.

She said the opportunities may not have fairly been there for African American women because 9 times out of 10 they already knew who they planned to put in the position. When asked who is the they that she refers to, she replied,

> It's not politically correct to say it anymore, but they used to call it the good old boy system, that was very much in play." When asked to elaborate she explained, "Heavy emphasis on they would know who they wanted and if they had groomed them for the position that was who was going to get it. That being a white male, as it being a white male-dominated agency in terms of supervision.

For clarification, I asked who were the good old boys in the system she referred to. Her reply was, "White men."

Participant 8 described her road to leadership as very hard and, at times, really discouraging. She says that her attempts to elevate were constantly met with resistance, as she was passed over and her Caucasian female counterparts were basically escorted up the ladder in front of her. She said they did not come with more education or skills, but instead they were just preferred and protected by the Caucasian superior officers. Her experience was that each time she expressed a desire to gain more experience to better prepare for the leadership positions that she desired, she was passed over or blatantly held back, citing that she was a better fit or the best officer for the more aggressive positions. It was a backhanded insult covered in a compliment to keep her stuck while the Caucasian females were enabled to get the experiences that were necessary for the upper-level management positions. In her exact words,

> Being afforded the opportunity to work in other areas to gain that agency experience was not a path that I was able to take because others were put on the fast track instead of me. They were allowed to work in certain areas, and they got a chance to get the experience by being moved outside of the jail, going to different other specialized units, being in the courts, working with evictions, and anything else they desired to move around and do.

She went on to say that these blatant pass-overs were explained to her as the agency's need for her strong presence in the area that she was in. However, the area that she was in kept her dangerous predicaments, as she had to be in direct contact with hardened criminals and inmates. Participant 8 recalls being told,

> You are awesome here. You are strong. You know how to work with the inmate so you need to stay right here. She can't handle this type of job.

She being any of the Caucasian women that were allowed to move into other positions as they climbed the ladder into the leadership positions that she wanted.

Participants 1, 4, and 7 shared similar stories. Each of them said that there were times, early in their careers, that they experienced being overlooked and they knew that it was because they were African American women, and the men did not want to be subject to their leadership. Because of these instances, they learned early that they could not advance by following the exact protocol that was set for them. Either they had to complain to superiors outside of their assigned precinct or request a lateral transfer out of the precinct all together, in hopes that they would have a better chance at moving up the ladder. If they were to complain, they ran the risk of retaliation.

If they transferred there was no telling how long it would take to advance because there were others already ahead of them at those other agencies, and they would more than likely have to relocate to less desired areas.

Theme 5: Angry Black Woman Syndrome (Combative/ Overly Aggressive): Several times the phrase Angry Black Woman (ABW) was mentioned when the participants shared their experiences. Out of the eight African American women leaders, seven of them said that they had been accused of being combative or overly aggressive, which is widely known as stereotypical descriptions of being an ABW. Other words that sometimes accompany that description are hostile, overbearing, bitter, and ill-tempered. Each time these words were used against them it was when they were operating with their rightful authority to implement procedures, command control, or set order amongst men.

Participant 5 stated,

> I have heard men express their mindset that if a Black woman was divorced, and then she's coming in to be an authoritative position over men, it's a strong possibility that she is the African American angry Black woman.

She goes on to discuss the difference in the way Caucasian women and African American women are responded to in law enforcement. She recounts,

> So, if a Caucasian woman questions the standard, or the director, she just needs clarification, but if an African American woman does the exact same thing then she is considered difficult to deal with or she is an angry Black woman that is challenging authority.

Participant 6 says that she once complained on for sending too many emails but she said that she did that so that she would not be accused of being too aggressive or hostile, and so that subordinates would not be able to claim that they do not understand what is required of them. She said that she was getting disciplined from her superiors for not addressing situations. So, sending emails was how she complied with their requests and eliminated the negative feedback that she got when she would verbally address situations. It was also her way of documenting her actions, and at the same time, not having anyone complain about her being verbally aggressive towards them. She said that she felt so much pressure because she was simply trying to cover herself, but her subordinates would turn around and complain about her sending out too many emails.

Participant 7 expressed that she feels like no matter what African American women do, "the ABW stigma will always be attached to us if we are positions of leadership and stand for anything," Likewise, Participant 8 says that because her job requires her to be stern and alert, and she does not walk around grinning from ear to ear, she has accepted that she may probably always experience others trying to insinuate or attach the ABW stigma onto her. She no longer cares because she has a job to do, and it can be a very dangerous one.

Summary

Chapter IV detailed the lived experiences of the participants based on themes that materialized from the open-ended interview questions they answered. The findings were disclosed, and the common themes expounded upon gave context to their perspectives on many of the hidden experiences of African American female law enforcement leaders in Georgia. Two specific theories were incorporated to illustrate the main ideas that explain the conceptual

framework. Those theories are Racial Discrimination and Gender Discrimination, which both support the statement that women of color do not experience forms of discrimination separate from one another but packaged together (Davis, 2012).

All participants agreed that African American women must do far more than all men and Caucasian women to show themselves qualified. They say that the privileges that their white counterparts are afforded, keeps them far removed from the reality of what African Americans face on a day-to-day basis, relating to the advances, barriers, and impact on performance. Chapter V will include a discussion on the research, conclusion, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of African American women law enforcement supervisors in Georgia related to the barriers encountered during their career, especially with promotion, and vital skills necessary for job performance. Despite their contributions, African American women law enforcement leaders have not had their experiences fully acknowledged within the literature of research that precedes this study. Their perceptions have not accurately been reported because in most cases, accounts were given by women of other races or the males who supervise them (Gamble & Turner, 2015). Assumptions and stereotypes have contributed to the slow-moving entrance and advancements of African American women in this male dominated profession, thereby affording a disparity of treatment, and underrepresentation to prolong.

As reported, African American women hold less than 10% of all United States law enforcement jobs (Archbold & Schulz, 2012; Gomez, 2016). Some have achieved top positions in law enforcement, but still fall far behind other races in law enforcement leadership roles (Primus, 2015; Tilley, 2008). The Glass Ceiling Commission (2013) tells of how most agencies have a disproportionate number of Caucasian males in sworn law enforcement positions. The blockages for African American women in law enforcement that have come to be known as the "glass ceiling" barrier, is a metaphoric term used to describe the invisible, yet unbreakable limits that are placed upon them (Harris, 2014). Men, specifically Caucasian men in positions of power, impose their gender and racial biases to consistently deny women of color advancement opportunities (Gossett & Williams, 2008). Since the 1900s this has kept African American women bound in their quest to higher executive and managerial positions (Primus, 2015).

Even those well-educated and highly qualified women that have been able to occupy executive positions are experiencing hardship from discriminatory practices (Noland et al., 2016). Holding 50% of the bachelor's degrees and 42% of the advanced degrees, workplace discrimination has been obvious because these African American women were compensated with lower pay and lower authority levels than their Caucasian counterparts (Cotter, 2009; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). It has been stated that improvements must be made to reduce the level of undermining and underrepresentation of African American women in law enforcement. However, with meager research that specifically uncovers the perceptions of African American women in law enforcement, it has been difficult to validate the necessity for those changes.

This final chapter presents a discussion, conclusion, and recommendations for future research. Specifically, it includes a summary of each chapter, a synopsis of the research questions, identified themes, implications, limitations, significance of the study, and a summary of the significant research points.

Discussion

The first four chapters of this study presented the problem, a review of the literature, the methodology, and the findings of the research. Chapter I set the foundation for the study by unveiling the facts associated with African American women in Law Enforcement not being afforded the same employment, salary, and promotional opportunities as their white male counterparts in law enforcement. The intentions to address the underrepresentation and the disparity of treatment that African American women in law enforcement leadership encounter in their pursuits to be promoted was expressed. Likewise, the purpose to help minimize discrimination, provide new leadership opportunities, and increase the number of African American women in law enforcement leadership roles was stated.

The need for this study was validated in the Chapter II review of the literature, as it delved into the historical mode of operating in law enforcement leadership and the discriminatory practices toward African American women. Outside normal protocol and in comparison, to their male and female counterparts, African American women leaders have had to overcome inordinate barriers in their pursuits to promotion since the entry of women over the last 100 years. As reported, law enforcement agencies have over a long period of time, been used in the oppression of African American women. As they fight to gain respect and ascertain higher level promotions to various ranks, unjust treatment in areas such as promotion, gender discrimination, and sexual harassment prohibit advancement (Zipf, 2005). By accumulating the history of women in law enforcement along with dissecting the intersectionality of race and gender discrimination, the literature review showed how entry, performance, and the advancement of African American women in law enforcement has been affected.

Chapter III presented the methodology used in the research study to credibly ascertain the lived experiences of African American women law enforcement leaders in Georgia. A qualitative approach was used to evoke the barriers, advances, and impacts on performance that African American women leaders experienced during their entry into the law enforcement profession and throughout their career pursuits to top level positions. Sections on the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations were included in addition to the selection of sample participants, data collection, and data analysis. The concluding section of the chapter was on ethical assurances, discussing the need and plan for protecting the basic human rights for each participant. This discussion included the federal regulations for compliance with the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

The background of each participant, the findings of the research, and the themes that emerged from the open-ended interview questions they answered were detailed in Chapter IV. An account of the criteria assessment and consent form completion by electronic signing was also shared. Email reminders were sent with a Zoom link, pseudonyms assigned, potential risks and benefits readdressed, and the offer for participants to ask questions was made prior to each interview. After the interviews were conducted, findings and common themes about the hidden experiences of African American female law enforcement leaders in Georgia emerged.

Those findings explored the lived experiences, leadership, struggles, promotional paths, and perceptions of eight African American women in law enforcement leadership roles. These women have held or are currently holding positions of leadership ascending from Sergeant to Chief of Police in the state of Georgia. Each participant was identified using the snowball effect, in which each interviewee recommended other African American women law enforcement leaders in Georgia. This resulted in data collected from those participants with intentions to address the overarching question of the study: What are the perceptions of African American women law enforcement leaders in their guest to advance and attain positions of leadership? The research sub-questions are as follows:

R1. What barriers, if any, do African American women law enforcements supervisors experience during their careers?

R2. What are the experiences of African American women law enforcement supervisors with regard to promotion?

R3. What skills and experiences do African American women law enforcement supervisors identify as vital for their careers and effective job performances?

R4. What barriers, if any, do African American women face as they seek to move from entry level positions to supervisory ones?

Notable points from the participants' responses were then categorized by their commonalities. Descriptions of the lived experiences of the participants were drawn from those categories and five themes took shape as a representation of their perceptions. Those emerging themes are (a) Obstacles, (b) Sabotage, (c) Jealousy, (d) Overlooked, and (e) Combative/ Overly Aggressive. In Chapter IV, an in-depth look at each theme was administered, which included the meaning of the themes, lived experiences from each participant, and direct quotes from their interviews. Below, the themes, their descriptive phrases, a brief summary of the interviews, and the conclusions drawn from this research are listed.

Theme 1: Obstacles (Operation Stumbling Blocks) – This theme provides context to the entire study, as every participant spoke of barriers that they encountered in their initiatives to attain higher-ranking leadership positions. Known as circumstances, words, preventative actions, and blockages to stop forward progression, the obstacles that cause difficulty for all but one of the participants were imposed upon them by their superior officers. The one that did not refer to her superior as a source of the barriers that she encountered, credited her own mental blocks and thoughts of inadequacy as the source of her delay to leadership. Except for two of the superior officers labeled as the forerunners, for what one participant phrased as 'Operation Stumbling Blocks,' all were Caucasian males. The two who were not Caucasian are described as African American males trying to measure up, desiring to impress, or afraid to do anything that would be considered as opposing to the practices of the Caucasian superiors.

Accounts of gender and racial harassment, as well as denied benefits and assignment opportunities were shared by the participants. One of the interviewees shared how she was

requesting assignments to gain more experience so that she could qualify to apply for leadership positions. She was denied the opportunities and made to stay in the assigned subordinate positions that kept her from qualifying. Another spoke of being alienated and treated as if she could not equally perform the same duties as her male counterparts, so she faced barriers in the underestimation of her physical abilities.

The overall conclusion about obstacles, as it relates to this study, was that the barriers that were imposed upon the participants were imposed because of their race and gender. This became apparent in the interviews as each interviewee began to describe how their Caucasian counterparts, who were much less qualified, were passed through and placed in leadership positions over them.

Theme 2: Sabotage (Monkey Wrench in the Works) – The research participants identified sabotage as a main thematic perception, relating to an impact on their advancements. There were attempts made to deliberately change or get in the way of their progress. One participant stated that her Caucasian male Majors and Lieutenants were responsible for providing information necessary for her to apply and prepare by studying for a written test for a leadership position, but they intentionally withheld the information until the last minute so that she would not have time to fully prepare and ultimately fail.

One of the other participants gave an account of how she was required to perform the duties of several positions but not being paid for the crossover duties. To be exact, she was performing the duties of four positions and her supervisor required her to do all of them while in an interim position to promotion. As she recounts, the clear plan of her superior officer was to bombard her with so much work that she would fail to perform and the department would fall short, thus resulting in the termination of her opportunity to advance and possible demotion or

dismissal. Even after requesting assistance and suitable pay she was denied and told that her time in the position was temporary and such changes for a temporary period would cost the department money that was not allotted in the budget at the time. However, the participant says that she knew better because one of the many duties she had to perform, that she was not being paid for, was budgeting. She was also screening for the new hires, so she knew what could financially be done. Then she attempted to move to another position that would be considered lateral in pay to alleviate the burden of the departmental misappropriation and her mistreatment. Again, she was denied the opportunity to move and told that there was no one else to replace the position that she currently held.

There were other accounts of sabotage that the participants gave and what can be concluded from those attempts regarding the aspect of the impact on performance in this research, is that those attempts were designed to discourage the participants and make them leave the department or quit the field of law enforcement all together. Having those that supervise you, and should be concerned with the overall well-being of the department, operating as the sources of deliberate destruction can be discouraging. It could, as most of the participants said, make you want to give up. They said they know it was mainly because they were African American that they were unwanted in the positions of authority, but especially because they were African American women. This is so because if there was only a choice between them and African American males, the males would be selected even if they were not better qualified.

Theme 3: Jealousy (The Green-Eyed Monster) – The green-eyed monster is commonly known as jealousy that threatens to drive a person mad and likely cause them to act out in a negative way, attacking those they feel envy or jealousy toward. As discussed in Chapter IV, many of the participants shared stories of how both men and women showed disdain for their

success and it did not matter that they worked hard to advance. The only thing that seemed to matter was that the participants had excelled to a rank in leadership that was above their positions and so most of the people that showed themselves green with envy also began to create obstacles and attempt to sabotage the participants. From Caucasian male superior officers showing their level of sexism and racism to other African American female officers making remarks about their pretentiousness, African American women law enforcement leaders experience a great deal of envy-based actions on a regular basis.

Some of the participants gave an account of having experienced jealousy from their own race of African American men, rather than the support they expected. They said that when those men recognized that they would be passing them in rank, they began to treat them in very belittling ways. The participants described being taunted, ignored, and their authority dismissed by those men when mandated to carry out policies at their behest. One participant said that an African American male officer that she worked alongside, in the same level rank for years, and considered to be a friend, began to file complaints on her when she was in the process of completing the standards for promotion. She said that she did not know until after she had been promoted and had access to employee files.

Other participants candidly spoke about the tension and level of jealousy that became very apparent from the African American female officers toward them. Complaints about the way the participants were allowed to dress and wear their hair differently once they were promoted became an issue. One of the participants said that because the men were required to report to her and constantly had to communicate with her, it was as if the women became threatened by her. She said they seemed to look for opportunities to compete with her for the attention of the men in the department. When asked if they rebelled or were insubordinate, she

said they were not as productive as they could be or had previously been. They did the bare minimum to ensure they met their quota but no longer took the initiative to do more. They even started taking more days off from work than they used to, causing her to have to do more work to cover the department's needs. Consequently, these difficulties were very discouraging and often interfered with their performance effectiveness. Had it not been for resilient spirits and determination to excel, and a desire to see their communities better, many of the participants said they would have chosen another career path.

Theme 4: Overlooked (Privy Passover) – Several times, participants shared how their superiors would overlook them, withholding information that should have been for all, to aid in their plot to hire their preferred officers in leadership positions. Overlook is defined as to look over, look down upon, fail to see, or pay no attention to (Merriam-Webster, 2023). As the interviewees told of how they were often treated as if they were insignificant and passed over for opportunities, though they were qualified and made known their interests, they used descriptive words like hopelessness, frustration, and impossibility. One officer shared her feelings regarding the reason why she believes African American women have been underrepresented in law enforcement. She said the consistent overlooking and intentional passing over that exists eliminates opportunities, making it unfair for African American women and 9 times out of 10 the Caucasian superior officers already knew who they were going to put in the positions, whether they were better qualified or not.

In most cases, the African American females would be better qualified, with more experience and higher-level education, because they have learned that they must work twice as hard to be considered just as good as their Caucasian male and female fellow officers. Unfortunately, they were always the last to know about opportunities to advance, while their

Caucasian counterparts were made privy far in advance. A participant shared that she was blatantly told by her Caucasian Lieutenant, when asked why she was not considered for the position, that her Caucasian female fellow officer made herself more visible and established relationships with those that she would need to consort with. In her words,

> That proved to me that it was not about my skills, abilities, or credentials, but it was about their preference to have a white woman that they liked talking to instead, because she was not better qualified than me.

Some of the participants expressed that if it had not been for the mentors that they had, to help them navigate through the apparent dismissals and continual passovers, they would not have been able to excel. They said that it was people outside of their departments, and retired officers that explained to them how to circumvent the problems they faced in order to gain traction on their promotional paths. In the findings of this research, to have mentorship and support proved to be extremely important. Overcoming barriers and navigating the hardships, for most of the participants, was with support.

Theme 5: Combative/ Overly Aggressive (Angry Black Woman Syndrome) – The final and most prominent theme that emerged from this research is all about the widely known and consistently used stereotype placed upon African American women in positions of authority, Angry Black Woman Syndrome (ABW). This is an unfair racial trope that is used against African Women to portray them as combative or overly aggressive. A passion for equality and an unwillingness to bow at the hands of injustice, or to assert the same authority that other races and genders assert is deemed as antagonistic and challenging when it comes to the African American women leaders, especially those is law enforcement. The findings of this research revealed 7 out of the 8 participants have had to contend with this stereotype being placed upon them.

Words like hostile, overbearing, bitter, and ill-tempered have all been used to describe the communication style of most of the interviewees. They said they have witnessed Caucasian female officers become irate in situations, only to be called passionate but when they have questions about policies, they are accused of being challenging and filled with rebuttals. One of the participants spoke of being made to feel like she was a bitter outsider by male officers. She tells of having heard a male officer say,

> I have heard men express their mindset that if a Black woman was divorced, and then she's coming in to be an authoritative position over men, it's a strong possibility that she is the African American angry Black woman.

As mentioned by one of the participants, the belief amongst strong Black women is that this stereotype is placed upon us as a silencing tool. It is to make the African American woman more docile and unwilling to press forward in fighting for justice and equality. As a couple of the participants shared in their interviews, they had to find ways to consistently communicate with their subordinates, fellow officers, and superiors so that they are not accused of being ABW. Once of the participants said that she started communicating every directive and office requirement by email so that no one would accuse her being verbally aggressive. Then they started complaining about her emailing too much. She said that when she would verbally instruct, she was either met with resistance or accused of not giving commands that she was required to give by her superiors. So, when the jobs that needed to be done were not done, it would fall back on her. Her way to eliminate what she deemed as ABW complaining and sabotage, she would memorialize it in writing to cover herself. Another participant stated, she is convinced ABW will always be attached to the unyielding strength of an African American woman, and she no longer cares. Her focus is to do the job well that she was hired to do.

Implications

The findings of this study along with the review of existing literature proves that African American women, despite being highly educated and experienced, are underrepresented and not afforded opportunities to excel into leadership positions. Barriers of race and gender discrimination, as well as imposed stereotypes have long affected the advancements of African American women in law enforcement. As a result, the need to implement programs and practices that will aid in changing the current mode of operations is recognized.

It was discovered in this research that the guidance and support of mentors was essential to the success and survival of many of the African American women leaders as they climbed to positions of upper-level management. They expressed how they had to gain insight on the way to navigate the system through those mentors. They were also encouraged and given alternative routes to promotion that their direct Caucasian male superior officers were intentionally blocking them from. Based on this discovery, agencies can have specialized mentorship programs that accompany the counseling services that are a part of their mental health initiatives. These programs and mentors would provide instructions and support to officers on their career path initiatives. Step-by-step instructions can be provided on how to prepare and apply for positions as they become available. A mentoring program of this caliber, that is available to all employees, will benefit the African American women officers who desire to advance because the program takes away from the superior officers having all the power, and the option overlook the women would be eliminated.

To offer the same opportunities to all officers, the same training programs that have been beneficial to men should be a requirement for women that desire to prepare for positions of higher rank. Through participants in this study, it was learned that many times their requests to

move into other positions to gain the experience needed for consideration, were denied. By making preparation for promotion programs for women a requirement, all women have the credentials to advance and an understanding of how all departments work, should lateral moves need to happen. Those preparation programs for promotion should include unit training in fields such as vice, homicide, motorcycle, field training, narcotics, etc. Furthermore, an established governing board to oversee the creation of a new career path goal catalog and program would also be a great addition to help those aspiring African American women put a plan in place for their future in law enforcement.

As an added measure to ensure that all opportunities for advancement are shared equally across the board and not withheld for preferential consideration, as some of the participants shared, formal job descriptions for leadership positions need to be developed, posted, and immediately circulated. It should no longer be up to the superior officers to share at their discretion. Everyone should have the same notice, option, and opportunity to prepare for the required application requirements and testing. Through all these changes better communication is fostered, networking and mentoring is made available, training programs are established, barriers are eliminated, diversity is increased, and equality for all African American women desiring to advance in law enforcement is made possible.

Limitations

Beyond the researcher's control, there are significant limitations in every qualitative research (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2011). The limitations of this study were recognized early in the participant recruitment process. As this research was aimed at gaining deeper understanding about the perceptions of African American women leaders as they climb the ladder to higher ranks in law enforcement, the first limitation that actualized was the generalizability. The

findings cannot be generalized as applicable to an entire population of African American women law enforcement leaders for two reasons: (a) the geographic area, and (b) the population size.

This study focused on law enforcement agencies only in the State of Georgia. Therefore, a full view of the practices, barriers, advances, and effects on promotion to leadership in all regions is not represented through this study. To gain a broader perspective, a wider scope or geographic area outside of Georgia would have to be researched. Also, the findings of this study were from eight African American women in Georgia, so the size of the sample does not represent a whole population of African American women leaders in law enforcement. As further mentioned in the Recommendations for Future Studies section of this chapter, there are other variations for a larger sample size to extend the findings of this study. By doing so, the lived experiences, values, beliefs, and practices of African American women leaders in other U. S. regions, as they ascend to leading positions in law enforcement, will provide a more comprehensive view of the law enforcement culture.

Another limitation was the hardship in obtaining active-duty participants. Although several active-duty potential participants were referred through the snowball sampling process, only four completed the pre-interview requirements, scheduled, and completed their interviews. The other four were retired. One of the retired participants shared that she would not have participated if she were still active duty because of the probable treatment she would endure as a result. When I explained that her participation was confidential and anonymous, she said her department required approval for participation. With other potential participants, after several follow-ups, I noticed the ones who kept deferring were active duty. Once sent me a list of questions regarding the research, although my letter, criteria questionnaire, and consent form explained in detail the purpose and process of the interview. I completed the questions and by the

time I heard back from the potential participant, I had concluded my interview process. She shared that she is bound by the Board of Regents (BOR) guidelines and the questions were from their legal department. I contend that for several of the potential participants, the additional requirements and disclosure to the department of their participation caused them not to participate.

Significance of Study

Information gained from this study is significant to enhancing the existing knowledge of African American women leaders in law enforcement, contributing to their promotional progress, and overcoming the barriers to advancement that exist for them. African American women supervisors are underrepresented in law enforcement and overrepresented in the obstacles they face, as they advance on the climb to upper-level management. In addition to the recommendations for policy and practice changes in the Implications section of this chapter, suggestions to advance the recruitment, retention, and advancement of African American women in law enforcement are as follows:

1. To diversify the pool of applicants, law enforcement agencies must involve community members, outreach recruitment initiatives, and create a pipeline of applicants from internship programs through partnerships with Historically Black Colleges and Universities.
2. To assist in the promotion of African American women in law enforcement, local agencies implement a mentorship program led by African American women who are currently holding or are retired from the position of Captain or higher. This will nurture relationships, encourage transparency, and equip potential leaders with required skills.

3. Agencies do away with all screening processes and selection criteria that disproportionately recruit and promote employees so that underrepresented communities are sufficiently aware and offered career opportunities that they qualify for.

When it comes to community, there is a need for greater diversity in leadership because the lack of cooperation, responsiveness, and connectivity with their police departments has been voiced as one of the reasons the relationship between them and those who are to protect and serve is broken (Richard, 2001). This reason highlights the benefits to bringing more African American women into law enforcement and how their inclusion is about more than increasing numbers (Tumulty, 2023). Gender diversity recognizes the importance of having women in roles of significance within the organization.

This study provides evidence to what has been hidden and brings a voice to the African American women who silently fight through the discrimination to advance. From federal, local, state, all national military branches, and governmental agencies, this broadening scope of understanding about law enforcement leadership evaluates the prerequisites for advancement for African American women. Each branch of law enforcement has policies, practices, and procedures that should be equally adhered to by every advancing officer and superior officer alike when it comes to promotional opportunities.

By adding to this limited body of research Commissioners, Chiefs, Captains, Lieutenants, Detectives, Sergeants, and Corporals, when ascending through the ranks of leadership, will benefit from the findings of this study. Law enforcement will hopefully recognize the need for making changes and implement procedures that will show as the numbers of African American women in law enforcement leadership roles increase throughout the United States. Peer

intimidation, sexual harassment, and discrimination of African American women pursuing top-level positions will no longer be tolerated and without severe penalties.

This study's significance to law enforcement leadership for African American women is useful in breaking barriers to promotional standards and makes those in charge of promoting people more cognizant of the consequences for not lawfully abiding by the standards. Furthermore, the opportunities are greatly increased for this research to serve as a road map to develop programs for African American women who would like to advance but, because of the barriers that have long existed, never attempted to move forward. By the comparisons made regarding the disproportionate number of Caucasian males and females in leadership to the number of African American men and women in leadership, the selection process can be revamped and strengthened.

Recommendations for Future Studies

The focus of this study was to examine the perceptions of African American women law enforcement leaders in Georgia and the impact on performance, advances, and barriers they encounter on their paths to upper-level leadership positions. The findings of this study were limited to a small group of eight African American women leaders in law enforcement, both active duty and retired, in the state of Georgia. Therefore, the results are not geographically widespread to other law enforcement agencies throughout the United States. Based on the findings of this study, there is a need for further research to continue in this area. The following four recommendations are suggested to further enhance the knowledge of the inner workings of law enforcement recruitment, training, and promotions. This will help assist in the development of fair practices, effective promotional programs, and the integration of bylaws that eliminate the

disparity of treatment and underrepresentation of African American women in leadership. The recommendations are:

1. A study should be conducted to broaden the scope of this research to include the Northern Region of the United States. Because this study was limited to African American women law enforcement leaders in Georgia, the experiences and behaviors may differ in the North.
2. A future study to be conducted, that would provide a direct perspective on the findings of racial discrimination in this study, would be on the lived experiences of Caucasian women only.
3. A study that should be conducted to explore the promotional practices and directly address the findings of gender discrimination in this research, would be on African American male leaders in Georgia. This study could also compare the experiences of African American males.
4. A recommendation for further research, that comes as a result of the difficulty in securing active-duty participants for this study, explores the fear of retaliation. After several active-duty officers deferred the interview process and one retired participant stated that she would not have participated if she was not yet retired. So, a future research of retired female law enforcement leaders that delves into the possibility of reprisal for participation in research about the policies, practices, and procedures of promotions in law enforcement. Specifically, questions can be posed about whether they would have participated if they were still active. Then follow-up with why or why not for further explanation.

5. A study to explore the possible barriers in other occupations for African American women outside of law enforcement.

Summary

This study examined the lived experiences of African American women law enforcement leaders in Georgia and the advances, barriers, and impact on performance they faced on their path to attaining higher ranking positions. This final chapter of the study discussed the results of the study and brought context to why this research is valuable to the culture of law enforcement for African American women, who are underrepresented in the male-dominated field. The responses from each participant were categorized and analyzed to generate themes that provided clarity on how deeply rooted the racial and gender discrimination for African American women is. The responses also helped to better understand how driven and resilient these women had to be to overcome the barriers they faced to attain the ranks that they had.

A discussion on the study's findings, implications of the findings, and recommendations for further research were also presented in this chapter. Mentorship programs, mandatory trainings for all, standard promotional pathway catalogs and guidance, cross-training for women in specialized fields, and a governing board to oversee the equal process for all to eliminate preferential treatment by superior officers, were recommended to fix the disparity of treatment, discrimination, and underrepresentation of African American women in law enforcement leadership. These agencies can benefit from this study's data, as it provides departments across the board with standardized ways to assist in the recruiting, training, and promotional path for all African American women in law enforcement who desire to advance to the Commissioners, Chiefs, Captains, Lieutenants, Detectives, Sergeants, and Corporals positions.

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APPENDIX A: LETTER TO POTENTIAL PARTICIPANT

Hello,

My name is Juantisa Hughes, and I am a doctoral candidate at Union Institute & University. I am conducting a research study entitled *The Lived Experience of African American Women Leaders in Georgia Law Enforcement: Advances, Barriers, and Impact on Performance.* As part of my research, I will need to interview African American women in law enforcement leadership positions. This letter is an invitation for you to participate in my research. The study proposes to explore the lived experiences of African American women law enforcement supervisors related to the barriers encountered during their career, especially with promotion, and vital skills necessary for job performance.

As an African American woman who spent more than 15 years in law enforcement, I understand that being asked to take time out of your already busy schedule and being asked to interview may cause you some concern. Let me assure you that your identity and company information will be kept confidential and the information you provide will be used solely for the purpose of this study. With your permission, our conversation will be audibly and visibly recorded, as well as transcribed, via Zoom software. A transcript will be sent to you for your comments and/or changes, should any of your responses need clarification. If necessary, I might follow up with an email or phone call with additional questions for clarifications? After the study has been completed and all the data has been transcribed, the tape will be destroyed if you desire.

I am requesting 60 minutes of your time. This will include the time that it takes you to complete the initial interview questions and subsequent expository questions. Participation in this study is voluntary and you are free to decline to answer any questions at any time.

I can be reached by email, which is xxxxxxxxxxxx@xxxxx.com or xxx-xxx-xxxx. Please take a moment and complete the attached Criteria Questionnaire and return it via email. I will be contacting you soon to arrange a viable meeting time. If you should have any questions in the meantime, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Juantisa Hughes, PhD Candidate

APPENDIX B: CRITERIA QUESTIONNAIRE

Name (printed): _____

Email (printed): _____

Phone #: _____

1. What is your ethnic background:

   _____African American _____Caucasian _____Asian

   _____Hispanic _____Native American _____Pacific Islander

   _____Mixed Race _____Other

2. What is your age?

   _____21-29 _____30-39 _____40-49 _____50-59 _____60-70

3. What is your education level?

   _____GED or High School Diploma _____Some College

   _____Associates Degree _____Bachelors Degree

   _____Masters Degree _____Doctorate Degree

4. Have you been appointed to a level of upper management?

   _____Yes _____No

5. What is your current job title? _____

6. Are you or were you a commander of a section, zone, area, specialized unit, or precinct?

   _____Yes _____No

7. How long have you been or were you working for your agency? _____

8. How long have you been or were you a manager for your agency? _____

9. How many people do you or did you manage?

_____1-4 _____5-9 _____10-25 _____26-50 _____51-99 _____>100

10. What administrative budget amount are you accountable for?

_____$1000,000 - $499,000 _____> $500,000

11. How many employees work for your employer?

_____1-100 _____101-500 _____501-1000 _____>1000

12. Please write the number of years:

What is your tenure in the following position(s)?

_____Chief _____Deputy Chief

_____Assistant Chief _____Commander

_____Major _____Captain

_____Lieutenant _____Sergeant

_____Detective _____Corporal

_____Officer _____Support Staff

APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Project Title: The Lived Experience of African American Women Leaders in Georgia Law Enforcement: Advances, Barriers, and Impact on Performance
Principal Investigator (PI): Juantisa Hughes
PI Phone Number: xxx-xxx-xxxx
PI Email Address: xxxxxxxxxxxx@xxxxx.com
Faculty Advisor/Dissertation Chair: Dr. Stewart Burns
Faculty Phone Number: xxx-xxx-xxxx
Faculty Email: xxxxxxx.xxxxx@xxxxxxx.edu

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Juantisa Hughes. The researcher conducting this study will describe this study to you and answer all your questions. It is important that you understand the potential benefits and risks involved in this study. Please read the following information and ask any questions you might have before deciding to take part in the study. Your participation is entirely voluntary. If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to sign this consent form, which will be filled with all other documents related to the study. The researcher will provide you with a copy of this consent form for your records.

The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of African American women law enforcement supervisors related to the barriers encountered during their career, especially with promotion, and vital skills necessary for job performance.

Potential Risks of being in this study:

- The potential risks associated with this study are minimized through the use of pseudonyms that will be written onto interview recordings and used in the transcript of the interview.
- If recalling certain events during the interview causes you to become emotional, you may take a break. You may choose to continue, reschedule, or withdraw from the study. All data collected before your withdrawal will be destroyed and not used in the data analysis and written report.
- The loss of confidentiality, only if you associated your name with your responses.

Potential Benefits of being in this study:

- The opportunity to make suggestions that may help others in similar situations in the future.
- The ability to voice concerns, share stories of career progression in law enforcement.
- The chance to contribute to the study as a possible mentoring tool for other African American women who would like to advance to leadership within the male dominated field of Law Enforcement.
- The capability to Further the body of research and be a voice for an underrepresented group of women.

Compensation/ Costs: You will not receive any financial compensation for your participation, nor will you incur any costs as a result of your participation in this research.

Confidentiality and Privacy Protections: Your identity in this study will be treated as confidential. The researcher, Juantisa Hughes, will be the only person that knows you are participating in this study. The dissertation committee acting on behalf of Union Institute & University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), may review your information. If the committee reviews your information, the copies provided will only include the records related to the study and it will not include your identification, or place of employment. Results of the study, including all data collected, may be published in the dissertation, in future journal articles, professional presentations, and Internet sites, but your name or any identifiable

references to you will not be included. These records will be kept private in so far as permitted by law. All study data will be retained for a minimum of three years as required by the IRB and then destroyed.

Please note, communication by e-mail during this study is not a secure form of communication. However, the computers used have security software, and the only person who has access to the email account(s) is the researcher, Juantisa Hughes. No one else will read that communication.

Termination of Study: Your participation in the study may be terminated by the investigator/ researcher without your consent under the following circumstances: You fail to appear at a scheduled time for participation or fail to respond to a request to set up a time for your participation on two occasions. This study may need to be terminated without prior notice to, or consent of, participants in the event of illness or other pertinent reasons.

Subject and Researcher Authorization: I have read and understand this consent form, and I volunteer to participate in this research study. I understand that I will receive a copy of this form. I voluntarily choose to participate, but I understand that my consent does not take away any legal rights in the case of negligence or other legal fault of anyone who is involved in this study. I further understand that nothing in this consent form is intended to replace any applicable federal, state, or local laws.

Signatures:

Participant Name (printed): _____

Participant Signature: _____

Date: _____

Principal Researcher's Name (printed): _____

Principal Researcher's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Note: You may contact the individuals listed at the top of this form with any questions about this study. In the event of a study-related emergency, contact the individuals listed at the top of this form within 48 hours.

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Overarching Question

What are the perceptions of African American women law enforcement leaders in their quest to advance and attain positions of leadership?

Research Sub-Questions

RQ1: What barriers, if any, do African American women law enforcement supervisors experience during their careers?

RQ2: What are the experiences of African American women law enforcement supervisors with regard to promotion?

RQ3: What skills and experiences do African American women law enforcement supervisors identify as vital for their careers and effective job performances?

RQ4: What barriers, if any, do African American women face as they seek to move from entry level positions to supervisory ones?

Open Ended Interview Questions

1. Describe how you began your career within your organization.
2. Describe your promotional path within your organization.
3. What has been your experience as an African American female law enforcement leader as you were climbing the ladder to your current position?
4. How do you define barriers? Were there any barriers? If yes, what were they? Why do you think they were barriers?
5. Describe any barriers, if any, that you felt you faced as an African American female when you started within your organization.

6. How have your skills and/or support system helped you deal with barriers?
7. How would you describe your experiences with others within your organization before you became a leader?
8. How would you describe your interactions with your male subordinates since you became a leader?
9. How would you describe your interactions with other male leaders in law enforcement?
10. As you look back on your years in law enforcement, is there anything that you might have done differently to deal with perceived mistreatment by other officers, especially those supervising you?