A Qualitative Study: Black Male College Students’ Perceptions of Campus Law Enforcement officers on a College Campus

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ABSTRACT

A QUALITATIVE STUDY: BLACK MALE COLLEGE STUDENTS’ PERCEPTIONS OF CAMPUS LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS ON A COLLEGE CAMPUS

Junelle M. Bennett, Ed.D.
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Northern Illinois University, 2020
Laura Ruth Johnson, Director

Black males are often the recipients of police brutality, criminal stereotyping, and inequitable treatment in higher education. This qualitative study examined the experiential narratives of 15 Black male college students’ perception towards law enforcement officers. The data was collected via one-on-one interviews, concluded with a focus group, and then presented in narrative forums. The participants’ feelings, attitudes, or beliefs about themselves as Black males significantly contributed to their inherent identification of the cultural challenges associated with law enforcement officers. The participants’ personal and vicarious life experiences prior to enrolling into higher education were significant to the authentic comprehension of the developmental factors of Black male college students’ perception of law enforcement officers. The majority of participants shared their overwhelming feelings of their view of White people as a contributing factor to their perception of law enforcement officers. Participant views of White people consisted of feelings of mistrust, oblivious to cultural biases, and being unjustly authoritative. This study illustrated the need for comprehensive reform of practices and policies in both law enforcement and higher education. Campus law enforcement
officers should consider a cultural-based approach for interactions with Black male college students. Black males’ prior experiences and interactions with noncampus law enforcement officers is a primary developmental factor for their perceptions towards law enforcement officers. The findings of this study provided viable solutions and strategies provided directly by the individuals impacted by systemic racism and whiteness looming on predominantly White institutions.
A QUALITATIVE STUDY: BLACK MALE COLLEGE STUDENTS’ PERCEPTIONS OF CAMPUS LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS ON A COLLEGE CAMPUS

BY
JUNELLE M. BENNETT

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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF COUNSELING AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Doctoral Director:
Laura Ruth Johnson
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I would like to thank God and my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, because with Him all things are truly possible. I thank God for the strength and motivation to return to school while working full-time as a police officer. Despite the discouraging climate of policing in America, I was able to persist against the “nothing will ever change” attitude and persevere to complete assignments and conduct in-class presentations all the while coping with blatant racism, bias, preferential treatment, and disparities towards communities of color, and unjust murders of Black people by police officers.

I have a heartfelt and inexpressible gratitude for the 15 Black male participants who chose to give up their personal time to share their stories with me. I admire your bravery to share personal details about yourselves and family upbringing. I was also humbled by your willingness to help me just as another Black student trying to complete an assignment with aspirations similar to your own, the ultimate end goal: graduation. I am inspired by you all.

I would like to thank my late friend and mentor Judy Jobe who initially encouraged me to pursue my doctorate in education. I never dreamed this was a possibility.

I would like to thank my dear friends Drs. Arlene and Clark Neher for their consistent words of inquiry, wisdom, and acknowledgement of my academic process. Thank you for reading and enjoying my work.
I would like to thank all outside readers for reading and revising my dissertation for clarity and validation. Without your commitment to excellence and my personal development as a writer, my dissertation would not be as complete.

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I would like to thank my “home team,” my best friends whose understanding, patience, and encouragement were graciously shown throughout the years of schooling, deadlines, and assignments that resulted in many interruptions of lunch, gym, and social dates.

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Although I am beyond grateful for my previous academic accomplishments, my Doctor of Education is significant and humbling. I proudly accept this degree on behalf of those individuals who aspire to make a “real” change. This accomplishment allows me to be a woman of color who can serve on dissertation committees, lead accredited training programs, teach college-level courses, and create and implement meaningful policies that affect generations of
people. I am who someone needs to see: a Black, female, educator, law enforcement officer, and colleague. Thank you for the opportunity to serve as a real-life example of Black excellence in higher education. I am forever grateful!
DEDICATION

To Black males finding their voice and power
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

At the start of my career as a campus police officer, our nation had experienced two horrific tragedies involving both the senseless murders of Trayvon Martin and Tamir Rice. As a young Black woman and law enforcement officer, I have a unique insider perspective on the disparities within the United States’ criminal justice system. As a society, oftentimes, we can be disconnected from tragedies reported by the traditional media that do not directly impact ourselves or immediate families’ well-being or community’s safety; for example, the Trayvon Martin or Tamir Rice cases. However, I am able to empathize with these two incidents specifically because I have two Black nephews aged nine and eleven years old, similar to Martin, who was killed by a man who felt threatened by Martin’s style of dress and demeanor, and Rice, who was killed by the police because he had a BB pellet gun in the park. I see how my nephews try to emulate the hip-hop style of dress with joggers (skinny sweatpants) and athletic hoodies. They even try to keep up with the latest trends of hairstyle and slang. Their favorite hairstyle right now is a low-cut fade on the sides with small, dreadlock-like twists on the top of their heads. They start and end countless conversations with, “Bruh” (an exasperated meaning for brother).

I have Black uncles and male friends ages 21 to 60, who sometimes can be quite animated in their behavior with a loud tone of voice. Some of my male friends wear diamond studded earrings and a cross chain necklace of some sort. Additionally, the majority of them
drive luxury vehicles popular within the minority communities and hip-hop culture, such as older model Cadillacs and Chevy Impalas, all with upgraded sound systems or tinted windows. Due to the culture barriers of style of dress and characteristics, such as animated behaviors, I am concerned for the safety of these Black males with regard to police interactions. It is my belief that some unidentified Black males matching the description listed above can be perceived as threatening, aggressive, ghetto, and criminal to some law enforcement officers. This perception (police officers’ perception) is problematic because although my nephews, uncles, and Black male friends’ style of dress, physical characteristics, and demeanor may mirror stereotypical descriptors of a criminal better referred to as a “bad guy,” they are not. Cultural perceptions, barriers, and stereotypes are important factors in understanding how others are perceived as different, deviants, or not following a pre-established stereotype of a “good Black person,” who is articulate, mild-mannered, but outwardly portrays the images of Blackness.

As a researcher, I am motivated to learn and be taught by others’ lived experiences. I aim to seek knowledge and perspective of an individual’s truth from those around me. At the heart of interviewing is an interest in other individuals’ stories because they are of worth (Seidman, 2006). I have chosen to research a topic that revolves around race and the highly regarded profession of policing. This topic may be perceived as unpopular, overly commented on, or controversial with the intent to negatively label campus law enforcement officers; however, that is not my intention. For example, research suggests that confidence in the police is complex and made up of personal and social factors, including one’s own encounters with police, his or her perception of crime in their neighborhood, media coverage and vicarious encounters — the experiences of one’s family and friends with police about which they’ve heard (Ramsey, 2017; Weitzer & Tuch, 2005). Therefore, since 61% of media coverage is produced by White people
who view the police as more favorable and have high confidence in the police viewed as their protectors, in comparison to the contrary narrative told by minority populations that do not reflect this perspective (Horowitz, 2007; Ramsey, 2017; Weitzer & Tuch, 2005).

This qualitative research study will explore the complexities of race, experiences, and perceptions to obtain an understanding of Black male college students’ self-awareness and identity as it pertains to campus law enforcement officers. I wholeheartedly believe academic environments should be a safe space to share ideas, ask difficult questions, and embrace in the ideologies of inclusion for everyone.

As a campus law enforcement officer on a college campus, my primary role is to keep students and staff safe. I have learned and enhanced my practical skills and knowledge to serve my community in a nonbiased, ethical, and reliable manner. My personal and spiritual beliefs have molded me into a culturally competent, compassionate, and patient campus law enforcement professional. I strive to provide my community with the necessary knowledge to make the right decisions and promote conflict resolution. I operate through the least restrictive means of consequential dispositions to achieve the ultimate goal of the preservation of life and property of others. Additionally, I am tasked to instill a sense of safety among the student and staff population, often times, through educational awareness programs, referrals to counseling services and thorough investigations that lead to the apprehension of an offender(s). Although I have built positive relationships with students, administration, faculty and staff through community partnerships, I’ve also seen how the result of poor decision making can adversely affect the lives of student and community members. I have experienced community protests, resistance to cooperate with investigations, and the negative reception of some police officers due to racial tensions on both the national and local level by communities of color. For example,
despite my intentions and efforts to be fair, before I exit my squad car, I am perceived as untrustworthy, harsh, and punitive simply because I am wearing a police uniform. I have heard many times throughout my career, “No, you’re not Black, you’re blue”. This statement speaks volumes to the disconnect and mistrust that communities of color have towards the law enforcement profession regardless of the character of the police officer.

As a Black female campus law enforcement officer, it is disheartening to see adolescent and adult Black males behave erratically, vulgarly, and uncharacteristic of people with great power and dignity by being loud, using offensive language, and looking unkept. I’ve seen pants sag below standards of the hip-hop trend, hair not maintained, and idle behavior displayed throughout an 12-hour workday on a consistent basis. I also have participated in criminal investigations of violent and drug-related crimes primarily committed by Black males in my community. I am no stranger to the negative reception of police presence while responding to service calls in communities of color. I recall a recent incident in August of 2018, when my Black partner and I responded to a disorderly conduct call with a large group of Black people arguing in a public space. A Black man walked directly towards me and stated, my Black partner and I were going to get ridiculed and disrespected the most out of all of the officers on scene because we were Black and were following the “White man’s orders.” I was dismayed by his comment, but I still had to perform my duties as a police officer, which is to enforce laws of peace and order. Additionally, I am often unsuccessfully expected to be easily persuaded to dismiss and understand petty criminal behavior due to the lack of severity of the crime at hand because I am Black; for example, two calls for services such as for family disputes that involve interfamily violence or drug-related offenses that involve small amounts of marijuana at the time when it was criminal. Furthermore, I have witnessed the cultural and communication barriers of
White officers interacting with minorities, specifically Black males. Or in contrast, the expectation that I speak and resolve situations with the minority individuals, even though I am not the primary, responding officer. All of these personal incidences coupled by reading disparaging accounts of Black males being unjustly physically abused or endure mass incarceration.

In addition to my observation of some of my White colleagues’ irritation, incorrect assumption of criminal descriptors, impatient demeanor for Black males is constant and not always warranted. For example, if Dispatch reports a crime without providing thorough physical descriptors or an exact location of where the offenders may be headed, the attempt to locate offenders is often initiated in heavily minority populated neighborhoods. Some law enforcement officials target racial minorities in criminal investigations in an attempt to increase the likelihood of uncovering illegal activity may be a consequence of prevailing stereotypes about the race of criminals (Welch, 2007). The racial disparity misleads law enforcement and the public, which in turn strengthens views about race and crime (Welch, 2007). While, I am fully committed to community policing initiatives, safety and preservation of life and property, I am aware of the crimes frequently committed in my community and who is often responsible. Thus, I do my job effectively and impartially, even if that involves questioning and arresting Black males. Consequently, in the eyes of the research participants, Black male college students, I may be viewed as a contributor to these social injustices rather than an inquirer for transformative solutions.

This research study was prompted by my observation of three Black male college students and their demonstrated perceptions of campus law enforcement officers on a college campus. It should be noted that I was an independent third-party bystander who was not wearing
clothing that indicated my affiliation with the campus police in this interaction between these students and the campus law enforcement officers. As a Black female campus law enforcement officer on a college campus, I am always conscious of the climate between people of color and law enforcement officers. I am privy to the interactions, approaches and responses to one another by both people of color and campus law enforcement officers, respectively. This observation prompted my interest in further studying the social issue regarding the Black male students’ perceptions of and experiences with campus law enforcement officers. It was apparent that these social issues that plague our nation (e.g., institutional racism, implicit bias, and mistrust of law enforcement officers by Black males) were also present within my small rural community. Below is a real life, firsthand example of my initial observation and experience that prompted my interest in this research study.

At approximately two o’clock on a Wednesday afternoon in October of 2015, three Black male students were sitting on a bench alongside of an academic building waiting for a bus. They appeared to be approximately 19 years old, approximately 5’8 to 5’9, and average in stature. I did not notice any outstanding identifying factors on them, such as hairstyles, scars, tattoos, or style of dress. Additionally, I did not notice any outlandish behavior, such as loud music or excessive profanity, their actions did not draw any unwarranted attention to themselves as they were talking among themselves. As a matter of fact, they were surrounded by approximately 15 to 20 other students varying in race and gender doing the same thing, waiting for the bus.

Unbeknownst to the students, several law enforcement officers were arriving for a meeting in the building the students were waiting outside of. I was approaching the building from the left to attend the law enforcement meeting as well, and as I crossed the street, I noticed approximately 10 White law enforcement officers not employed by the University, in full duty
uniform, approach the building from the right side. The police officers did not appear to have noticed or engage with the (Black) students, as they were talking amongst themselves and simply entering the building.

As the officers approached the building and inadvertently the three Black male college students, the three Black male’s conversations immediately ceased. I observed all three students frown with a look of concern. One student completely averted eye contact away from the direction of the law enforcement officers as if to make himself appear invisible. I noticed the other two students look down at the ground and nervously try to preoccupy themselves with their cell phones. The officers did not acknowledge the students; instead they continued to walk by and entered the building. Immediately, after the officers entered the building, the students resumed talking to one another.

Subsequently, I directly walked up to the three Black male students and said, “Man, y’all was nervous, huh?” All three students looked at each other and laughed with a sigh of relief. They appeared shocked that I had noticed their reactions to the law enforcement officers. Furthermore, they did not seem to recognize me as a campus law enforcement officer because they didn’t comment on my style of dress or make any remarks connecting me to the law enforcement profession. One student stated: “Man, I didn’t know what they (the law enforcement officers) were on,” meaning he did not know what their intentions were with him and his friends. The other student chimed in: “All I know is we ain’t even do nothing.” I told them: “Don’t worry about it… you guys are good because you didn’t do anything wrong.” I laughed, told them to have a good day, and entered the building for the law enforcement meeting. I assume after I entered the building, the students resumed talking to one another because they didn’t make any effort to prolong the conversation with me.
I could have disregarded this interaction, or the lack thereof, between the three Black male college students and officers, but I thought it presented an interesting dynamic.

On reflection, I wondered if the law enforcement officers even noticed the three Black males, specifically or did they blend in with the sea of students. If they did, were the officer’s conscious of the symbolic impact of power and privilege toward the three Black males? Race is one of the most consistent predictors of attitudes toward the police (Weitzer & Tuch, 2005). The police officers were all White, older males ranging from 30 to 45 in age, and tall in stature. Did the race of the police officers’ matter during this interaction? Perhaps the presence of law enforcement officers, in full duty uniform, was a visual representation of authority and power, which was intimidating or scary. By no means are law enforcement officers obligated to befriend or entertain every student of color; however, it is their professional responsibility to be conscious of their exertion of power and privilege on the minority community. Although police officers are not responsible for the negative experiences citizens have with other institutions, they (police officers) can work to change the negative perceptions of the law enforcement profession by building collaborative relationships to rebuild trust and confidence with its citizens (Warren, 2011).

According to Brunson (2007), the impact of racial discrimination accounts for the way Blacks perceive and evaluate their experiences in public encounters, including in interactions with the police. Blacks not only draw from their own experiences but also from patterns of events they are exposed to in their communities (Brunson, 2007). This real-life experience of social identity, complexity of race, and perception of equity at institutions of higher education produced by the criminal justice system supports my call for additional research on campus law enforcement officers and students of color, specifically Black males, on college campuses. There
is a significant need for campus law enforcement agencies to explore the developmental factors of Black male college students’ perceptions of campus law enforcement officers on a college campus because their insights will be explored, documented and expanded on for the first time. Additionally, these insights may give rise to the implementation of practical community policing philosophies, reduce implicit bias, and preserve the safety of Black male college students as well as campus law enforcement officers on a college campus. There is an abundance of research reveals that racism is a regular, everyday feature of life in the United States and that most people are implicitly prejudiced if they are not explicitly so (Underhill, 2018).

It is the responsibility of the researcher to create a safe environment for each participant to share their individual stories. Although I will focus on the experiences of each participant, it is important to understand who I am as a researcher. I hold a unique position consisting of many roles as a campus law enforcement officer, student, researcher, woman of color, and family member of the Black males. Due to my professional affiliations as a campus law enforcement officer and a researcher, I have a dual perspective and responsibility regarding the social issue of Black male college students’ perception of campus law enforcement officers on a college campus. Therefore, it is imperative to explain the purpose of my research study from a scholarly perspective. I am a Black woman, who grew up in a middle class, suburban environment with minimal police contacts except on admittedly wrong traffic offenses. My police contacts were not contentious or prejudicial as other individuals may have experienced. I have always resided in diverse, ethnic neighborhoods such as the northwest suburbs of Chicago. I studied and graduated from predominantly White high school, undergraduate and graduate institutions. After graduating with my Masters in Public Health with an emphasis in Health Promotion, I desired a career where I could directly impact the safety and well-being of others, without being restricted
the limitations of an office setting. The profession of campus law enforcement was recommended by many well-respected campus law enforcement officers of whom I was in contact with throughout my undergraduate and graduate careers. Their ability to mentor and educate while simultaneously protect students was attractive and seemed rewarding to me.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this narrative study is to explore Black male college students’ perceptions of college campus law enforcement officers at a midwestern university. For the purposes of this research, the Black male college students’ perceptions are generally defined as thoughts, feelings, and attitudes. This study primarily focuses on the factors that influence the development of Black male college students’ perceptions from family influence and their lived and vicarious experiences with campus law enforcement officers on a college campus.

Previous research has provided evidence of satisfaction of law enforcement officers working within communities of color, yet there is little to no research on the development of perceptions by people of color, specifically Black male college students (Brunson, 2007; Mbuba, 2010; Piquero, 2008; Verga et al., 2016; Warren, 2011; Weitzer & Tuch, 2005). This research study seeks to explore how perceptions are developed among Black male college students, which is a significant contribution to the existing literature. This contribution identifies and promotes awareness of self-identity, lived and vicarious experiences, and cultural contributions of perceived perceptions of Black males. Understanding the development of Black male perspectives towards law enforcement may provide the foundation for building a more positive community relationship. For example, campus law enforcement officers’ awareness of this social
issue can serve to determine an appropriate approach with Black citizens for nonviolent offenses, such as consensual encounters or traffic stops.

I have developed two research questions that will assist in the exploration of the development of Black male college students’ perceptions toward campus law enforcement officers on a college campus. These research questions address the experiences derived from perceptions of campus law enforcement officers on a college campus only.

Research Questions

The following questions framed this study:

1) How do Black male college students describe their life experiences and perceptions of campus law enforcement officers on a college campus?

2) How do Black male college students describe their relationships with campus law enforcement officers on a college campus?

For the purposes of this research, the term Black is interchangeable and in reference to people who identify as Black Americans, African American, and of African descent. The term campus law enforcement refers to sworn law enforcement officers employed on a college campus and is interchangeable with the term campus police officers.

Significance of the Study

This research differs from previous studies in that it seeks to explore the experiential narratives of the participants’ perceptions rather than the outcomes and effects of those perceptions. The significance of this research is to provide a platform for Black male college students to share their perspectives of campus law enforcement officers. It is my belief that
firsthand experiences of the reasons Black male have come to feel the way they do about the police will provide in-depth awareness and clarification of Black male’s thoughts that result in certain behaviors and responses toward campus law enforcement officers. This research differs from previous studies in that it seeks to expose the development of the participants’ perceptions rather than the outcome and effects of their perceptions. Additionally, my research study is also directed to campus Black male students, in comparison to most existing studies are directed to the communities where Black males reside (Brunson, 2007; Warren, 2011; Weitzer & Tuch, 2005).

My research study is unique because I utilized a qualitative approach, whereas existing literature were based on quantitative research. For example, some quantitative studies have sought to examine the satisfaction of minority communities and police officers but did not focus on the population of solely Black male and their perspectives (Brunson, 2007; Mbuba, 2010; Piquero, 2008; Verga et al., 2016; Warren, 2011; Weitzer & Tuch, 2005). A study by Stewart et al. (2009) examined Black males and their relationships with police officers but did not investigate the population of Black males enrolled in higher education or how their student status affected their ability to communicate and understand their rights as citizens. Lastly, Bichler and Gaines (2005) examined the perceptions of criminal behavior by police officers but did not reveal the Black males’ perceptions of police officers or why these perceptions existed. I believe in the principles and values of higher education institutions and its ability to integrate lived and practical knowledge of cultures for the advancement of understanding and awareness for all. Educators and campus law enforcement officers should participate in meaningful community engagement programs that address social issues of privilege.
I examined Black college male’s perceptions of campus law enforcement officers on a college campus through their firsthand experiences. The significance of my study is to reveal participants’ cultural depictions of authority figures, explore ideologies of racial identity, and finally gain knowledge of the development factors of the perceptions of campus law enforcement officers by a population, specifically, Black males. Through the qualitative research by means of participant interviews in this study, I examined Black male college students’ perceptions and how they have begun to feel the way they do.

Theoretical Perspective

In my exploration of existing literature, I utilized two theories and one ideology to guide my research study. I intended to explain and predict Black male college students’ association of identity, perceptions and satisfaction of campus law enforcement officers and the culture of college campuses through the application of theory. The principles of CRT, William E. Cross’ theory of Nigrescence, and the ideology of whiteness guided this study.

CRT is a framework of perspectives, methods, and pedagogy that seeks to identify, analyze, and transfigure those structural and cultural facets of education that preserve subordinate and dominant racial positions in and out of the classroom, (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). From the higher education perspective, this theory is fitting because CRT is used to analyze and critique educational research and practices (Hiraldo, 2010). Therefore, it is important to incorporate the CRT when implementing institutional processes and procedures and its ability to potentially identify and combat presence of whiteness. Whiteness determines and reflects the normal natural and normative ways of functioning demonstrated through unconsciousness, of things like norms, social roles, characteristics of different groups,
social status, and power (Gusa, 2010). CRT also identifies systems in place within campus law enforcement that reflect racism on college campuses. CRT supports that racism in the form of whiteness and White privilege does indeed exist.

The theory of Nigrescence is conceptualizations of Black identity development and processing of race (Constantine et al., 1998; Vandiver et al., 2001). This theory consists of five stages of development that addresses the thoughts and about one’s self (Blacks) accompanied by the beliefs and association of Whites (Constantine et al., 1998; Vandiver et al., 2001). For this research study, Black male college students were asked to share stories and details about their childhood upbringing related to their Black identity formation; therefore, the exploration of the theory of Nigrescence outlined the cultural connection of identity through its five stages, later condensed to four: Pre-Encounter, Encounter, Immersion-Emersion, and lastly Internalization and Commitment stages (Constantine et al., 1998; Worrell et al., 2001). These four stages assisted in relating the connections of adolescent development of identity to the transition into higher education at a predominantly White institution (PWI) for the research participants. This theory assisted in the exploration of Black racial identity and development process of Black male college students.

For this research study, I examined the perceptions of Black undergraduate students in higher education at a PWI; therefore, the ideology of whiteness was applicable. Black undergraduate students have been described as marginalized within PWIs, yet PWIs do not have to be explicitly racist to create a hostile environment, (Gusa, 2010). This statement supports that law enforcement officers do not have to demonstrate overt racism to impose power, authority and privilege over Black male college students; their presence whether physical or not is sufficient. Unexamined historically situated White cultural ideology embedded in the language,
cultural practices, traditions, and perceptions of knowledge allow these institutions to remain racialized (Gusa, 2010). It is imperative for PWIs to recognize these blind systems of power. Research shows, the overall criminal justice system is steeped in whiteness for people of color through policy, ideology of whiteness, and systems of power (Gusa, 2010). When higher education ignores the existence of systematic racism, diversity action plans become ineffective (Hiraldo, 2010).

Systems of power, inequality, and racism affect Black male college students’ academic and personal progress and in turn can adversely affect their perception of safety on campus (Gusa, 2010; Hiraldo, 2010). The influences of current practices on a college campus affects one’s ability to achieve good grades, internalize positive self-esteem within Black culture, and advance within higher education (Smith et al., 2011). An institution of higher education, specifically PWIs cannot provide fair and equal treatment and provisions for all students because racism is built on the foundation of institutional power, a form of power that people of color and non-Whites in the United States never possessed (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Since there is little to no research on the developmental factors of Black male’s perception of campus law enforcement officers, I used the CRT, theory of Nigrescence, and the ideology of whiteness to guide this study through aspects of Black male college students’ family influences and lived and vicarious experiences with campus law enforcement officers on a college campus. The experience of Black male’s perception of campus law enforcement officers was a result of many underlying, deeply rooted cultural issues that impacted the dispositions of the police interaction. Previous studies assert that negative police encounters render a person more critical of the police, even among community members who have higher educational backgrounds (Mbuba, 2010). Identifying and understanding the development of perceptions may
be the foundational aspect in building positive community relationships between campus law enforcement officers and communities of color through trust, reduction of fear and equitable treatment same as White males. The next chapter provides a review of the existing literature on Black male in relation to their perceptions of law enforcement officers.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into seven chapters. Chapter 1 of this dissertation provides the background to the problem, the statement of the problem, research questions, purpose of the study, an overview of the design of the study, and its significance. Chapter 2 presents a review of the relevant literature associated with the study and concludes with a chapter summary. Chapter 3 describes the design of the study, conceptual framework guiding the study, surveying approach, instrumentation, data collection and analysis, procedures, definitions of relevant terms of the study, and will conclude with a chapter summary. Chapter 4 provides the first category of findings of the research study, Black Identity. Chapter 5 presents the second category of finding of the research study, Views of White People. Chapter 6 presents the third and final category of findings of the research study, Personal and Vicarious Experiences with Law Enforcement Officers. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 provide participant introductions, vignettes, and findings pertinent to the two proposed research questions. The study concludes with Chapter 7, a brief review of the problem, discussion of the findings, implications to practice, and future recommendations for research.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

This review of literature intends to highlight the identification, explanation, and promotion of Black male college students and their perceptions of campus law enforcement officers on a college campus. However, there is little to no information available on this topic; therefore, this literature review will detail the descriptions of the law enforcement profession as it pertains to college campuses. The general practices of law enforcement, community policing, college campuses, and demographics of officers will be explored. Subsequently, the exploration of existing literature on Black racial identity through means of family and cultural attributes such as childhood upbringing, peer influences, and integration into higher education will assist in establishing perceptions of campus law enforcement officers on a college campus.

The problem and purpose of this study demonstrates a gap in existing literature on the developmental factors of perception of Black male college students’ perceptions of campus law enforcement officers on a college campus. Mbuba (2010) conducted a quantitative study on the attitudes towards police on a four-year public university. He studied the attitudes of White and minority college students toward police and found while holding the educational attainment and all other factors constant (such as major, age, and socioeconomic background) the racial background of citizens continues to be the single most significant predictor of the type of attitude a person will have toward campus law enforcement officers. Existing literature presents information based on minorities, such as non-White descendants, in regard to attitudes,
confidence, and satisfaction of law enforcement officers but not how minorities came to feel the way they do (Brunson, 2007; Johnson, 2017; Mbuba, 2010; Peck, 2015; Smith et al., 2016; Verga et al., 2016; Warren, 2011). This call for additional research on Black male college students’ perceptions of campus law enforcement officers supports the need to identify and define the origin and developmental factors. Since relations between the law enforcement profession and minority communities, especially the African American community, still remain strained, many individual states and communities have recently implemented and mandated commissions of multicultural training for law enforcement officers to address this relationship (Johnson, 2017). Which leads to the inquiry of roles and responsibilities on campus law enforcement officers on a college campus and their necessities. First, I will expound on the racial identity frameworks that will guide this research study. The Critical race theory will be primary, followed by the theory of Nigrescence, and then the impact of whiteness.

**Racial Identity Theories**

(CRT was derived from the critical legal studies in the 1970s (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lopez, 2003). Authors Richard Delgado, Derrick Bell, and Alan Freeman were among the first scholars to integrate and present these concepts from the legal, civil rights aspect into the educational and social science studies (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lopez, 2003). As an extension of the Civil Rights movement and the Critical Legal Studies movement, CRT’s seeks to analyze and explain how the law reproduces, actualizes, and normalizes racism in society (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lopez, 2003). Instead of adhering to the belief that racism is an abnormal or unusual concept, critical race Theorists assert racism is a normal and
endemic component of our social fabric (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lopez, 2003; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). CRT has five major propositions that serve as theoretical frameworks to deconstruct systems of oppressions such as institutions, ideologies, and behaviors (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lopez, 2003; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

The CRT advances the significance of the role of race and racism. Racism is defined as the belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all others and thereby the right to dominance; a system of ignorance, exploitation and power used to oppress other people on the basis of ethnicity, culture, mannerisms, and color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lopez, 2003; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Researchers support that race refers to events, class, expression of social decay and economic division more than biological traits (Ladson-Billings, 1999). However, despite growth and diversity, racial categories have evolved from Black and White biological designations to who is White and who is not White (Ladson-Billings, 1999). CRT also integrates historical connections of how citizenship and race interact in regard to property rights, which is a significant part of American history and classification. Researchers state property ownership was a prerequisite to American ownership (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). This relationship is still valid in present day when students of color account for scholarship application, grant recipient and still remain scarce in numbers for ownership of higher education, faculty position, and positions of power (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solórzano, 1997; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Finally, one of the more applicable aspects of CRT for my research study is the incorporation and significance of “naming one’s own reality” more popularly known as storytelling (Ladson-Billings, 1999). Storytelling incorporates experiential knowledge and
experiences of racism and need for a deep understanding of the educational system (Ladson-Billings, 1999; Solórzano, 1997; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Members of minority groups internalize the stereotypic images that certain elements of society have constructed to maintain power, which supports my interest to explore my participants family upbringing and interactions of law enforcement officers (Lopez, 2003; Solórzano, 1997). My research will provide a platform for participants to freely share their experiences in a formalized manner, which may have not been validated before. According to existing literature, storytelling can serve as a form of medicine to heal wounds of pain caused by racial oppression (Ladson-Billings, 1999; Lopez, 2003). Storytelling is not only important for my research participants, but the narratives they share can serve as a necessary conflict to affect the oppressor (Ladson-Billings, 1999).

The implications of storytelling and counterstorytelling is also an important part of CRT (Ladson-Billings, 1999; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Counterstorytelling is different from fictional storytelling (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Researchers are not developing imaginary characters that engage in fictional scenarios; instead, they are grounded in real-life experiences and actual empirical data and are contextualized in social situations that are also grounded in real life, not fiction (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Once these various sources of data were compiled, examined, and analyzed, the unanimous characters helped tell a story to engage in a real and critical dialogue about the findings from the interviews, literature, and experiences (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). These concepts support my methodological approach of the participant interviews by giving them a voice. The counterstory is a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told (Solórzano, 1997; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

I admire how to Solórzano and Yosso (2002) examine and present the CRT in a practical manner. The five tenets of CRT provide a framework for teacher education faculty and students
to utilize these resources in order to create, recreate, and recover knowledge and art in communities of color (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

The first tenet is the intercentricity of race and racism with other forms of subordination (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). This refers to how race and racism are in all aspects of the research process, where race is a powerful tool for explaining social inequity (Ladson-Billings, 1999). This supports my research to focus on race as a major component of the developmental factors of perception of college students, specifically Black males in regard to campus law enforcement officers.

This second tenet is the challenge to dominant ideology (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). CRT challenges the traditional research process and used to explain the experiences of students of color. This refers to confronting any notion that educational institutions claim toward objectivity, meritocracy, colorblindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Critical race scholars argue that these traditional claims act as a camouflage for the self-interest, power, and privilege of dominant groups in U.S. society, such as affirmative action and civil rights legislation (Ladson-Billings, 1999; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

The third tenet is the commitment to social justice (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). CRT offers a transformative solution to race subordination, such as the elimination of racism, sexism, and poverty and the empowering of subordinated minority groups (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). A specific transformative solution is providing a “voice” of the individuals who experience racism so they can empower teachers and students to better understand and challenge those racial stereotypical portrayals (Solórzano, 1997).

The fourth tenet is the centrality of experiential knowledge (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). This focuses on the racialized experiences of students of color, where knowledge is a strength
and draw explicitly on the lived experiences of people of color by including such methods as storytelling, family histories, biographies, scenarios, chronicles, and narratives (Ladson-Billings, 1999; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). As included in my methodology section, my research participants will be granted the opportunity to share their lived and vicarious experiences privately and describe and discuss images of other Black males in a group setting. Additionally, I will use the power of imagery to focus on the idea presented by Lopez (2003), the idea that racism is rarely seen as something that is always present in society and in our daily lives.

The fifth tenet is the transdisciplinary perspective (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). This refers to using the interdisciplinary knowledge base of ethnic studies, sociology, and the law to better understand experiences of students of color (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). This is used to guide research that better understands the effects of racism, sexism, and classism on people of color (Solórzano, 1997; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). American culture appears to be more diverse and accepting towards race because of the absence of racism now requires tangible proof of its existence: hate crimes, lynching, hate speech, burning crosses, or other symbolic or physical assaults (Lopez, 2003). However, racism is as powerful today as it was in the past because it’s more subtle, invisible, and insidious (Lopez, 2003). For example, on a systemic level and interpersonal level, when racism becomes more invisible, society associates it with past occurrences or a specific act; therefore, the frequent occurrences and historical perceptions of Black males and law enforcement are often ignored and viewed as isolated incidents (Lopez, 2003; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). In the section that follows, I will provide readers with a broad overview of the application of the theory of Nigrescence and whiteness for my research study.
Theory of Nigrescence

In 1971, William E. Cross studied and developed the theory of Nigrescence, which is a symbolic concept for the literal meaning for the French translation word, Nigrescence, of turning or becoming Black or dark (Cross & Vandiver, 2001). This theory also correlates with the stages Black Identity Development in higher education. The theory of Nigrescence will describe the cultural process of Black identity through its five stages, later condensed to four: Pre-Encounter, Encounter, Immersion-Emersion, and lastly Internalization and Commitment stages (Cross & Vandiver, 2001; Constantine et al., 1998; Worrell et al., 2001). Richtey (2014) argues Black identity development involves going through stages simultaneously. The first stage of Pre-Encounter refers to the outsider perspective of self through self-hatred and demeaning value. The second stage of Encounter refers to the actual events that comprise of experiences that separates Blacks from other cultures. The third stage refers to Immersion-Emerson of the of being Pro-Black to the transition of a rational level of comfortability of self. The fourth stage of Internalization and Commitment refers to understanding the value of the Black race and then learning and associating with the Black history and culture. This final stage serves as a catalyst for participating in transformative change for Black culture and its people (Cross & Vandiver, 2001). Richtey (2014) presents that every student is at different stages in their developmental process; therefore, advocacy for each individual Black student at predominantly White institutions will vary. Research supports, if these of identity development stages are interrupted by racism, academic isolation, or social inequity, then racial identity development will negatively impact Black students among their White peers (Harper & Quaye, 2007; Richtey, 2014; Watson & Protinsky, 1988). Richtey (2014) concluded, the Black identity development model helps
“Blacks begin to shed a poor self-worth and move toward embracing a positive Black self-definition” (p. 96). Racism, domination, and privilege are interwoven into society, which is the initiation of how Black people with less awareness about their Blackness can feel the effects of aspect whiteness around them.

**What is Whiteness?**

Across research, the term whiteness is commonly adversely associated with colonialism and struggles of power between White and non-White people (Ahmed, 2007; Alexander, 2004; Blumer, 1954; Crocker, 2020; Fanon, 1967; Fobear, 2020; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Colonialism is the denial and regulation of marginalized people around gender, racial, and sexual lines (Fobear, 2020). Blumer (1954) concluded that the organization of American race relations emerged from three significant events of colonization in history: the conquest of the Indians, the forced importation of Africans, and the solicited coming of Europeans, Asians, and Latinos. Therefore, the struggle of power and inequity has always been embedded in American history and race relations.

Crocker (2020) argues the concept of whiteness is “a complex, dynamic, and power-laden assemblage” that is flexible, frequently confusing, and also always historically contingent (p.108). Guess (2006) argues whiteness, in its social significance, is guided not so much by any biological foundation as by the social meanings that are ascribed to them. The social construction of race and whiteness and their social significance are intimately linked to the history of social organization in American society (Guess, 2006).

Whiteness can be present and experiences everywhere, even in academic environments. Institutions of higher education are a staple for whiteness and privilege because it deals with
equity, access, and power (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Ahmed (2007) argues whiteness is only invisible for those who inhabit it, or those who get so used to its inhabitance that they learn not to see it, even when they are not it. Unacknowledged White privilege helps maintain racism’s stories where whiteness is a category of privilege (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). There is every social indicator, from salary to life expectancy that reveals the advantages of being White, which are invisible factors (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). The experiences of people of color generate from a legacy of racial privilege, they are stories in which racial privilege seems “natural” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

White privilege is often expressed through majoritarian stories; through the perceived wisdoms and shared cultural understandings from individuals in the dominant race (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). This statement validates the importance of Black male narratives and perspectives also known as untold stories. Racism has been claimed by Whites who make allegations of reverse racism and calls for equal protection to prove discrimination or racial harm against them (Whites) (Lopez, 2003; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). For example, the Black Lives Matter movements or Sexual Assault awareness campaigns to the over police presence at Black student led events compared to White student led events on college campuses. Furthermore, the televised imagery and presentation of perceptions of civil disobedience gatherings have been viewed as unorganized, violent riots instead of structured, informed demonstrations, at Black and White events, respectively (Lopez, 2003). Simply put, (Guess, 2006) concluded whiteness and its significance in patterning social interaction and social organization between Whites and non-Whites.

These racial identity frameworks, CRT, The theory of Nigrescence, and the impact of whiteness will guide my research study. As educators, we need to identify the resources and
strengths of Students of Color and place them at the center of our research, curriculum, and teaching (Solórzano, 1997).

Campus Law Enforcement in Higher Education

The first introduction and implementation of law enforcement on a college campus occurred at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut, in 1894 (Yale University Police Department, 2017). The department’s origins date back to when two officers from the New Haven Police Department, Bill Wiser and Jim Donaldy, volunteered to be exclusively assigned to the Yale campus. The need for campus police arrived when a rumor circulated that Yale Medical School students had been removing recently buried bodies from local cemeteries for use as cadavers. This rumor resulted in a mass riot in which many students and community members were injured, at which point Wiser and Donaldy were assigned to the Yale campus.

College and university administrators, faculty, staff, and campus law enforcement aspire to create safe learning environments that facilitate students’ intellectual and psychosocial development (Harper & Newman, 2016); therefore, campus law enforcement (campus police) are essential to fostering a safe learning environment that will allow for student development (Bureau of Justice Statistics [BJS], 2017). Campus law enforcement officers provide a quicker response to incidents on campus and offer campus-specific services not necessarily available from local policing organizations (BJS, 2017). They can be comprised of sworn police officers, nonsworn security officers, or both. Campus law enforcement officers can perform use of force tasks, which include any physical contact above touch for escorting or handcuffing including restraints, holds, or takedowns needed to control or detain an individual (policeone.com, 2019).

The BJS (2017) reported 75% of campuses use armed officers, 94% authorize use of chemical or
pepper sprays, and 93% authorize use of a baton. Campus law enforcement officers can have state, county, or city-wide jurisdiction; others are limited to campus property.

According to the BJS (2017), campus law enforcement refers to police officers on a college campus. The purpose of campus police is to focus, protect, and respond to a specific population independent of the local police departments (BJS, 2017). Campus law enforcement perform functions related to special events security, dispatching calls for services, traffic enforcement, property crime investigation, building lockup, parking enforcement, vehicle registration, violent crime investigation, and fire prevention education (BJS, 2017). Most campus law enforcement individuals and agencies are also responsible for enforcing laws and maintaining public order and public safety within the encompassing city or town. According to the BJS (2017), 81% of the higher education institutions allow jurisdiction extended beyond the campus boundaries, promoting the idea that the community and law enforcement officers are working in a cohesive partnership to address issues of safety. This concept of community policing is based on statistical data of high crime areas and implementation of community liaison programs to improve at-risk communities (www.policeone.com). These partnerships and community-based activities are significant to understanding law enforcement and the minority community (Mbuba, 2010). Community policing has become the primary mode by which police departments provide services that include a comprehensive set of principles and has implications for a department’s philosophy, strategies, and tactics (Bichler & Gaines, 2005).

Law Enforcement Demographics on a College Campus

According to Lasley et al. (2011), the racial disparity between police and citizens may increase the willingness of officers to represent the interests of others with similar demographic
backgrounds. According to PoliceOne.com (2019), campus law enforcement officers are predominantly White male with the following demographic characteristics. The average age is 34 years old with an average annual income of $47,000. The average education earned is an Associate’s in Criminal Justice because most police departments do not require a college or university degree for employment. Per PoliceOne.com, 44% of individuals with prior military experience transition to law enforcement careers. The current national demographics for the US population do not parallel those represented within law enforcement. Solórzano et al. (2000) reported that among hundreds of police departments across the country, the percentage of Whites on within law enforcement is more than 30% points higher than the communities they serve.

These data demonstrate the reality that police departments are not reflective of the racial composition of the local populations. Lasley et al. (2011) stated that the lack of racial and ethnic diversity within police organizations contributes to the formation of an organizational culture in which officers learn to believe that it is acceptable to treat minority citizens differently than their nonminority counterparts. Conversely, because most law enforcement officers are White, it may be difficult for Blacks to identify with, relate to, or trust someone who does not look like them (Hiraldo, 2010). The question arises, how can a community fairly be policed by a nonreflective group of people?

Previous literature (Bichler & Gaines, 2005; Brown & Frank, 2006; Warren, 2010; Welch, 2007) reinforces practical training methods and applications for law enforcement officers from post-academy training to a continuous update of physical, technological, and leadership skills at all stages of the officer’s career, regardless of geographic locations. These skills have the ability to enhance policy, practice, and integrity within the law enforcement profession. Below is existing literature of the stages of training that can influence an officer’s perception of its citizens
within the law enforcement profession. Law enforcement officers are trained and tasked to immediately identify criminal problems, make sound decisions, and then provide viable solutions to the identified problems. Prior to and throughout law enforcement officers’ careers they are mandated to attend various training courses to become certified police officers as well as maintain their skills and knowledge as it pertains to the criminal justice system.

**Law Enforcement Identification of Crime and Decision-Making Influences**

If the police are to be effective in problem solving, they must be proficient in identifying those problems that have substantial impact on crime, disorder, and the community (Bichler & Gaines, 2005; Warren, 2010; Welch, 2007). These actions generally are geographically focused in that the police concentrate on specific or clusters of problems (Bichler & Gaines, 2005). Law enforcement officers’ safety enforcement tasks include identifying the most prevalent types of crime, identify and monitor repeat offenders, locate crime ridden neighborhoods, and develop a profile of an offender to prevent future crimes (Brown & Frank, 2006; Welch, 2007). After identifying the problem, law enforcement officers are tasked to make appropriate decisions to resolve the issue.

Law enforcement officers have the responsibility to make quick and often life-altering decisions, whether it is the decision to arrest, issuing a ticket accompanied by court fees, or use of force (Bichler & Gaines, 2005; Brown & Frank, 2006). A few factors that may influence an officer’s decision-making ability include severity of crime, race, sex, age and demeanor of the involved individuals (Brown & Frank, 2006; Smith et al., 2016; Warren, 2010). Research (Brown & Frank, 2006; Smith et al., 2016) shows that in law enforcement encounters involving victims and offenders, police decision-making turns more on the race of the victim than the
offender, whereas in property offenses, police are significantly more likely to arrest the offender at the victims’ request when the victims are White (Smith et al., 2016).

Male suspects and juvenile suspects are significantly more likely to be arrested than females or adults (Brown & Frank, 2006). Officers are significantly more likely to arrest Black suspects than White suspects, and regardless of the officer’s race, the likelihood of arrest is significantly increased if an encounter involves a suspect who committed a felonious offense, if the encounter was with a visibly intoxicated person, if the suspect showed disrespect or hostility toward the police, or if the interaction involved a juvenile suspect (Brown & Frank, 2006). Lastly, citizens who are disrespectful to the police increase the likelihood of their arrest, as do suspects who commit crimes in the presence of an officer. The likelihood of arrest also increases significantly if an officer is dispatched to the encounter or other citizens are at the scene of the encounter witnessing the police–suspect interaction (Brown & Frank, 2006).

Problem Solving

Problem solving is imperative to further community policing efforts. Proponents of community policing suggests that community partnerships are developed to assist the police in identifying problems affecting the community or neighborhood and form partnerships that provide a more effective and comprehensive response to problems that are identified (Bichler & Gaines, 2005). The problem-solving process has four steps: scanning of the environment for problems, analysis of identified problems, response to the problem and assessment of outcomes as a result of the response (Bichler & Gaines, 2005). This concept is widely referred to as the acronym “SARA” by law enforcement professionals.
Police departments have also developed and implemented philosophies of a problem-solving model as the standard method of policing rather than an occasionally useful tactic. Problem-solving efforts focus on problems of the public, not police administration in that when problems are taken on, police establish precise, measurable objectives, and police managers consistently look for ways to get all members of the department involved in solving problems (Bichler & Gaines, 2005). Along with adapted department philosophies, some police departments have committed to hiring more minority police officers to engage Black citizens (Brown & Frank, 2006). Through White officers’ contacts with fellow officers who are African American within the agency, they may become more culturally sensitive and culturally competent in their dealings with the minority communities they serve (Brown & Frank, 2006, Brunson, 2007). However, despite increases at the national level, under-representation of Black officers continues to be an issue in most police departments, particularly small and mid-sized departments in nonurban settings, similar to my target population within a rural environment (Brown & Frank, 2006; National Research Council, 2004).

Law enforcement officers take actions through partnerships to reduce crime and disorder or the conditions that contribute to them, such as neighborhood watch programs and information received from community residents (Bichler & Gaines, 2005). Researchers have identified more effective means to reduce implicit bias with minority communities is to have personal contact with its citizens (Brown & Frank, 2006; Johnson, 2017). An example of contacts includes leisure activities, community focus groups with four to eight citizens to one police officer, and all other community partnership initiatives (Brown & Frank, 2006; Brunson, 2007; Johnson, 2017). Research has shown that these community partnerships can increase minority satisfaction with the police as well as decrease racial disparity and biases with the police and its
minority communities (Johnson, 2017). Many studies have examined the benefits of engaging police satisfaction through community-based learning for students, faculty, universities and communities (Brunson, 2007; Marche & Briere, 2012; Mbuba, 2010; Peck, 2015; Weitzer & Tuch, 2005). Students in the Marche and Briere’s project reported a number of personal outcomes (e.g., enhanced personal identity, moral development, interpersonal development), social outcomes (e.g., reduced stereotypes, increasing a sense of social responsibility), and learning outcomes (e.g., improved ability to apply what they are learning to the real world). For effective and just changes in the criminal justice system, it is important to educate and interact with the public on issues related to the criminal justice process (Johnson, 2017; Marche & Briere, 2012).

Mandated Certifications and Continuing Education for Law Enforcement

Comprehensive community-oriented policing involves training courses that rely on nontraditional law enforcement tactics (Bichler & Gaines, 2005). Law enforcement officers participate in a variety of continuing education courses that involve multicultural awareness, use of force incidents, and skill advancements (Bichler & Gaines, 2005; Correll et al., 2002; Johnson, 2017). The purpose of mandated training courses is to introduce knowledge about case law, best law enforcement practices and apply them to daily operations. Most law enforcement department hold annual simulation training for its officers for use of force scenarios (Correll et al., 2002).

Correll et. all (2002) conducted four studies employing a simplified videogame that roughly simulates the situation of a police officer who is confronted with an ambiguous, but potentially hostile, target, and who must decide whether to shoot. The purpose was to investigate
the effect of a target’s ethnicity on participants’ decision to “shoot” that target during simulation (Correll et al., 2002). The result demonstrated one unarmed Black target was shot by more than 90% of the participants. The same mildly aggressive behavior was perceived as more threatening when it is performed by Black target than when it was performed by a White target (Correll et al., 2002). The participants were faster and more accurate in distinguishing guns from hand tools when they were primed with a Black target as opposed to a White target (Correll et al., 2002). Blacks were much more likely than their White counterparts to be portrayed as criminals as opposed to police officers (Correll et al., 2002; Welch, 2007). It seems crucial to understand whether the decision to shoot is influenced by the target’s ethnicity, and if so, what this bias represents (Correll et al., 2002).

Since these studies reported an alarming disparity in a training environment associated with real-life use of force incidents, law enforcement departments have created mandatory cultural and diversity training for its officers (Correll et al., 2002; Johnson, 2017). Multicultural awareness training also known as cultural and diversity training (Johnson, 2017) to increase law enforcement officers’ knowledge of the experiences, histories, and cultural norms of groups other than White males to promote more sensitivity to the experiences and cultural norms of others, to hold fewer prejudiced opinions, and to behave in a less prejudicial manner toward citizens they encounter who are not White males (Johnson, 2017). These training experiences often involve a combination of video clips, lectures, discussions, and field trips that seek to educate officers (Brown & Frank, 2006; Johnson, 2017). Since 1975, these types of multicultural trainings have been nationally implemented; however, according to Johnson (2017), the published research provides no evidence that this sort of training has any effect on attitudes or behaviors of the attendees.
While law enforcement officers rely on department training mandates and lived experiences in the field, community members, specifically Black males rely on family influences, personal and vicarious experiences to predict attitudes, interactions, and outcomes regarding law enforcement officers (Weitzer & Tuch, 2005).

Background on Perceptions of Law Enforcement Officers

Existing literature reveals several aspects related to the satisfaction of people of color and their perceptions toward local law enforcement officers (Brunson, 2007; Mbuba, 2010; Piquero, 2008; Verga et al., 2011; Weitzer & Tuch, 2005). The term “people of color” includes all individuals identified as non-European and is associated with issues of powerlessness, discrimination, and prejudice (Constantine & Sue, 2006; Phinney, 1996; Thompson, 2006). Satisfaction refers to the pleasure of service, interaction, and fairness conducted by law enforcement officers (Piquero, 2008; Verga et al., 2016; Warren, 2011). The matters of mistrust, vicarious experiences, and socio-economic status were also portrayed as influences of satisfaction with and outcomes of police interactions (Brunson, 2007; Piquero, 2008; Verga et al., 2016; Warren, 2011; Weitzer & Tuch, 2005). The conclusionary findings of satisfaction were collected via surveys, one-on-one interviews, and focus groups and then presented in narrative forums; the overarching aspect of the influence of satisfaction within research was an individual’s race (Brunson, 2007; Piquero, 2008; Verga et al., 2016; Warren, 2011; Weitzer & Tuch, 2005). However, there is little to no research on the developmental factors of Black male college students’ perception of law enforcement officers on a college campus. For the purposes of this study, the feelings, attitudes, and beliefs will be referenced as perceptions. According to the existing literature, Black male’s perceptions of law enforcement officers originate from
personal beliefs and vicarious experiences (Brunson, 2007; Warren, 2011; Weitzer & Tuch, 2005).

**Development of Perception Through Family Upbringing**

Mistrust is defined as a psychological defense mechanism (Biafora et al., 1993). The first elements of mistrust are thought to developed in the home, where parents and/or siblings provide some of the initial definitions, parameters, and cautions of being Black in a predominantly White society (Biafora et al., 1993) through conversations between a parental figure and an adolescent regarding appropriate behavior for a person of color (Biafora et al., 1993; Brown & Frank, 2006; Brunson, 2007; Watson & Protinsky, 1988, Weitzer & Tuch, 2005). This supports the need to explore the influence of family upbringing as it pertains to the developmental factors of Black male college students’ perception of law enforcement officers.

**Development of Perception Through Personal Experiences**

The influence of lived and vicarious experiences is essential for comprehending the development of Black male college students’ perception of law enforcement officers. Black citizens’ mistreatment by the police is abundant in some communities, which increases the likelihood that neighborhood residents will come to view local policing strategies as racially biased (Weitzer & Tuch, 2005). These perceptions may have been developed and nurtured by individual’s own real-life experiences or by those of another person that may lead to mistrust, resistance, or negative unwarranted interactions with law enforcement officers. Community satisfaction and attitudes toward the police are related to how a person experiences an encounter with the police (Verga et al., 2016).
This issue is an epidemic that affects the Black community. According to the Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice (CJCJ, 2017), young adult Blacks ages 20 to 24 are 7.1 times more likely to be killed by the police than individuals from other races or age groups and account for nearly one-fourth of all Black deaths by law enforcement officers. Young Black lives are in jeopardy. Young adult Blacks are four and one-half times more likely than Whites to be killed by law enforcement officers, whereas dominant racial groups perceive the police as allies (CJCJ, 2017). Whites tend to align themselves with the police and may perceive their group interests as indirectly threatened; therefore, it seems sensible for law enforcement to target minority individuals or minority neighborhoods and to see Blacks as inclined toward criminal or violent behavior (Weitzer & Tuch, 2005).

**Development of Perception Through Vicarious Experiences**

Vicarious experiences are indirect contacts with police that citizens hear about from their friends, family, and the media that can be internalized and used as information about how police will interact with citizens in the future (Warren, 2011; Weitzer & Tuch, 2006). Research (Brunson, 2007; Marche & Briere, 2012; Mbuba, 2010; Warren, 2011) shows that personal and vicarious experiences, including through social network or media, can impact one’s perception of law enforcement officers. The public estimates of Black criminality surpass the reality, while the media perpetuates ideas linking race with criminality (Welch, 2007). White citizens are more likely to hear negative stories about police from media outlets, whereas African Americans more frequently hear negative accounts of police behavior from their friends and, despite the consequential outcome of punishment (Mbuba, 2010; Warren, 2011). According to Marche and Briere (2012), the relationships between communities of color and law enforcement officers can
influence social and personal identities regarding the criminal justice system, starting with views of law enforcement officers. This perspective may increase fear of communities of color, due to the broadcasting of criminal physical characteristics or descriptions of criminal activity. Previous studies on citizens’ attitudes toward the police have demonstrated that different population groups express different levels of satisfaction with the police, with the more satisfied groups tending to show more positive attitudes toward the agents of law enforcement (Brunson, 2007; Correll et al., 2002; Mbuba, 2010; Smith et al., 2016; Warren, 2011).

Residents of disadvantaged communities have considerable risk of experiencing direct and indirect contact with police because of the aggressive crime-control strategies to which they are exposed, specifically, official and unofficial police patrols historically have been used to enforce unjust laws by monitoring and restricting Black citizens’ movement (Brunson, 2007). These studies report the effects of lived experiences within distressed communities, such as being watched and/or detained. Thus, perceptions of unfair and disrespectful treatment, coupled with high rates of being targeted by the police, have a cumulative effect on urban Black young male’s perceptions of police (Brunson, 2007; Weitzer & Tuch, 2005). The perception of police practices as unfair or as racially motivated may lead to more frequent and severe confrontations between police and citizens and to greater distrust of the police (Weitzer, 2005). An officer’s interaction with people of color can outweigh the detriment of a ticket or arrest.

The possibility of Black male’s negative perception can escalate or disrupt law enforcement officers’ ability to effectively perform their duties. Therefore, it is important to explore this relationship and perception of Black male college students and expose its root causes of the development factors. Recognition of a perceived threat or fear is important for law enforcement officers who are dealing with an individual, specifically a Black man who has never
encountered the police. The misunderstood reason for anger, fear or defiance over simple nonviolent offenses, such as traffic infractions, may be perceived as unnecessary noncompliance to a law enforcement officers; however, underlying family influences may have triggered this response (Warren, 2011).

For example, the racial content of televised newscasts in Chicago found that they commonly portray accused Black criminals in scowling mug shots or in video clips being led in handcuffs by White police officers (Welch, 2007). These images are so widespread that it would not be surprising if much of American society has subconsciously come to accept the visual portrayal of Blacks as criminals (Welch, 2007). Because media presumably have the power to help construct the meaning of race in our society, it is apparent that they play a significant role in defining Blacks as criminals as a result of the way they are often presented to readers and viewer (Welch, 2007).

Aside from the actual involvement of Blacks in crime and the criminal justice system, other potential contributors to the profiling of criminals as young Black male may be media sources. The media provide readily accessible depictions of criminality, which may help to shape perceptions about crime and subsequent justice practices (Warren, 2011; Welch, 2007). Welch’s research on the treatment of defendants in court proceedings shows that prosecutors sometimes take advantage of and perpetuate racial stereotypes by characterizing Blacks as particularly prone to violent criminality, which results in higher conviction rates. When the public sees such a large portion of those convicted and sentenced by criminal courts are Black, the message conveyed is that Blackness and criminality are inextricably related (Welch, 2007).

This literature review will now define Black male’s racial identity, their experiences within higher education, and the role and impact of campus law enforcement officers on a
college campus as they relate to the minority perception of campus law enforcement officers. This research will include two in-depth phenomenological interviews with 15 Black male college students at a Midwestern university to identify the factors related to the development of their perceptions of campus law enforcement that result from their experiences.

**Black Male Racial Identity**

Rosenthal et al. (1971) suggested that positive Black identity seems to be most effective when he (a Black man) has a realistic appraisal of his chances and what is necessary to create new chances, and what his educational, occupational and social possibilities are and the means necessary to create more relevant options. According to Saud Nasir et al. (2009), self-identification for Black male is multidimensional and consists of physical traits, intellectual attributes, and the outward demonstration of culture (Thompson, 2006). Ford (2011) surveyed 29 Black male and found they identified themselves based on popular racial stereotypes. These stereotypes defined Black masculinity and included dark skin (identified by the male with descriptors like brown, chocolate, or Black), chiseled African features (e.g., a wide nose, fuller lips), sufficient height, broad shoulders, athletic build, sizeable penis, various hairstyles (e.g., cornrows, Afro, crop cut, do-rag), and a deep voice (Ford, 2011). Darker skin, coarse hair, wider nose, and fuller lips were also associated with the epitome of Blackness (DeCuir-Gunby, 2009; Ford, 2011). This research has revealed that physical characteristics and social acceptance are significant as Black adolescents’ transition into manhood (DeCuir-Gunby, 2009; Ford, 2011; Kroger, 2008; Thompson, 2006). For example, lighter skin is related to financial, educational and life success; therefore, differential treatment based on skin color impacts Blacks in the educational arena (DeCuir-Gunby, 2009).
Identity formation is a multifaceted negotiation process that asks questions about one’s present, past, and future experiences (DeCuir-Gunby, 2009). While identity development occurs over one’s lifetime, the period of adolescence and development ranges from ages 11 to 22 and has been considered the most critical (DeCuir-Gunby, 2009; Kroger, 2008). This development period is directly correlated with the target population of my study, which involves participants aged 18 to 24. Identification evolves beyond physical (personal) and cultural (family) influences (DeCuir-Gungy, 2009). Racial identity and adolescent development include conversations minority families have related to teaching their children how to conduct themselves in public, development of self-identity, and how to interact with authority figures, including law enforcement officers (Biafora et al., 1993; Brunson, 2007; Smith et al., 2016; Watson & Protinsky, 1988; Weitzer & Tuch, 2005).

According to James Baldwin’s, Notes from a Native Son (1955), “Every parent has to prepare the child for the day when the child would be despised in this White world and how to create a stronger antidote to the poison for oneself.” Baldwin’s historic insight can serve as a demonstration of how Black male have to prepare themselves to cope with various forms of prejudice within society. As a part of adolescent development, young Black adolescents are given instructions on how to survive law enforcement contacts, which often lead to negative attitudes and satisfaction of law enforcement profession and, as a result, this divide can accentuate the race gap in perceptions of police (Brunson, 2007; Warren, 2011; Weitzer, 2011). Many Black adolescent drivers are given precautionary directions of personal behavior that may lead to initial mistrust and fear of law enforcement officers without personal experience (Brunson & Weitzer, 2011). These stories that are shared about police not only serve as information about a particular (police) interaction but might also provide real-life expectations.
that people may use to predict how police will respond to other citizens in similar circumstances (Warren, 2011).

For example, whenever a Black man is pulled over on a traffic stop, he should keep both of his hands on the top of the steering wheel, inform the law enforcement officer prior to reaching for his identification, turn the music down, and refrain from raising his voice (Brunson, 2007; Warren, 2011; Weitzer & Tuch, 2005). Black adolescents may be taught to practice these precautionary practices to avoid escalating any interaction or misinterpreting lawful commands given by law enforcement officers (Brunson & Weitzer, 2011). The data on racial awareness provides insights into how Black adolescents are viewed and how they are taught by significant others (family and friends) to deal with prejudice and discrimination (Biafora et al., 1993).

Furthermore, instead of recalling factual accounts, individuals represent a story about police behavior that is remembered as real and can be drawn on when interpreting future encounters and expectations of police bias (Warren, 2011). Although these experiences of identity and self-awareness evolved during adolescent development, these experiences can influence the transition into Black manhood and predict future responses to the police (Biafora et al., 1993; Smith et al., 2016).

**Identification of Black Male College Students**

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2017), the average higher education institution is made up of 17% Black male, and their socioeconomic status is between lower to middle class. Black male’s residency background varies, but they are often from the inner city as compared to the rural areas (NCES, 2017). For the sake of my research study, Black males aged 18 to 24 will be my target population, which is also the typical age for
traditional undergraduate individuals enrolled in a four-year institution of higher education (NCES, 2017). Interviewing representatives of this population will meet the focus of the proposed study because “college is an arena in which (mainly) middle class youths intend to ‘find themselves’ and construct a sense of self that ‘feels right.’” It can also be a heightened environment for racially underrepresented students as they learn to negotiate contradictory messages within the student of color community and/or within the primarily White social spaces at the college or university (Ford, 2011, p. 38).

**Black Male in Higher Education**

Although Black male have transitioned into higher education, the stigma of the stereotypical images can still be found on college campuses (Gusa, 2010). Mbuba (2010) and Smith (2016) have both explored concepts of racial conflict and attitudes toward police on a college campus though the lens of Black male college students. They stated that members of racial minority groups, especially African Americans, tend to give the police less favorable evaluations compared to White racial groups because minorities have more contact with the police, which makes it more likely that they look at the police more suspiciously and view them as a threat (Mbuba, 2010). Moreover, “for every one Black man who graduates from college, 100 are arrested (Walker, 2003, p. 663).

Black identity and perception are strongly associated with racism or White supremacy (Correll et al., 2002; Mbuba 2010; Smith et al., 2016; Warren, 2011). Black male college students often face racism in what is supposed to be a safe space (campus) for all students (Gusa, 2010; Harper, 2012). Whites tend to minimize or discount the existence of racialized policing and perhaps view charges of police racism as a threat to a revered institution (Weitzer & Tuch,
However, Black male college students are continually mishandled by educators and policymakers, face decreased college enrollment with disengagement and underachievement, low rates of baccalaureate degree completion, low teacher expectations, insufficient academic preparation for college-level work, racist and culturally unresponsive campus environments, and debilitating consequences of severe underrepresentation (Harper, 2012). Black male students experience unique ‘racial’ and ‘gendered racial’ microaggressions at all stages of the educational pipeline, experiences that are often detrimental to their educational aspirations, achievements, and ability to be appropriately taught and mentored (Smith et al., 2016). Microaggressions are considered being treated with less respect, receiving poor service, people acting as if they are afraid of you or think you are dishonest all due to racial stereotype and identity of specific ethnic groups (Solórzano et al., 2002).

Beyond the pressure to succeed academically, there is often pressure to disconnect from Black cultural expectations in favor of moving into the White world (DeCuir-Gungy, 2009; Ford, 2011). In the book *Code of the Streets*, Anderson (2000) discusses how young male learn to code-switch or use different signifiers depending on the social context—from decent to street behavior—because of feelings of alienation and limited alternative models of self-expression. Consequently, a “code of the street” or “set of informal rules governing interpersonal public behavior” is adopted to establish peer respect and approval (Anderson, 2000). This information is also validated by the impostor phenomena of Black males, which is an inner experience of intellectual phoniness felt at PWIs, (Ewing et al., 1996). This phenomenon is used to identity beliefs, attitudes, and background experiences that may be linked to academic success, physical attractiveness, and knowing how to please others to defend or promote one’s feelings and avoid judgment from White individuals, (Ewing et al., 1996; Smith et al., 2016). Black male college
students can embody the same basic idea of who they are as Black male but can differ in the affiliations of self-identification, such as culture, masculinity, dress, and self-image (Ewing et al., 1996; Ford, 2011). Identification of Black identity is imperative in the Black culture; however, awareness of the Black culture is significant among the culture of law enforcement officers (Brunson, 2007).

Through research-based information, Mbuba (2010) found higher education equips individuals with the knowledge “demystify the sensational information” about law enforcement broadcast by the mass media; therefore, satisfaction is often based on preconceptions of the community members toward policing and preconceptions are influenced by the type of information the subject has been exposed to (Mbuba, 2010, p.212). This background suggests that exposure to factual information regarding the operation of law enforcement presents a high likelihood of altering the perceptions a person has toward the agents of law enforcement (Mbuba, 2010) as compared to the general public that tends to obtain crucial data from the news media, which may be skewed toward sensation and emotional appeal instead of objectivity (Mbuba, 2010).

Summary

This review of literature provides insight into the identification of Black male, particularly Black male college students; minority perceptions with campus law enforcement officers; and the role and responsibilities of campus law enforcement officers and the training courses that validate their profession. Information regarding the influence of perception and attitudes via vicarious experiences, educational attainment and media outlets were also shared. Research suggests that despite interaction and outcome, race often remains the final indicator for
perception of law enforcement officers (Weitzer & Tuch, 2005) and that Black identity is a complex factor that determines ones’ outlook of self and how one is perceived by others (DeCuir-Gunby, 2009; Ford, 2011; Saud Nasir et al., 2009; Thompson, 2006).

However, existing literature lacks examination of the factors that lead to the development of Black male college students’ perception as well as how they pertain to campus law enforcement officers on a college campus. My research study seeks to find viable solutions to the criminal justice system through positively influencing the campus law enforcement profession. The police bear a major responsibility for making needed changes (Brown, Frank, 2006).

Chapter 3 presents my research study’s design and data collection and analysis methodologies.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methodology I utilized to conduct this qualitative study on the perspectives of Black male college students’ perceptions of campus law enforcement officers on a college campus. Qualitative research guided this research because it best captured the narratives of the research participants’ experiences through the means of participant interviews. This process is flexible and typically evolves contextually in response to the lived realities (Creswell & Creswell, 2009). A qualitative design focuses on specific situations or people and has an emphasis on descriptions rather than numbers (Maxwell, 2013). At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience (Seidman, 2006). By utilizing Seidman’s in-depth, phenomenological interviewing approach, I obtained participants’ beliefs and interpretations on this specific social issue, instead of relying on previous literature based on quantitative research, such as the numeric ranking systems of communities of color’s satisfaction of campus law enforcement officers.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore Black male college students’ perceptions of campus law enforcement officers at a large midwestern university. For the purposes of this research, the Black male college students’ perceptions were generally defined as thoughts, feelings, and attitudes. This study primarily focused on the development of the Black
male college students’ perceptions through aspects of family influence and their lived and vicarious experiences with law enforcement officers.

The following research questions guided this study:

**Research Questions**

1) How do Black male college students describe their relationships with campus law enforcement officers on a college campus?

2) How do Black male college students describe their life experiences and perceptions of campus law enforcement officers on a college campus?

**Study Population**

The primary setting for my research study was the campus of Tessa and Lew University (TLU) in a rural town in Illinois. As of fall of 2018, the following data was produced by Fast Facts-TLU. TLU was comprised of approximately 17,169 students, with 12,788 students enrolled in the undergraduate programs. TLU offers 71 undergraduate majors and has 320 student organizations. The undergraduate students are approximately 50.8% male and 49.2% female. The ethnic makeup was as follows: 55% White, 15.8% Black, 17.9% Latino, 5.4% Asian, 3.7% two or more races, 1.9% alien, nonresident, and 0.1% Native American. The educational attainment of Black male residents is 87.69% for high school and 34.81% for a bachelor’s degree. This campus, which was predominantly White, has experienced an increase of 1.7% of minorities, specifically Black students from fall of 2010 to fall of 2016. The number of Black students has numerically increased, but the total student population of TLU has decreased;
therefore, it has inflated the percentage of the overall population for Black students for the university.

According to Data USA (2017), this rural town in which TLU is located is approximately 65 miles west of Chicago, Illinois. The total population is 43,849. There are three most common ethnicities in the city: Whites, Blacks, and Latinos. The 2017 US Census bureau reports of the 4,686 Black residents, 2,523 (53.84%) are living in poverty.

Like many other small, midwestern rural towns, minority families have migrated from urban areas, but this is not a new phenomenon. Similarly, in the rural county, Housing Authority of the County of DeKalb, Illinois (HACD, 2017) offers 611 vouchers annually. These housing vouchers were permissible by availability and criteria matching under the provisions of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Criterions include citizenship status, no current or past criminal affiliation, annual income at or below $24,600 (HACD, 2017). HACD (2017) vouchers were typically redeemed by elderly, disabled, or displaced individuals from the inner city.

Jeff Crump (2002) reported on the demolition of public housing projects and the dispersal of low-income residents in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He stated federally sponsored programs attempted to deconcentrate inner cities by the demolition of public housing and second, through the use of housing vouchers intended to provide the displaced residents of public housing with greater economic opportunity (Crump, 2002). However, this displacement was an opportunity for social isolation of the poor to prevents low-income African Americans from coming into contact with middle-class individuals (Crump, 2002). During the 1990s, local and federal urban policymakers agreed the geographic concentration of low-income, minority residents in public housing projects located in the inner city significantly contributed to the fundamental problem of crime and poverty facing US cities (Crump, 2002). Therefore, a major cause of social problems
such as joblessness, poverty, and crime has provided a rationale for changes in federal public housing policy, which focuses on the need to deconcentrate poverty via the demolition of public housing (Crump, 2002).

Subsequently, Crump (2002) reported to reconcile these problems allegedly associated with the spatial concentration of poverty, public housing, which concentrates low-income residents in the inner city, must be demolished and the residents relocated. The demolition of public housing and dispersal of low-income people was merely a pretext for redevelopment scheme to bring the upper- and middle-class individuals back to the inner city and develop new zone for landscape and entertainment centers (Crump, 2002).

**Participant Demographics**

I interviewed 15 Black male college students enrolled as undergraduate students at TLU in Illinois. The stages of undergraduate academic status included freshmen, sophomores, juniors, seniors, and transfer students aged 18 to 24 years old who were enrolled in current classes on campus. Participants were not excluded based on the preference of religion, sexual orientation, social economic status, military experience, or political affiliation. The participants were categorized as African American or Black United States citizens with English as their first language. It is important to note each participant had the option to classify himself as a Black man despite physical features of lighter skin and softer hair texture to heritage ties with other ethnicities. The identities of the Black male college students were kept confidential for the reporting of data and replaced with pseudonyms.
Participant Profiles

I interviewed Joseph Moore, Randle Cross, Darrius Gates, Brian Rivers, Anthony Cooper, Tobias Samuels, Kevin King, Charles Overton, Russell Stephens, Aiden Jones, Donald Newell, Quentin Crawford, Alexander Pierson, Bernard Braxton, and Jimmy Johnson, who identified themselves as Black males. Each participant was eager to share their unique perspective and how they each developed these individual feelings towards their campus law enforcement officers.

The following information on the interviewed participants will provide helpful, contextual information related to the introduction and identification of each research participant. 11 out of the 15 participants grew up in a single-parent household. Of that 11, nine participants were primarily raised by their Black mothers. Lloyd (2018) argued historically, Black fathers have been absent through the disruptions of slavery, the undermining of paternal authority, and the physical confinement. Ten out of the 15 participants had one or more parent with some college education during their developmental, adolescent years, but out that 10, three participants’ parents did not graduate from college. Six out of the 15 participants described themselves as a “dark skinned”, Black male. All 15 participants verbally acknowledged despite the blatant differences and adversaries of being a Black male, they each feel a sense of overwhelming pride and gratefulness for their Black identity. Black identity is an integral part of Black student development from adolescence to adulthood (Davis, 2004).

Joseph Moore was a 23-year-old, junior in college. His major was Kinesiology. He aspired to go to medical school after graduation. He was a transfer student who recently completed two years at another college prior to enrolling at TLU. His father had a total of six
children. Of the six, he and his younger sister were his mother’s only children. His father was incarcerated the majority of his adolescent and adult life. Joseph grew up on 73rd and Western in Chicago, Illinois.

Randle Cross was a 21-year-old, senior in college. His major was Psychology. His father had a total of three children. Of the three children, he and his younger sister were his mother’s only children. Randle grew up on 67th and Champlain in Chicago, Illinois.

Darrius Gates was a 19-year-old, sophomore in college. His major was Journalism with a minor in Black Studies and Communications. Darrius did not know his father while he was growing up. He was the oldest child of his mother’s two sons. Darrius frequently moved during his early adolescent years. He grew up in Alsip, Humboldt Park, and then Garfield Park in Illinois.

Brian Rivers was a 21-year-old, senior in college. His major was Health Sciences. He lived with both of his parents, where he was the middle child of three sons. Brian grew up 78th and Rockwell in Chicago, and later moved to Lynwood, Illinois.

Anthony Cooper was a 20-year-old, sophomore in college. His major was Economics. His parents had three children total, where he was the youngest child. Anthony later grew up in East St. Louis, Illinois after his parents divorced. Originally, he and his family lived on the north side of Chicago, Illinois.

Tobias Samuel was a 21-year-old, junior in college. His major was Psychology with a minor in nonprofit studies. His father had a total of seven children. He grew up with his father, mother, two brothers, and two sisters. His father had two additional children after his parents separated. Tobias grew up in Joliet, Illinois.
Kevin King was a 21-year-old, senior in college. His major was Political Science with an emphasis in Public Law. His parents had a total of five children, where he was the middle child. Kevin grew up in Avalon Park in Chicago, Illinois.

Charles Overton was 20-year-old, junior in college. His major was Business. His parents had two children, where he was the oldest. His father has been incarcerated the most of his adolescent and adult life. Charles grew up in Waukegan, Illinois.

Russell Stephen was an 18-year-old, freshman in college. His major was undecided. His parents have two children, where he is the oldest. Russell lived in St. Croix in the Caribbean until his family moved to Naperville, Illinois when he was 11 years old.

Aiden Jones was an 18-year-old, freshman in college. His major was undecided. He is biracial but considered himself Black. His parents are Puerto Rican and Black. He was the only child until he was seven years old, and then his parents had four additional children together.

Alexander Pierson was an 18-year-old year, freshman in college. He was a first-generation student and student athlete. His major was undecided. He had seven siblings, where he is the middle child. Alexander primarily lived with his father in East St. Louis, Illinois, but often visited his mom who lived in Chicago, Illinois.

Quentin Crawford was a 21-year-old, senior in college. His major was Kinesiology. He was his parents only child, but they later separated. He grew up in Chicago, Illinois, until his senior years of high school. Due to behavioral issues in school, Quentin moved to South Holland to live with his father.

Donald Newell was an 18-year-old, freshman in college. His major was undecided. His parents had three sons, where he is the middle child and twin. However, he did not meet his
father until the age of 11 years old and has not kept in constant communication with him. Donald
grew up in Calumet City, Illinois.

Bernard Braxton was a 22-year-old, senior in college. His major was Occupational
Therapy. He is Nigerian but considered himself Black. He parents had three sons, where he was
the youngest and twin brother. Bernard grew up on the north side of Chicago, Illinois.

Jimmy Johnson was a 21-year-old, senior in college. His major was Corporate
Communications. Jimmy was a transfer student who recently graduated with his Associate’s
degree. His parents had two children total, where he was the youngest son. His father left his
family when he was five years old. Jimmy grew up in Richton Park, Illinois.

Data Collection

After getting approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I distributed flyers of
interest for this research study through the TLU Center for Black Studies and Black student
organizations, such as Black Male Initiative Organization and predominantly Black fraternities. I
collected data through one in-depth, phenomenological interview and a second interview
consisting of a focus group with 10 out of the 15 willing participants. In conjunction with the
structured interviews, I observed Black male college students interacting with both campus and
noncampus law enforcement officers in their everyday campus life. Prior to conducting each
interview, participants were asked to read and sign consent forms in exchange for their
participation in the research study. All of the participants in this study were adults, 18 years and
older. The participants signed a consent form as their agreement to complete the research study
without promise of incentive or threat of penalty. Additionally, participants signed a separate
consent form agreeing to the audio recording of their interview and participation of the study. Both consent forms stated the voluntary nature of the study with a signature and date line.

Each interview was scheduled for approximately 45 to 90 minutes. There was additional time allotted for each interview depending on the participants’ willingness to elaborate on their personal experiences. There were a series of approximately 20 to 25 open-ended questions per interview (Appendix A). Open-ended in-depth inquiry is best carried out in a structure that allows both the participant and the interviewer to maintain a sense of the focus of each interview in the series (Seidman, 2006). Interview notes were collected after each interview. Subsequently, I immediately transcribed each interview audio recording into narrative format in separate documents for each study participant, respectively.

The structure of the interview focused on the participant’s life history, family background, cultural identity and educational experiences and then gradually transition to his interactions and perceptions of campus law enforcement officers. This interview provided the opportunity for study participants to reconstruct their early experiences in their families, in school, with friends, in their neighborhood, and at work (Seidman, 2006). Additionally, this interview included the participants’ present lived and vicarious experiences with law enforcement officers. I sought to uncover the factors that have led to the development of the participants’ perceptions towards campus law enforcement officers on their college campus.

Initially, 11 participants showed up for the focus group, but one individual had to be excused due to a family emergency. The second interview was conducted in the form of a focus group consisting of 10 participants. These 10 participants were selected according to the willingness, availability of the respondents who were able to meet on the scheduled and designated date. This second interview allowed the 10 participants to share common cultural
upbringing experiences, discuss their experiences in higher education, and propose solutions for changes in a roundtable forum. This final interview empowered participants to elaborate any additional information from the previous interviews as well as be more transparent in their responses as a collective group.

I provided both phone call and text message reminders to the research participants about upcoming interview appointments. Each interview was audio recorded and included the option for participants to provide any artifacts, such as personal drawings, writings, or memes. The participants declined providing any such artifact for this study. From the researcher’s perspective, I included images of unidentified Black males to serve as examples of references to inferences made by campus law enforcement officers. In reference to the images of Black males, a set of nine images of Black males were presented to the participants. Initially, participants as a collective group were asked to make inferences of what they perceived about the photographed individual, in regard to image portrayal. Then the participants as a collective group were asked to make inferences of what campus law enforcement officers perceived about the photographed individual, in regard to image portrayal. At the conclusion of both interviews, I reviewed and organized the data. As recommended by Emerson et al. Shaw (2001), I read all interview notes, considered and examined the entire experience with a closer perspective, elaborated on insights and hunches, reflected and analyzed closely and intensely. All participant interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and edited to remove identifying information about individuals and the elected college campus. I listened to the recordings again while proofreading the accompanying transcript. Subsequently once themes were identified in the text, I reread passages and organized themes into coding categories. Coding categories were not mutually exclusive; therefore, a block of responses might be coded for more than one category.
Data Analysis

It is the responsibility of the researcher to present the complexities of participant narratives in the format of unbiased, authentic research data. Although, I will focus on the experiences of each participant, it is important to understand who I am as a researcher. I hold a unique position consisting of many roles as a campus law enforcement officer, student, researcher, woman of color, and family member of Black males. Due to my professional affiliations as a campus law enforcement officer and a researcher, I have a dual perspective and responsibility regarding the social issue of Black male college students’ perception of campus law enforcement officers on a college campus. While it is imperative to explain the purpose of my research study from a scholarly perspective, my demographics and life experiences have greatly influenced my motivation for this research. I am a Black woman, who grew up in a middle class, suburban environment with minimal police contacts except on admittedly wrong traffic offenses. My police contacts were not contentious or prejudicial as other individuals may have experienced. I have always resided in diverse, ethnic neighborhoods of the northwest suburbs of Chicago. I studied and graduated from predominantly a White high school, undergraduate and graduate institutions. As a researcher, I am motivated to learn and be taught by others’ lived experiences. I aim to seek knowledge and perspective of one’s truth from those around me. At the heart of interviewing is an interest in other individuals’ stories because they are of worth (Seidman, 2006).

I have chosen a research topic that revolves around race and the highly controversial profession of law enforcement. This topic may be perceived as unpopular, overly commented on, or controversial with the intent to negatively label campus law enforcement officers and other
law enforcement officers; however, that is not my intention. For example, research suggests that
certainty in the police is complex and made up of personal and social factors, including one’s
own encounters with police, his or her perception of crime in their neighborhood, media
coverage and vicarious encounters — the experiences of one’s family and friends with police
about which they’ve heard (Ramsey, 2017; Weitzer & Tuch, 2005).

Prior to engaging in research, I possessed several biases of perspective as the researcher
in higher education. I wholeheartedly believe academic environments should be a safe space to
share ideas, ask difficult questions, and embrace the ideologies of inclusion for everyone.
Regardless, as a law enforcement officer, I am intimately familiar with the common, best and
safe practices of law enforcement. I was intentional to not disregard some of the experiences of
the participants with my nonverbal or verbal responses to their shared experiences. For example,
participants shared their frustration with the overwhelming police presence during nonviolent
offenses, the humiliation and lack of consideration for having to exit their vehicles, and always
experiencing a disruption or stoppage of their social gatherings by law enforcement officers.
However, due to my dual perspective, I understand that during routine traffic stops, it is common
practice for an additional officer to arrive on scene to assist for purposes of officers’ safety.
Additionally, often times, it is common to order individuals out of their vehicles without
explanation in order to better control their movements. For example, depending on the type of
traffic investigation, it may be safer for both the driver, passengers, and officers to be on the
curbside of traffic, instead of the roadway to conduct the investigation. Lastly, for most noise
complaints calls for service, generally, there is an actual complainant requesting police assistance
in residential areas, specifically off campus events, such as parties or large social gatherings.
This is problematic because in comparison to an area where there is a large student population of
like fraternity and sorority houses, the likelihood of complainants may decrease; therefore, the law enforcement may not have a or as many complaints for noise violations. As a researcher, I understand these practices, but did not have the appropriate time or space to explain that to the participants without negating their truths or experiences. This understanding, or perspective can be considered a bias in research, so I was sure to report the research data as presented.

Prior to research, I had some assumptions of participants, findings, and the research process. My assumptions of the participants concluded that the majority of participants had very specific, personal experiences with law enforcement officers that shaped their perceptions. However, this was not the case. Most of the participants were firsthand witnesses to incidents of racism, bias, or unjust treatment of their Black peers. Secondly, they were informed of third-party incidents via the news or social media that influenced their perception. Lastly, I assumed due to the overwhelming feelings of dislike and distrust during the initial interview, participants would not have viable solutions to improve their perceptions, relationships, or understanding about law enforcement, but the majority of participants did. My assumptions for the findings were accurate, but the arrival of the perceptions were surprising. As a Black, female law enforcement officer and researcher, I was aware people of color, specifically Black males, did not trust or feel favorably towards law enforcement; however, I was unclear as to why the majority felt this way. Consequently, my assumptions of the research process was not as simple as expected. There were so many complex factors that contributed to the participants’ feelings and attitudes towards law enforcement officers. Also, the interview questions evoked a broad, but different response from each participant due to their own life experiences. For example, the interview questions aimed to gain perspective on household makeup and family upbringing struck some participants to immediately reflect of the pain of being raised by a single-parent,
lack of financial resources during their adolescent years, or self-reflection of how they could have been further along both academically and financially, if they indeed had a more stable, home environment. Overall, these assumptions had to be addressed prior to engaging in the research, analysis and reporting of data; therefore, I implemented several coding methods to safeguard the analysis of the data from my personal opinion.

Each participant interview was transcribed into a narrative immediately following the participant interview. I examined each line of the interview and searched for reoccurring ideas. By doing so, I was able to have a deeper understanding of the participants’ experiences because I personally reviewed it several times. Qualitative analytic coding involves open coding, where interview notes are examined line by line, used to identify and develop all ideas, themes, or issues (Emerson et al., 2001). For example, whenever a participant described themselves as a Black male, a code was generated and repeated or assigned to that block of description. Additionally, whenever a participant described their interactions with a peer, a code was generated and repeated, or assigned to that block of description. View of self, relationship with peers, view of education, delinquent behavior, criminal behavior were a few of the initial codes that were assigned for lines within participant interviews.

After creating the initial code, I conducted a search for the most frequently reoccurring codes and then categorized them into a second round of coding. The second round of codes produced three distinctive codes. This qualitative research study explored the contents of race, experiences, and perceptions to obtain an understanding of Black male college students’ self-awareness and identity as it pertains to campus law enforcement officers.

I conducted a manual coding method that consisted of first and second round coding. I had the data layout on a Microsoft Word document. I did not utilize any specialized coding
software, I used the comments capability and tracking to mark my initial impression of the codes line by line. I utilized all analytic memoing methods. I defined all of my initial codes pertaining to the participants, for example, perception of self, perception of others, relationship with father, relationship with mother, family upbringing, view of education, and interaction law enforcement.

The first cycle of coding consisted of open coding, then led to the second cycle of coding, where the data was reorganized and reanalyzed. This second cycle of coding helped the Pattern Coding to emerge, which according to Saldaña (2016) helps find repetitive consistencies documented in the data (p.6). An example of a repetitive patterns was “Interaction with White people.” By identifying other repetitive patterns, the three prominent codes were developed. After the second coding, I separated participant excerpts based on their reoccurring categories or themes. For example, during some participant adolescent, developmental years, they specifically recalled incidents where they felt White adults were behaving extraordinarily authoritatively over them or how White adults were quick to dismiss or accuse them of some wrongdoing.

Saldaña (2016) suggested regardless of codes, extracting no more than 10 quotes or passages from the interview transcripts that strike as most vivid representation of the study (p. 274). Aligned with Saldaña’s (2016) Pattern Coding strategies, I created three separate documents with headings of the categories that emerged: Views of White People, Vicarious and Personal Experiences with law enforcement, and Black Identity. I selected the respective participant excerpts from each interview transcript and compiled them with the matching category. This style was similar to Saldaña’s (2016) study’s “trinity” which highlighted the overlapping concepts that developed the three categories for this qualitative study (p. 275). Subsequently, I created subcategories under each category. Black Identity was coded into Black Images, Black Childhood and Neighborhood Experiences and lastly Black Family Occupation.
and Education. The second category was Views of White People, where I created three subcategories: Adolescents First Experience with Racism, Perceived Social Differences with White People, and Law Enforcement Descriptors. The final category was Vicarious and Personal Experiences with Law Enforcement also included subcategories; Vicarious and Personal Experiences were coded into Humiliation, Accusation and Discrepancy in Treatment due to race with the law enforcement officers.

After, all the participant passages were appropriately assigned under a subcategory, I provided a brief analysis of the data. The analysis consisted of my interpretation and an elaboration of my analytic memoing of the data. Analytic memoing requires the evolution of notes taken in the field setting to identify, develop and modify analytic themes and arguments (Emerson et al., 2001). This method allowed me to discover coding patterns and then categorize emerging themes from my participants’ interviews. The data analysis provided deeper reflection of the participants’ perspective from the researcher’s lens. The process of identifying themes is to make links of broad experiences to individual commonalities (Emerson et al., 1995). After compiling thematic pattern statements or activities shared by research participants, I presented them in the form of narratives.

Summary

Through phenomenological, in-depth participant interviews, I revealed the developmental factors of Black male college students’ perceptions of campus law enforcement officers on a college campus. I applied the theoretical frameworks of racial identity such as the critical race theory, theory of Nigrescence, and the ideology of whiteness to guide this research process. The participant narratives were used to corroborate transformative solutions of the impact of race and
perception of campus law enforcement officers by communities of color, specifically, Black male college students. Participants shared genuine feelings, experiences, and reflective answers. Feelings are an important vehicle for establishing rapport and for gauging subjects’ perspectives (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006). I reminded the participants about the importance and integrity of this study to be conducted without the apprehension to offend me as the researcher due to my professional affiliation to campus law enforcement. Research is often done by people in relative positions of power in the guise of reform (Seidman, 2006).
CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

With respect to previous research studies (Brunson & Weitzer, 2007; Weitzer, Tuch, & Skogan, 2008; Chaney & Robertson, 2013), there is much evidence to support how law enforcement officers perceive Black males. There is also some research about law enforcement interactions and Black adolescent males (Brunson & Weitzer, 2009), but there is little to no research about Black male college students and their developmental factors of their perception of law enforcement officers on their college campus. Therefore, I wanted to interview Black male college students because their voices are underrepresented in many aspects of academic research. It is important for African American men to construct and tell their own story (Braxton-Newby & Jones, 2014). Through storytelling, a person arranges their life experiences and events in such a way as to arrive at a coherent account of themselves and the world around them (Braxton-Newby & Jones, 2014).

The following chapters will share the findings of this research study. The subsequent chapters four, five, and six will be broken down categorically. Chapter four will discuss the findings of Black Identity as it pertains to Black male college students’ perception of campus law enforcement. Chapter five will discuss the findings of Views of White People as it pertains to Black male college students’ perception of campus law enforcement. And lastly Chapter six will discuss the findings of Personal and Vicarious Experiences with Law Enforcement as it pertains to Black male college students’ perception of campus law enforcement.
After privately speaking with each individual participant, varying developmental factors that contributed to their perception of campus law enforcement officers on a college campus uncovered. There were three resounding codes that emerged from the 15 participant interviews. The first code was Black identity, the second code was view of White people, and the third was vicarious and personal experiences with law enforcement officers. These three codes allowed me to create a compilation of evolving characteristics that led to the developmental factors of Black male college students’ perception of law enforcement officers on their college campus. For the purpose of this study, the participants’ feelings, attitudes, or beliefs about themselves as Black males towards campus law enforcement officers were considered developmental factors. The first category was Black Identity, then presented into three subcategories: Black Images, Black Childhood and Neighborhood Experiences, and Black Family Occupation and Education. The second category was Views of White People, where I created three subcategories: Adolescents First Experience with Racism, Perceived Social Differences with White People, and Law Enforcement Descriptors. The final category was Vicarious and Personal Experiences with Law Enforcement also included subcategories; Humiliation, Accusation and Discrepancy in Treatment due to race with the law enforcement officers.

Each category also included subcategories; Black Identity was coded into Black Images, Black Childhood and Neighborhood Experiences, and Black Family Occupation and Education. First, I will share the participants’ descriptions of themselves, specifically what they have considered their Black identity. Black identity is significant to the authentic comprehension of the developmental factors of Black male college students’ perceptions, such as feelings, attitudes, and beliefs. Black identity encompasses both participants’ realization of their Blackness and daily awareness of their Blackness. There is no universal African American male
An analysis of the data revealed that the participants’ feelings, attitudes, or beliefs about themselves as Black males significantly contributed to their inherent identification of the cultural challenges associated with law enforcement officers.

I chose to seek the opinion of college students, specifically Black males, about their developmental factors of perception towards campus law enforcement officers on their college campus. Black male college students have to navigate the social and academic aspects of higher education. They also have to be aware of the impact and response of their everyday Blackness on their college campus. Despite their level of education, the color of their skin, tone of voice, style of dress, and cultural display of themselves through music or social gatherings may attract unwarranted attention from campus law enforcement officers. Young African American males may put their special “twist” on soul through language, dress, music, or even the way they walk, meanwhile, to the outsider, young African Americans appear as out of touch, clownish, or dangerous (Braxton-Newby & Jones, 2014).

This population is special because Black male college students enroll in higher education for a variety of reasons. For example, some desire the social, collegiate experience, some crave enrichment through diversity, and some believe gainful employment is an imminent possibility following graduation. Additionally, some college students are simply carrying out a family tradition of educational expectations, while others look to be their family’s first-generation college graduate. If you were born into a family that struggled financially, you can build a better life for yourself than your parents had by getting a good education and working hard toward a successful career (McIntosh et al., 2020). However, Black male college students face several challenges prior to enrolling in higher education. The courage to engage in often times, unfamiliar territories of academic expectations or arguably worse, familiar territories of being the
only minority surrounded by White authority figures that did not look like them adds to the challenges of enrolling in higher education. Some Black men may struggle academically in campus environments that are racially hostile, unfriendly, and unwelcoming to students of color, or lacking a “critical mass” upon whom Black men can rely for support and advice (Strayhorn, 2013).

In this next section, the participants shared personal stories about their family backgrounds, adolescent experiences, and educational processes as it pertains to the development of perception for campus law enforcement officers. The Black Identity Development model describes the process of becoming Black by fully embracing a Black identity and reaching self-actualization under oppressive conditions (DeCuir-Gunby, 2009).

**Black Identity**

**Black Images**

All participants were asked to provide a description of their Black identity. This description included, but not limited to their height, weight, complexion, style of dress, and hair style. Then after their initial description of themselves, there were asked to provide a description of how they believed they were perceived by others. All participants provided a preferred description of how they believed they are perceived by others. Moreover, it was interesting to hear the contrast of the participants’ perception of self in comparisons to how they were perceived by others. Most of the participants expressed their perspective on “being Black”. Being Black ranges from physical features to the understanding and affiliation of Black culture. Despite previously stating positive attributes to their Black identity, the overarching idea of
being Black presented many opportunities for the participants to be misunderstood. This
description of self and others’ perception and concept or affiliation of being Black was
significant to this research. These perceived similarities and differences of identity provided an
unusual insight to their normalized interactions and treatment by others. Additionally, the
favorable perceptions of themselves and their Black identity appeared to be in direct conflict
with the perception and interactions they had with White people and White law enforcement
officers.

Randle and Aiden shared their experiences with White people’s nonacceptance of the use
of slang terms. They considered the use of slang words and having to overly explain their
intended meanings as a cultural barrier. Randle and Anthony also shared their experiences of
frustration with having to alter their tones of voice. They stated their tones of voice were often
misconstrued as aggressive and angry because it was deep, loud, or animated. Darrius spoke
about his perception of unfair associations due to his style of dress. He stated Black males’ styles
of dress was negatively associated with being too pro-Black or criminally profiled. Russell spoke
about the cultural differences in the types of foods that sets him apart from other races. He
referred to family meals eaten at Thanksgiving dinners. Aiden who was biracial, but identified as
Black, spoke about his feelings of not being easily identifiable; therefore, people were unsure
how to interact with him.

Randle shared his feelings of the significant difference in feelings of discomfort and
anxiousness when he sees law enforcement officers, in comparison to White people, who feel
relief and safe. Anthony spoke about being denied employment opportunities because he was
Black, despite being qualified. Kevin, Tobias, Donald, and Bernard spoke about their perceptions
of having to work harder and being mindful of everyday interactions because of their Black
identity. They shared examples of experiences of social and academic acceptances in higher education. Joseph Moore and Jimmy Johnson were the only two participants, who declined to provide physical descriptors of themselves as requested during the study interviews. Joseph and Jimmy felt their physical descriptions were irrelevant to their Black identity. Jimmy stated he was reluctant to answer because of the historical process of how White people bought slaves. He further elaborated how physical characteristics were used as a constellation by slave owners for acquiring property (Black people). Which is still relevant and symbolic for present day in how White people and law enforcement officers use physical descriptors to identify and label Black people. Joseph preferred introduction of himself to others,

Naw… I mean I guess I ain’t never really put too much thought into it. Just … you know… Joseph. Black man… Man of God. Ummm. I mean I just it’s funny because the only times I feel Black is when somebody treat me like I’m Black like if somebody is being racist towards me. Other than that, I don’t really think about being Black. Joseph recalled his initial experiences of being Black. He stated, Ummm growing up with the White people and uhh with the police in our neighborhood.

Instead of being eager to physically describe himself, Joseph appeared hesitant and offended. He appeared to be tired of being identified and labeled by his physical appearances. Joseph was approximately 6’0” tall, brown skin, with a low haircut, and tattoos on his neck and arms. Joseph had some religious and others gang affiliated tattoos. Despite his affinity to his Black identity, Joseph doesn’t rely on his race to maneuver throughout his day. He expressed how his reminders of his racial identity were provided by White people or White authority figures. Instead Joseph chose personality descriptors and characteristics to describe his Black identity because he did not consider his Blackness on a daily basis. This early distinction of his racial identity determines his latter experiences and interactions with White people and law enforcement officers. Joseph did not elaborate on what he perceived to be black.
Randle preferred description of himself to others:

I want you to meet my friend Randle. He’s umm a smart guy. Spiritual. He’s funny. Also, can be serious. He’s a Black guy. Like 5’10 with Timbs (Timberland shoe brand) on *laughs*. Ummm has a lot of hair right now. Skilled with music. Art. Anything, he finds interested in… adaptable. Versatile. Ummm confident. *Laughs*. What else can I say. I don’t know. So, it’s (his hair) a little crazy right now. Well, I don’t really like to call them dreads because my hair isn’t dreadful. It’s kinda locs… but these are kinda twists. I just twist these together and then I two strand them together. But this is kinda how my hair is now. I started off with the sponge with the little high-top fade and then I just like like having hair on my head because I don’t really like … the shape of my head. I look at old pictures. It’s like I had a fat ass head. My lining was kinda like crooked every now and then… so I’m like let’s just… eliminate that plus I had those widow’s peak. I had to get it faded because it would just come up. Then it’s like the McDonalds sign. I think the reason I got this hair style. I think… watching anime. Like and their crazy hairstyles and like afro samurais’ stuff and like their hair is always spikey and crazy and colorful and just big it was always just a part of the aesthetic apart of the character.

Randle’s description of “being Black:”

Yeah just how I talk … you know… Black people could talk to each other using a lot of slang. That’s when I really realized when I started getting older. I be like man uhh let’s say for instance… I’m finna slide! *laughs*.

Oh… man that shit (being Black) kinda sucks but it’s so cool. Being Black is amazing but being Black in this country kinda sucks. Just being Black is so different or like experience with police. I feel like when police come around White neighborhoods look at it like… “Hi! Oh, look it’s police cars!” And then us (Black people)… our hearts start pumping then motherfuckers get mad and then it’s like oh damn my whole day… I hope they don’t be on no stupid ass shit and just try to like fuck with me.

Randle’s description of himself appeared to be very basic in nature. He provided factual statements about himself, in comparison, to how he believed he was perceived by others. His perception of himself by others included various characteristics of style of dress, physical features, and hairstyle. Randle was sure to include a popular brand of shoe among his Black peers. Additionally, he named several hairstyles and the thoughtful rationale behind each style. Lastly, Randle’s expression of the primary difference between how Black and White people associate with law enforcement. His comparison validated how he perceived the purpose of law
enforcement and who the system was designed to protect. Darrius’s preferred introduction of
himself to others:

Honestly… I don’t have an answer to that… let me try. I guess from what I’ve seen is
that I could say that… you could say I’m well spoken… you know outgoing, friendly,
caring person who you know is genuine. I do everything with ingenuity. That’s a good
question. I’m not sure how I can answer it. Ok, you can just say genuine, outgoing, well
spoken. Leader. Umm you know what I’m saying… authentic … you know I’m not really
a person who follows trends. I do everything on my own. I dress the way I want to dress.
Motivational. I guess you can say inspiring… I got that knack, I guess. I inspire my guys.
You know… well driven. I guess you can say all of that. *Laughs* that’s pretty much it.
I’m 6’3 kinda you know what I’m saying more decently built guy you know… dark
skinned. That’s important. Ummm nice smile you know… you know… *laughs*
handsome… you know. I’m not like you know… well confident. I’m not going to say
I’m arrogant but nice hair… course but it’s not like super course. I don’t like the work
nappy so. I embrace my skin color. I never did. I never used to so. Now, that I appreciate
who I am as a person it’s important to count that in as dark skinned.

He continued about style of dress:

I’m a very controversial person. I like to piss people off with the clothes I wear. Ummm
so, I wear a lot of Black consciousness shirts with like the fists and explaining who these
figures are. Who they are, what they are known for? Ummm fun fact… I read a lot so it’s
like if you try to check me with some shit in my history. Or treat [correct in an abrasive
manner] me or something, I’m aware of my history. I like to read a lot about my history. I
found it important that people do because everything you need to know it’s in a book. So,
I would say my Blackness isn’t where it should be but it’s at a level where I can… where
you gotta respect it u know what I’m saying. I like documentaries. Just because why not.
Because I feel like a lot of times people say Blackness ummm [did not finish his
thought].

I don’t sag my pants. I don’t like that. That’s a negative stereotype. I don’t like… see the
thing is… I don’t dress like as a stereotypical Black man would dress. You know … of
course the image they paint for us is… ummm saggy pants. Ummm you know expensive
clothing… always with the designer and all of that stuff. I’m not really into that stuff.
Tight as hell. I don’t know why people thinks that’s cool. But it’s tight. *laughs* But you
know… I like to… you know… I’m a bigger dude so, one, I would look weird as hell
wearing tight ass clothes and two, I just feel like it’s not really… it’s not my thing. I like
to draw… I wear vans (shoes) Nikes you know what I’m saying. Adidas. Probably,
the most expensive thing on my body is my shoes. Shirt cost like $13 /$14. I buy off of
amazon most of the time. *Laughs* Like that’s why I’m kinda glad I lived on both sides
of the spectrum, so I understand like what really is fashion. Fashion not really about
following the next person. It’s about creating your own individuality. Express my
individuality. I say pretty damn well.
Darrius’ perspective of “being Black:”

Being Black is awesome. I would say that. Being Black is awesome. I think a lot of times when you look at where the climate is in our country and recent activities involving Black people and what we go through it’s... it’s starting to be exploited. I got a lil of will power. I don’t settle for no for an answer. To be honest with you. I don’t like hearing no. Like you know what I’m saying being told I can’t do something. So, I prove… I try to prove that something every day I’m on this campus.

Darrius was thorough in his explanation of the reason he chose to dress the way he did. His style of dress was primarily about making overt statements about who he was as an individual. Darrius’ connection to the present-day events of racism greatly influenced his motivation for success. Darrius made the distinction to clarify his acceptance of his dark skin complexion but was not applicable during his adolescent years.

Brian’s preferred introduction of himself to others,

Ok. My name is Brian. I’m 21 years old. I’m a Black male from Chicago, Illinois. What I’m in school for. I’m a senior in college. What else… handsome. *laughs* But I feel like I am. But nah. I’m like 160 (pounds). I don’t know. I got waves but not right now. *laughs* You can’t see it. Like that’s why I put the hat on but yeah, I got waves... buttas (slang term for long hair). I’m like middle to dark. I guess.

Brian’s self-introduction differed from how he would describe himself in comparison to how he was perceived by others. He appeared excited to express that he had long hair and was of a darker skin complexion. Brian did not elaborate on what he perceived to be black.

Anthony’s preferred introduction of himself to others,

This is my friend Anthony. I’m just a lanky Black male…that’s it. I don’t know what else. Oh… I’m like...I’m not I’m not dark, dark. I’m not, not light skin. I’m like I’m not caramel. I’m not caramel but I’m not chocolate. Brown …paper bag. Paper bag brown Anthony. I’m a male. Gender. Gender identity preferred. Him or mister right. Sexuality? I like females. I think that right and then brown male from southern of Illinois. And I don’t know that’s about it. He got Black hair. He has wavy Black hair. Not wavy as in naturally wavy but he brushes it. And its wavy, Black hair. He’s sub 6 foot on a good day. He’s like 5, like 6 foot. But every time I measure that boy is like 5’11… 5’10. I’m boring. I feel like I’m boring. I don’t talk a lot unless I’m force too. I don’t not prefer being the center of attention. That’s never my thing. Boring guy. To me, to me I’m boring. I don’t
like partying and start dancing that’s not my vibe. Never probably was my vibe. I don’t fall into peer pressure a lot. I know what people try to take advantage of me.

Anthony’s description of “being Black:”

Usually, I feel like I just gotta do everything right so people will look pass the Blackness. If I feel like ima be face with discrimination. So, if I feel like I finna go to a White corporate office. I gonna like… I feel like… like I feel like not even just being Black but also everybody you know. I gotta work a little couple times harder to be looked at or looked as average to them and honestly. It’s nothing wrong with hard work, if you ask me. yeah, it’s not fair but hey.

Anthony was the only participant to differentiate with his expression of his sexuality. The expression of sexuality and preference can be critical to his identity development and perception of others. Anthony appeared unsure on how he described his complexion. Despite his indecisiveness of his exact physical descriptors, Anthony was certain that his blackness caused his to be at a disadvantage in society.

Tobias’s preferred introduction of himself to others:

Ummm… *laughs* Hey, this is Tobias. Pretty quiet dude, but really pretty chill. Doesn’t talk much but if you get to know him you know he’ll make it worthwhile. Oh yeah… Black. (Complexion) Oh, great if I didn’t have all of these scars. No, I’m dark skin to the bone. Dude my skin would be amazing like for real. 5’10” hmmm 200 (pounds). Medium length dreads. It needs a re-twist but other than that. You know it’s pretty good.

Tobias description of “being Black:” “But the thing is about being Black, you don’t know what you signed up for. You just living life trying to do the best you can do.” Like Randle and Anthony, Tobias’ realized that his black identity, while personally perceived as positive, can dictate progress in his life. He appeared to express some adverse uncertainties that coexisted with his blackness.

Kevin’s preferred introduction of himself to others:

I would want somebody to say this is Kevin King and he is a person who thinks. Yeah…skinny. *laughs* And taller than a bunch of people but not the tallest, I guess. *laughs* I think I’m like 6 foot might be 5’11. I think I might be 6 foot. Light skin to
some people. But I mean I don’t think I’m light skin… I ain’t dark skin. I’m just right. (Researcher: Caramel). You know what I’m saying! I’m like fair skinned you know. I got good hair, but both of my parents are Black. Ummm but yeah, I got good hair. If I go outside and its moist and shit. It would be frizzy. (Researcher: You said you got good hair). Yeah. Like… *laughs* Yeah you got me! *laughs* Yeah you got me … you got me! *laughs* That’s cool though. What are you saying about other people’s hair? Nah *laughs* I’m just kidding, but you know the stereotypically “good hair”. That’s like the hair that’s like naturally wavy without the wave cap and the grease. It doesn’t matter. It’s super easy no matter how dark you is. So, it’s not like White people dreads which is just like clumped up hair. But at the same time, it’s not, it don’t lock as quickly.

Kevin’s description of “being Black.”

All the way down to watching tv as a kid and whatever is going on on tv. That’s like, it’s not reflective of what’s going on at home. Well, I would like to blame it on or accredit it to the fact that I’m wise enough to know right from wrong. And that I play a certain role or a certain mindset of to just or enough of a degree to handle what I gotta do. But ummm that made me aware that I’m Black. I don’t think I ever didn’t know I was Black if that makes sense.

Although, Kevin had a lighter complexion, he did not consider himself as light skin, but committed to the decision of having good hair. Even though, Kevin did not appear to be defined by these physical features, he was adamant that both of his parents were both Black. Kevin understood that he was always black, but understood through media, he was able to identify that there were differences between his family and White people. Kevin also made mention of having to “play a role.”

This type of self-perception and insecurity is rampant among black males. It is considered a form of code switching. Ogbu (2004) argued “another coping strategy for some was to more or less live in two worlds at different times: Black and White. For example, Ogbu (2004) stated, “within the Black community they behaved and talked according to the Black frames of reference and in the White world, like school, work, and among White people, they behaved and talked like White people required” (p. 15).

Charles’ preferred introduction of himself to others:
*Laughs* First I’d say… ummm dang. Nobody never asked me this. *laughs* But I would say a young, short, strong, intelligent, young Black man but also a powerful mind sense that you know when I come out there. I want people to feel my, my whole just, just feel, just feel me as I’m coming. But also, when I’m talking, I want you to understand where I’m coming from too. So, I feel like that’ll be the best way to describe me, but I don’t know. Hmmm, I could say… Well, my hair is dark brown. Curly when it wants to be. *laughs* Light skin tone. Ummm, I’m short, wise and that’s it basically.

Charles was the only participant to link the absence of his father to his identity development. He spoke about attributes that are necessary for the development of a man, but were absent due to being raised by his mother. In comparison to how he was perceived by others, his family influence was not a factor or included in the description. While he understood the personal challenges of his adolescent, he did not appear to be defined by them.

Russell’s preferred introduction of himself to others:

I would say like… I. *laughs* I don’t know. I’d probably just say… this is Russell. I don’t know. He’s a cool guy from the Caribbean. He just, just tries hard in school. Try to look out for his friends. I don’t know. Just a couple of extra pounds. A lil big boned. I would say like that’s it. Ummm yeah, just a bit chubby. That’s what I would say. [Researcher: What about your hair?] Its Black with some grey in it. I don’t know why the grey is there. It just is. Uhh yeah. Curly. [Researcher: What about your skin?] Dark and I’m 5’9. 220—230?

Russell description of “being Black:”

I mean I would say like I eat different food. Different food like soul food. Caribbean food. And just like something like the actions I might do. Do something like the stereotypical like Black things like play basketball and stuff like that. But like I don’t know. I guess that’s like all I can say really.

Russell was the only participant that was born on a Caribbean island. His family migrated to the United States for more economic and academic opportunity. Unlike Joseph, who tried to distinguish himself from stereotypical black activities by watching documentaries and attending art galleries, Russell recognized sports as a major link to black culture and adolescence activities.

Aiden’s preferred introduction of himself to others:
Uhh that’s hard. I’d just be like… I would want you to say like…looks can be deceiving because I may just look like any other Black person but I’m not. I’m mixed. Ummm personality probably just chill and short. *laughs* (Researcher: Describe your hair to me.) Like… curly. (Researcher: Describe your complexion to me.) Uhh marron claro (Spanish translation of light brown). Si. *laughs*

Aiden’s description of “being Black:”

Hmmmmm I don’t really never had any bad experiences. (Work experience). So, like all of the Hispanics or whatever. They like … they bond good or whatever so like then like I bond good with the other Black workers. Something like that…maybe. Maybe cus [because] they don’t know. Or like… cus [because] anybody can just come up to me and speak Spanish or anything or English. Maybe they just don’t know.

Aiden’s experience of racial identity was unique. Although, he identifies as Black, but declared he was biracial. Aiden’s did not focus on his experience or acceptance by White people, rather by other minorities. It is extremely difficult to distinguish someone’s racial identity based on appearance alone, particularly as a member of another racial group (Walker, 2003).

Alexander’s preferred introduction of himself to others:

I’m 6’2. I just weighed myself. I’m 280. (Researcher: Describe your hair to me.) It’s nappy right now. *Laughs*. I was supposed to...ima get a haircut though. It’s Black. When I have a haircut, I have waves. I have waves in my hair. My eyes are light brown. I would say or dark brown. I haven’t looked at them in a while. *Laughs*. (Describe your complexion to me). I would say… *laughs* I don’t know… dark brown.

Alexander description of “being Black:”

I would say now it’s kinda like cleaning up some of my language. *laughs*Like its more, it’s getting better. Like proper, more proper. Cus [because] like I would say some words and people be like huh? *laughs*

Alexander was the only student athlete in this study. His athleticism appeared to shield him from bouts of racism. Alexander later shared that people treated his more favorably because he was always a good student athlete. Alexander was not only the first collegiate athlete, but the first in his immediate family to enroll in college. Alexander appeared confident in his appearance and
stature. He believed he was perceived differently by others due to his East St. Louis slang in comparison to Black adolescent slang.

Donald Newell’s self-introduction:

My name is Donald. You already know that. I’m like a happy person. I guess like even when I’m sad and I try to hide it. I just like being happy because like that’s who I am. And I try not to like not let nothing really get to me. I’m 18. I’m undecided right now cus [because] I have no clue what I want to do. I’m just feeling out right now.

Donald’s description of “being Black:”

Cus[Because] I feel like I have to show people like every day I belong and I’m not, this wasn’t an accident that I made it in college. I graduated. I actually did this.

Like Randle, Anthony, and Tobias, Donald expressed the disadvantage of the sense of belonging because he was Black. This constant need for Black males to validate their worth or competence in higher education was a reoccurring concern. Donald focused on his personality as a happy, helpful individual despite his large statue and somewhat unkept braids. Donald appeared to struggle with recognizing the difference between his complexion and hair texture as compared to other Black males.

Bernard’s preferred introduction of himself to others:

I would say I’m shy at first. But once I get to like open up, I’m pretty goofy. I’m pretty entertaining. Some people say I’m like I’m one of the funniest people they ever met. So, I guess I got a really funny side to me. I’m cool. I’m chill for the most part. Some people say I seem like nonchalant. I mean guess that’s kinda true, but I guess it’s like I don’t know. I just don’t like to do too much. I just don’t like to do like extra. I just like to you know chill and just be cool. I guess I’m just a cool guy. *laughs* Physically say, some people say I have like an athletic build to me. So, I probably say pretty athletic. Some people say I look like grown for my age. Once, I find that true. Some people say that I look like I’m 28, 29, 26. So, I’d say mature. I got like a mature demeanor. My hair ummm wavy… wavy low cut. My complexion I’d say pretty dark skinned. Full beard. Ummm tall am I… 5’8. I weigh right now, last time I checked was 195. I’m trying to slim down to 15 pounds so hopefully I get to 180 by the end of the year. (Researcher: Describe your eyes to me) Ummm brown. I think yeah… it should be brown *laughs*

Bernard’s description of “being Black:”
I would say it depending on the situation. I’d say it more like the situation is like more at risk but it’s like the stuff that I do like. If I draw more attention to myself, I could see myself being, other people can see that as being negative or you know depending on the situation. So, you know like I get out of character. Or if I’m going outside doing like reckless stuff. It’s going to look ten times worse on me because I’m Black. Because you most, most people just… Why is that? It’s like I don’t know how to explain it really but like in today’s society. Ummm like majority of people target you know young Black males and in a way, they want to see them fail. So, they you know any, any mistake any like screw up that you do they gonna hold that against you. Whereas you know a non-colored individual could do the same thing and it may not look as much as like as a problem.

Unlike Russell who also had parents from another country, Bernard was born in the United States. His Nigerian ethnicity was a strong developmental factor in his adolescent upbringing.

Like Randle and Kevin, Bernard had a similar outlook on behavior and conduct and how it was perceived differently for Black males. Bernard was the oldest participant in this study. He appeared to be more adamant about the disparities and perceptions solely based on race due to his Black identity.

Jimmy’s preferred introduction of himself to others:

I’d say pretty solid. Solid built. Guy. Ummm he’s you know, I, I don’t really. I really, really want to be a like a… I know this is a question you’re asking, but I don’t, if you were to have me be out, if that were to ever happen just my name, what I do who I like you know, what I like, what I’m about, what I’m going to speak about, and then you see me. Then you see me. And you see who I am. I feel like don’t need to be explained about my physique, my skin color, or anything like that because you know, you know other people (White people) like, I say they don’t, you know, introduce each other like oh blah blah blah… this is …this is tom… he’s a uhh… uhh a blonde haired blah blah blah blah blah. I don’t, I don’t feel that. I feel like just, that’s my name. I walk up you talked about what I do. (Introduce me) By my name. I am not property. You describe your property like that. I take that deeply because when they auctioned off my ancestors. This strong blah blah fair skinned blah blah really strong, his back, back muscles. 6’6” (Height) This tall and his hair is this that and his hands eyes are like. My, my, my like, you know, I’m not that. You address me by my name because I’m not… when it comes to you and they describe you, he’s this, he’s that. I mean I could see, if I was, you know, trying to talk (flirt) to you. Or something like that. You know. Giving like a, something, or show a picture, you know. That’ll help but I feel like you know you want me to speak, you don’t have to describe me. You know, I, you, want, you want to know me? You don’t have to
look to know what I am or what I look like. I mean my name already can go off of my name.

Jimmy’s description of “being Black:”

Ummmm the way I move. Like, you know how I wear my hair. You know how I dress. The way I smell like you know, my incense and everything. People who I talk to. The music I listen to. Just everyday little things. That happen that like you know that’s this is who I am. Just this is me. I am an African American male at a predominantly White institution.

Like Joseph, Jimmy was a transfer student and declined to describe himself physically. Jimmy appeared to be approximately 5’8, light skin in complexion, and had wavy black hair. Jimmy appeared to have provided a very thorough expression of what he considered black. Jimmy’s definition encompassed demeanor, affiliation to black culture, peer associates, instead of strictly physical features. White his attributes of being black appeared inclusive, he was sure to distinguish his obvious separation of being a black male at White college, which he later described as a developmental factor to his identity and perceptions.

Joseph, Randle, Charles, Kevin, and Bernard were all 21 years or older and seemed more confident and comfortable answering questions about their identity. It appeared as if the more older participants consistently elaborated on and provided elongated answers about themselves compared to the younger male participants. Some of the younger participants appeared hesitant and still learning to establish and validate their Black identity.

To further support my distinction of the differences in perception amongst Black male college students and Black males not enrolled in higher education, during the second scheduled interview, (the focus group), I invited the focus group participants to analyze a variety of images of unidentified Black males. Joseph Moore, Randle Cross, Brian Rivers, Anthony Cooper, Tobias Samuels, Kevin King, Russell Stephens, Donald Newell, Quentin Crawford, and Bernard
Braxton agreed to participate in the focus group. The focus group was shown nine images of Black males (Appendix B) and asked for the first descriptive words that came to mind. The second round of interviews consisted of 10 out of 15 participants. See Appendix A for all nine images shown in the order they were displayed. In order to avoid over-selecting participants or participant isolation, I had participants shout out their answers amongst themselves for each image. The same 10 out of 15 participants were asked what they perceived law enforcement officers would describe the same nine images, displayed after the conclusion of their initial perspectives. Table 1 shows the compiled responses of the 10 participants.

I asked the participants why they provided such grave discrepancies in the descriptions of perception. Collectively, they informed me, each picture was reflective of themselves or someone they knew. These Black images were familiar to them in some manner, instead of focusing on a physical attribute as a difference, the participants appeared to connect images of style of dress, background with a Black narrative. For example, Image #6 was quickly identified as individual who reminded them of their barber, Image #4 resembled a peer whose facial expression was similar to a male losing in a video game. African American males resent being stereotyped (Braxton-Newby & Jones, 2014).

In contrast, while the participants appeared to often yell “Shoot him!” for some comedic relief, this was also symbolic of they perceived law enforcement officers’ perceptions of all Black males regardless of their demeanor. Black is Black. The African American male is seen as a thing, as a stereotype, as a danger (Braxton-Newby & Jones, 2014). For the perceived law enforcement description, participants created a backstory that justified the officers to take legal action against these individuals. For example, Image #6 assumptions of involvement criminal activity, specifically the sale of drugs and identity as a repeat offender were made. Also, for
Table 1

Responses to Images of Black Males

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Image and Description</th>
<th>Black Male College Student Descriptions</th>
<th>Law Enforcement Officer Descriptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Black male with glasses and multicolored bowtie</td>
<td>Smart Black man. College student. Dork. Regular Person. Somebody with inferior vision.</td>
<td>Nigga. Shoot him! Stay away. BMI brother. He gon report you or something he gon saying. He gon sue you. He knows the law. He looks like he knows his rights. You ain’t going to get away with it. I ain’t gon lie I think that they look at them all the same… all these pictures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Black male with locs faded sides on his cell phone with headphones around his neck</td>
<td>Regular Person. Android Phone. Jerome [Stereotypical black name for a male]. Black boy going to school. 20-year-old middle school student. CPS [Chicago Public School] student. White collared shirt.</td>
<td>What’s your badge number? He don’t go here. He up to no good. He probably stay in Stevo [Undergraduate residence hall]. Shoot him!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Black male with white collared shirt and black bookbag</td>
<td>Sexaderm [slang for playboy]. Pretty boy.</td>
<td>What’s in the bag? Shoot him!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Black male sitting on the couch wearing a multicolored Nike tank top</td>
<td>Somebody losing in 2K [Basketball game on PlayStation]. Somebody arguing with their girlfriend. Just waking up. When you roll a fat one and smoke all the skin.</td>
<td>A menace. He might got a skateboard or something. He gets high. He sells drugs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Black male wearing a Black dorag and grey tank top</td>
<td>Someone who look like they talking to they girlfriend but she ain’t having it. I ain’t want your number anyway.</td>
<td>Detain him. Shoot him! Convict.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continued on following page
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Image and Description</th>
<th>Black Male College Student Descriptions</th>
<th>Law Enforcement Officer Descriptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6 Black male wearing a white t-shirt and gold chain</td>
<td>Big homie on the block. My barber. Card cracker</td>
<td>We locked him in the 90s. Drug dealer. He sells drugs. Card Cracker.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Black male with long locs wearing a black turtleneck with a blue handkerchief</td>
<td>Educated. Last school year picture. Mama I made it.</td>
<td>He might know his law. He got a sister that’s a teacher and a nephew in college the first one to go to college. Mid shoot him!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Black male with shoulder length locs wearing a white t-shirt with his arms open</td>
<td>Where he from. Confusion. From the westside of Chicago. Someone standing in front of the store.</td>
<td>He fast. He got dope. He going to run. Check his pockets. Arrest him. Shoot him!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Black male wearing a Black winter coat and striped hat standing by the basketball court</td>
<td>Cold Black man</td>
<td>He sells drugs. Why is hands in his pockets? Shoot him!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Image #4, assumptions of being under the influence of drugs and affiliation with being a delinquent were made. Simply being a “Black man in America” was, however, enough to warrant concern and fear, because that constellation of race and gender risks police victimization regardless of age and social class (Dottolo & Stewart, 2008). These vast differences in police perception in comparison to the Black males in this study was alarming. Based solely, on appearance, style of dress, and demeanor, the Black males in this study believed law enforcement officers were able to determine which Black males they would be able to successfully target without repercussions. For example, Black males who appeared to be dressed in a more professional manner, this thought process and perceptions are problematic for Black males in higher education. The reason being is campus life and campus law enforcement are two
entities that both exist 24 hours a day. Therefore, Black male college students aren’t always clothed in a professionally or behaving in a scholarly manner. However, as learned in the participant narratives, this ability to change from an academic to a social environment should not negate their (Black male college students) rights to freely live and move without fear or accusation or disruption of their daily activities.

During the initial, individual interviews, Russell and Aiden presented a concern of being Black. Specifically, the use of slang. During the second interview, the focus group, Randle elaborated on having to talk more professional around White people and it made him extremely uncomfortable.

Randle stated,

The things I say like before I’m talking to a professor, I have to think about what I’m saying… so I don’t maybe offend from however way I might. I’m Black. I’m animated bro. I have energy. I’m talking I care about what I’m talking about so I’m doing this (Gesturing) I can’t move my hands if I’m talking to a White person I can’t be like “Yo… what’s all that about?”…they get uncomfortable cus [because] they think I’m just that angry Black man or they think I’m… I’m… I’m a danger to society but that’s not the case. My people just animated.

Other participants added, they too felt they had to “code switch” in various settings with White people. Ogbu (2004) argued minorities are forced against their will to assimilate into the dominant group, although this assimilation usually results in marginalization. For example, the classroom, job interviews, or just hanging out with their White peers. In contrast, Anthony and Kevin stated, they did not believe code switching was inappropriate in academic settings because of future repercussions.

Anthony stated,

I feel like code switching on a college campus is really not for me it’s not like a big deal because I view college as not just like a social thing. I’m not finna go talk to my teacher in my same way ima talk to my friend. So, it’s not really code switching. I was still like
Kevin stated,

Regardless of if you like a friend… homie… like hey how you doing… you could be a future CEO hey how you doing to the person introduce right type of situation., but I understand like you feel you more comfortable talking to a person of your color and you feel like you can be more relaxed. When you’re around White people you know like you gotta change the way you move to appease them… that’s not necessarily a bad thing. It might be because in order to kinda benefit yourself or give mutual benefits from people … each person has to kinda give up… a piece of them or change how they moving or I’m sure those same White people act differently at home when they’re with their whoever they friends are.

It was a somewhat alarming on the participants’ readiness to assimilate their personality to “appease” White people, who are the majority of authority figures with the ability to control and made impactful decisions. Ahmed (2007) argues non-White bodies do inhabit White spaces; we know this. Such bodies are made invisible when we see spaces as being White, at the same time as they become hyper visible when they do not pass, which means they ‘stand out’ and ‘stand apart’ (p. 159). However, the majority of the participants stated they agreed with speaking properly without the use of slang term in the higher education setting, but found it harmful to have to alter their behavior in the presence of their White teachers or peers, in efforts to not being adversely stereotyped. Participant feelings were supported by Ogbu’s (2004) findings of how after emancipation, some Black people chose to assimilate in culture and language. “Black people emulated White people in behavior, speech and thought because they believed that their chances of success in education, employment and in being socially accepted by White people would be better if they abandoned Black frames of reference and emulated White people” (Ogbu, 2004, p. 15).
This next section will introduce the participants’ childhood and demographic upbringing and experiences. Black heritage and culture, extended family, and childrearing practices are essential to family background, cultural pride reinforcement, and racism awareness teaching (DeCuir-Gunby, 2009)

**Black Childhood and Neighborhood Experiences**

Childhood experiences help create and solidify identity for Black children. Person in the environment (PIE) is a theoretical construct used to explain the relationship between one’s environment and life experience (Braxton-Newby & Jones, 2014). The nuclear household determine personality traits, create tolerances, instill family values, and build self-identity and pride in self. The development of shared systems of belief within a family unit, and family identity, influence the character development of adolescence (Miller & Tatum, 2008).

Dowd (2018) argues the process of constructing racial identity begins in middle childhood and is linked to racial awareness, which emerges in early childhood. Therefore, it is imperative to explore all previous childhood experiences, such as household make-up and adolescent neighborhood that molded aspects of their identity as Black males. This is supported by Dowd’s research findings. He found that state policies create and perpetuate structural causes of poverty, fail to provide support to families and communities to move out of poverty, and fail to provide resources sufficient for families of whatever form to provide critical developmental support to their children, which is responsible for sustaining culture and concrete effects of racism (Dowd, 2018). Participants demonstrated they were products of their environments, specifically their neighborhoods and immediate household influences. These actions collectively
generate deep developmental consequences for Black communities, Black neighborhoods, Black families, and therefore Black children (Dowd, 2018).

Joseph described aspects of his childhood experiences as a Black adolescent:

I got 2 older [siblings]. One younger. My parents are probably about to split. My father has... hmmm... what 6 kids by 4 different women. Then me and my sister, we’re my mother’s only kids. Yeah and I guess I’m not gon’ lie... my parents especially my mother. She really into history and all of that. So, she made sure that we went to like the DuSable museum and all of that. So, I mean, I guess like I really just like museums. I know we went to museums in Ohio, DuSable museum, and I mean just watching different documentaries about different Black people. My childhood? I mean we were broke you know like most people on the south side of Chicago. And then my father was a playa [man with many partners]. So, we just used to seeing him and all my uncles being [with] and run around with a hundred different women. And I mean it was alright I guess until I got to my teenage years. Then it got worse. Brown “suga” [sugar] sandwiches. Broke. Microwaving your bath water. All of that stuff. Yeah. I mean look, it’s you know, people still killing each other over gang. I mean my grandmother is almost 70 and she be telling me stories about gang wars and still the same stuff. Same streets. *laughs*

Joseph’s early childhood included both of his parents, and older sisters where he learned to interact with others and communicate. He later revealed his relationship and perception of Black men was altered due to his father and uncles’ example of manhood. Black adolescent males are constantly bombarded with stereotypical depictions of older Blacks as incompetent or lazy (Scott et al., 2013). Joseph did not have a healthy example of parental or adult relationship as his father had divided loyalties with his additional families. Joseph’s family’s financial struggle heavily influenced his decision to partake in criminal activities, such as selling drugs and robbing people. Parental engagement, in the form of actively discussing educational issues with Black males, increases their likelihood of being successful (Scott et al., 2013).

Despite the bouts of poverty, his mother made sure, to instill lessons of Black culture and pride regardless of their economic circumstances and deteriorating family structure. The African American male is seen as a thing, as a stereotype, as a danger (Braxton-Newby & Jones, 2014).
More interestingly, fast forward to present-day conversations with his grandmother, which demonstrates the vicious cycle of poverty, violence and family instability in his childhood neighborhood dating from decades in the past. The PIE perspective is premised on the belief that an individual and his/her thoughts and behavior cannot be understood without understanding the impact of the influences of the environment in which he/she exists (Braxton-Newby & Jones, 2014).

Randle described aspects of his childhood experiences as a Black adolescent:

Well, you know I have 2 sides of the family. My, my father’s side of the family. We are all educated, but no not all. But mostly educated. And have went to high school. Some went to college. Have some college. Then mainly a lot of them are over east. Then they pretty cool. Quite religious. You know Christian. They have a little more hardship. I would say. Like, you know, in the city, you know whether its addiction or substance. You know, substance abuse, or you know a lot more smoking. On my mother’s side. Unless, I don’t know, I can’t think of the term but ummm there more of them have gotten their education. My mother’s side, it’s a lot more women. I have a lot more aunties. I’m close to my mother’s side because you know my parents had a divorce. I don’t know when, but it was like you know early in my years… in my early years. But they also religious. They are Christian. They cool. My neighborhood is mainly African American people. Mainly teachers, lawyers, businesspeople. You know they all have good jobs because you know you can’t really have a bad job living there. It’s pretty chill. They started raising a lot after I left. When I came to college, I started hearing about more people getting shot. Cus [Because] we’re in between 79th and 83rd you know when you get close to 79th it’s a little worse, you know.

Despite the positive visual representation of Black success within his neighborhood, Randle’s family lineage struggled with drug addictions. This is problematic in reference to the powers of influence on an adolescence’s maturation. Similar to Joseph, after Randle left for college, his childhood neighborhood was rumored to still be ridden with violence. Social scientists have amassed considerable evidence that poor families exhibit high levels of residential mobility, moving, in most cases, from one disadvantaged neighborhood to another (Desmond, 2012).
Darrius described aspects of his childhood experiences as a Black adolescent:

Childhood was rough. I would say that right now. I have, I grew up in the ummm my childhood was essentially kinda like... it wasn’t the usual like street life you know what I’m saying. But I definitely did, didn’t have a, it was a rocky childhood. So, like I said single parent household, low income housing for a while. I wasn’t always poor. She [his mom] used to take care of us. Two government apartments for eight years of my life. It was, it was safe growing up. Ummm not like now. You see everybody dying, but people still died then. You know you randomly be outside and hear some gun shots a few blocks away. It was one of those situations where same old same old you know. You got a bodega on every corner. No fresh food. You had, you had your meats. But you didn’t want to buy meat from a bodega. Empty properties. Classroom growing. Just trees but it wasn’t like... old ass trees. *Laughs* You know. It was just raggedy. Ran down. It wasn’t the best-looking community. But it was my own. You know what I’m saying. I was grateful to live there. So, I grew up in the Alsip community then I moved to Humboldt Park then I moved to back to Alsip for a few years. And then I moved to Garfield Park.

Darrius appeared to have struggled with affiliation of himself and other Black males. He seemed conflicted to admit his situation was not similar to other Black males. He shared his perspective of struggle through population increase and poverty in his neighborhood. His description of the defeats in his neighborhood is consistent with many communities of color. The PIE perspective is premised on the belief that an individual and his/her thoughts and behavior cannot be understood without understanding the impact of the influences of the environment in which he/she exists (Braxton-Newby & Jones, 2014).

Brian described aspects of his childhood experiences as a Black adolescent:

I’m, my childhood was pretty solid. I guess my parents they pretty much tried to give us like a solid like foundation. I guess. It was fun. *Laughs* I guess. You know what I’m saying. Yeah it was fun like it was solid as you know what I’m saying. I had two brothers I always had people to play with and stuff like that. Most memorable experience? Probably like just playing baseball and stuff like that. Playing sports. Played in school. Always like that a lot. I mean like it was like carefree child. So, you don’t really have to worry about that much. It was like solid. I can’t complain.

Brian then described his neighborhood:

Ok growing up. I lived in two neighborhoods. Cus [Because]I live in Chicago til’ I was like 10 then we moved to the suburbs. I lived in Chicago. I lived on 78th and Rockwell.
So, it was like I mean it was like it’s not like good but it’s not that bad either. Then like when we moved to the suburbs we lived in like Lynwood. So, it was pretty nice area. Like it wasn’t bad from what I remember I mean I was a child, so I don’t really remember like in detail. I never see like no fights or nothing like that. Until like we got older and then we moved. My aunties still live over there, so we go back. Now I can see it was kinda like it’s not as bad as other places but it’s still like you know. You know what I mean. The lights get turned off.

It’s nice, nice neighborhood [Lynwood] I’m not going to lie. It’s like quiet. You know no crimes. It was pretty solid. My parents tried to give us like a solid foundation and stuff. I can’t complain. I mean like ok I mean like the neighborhood maybe not. But it was like I lived right by Marquette park. On the other side of Marquette park was Mexicans. So, it’s like if you want to call that diverse. I guess. It was on the other side of Marquette park. It was Marquette park and Black people so. Not like super diverse. You know. *Laughs*

Brian then described his transition to a suburban neighborhood:

Lynwood was like A ok. I know like when we moved there like my parents like went out their way to make sure we like lived on a block of all Black people. Because they said they wanted us to see like Black people doing good. But like Lynwood at the time, ok, it was like White people lived over here and Black people lived they were here. They just wanted us to see like Black people doing good. That’s what they used to see. They wanted us to see Black people doing well. Yeah but it’s like as you grew older all the White people moved out so now it’s now majority Black people.

Like Darrius, Brian teetered between his measures of safety and acceptability. His experience was the same as his parents decided to intentionally relocate him to an environment surrounded primary by Black success. The nature of a person’s situation in the environment impacts how that person is perceived. (Braxton-Newby & Jones, 2014). Interesting when families uproot, they seek out more diverse, suburban neighbors, in contrast to Brian’s families who specifically sought out Black residents. Some researchers have posited that diversity in the ethnic composition of one's neighborhood shapes students into more culturally accepting, tolerant, and adaptive individuals (Woldoff et al., 2011). This is noteworthy to contradict the narrative of the presumed nice neighborhoods, which are commonly referred to as predominantly White residents. From birth to age three is a period of critical development when the context of
children’s families (neighborhood, work, economic circumstances, wealth, and stability) has a huge impact on children reaching developmental benchmarks (Dowd, 2018).

Anthony described aspects of his childhood experiences as a Black adolescent:

Oh, we all lived together. It was me, mom, dad, two sisters. They divorced when my sister graduated. So, 09 [2009] around that 09 [2009] area for real. We all lived together until like I want to say… 20… 2014… 2015. I moved in with my dad. Because my dad, I mean my mom. So, we just didn’t live in the same house, no we moved. And I didn’t like where we were staying so I moved with my dad. Cus [Because] my dad had a bigger house. Cus [Because] like you know I got my own room. I got to sleep in my sister’s room. So, it’s basically like I was that one guy that I promise you people claimed the hood. I liked the streets. No. I don’t like the street life. I don’t like being in the hood. I don’t like living in the family room with my cousins. No, I was never that type of guy. I, I mean I did it. I don’t brag about it. My dad said he had a nice fat crib in the suburbs. I said, “I’ll be out there”. Right. The White parts. I want to say Shiloh, St. Clair county. So, it was just like St. Clair county which is like that area code is 618. It was a lot of White people lived there. Probably like including my dad three or four Black people lived there. And so. It was like, like it was like big house.

Unlike Darrius and Brian, Anthony adamantly absolved himself from any connection to the typical Black, poverty struggle story. Universal susceptibility to racist barriers and stereotypes is sufficient to generate trust, special concern, and mutual identification amongst African Americans (Papish, 2015). Despite his family unit dissolving, his recognition of the economic difference between his parents, allowed him to choose his social and class fate. Race appears to be a determining factor for the legitimacy of wealth. Wealth inequality may be largely attributable to the greater barriers to educational, occupational, and financial opportunities that Blacks have traditionally faced outcomes that also may be influenced by negative stereotypes of Blacks (Painter et al., 2016). Anthony’s displayed some distain for families or individuals who cling to that poverty narrative. He desperately wanted to separate himself.

Tobias described aspects of his childhood experiences as a Black adolescent:

Luxurious. I don’t know my childhood wasn’t bad. I’ve seen people shot. Like, I have friends who like their childhood was like amazing way better than mine. And I have
others who just like dang that’s [peer childhood experience] horrible. So, mine, I really
think of like is like in the middle. Like, the community that we stayed in. It wasn’t great,
but it wasn’t as bad. We have gangs, violence, shootings but what person doesn’t. Well, a
lot of people don’t, but like even coming to school most the Black people here have been
around the same thing. You know you usually have violence in your ways in an out of
like things happening so for us to make it here. I don’t think it was that bad honestly.
Like, if you, or some people want to pride themselves all day and night and it just doesn’t
happen. So, I had a decent opportunity to make it to where I’m at. So, childhood was
pretty decent. Poor but pretty decent. We stayed on section 8. So, bills weren’t high, but
we never had money for anything. Ummm never had like, there was always kids that had
way more than I did. So, it’s like dang. We went on a vacation. I never went on vacation.
I remember one year. I never come back from somewhere on birthdays and stuff. Like,
my birthdays always at school. You come. Go to school come home. Here’s a cake.
Which is better than nothing. You know. Ummm other people they get like new clothes.
New games. New this new that. New this. And then I’m just like dang. Then it’s like...
hmm some people don’t have to do that. So, like nice and then they [his peers] take
advantage of it. So, I know how to appreciate things. So, I’m proud of how I came up.
So, when I first moved to Joliet, we lived on the west side. It’s not bad. Time, time has
changed. When we first got there and everything. It was like … it was always gang
violence. Like you know you hear shootings and stuff. And then you go on the news and
somebody got shot down the street. Honestly, I liked it [Joliet]. Because Joliet was more,
it was more to do. Like, the gangs was the bad stuff. That [Gang violence] happened like
during that time messed up the good that was happening because we had Bicentennial
park. We had Black pride parade. We don’t even have that no more because people be
fighting and shooting. It’ll go all the way from the eastside or like from the majority of
where the Black people were at and it’ll go downtown, and it was a good time but you,
you know. You know cus [because] it be stuff, so it was like really nice. Yeah, too
diverse. Majority Blacks and Mexicans. Never really saw that many White people until
you went to school. They [White people] stayed more on the deeper, more far west part
of Joliet. But for like close to the bridge, the more Blacks and Mexicans you gon see.
Then on the east side. Its more Blacks and Mexicans. Now, it’s more diverse everywhere.
You find more Black people, White people, Mexicans everywhere but yeah. Pretty
decent.

Despite the imminent danger and violent experiences in his neighborhood, Tobias was
able to recall positive recollections of his childhood. Social identities are, not only multiple and
complicated, but result from social locations that are situated within systems of oppression that
create, shape, and maintain social identities (Dottolo & Stewart, 2008). Like Anthony, Tobias
considered Mexican and Black communities to be diverse During his elongated description of his
neighborhood, it was alarming to hear Tobias, casually recall the violence he’s witnessed.
Kevin described aspects of his childhood experiences as a Black adolescent:

Typical family. I guess. I grew up in a household with both of my parents originally. And then later on in life my parents got separated. I got two older brothers. I got a big sister. I have a little sister. And at times we had other family members living with us. Like grandma, grandpa lived with us. My aunt and cousins stayed with us at times. At times, I stayed with my grandmother. At times I stayed with my aunt. At times, sometimes I stayed with my uncle. Yeah.

Typical little childhood, I guess. Pretty reasonable parents. Strict at you know, reasonably strict though you know. Just high expectation at most times. I’m from 115th and Carpenter. So, currently it’s, it’s pretty you know nothing really going on over there. Well, I was younger, it was worse than it is now. But, it wasn’t as bad as other places in Chicago. Right? So, there was gang violence. Gun violence in that area. Surrounding areas. But not to the degree that it would be in other parts of Chicago. Alright so, yeah. *laughs* It was a lot of Black people. Couple Hispanics people not a lot of Hispanic people just like not that many that I can think of. But yeah, mostly just Black people or either Black people or if it was Hispanic person he might as well been Black. You know what I’m saying. Just light skin, you feel me.

Kevin was the only participant to attribute his skin tone as a positive means of assimilation for his community. In contrary to Anthony, Kevin did not buy into the Black, impoverish narrative for Black males. He noted his childhood was typical, consistent of two parent household. He is also mentioned the extension outside his nuclear family living with him. In contrast to Whites, Blacks had a greater prevalence of extended household (containing adults and/or children from outside the nuclear family (Fine et al., 1987).

Charles described aspects of his childhood experiences as a Black adolescent:

Yeah, I’m the oldest. I got five siblings. So yeah, my mom has yeah six kids. With me its six. I could say when I was like younger, I played games a lot. Played basketball every now and then but I feel when I was in middle school, I feel like that’s when everything started happening as far as I didn’t play games no more. I got on the basketball team and football team or whatever and volleyball. I was good at volleyball. But I stopped playing sports because my mom was struggling. I felt that I needed to do something else and it was basically work. But, I started just doing all type of bad stuff and it just I’m not saying that it was her fault or anything, but I had to work. It was no doubt about it. I couldn’t just sit up there be doing all these other things all these other kids was doing, going outside every day, having fun with their friends. My friends be like “where you going? Where you going?” I be like, “I’m finna go try to make some money.”
My neighborhood back in Waukegan look like, it’s really like a Mexico city right now. We got Black people around. Oh, it was a lot of Black people back then when I was growing up. We stayed in the projects, of course. Once, I went to my grandma house, we had more Black people on the block than we had ummm Mexicans. Hispanics basically and you know even White people. But I started to see it change within time.

Like Randle, Brian and Tobias, Charles also noted the degradation of race in the neighborhood over time. The majority of participants shared the extracurricular activities that they participated in, but Charles explicitly stated he was unable to participate with the average or expected childhood activities because he had to assume adult responsibilities during his adolescent years. Black children have less-advantaged parents, on average, which may disadvantage their asset accumulation (Keister, 2003; Killewald, 2013; Yamokoski & Keister, 2006). His assumptions and acceptance of poverty was problematic. There are cycles and generations of people living in poverty that the educational system may not be eliminating or at best helping to reduce (Milner, 2013). The consequence of a reduced childhood due to parental absence or incapacity to lead is detrimental to children.

Russell described aspects of his childhood experiences as a Black adolescent:

My family is cool. I mean my parents are just like a bit strict. But like I think that’s just how they are. They like they came from the Caribbean. They’re like came from St. Lucia. My family like came from St. Lucia and still lives there. I guess that’s why they’re kinda strict. Probably cus [because] like when they came here, it’s just like a different environment. And then like I don’t know just, I want to go out and they like nah. Like, it’s like well why, just like fear for your safety and all that. So yeah, I moved to like Illinois when I was 11 or 12. 11. Yeah, I moved to Illinois when I was 11. First, we moved to Naperville. First, we moved to Naperville and then we like, we were just like living in a apartment there. And then like we bought a house in Oswego and we moved there. Then, I just basically lived there ever since. It was a good neighborhood. I mean like its mostly White neighborhood. But like there was like a couple of Black people on my street. There’s like a couple of Indian people on my street too. So, it’s like, like the neighbors though were nice. They weren’t like hostile or anything. You know. They did what neighbors do. They moved in you know brought just like goodies and stuff.
Russell was the only participant that was born outside of the United States. He still identified as a Black male despite his Caribbean origin. He attributed his parents’ style of upbringing to his Caribbean roots. Russell left his native country where the residents were predominantly Black and brown people and then moved to a predominantly White suburb. Russell’s description was interesting. Although, Russell’s choice of words appeared drastic and assumed the worse, his experiences demonstrated the exact opposite.

Aiden described aspects of his childhood experiences as a Black adolescent:

My mom, my dad, my siblings. Well, at first, I was the only kid. For like? For maybe like... 7 years. So, it was just whatever I wanted I got it. Spoiled. Yeah. *Laughs* My family very supportive, caring just like any other family. But they really push me to like strive for greatness. Like to choose my goals like get a higher education. Don’t settle for less.

It’s just like uptown so like kinda bad area, but not really a bad area. Something like that. It was Montrose and Hazel. I mean it wasn’t really a bad area. I didn’t really see like a lot of cops anywhere. I could go outside. Yeah.

Aiden was the only participant that described how he was able to be afforded him extra financial opportunities and even affection from his parents since he was the only child for seven years. According to Aiden, his parents had instilled values of education, hard work, and support.

Donald described aspects of his childhood experiences as a Black adolescent:

My family is different. It’s like I have a huge family cus [because] my grandmother they had 12 kids and her kids had kids, so I like I have like probably live over 40 cousins or something. So yeah, my twin brother, my mom, my big brother until my big brother got older and then he moved out. Ummm born in Chicago. I really don’t remember anything. From that time cus [because] I moved to the suburbs [Calumet city] when I was like five years old. I remember more of that. And it was like, we lived in an apartment. And it was like real small. And we had one bathroom and stuff. It was nice, I guess. She [his mom] just didn’t want me going out in Chicago really. Well, I lost family members and stuff and I guess she didn’t want that to happen to me. The majority of my family like moved to Milwaukee because they didn’t want their kids growing up in Chicago. Ummm like I said a lot of violence and like a couple of my family members died to gun violence. So, like my family decided that they didn’t want their kids to grow up in that. They didn’t want anything to happen to them.
My childhood, ummm I mean it’s kinda sheltered because my mom didn’t really want me going outside really. But I had fun. Because it was fun, so like I always had someone to play with and stuff, but it was fun though. I have a lot of friends growing up when I was little cus [because] I don’t really, I don’t really know, I didn’t really go out like I say I was sheltered. We always had something to do in the house. Even cardboard games or until when I got like to like eight years old when we got our first video games so I played that. But I went outside every now and then riding my bike. We had like a little playground in our area and I played there.

Donald shared his father’s absence in his life.

Uhh *laughs*… long pause uhhhh I really don’t know. I didn’t meet him until I was 11 and then even then it was still like I don’t know, so yeah.

I guess he was busy. Probably. Yeah. Even now like I don’t know. And then I still don’t see him much probably like maybe I might see him once or twice maybe every couple years.

Although Donald came from a large family, he still felt his father’s absence in his life. Black adolescent males are constantly bombarded with stereotypical depictions of older Blacks as incompetent or lazy (Scott et al., 2013) Despite the lack of father figure, his mother decided to uproot the family from the inner city setting and transitioned to a suburb. changes in children’s home environments as changes in the parent-child relationship develop and children become more independent and begin to spend more time exploring their neighborhood (Iruka et al., 2015). Donald’s mother recognized the violence and potential of threats of safety for her three Black sons. Due to the violence, Black families had to find alternative means to entertain themselves indoors to bypass the uncertainties within the neighborhood.

Quentin described aspects of his childhood experiences as a Black adolescent:

My family? *Laughs* So, I have about six to eight people living with me at the time. So, my mom was one of them. Ummm my auntie tiara was one of them. My little cousin. My two little cousins. Jaylen and Jamari, that’s four people. My cousin Nesha, she’s one of my older cousins and my auntie Joyce. So that’s six. And then my grandma and my grandpa. But my family very, are very family oriented. And they, they help me through school anytime I call. *Laughs* Back home, for any family member, for anything like as
far as money, or advice they there. They help me out a lot. Always came to my football and basketball games, track meets. Supportive, huge support system.

No, I didn’t have any siblings at the time. My childhood, I was... I was very adventurous like I’d like to explore a lot of places and stuff. I went to a few states, but I always enjoyed myself. My mom always took me to parks. That was our favorite place to go. I had a little bit made friends in my neighborhood. Hurst was a very a fairly new neighborhood for me. It’s on 47 and Cicero Chicago, Illinois. Hurst was a very, very new neighborhood to me at the time because I think I was like going into the 3rd grade. And I was coming from suburban school in Schaumburg. It was a suburban elementary school. And I didn’t really like it there. You know it was definitely more organized I would say. But with the neighborhood I was in at the time wasn’t that, it wasn’t like it wasn’t good or bad.

Quentin’s family upbringing was unique. He grew up in a single-parent household, his mother being the only parent. Along with many cousins and aunts, Quentin’s grandparents also lived with his. Parents, grandparents, and great grandparents have an opportunity to become engaged in the child's education (Miller & Tatum, 2008). Although Quentin was the only child, Like Kevin, Quentin grew up with extended family in his household. Children are cared for within this larger extended family, whose ties are considered as important as nuclear ties (Fine et al., 1987). Quentin was the only participant to move from the suburbs to the inner city, which he expressed his displeasure.

Alexander described aspects of his childhood experiences as a Black adolescent:

I have about six sisters. I’m the only boy. I have an adopted brother. They’re crazy. *laughs* I pretty much stayed with my mom and my dad, but they stayed in separate house. They still cool and things. Like they, they still like talk and go to each other houses and stuff like that. *Laughs* They just crazy. Like, we fight and things like that, but we always seem to get back cool with each other. I mean that’s what family do.

Alexander clarified how he later moved with his father as the sole custodial parent:

Just me and my dad. Basically, going to church and I played a lot of sports. He kept me active. Oh yeah, he was also a construction worker. So, I know how to fix a few things. It was pretty fun. I used to still go to my mom’s house with my sisters at. Every now and again. Most of the time I’d be with my dad. We’d be going everywhere. He’d be taking me places. Just bonding with him most of the time. Somewhere cool that he’s taken me...
ummm we went to Kansas City to go see the Kansas City Chiefs stadium and the Kansas City Royal’s stadium. [My neighborhood] East St. Louis it was, it’s very rough. It’s one of the dangerous cities they say but it’s really a nice community. Things like that we grew up in Edgemont. As you know it’s pretty much where all the older people like stay but it was also a mixture of young guys. Young people in there too. So, you would see, you would also hear like gunshots at night. Police sirens all of that, but like I got used to it. But I remember when I used to sit outside in the car and my dad would be in the house and you’d just hear gunshots. And then I’d just go in the house. I’m used to it. So, It wouldn’t really bother me, but it would bother me at the same time. I didn’t want to hear that at night, but I did. And then waking up to like seeing someone that I know like being in the newspaper or on the news. It was just hard like I had a lot of friends that died from that. Just this past year, [I] had three of them die from gun violence.

Although Alexander grew up in a single parent household, like Anthony, he chose to live with his father. Alexander proudly spoke about the structural guidelines living with his father. research indicates the positive impact of the African American father’s presence in the lives of his children as an enhancement to healthy development. His connection to his masculine, father figure came at a cost. His neighborhood was ridden with violence, but like many other he normalized it, especially since he had firsthand experiences of death due to the violence. African American males were socialized to mask their feelings and to control their behavior (Braxton-Newby & Jones, 2014). Alexander casually spoke about the routine to navigate around the violence. Young people from high poverty neighborhoods are exposed to high rates of crime and violence (Harding, 2009).

Bernard described aspects of his childhood experiences as a Black adolescent:

I have two older brothers and I have a twin brother. I have a dog. We grewed [sic] up. All four of my, all four of us. We grewed [sic] up with my mom and dad. We all shared, it was a two bedroom, so my mom and dad had their own bedroom. Me and my brothers we had to share like one bed but one bedroom, but it was two beds. It was two of us each on, on the same… same just sleeping until they moved out. Then me and my twin got our own separate beds in the same room. So, we all grew up together. It was it was fun. It was fun.

My childhood was pretty, wasn’t too, too much. It was it was nice. I mean. It never had any like complications I mean I had some moments you know with other people and
school and stuff like that but for the most part. It was pretty cool. It was pretty good. And
umm they like most people think about African parents being like really strict but my
parents. I mean they are strict but they not strict to the point where I like like typical
African parents. Like they still you know understand and give me some type of lead way
and just let be independent and I guess. I think with that as you know how I became who
I am now. So just that lead ways just that you know independent just like not letting me
do what I want but just allow me to do what I like you know like allow me to do what
like I’d say like doesn’t feel like they was holding my hand.

My neighborhood [north side of Chicago] is very diverse. So, plenty of, majority
Hispanics. Hispanic and Blacks and you got all different type of ethnicity groups and you
got like Indians and Nigerians. And in like one corner then you got the Hispanics in one
corner and then the Blacks in one corner. It’s pretty diverse though for the most part. [It]
Could be tough at times. You know some people see like oh you live in the north side
you must have like a big house or your family must be rich. It’s not, it’s nothing like that
but for the most part it’s you I know you have your days your moments where you just go
outside and have fun and you have some moments when you can’t go outside and have
fun cus [because] you know gang members and people just antagonize you and then you
got to you know some Hispanic groups who think you part of a gang, so they go toward
the Black community more.

Bernard was the only participant, who openly identified as Nigeran, but still a Black
male. Racial and gender stereotyping has produced significant inequalities both economically
and within social status (Braxton-Newby & Jones, 2014). Bernard self-admitted his upbringing
was unique in comparison to stereotypical Nigeran families. African American males resent
being stereotyped (Braxton-Newby & Jones, 2014). He had to openly dispersed the image of his
neighborhood being associated with big homes because they wasn’t his narrative or living
situation. Due to skin color, his was negatively gang associated.

Jimmy described aspects of his childhood experiences as a Black adolescent:

My mother and my sister. Ummm my dad left when I was five. Yeah, he was… he’s out
of there when I was like five. Yeah. Typical you know typical story. It was like a lot like
you know, aggression from him. Like not really understanding him not really being ready
to be even have kids in the first place. And he take it, takes it out on all of us. So, then
that led up to him exiting and my mother having to take on the full load of being a double
parent. And that’s very, very hard. *chokes up* It’s very hard to watch. So, you see a lot
of things and ummm it shapes you in a different way if you would have had that man, the
male in the family and the mother in the family at the same time. So, the mother has to
try to play both roles some things you miss. Ummm you miss uhh like just how to be a man. And like how, how to carry yourself little things that you know just the masculinity of being a man. You don’t really, you can’t I can’t learn that from my mom, my mom can only teach me things that you know like she knows when it comes to like a father like they have that that firm hand they’re, they’re males. You know you naturally adapt. So, for me it was like for years, I had to try to find that, find an avenue to get to that point of like ok… this is where I need to be to be a man this is where I need to be a man. But learn from my mother. Her experiences. I learn how to treat women correctly. So, if I, when I’m in a relationship and all of that and things don’t go bad usually but you know we’re young, so things happen. But other than that. She [his mom] has, she’s honestly the most intelligent like just awesome person I know just how she did everything. And how she like got us from really cheap apartment to a big ole house in Chicago. Southside of Chicago. And it, we was living a great life. You know. Even though my father wasn’t in my life ummm I felt that helped me work more into trying to be a man and think about things. A lot more. Like knowing that ok I don’t have this in my life, so I have to work twice as hard to get that. But it makes it even more… willing to try new things and work harder. To achieve my goals

My childhood filled with filled with sports. I love, I love nature. Ohhh man… oohh… it was really, it was really weird. So, you know where Richton park is right. So, let’s say like 2004…5 [2005] ish like around there moving forward it got bad. It was like It was like in between in like 2005 to like 2012. Like it was bad. Like we had drug deals all down my hallway and it was always a fight. Always some domestic. I see domestic abuse thing going on up and down in our in our building. I got into plenty of fights. My sister got into fights for me. A lot of like you know; it was good amount of gang activity around us as well. Shootings. It is just like you would never think that in Richton Park, but that area was like really bad at a point. So, now, it was just African Americans you know that was it. The only Caucasian you know people that were there were like people that worked in the offices and everything.

Like Donald, Jimmy he believed and accepted his story was typical Black adolescent narrative. Jimmy was the only participant to admit although, he greatly respected his mother, he was adamant that his father was best suited to raise him, as a young Black male. Society has ignored the African American male, except to punish him, collect child support payments, or stereotype him as a deadbeat dad (Braxton-Newby & Jones, 2014). Jimmy expressed in great detail, the impact of his fatherless childhood. He attributed his issues of aggression, accountability, and aspects of manhood. Similarly, economic, political, and social barriers create role strain, especially for African American males, that prevent them from carrying out
traditional expectations of “being a male” in White society (Braxton-Newby & Jones, 2014). While his perception of his father adversely affected him, he spoke highly of his mother and her expectations of him. Jimmy’s neighborhood was a foretelling image of his educational experiences to come, predominantly Black with White people in positions of authority.

This next section will provide insight to the participants’ familial occupational paths and their influences or lack thereof to enroll in higher education. The Black family structure often times dictates the outcome of the child and their academic and career aspirations. Browne and Battle (2018) argue “the persistent inequalities produced by race, class, and gender have a pernicious effect of Black families, as they shape family structure, income, residential patterns, wealth, and educational opportunities” (p. 81).

**Black Family Occupation and Education**

Many Black family traditions have been passed down from generation to generation. Unlike like most European cultures, education, specifically higher education hasn’t been a customary tradition for Black people, otherwise the continuation of the prevalence of first-generation college students in the 20th century wouldn’t be as common. Blacks have lower net worth, even after controlling for their own income, education, family structure, age, and inheritance received, as well as the education, income, and family structure of their parents (Painter et al., 2016). Therefore, it is imperative to explore all previous childhood experiences, such as household make-up, neighborhood and academic experiences that molded aspects of their identity as Black males.

Some participants believed that some law enforcement officers joined that profession to carry on a family occupational legacy. But this nation, this America, is White America, whereas
transmission is so obvious and apparently natural in the European context that it requires little work, from father to son can successfully occur in America (Lloyd, 2018). The transmission of blood and values and memories and hopes means affirming the precarious legitimacy of whiteness (Lloyd, 2018). So, it’s important to explore, Black family traditions as it pertains to education attainment and occupation as well as the reasons the participants chose to enroll into higher education. Educational attainment level matters in terms of economic, social, and class status in society. Parental wealth is associated with children's educational attainment (Painter et al., 2016).

Black male college students are set apart from other Black males who are not enrolled in college. Black male college students’ understanding, ability to comprehend, seek resolutions is admirable. It is important to identity the educational backgrounds of each participant because it demonstrates a pattern the determining origin for decision-making abilities, access to resources, as well as validates or dispels any assumptions about Black male college students. Cultural change is a problem encountered by first-generation students regarding the discomforts that arise upon leaving the social standing of one's family of orientation (Miller & Tatum, 2008). The relationship between race and educational attainment in a higher education environment affects Black male college students as it pertains to their perception of law enforcement officers on a college campus.

Subsequently, these variables of race, family education and occupations may have contributed to their feelings towards their confidence and ability to have a voice in regard to interacting and perceiving law enforcement officers on their college campus. Each participant enrolled into higher education has a unique reason for enrolling, whether it be financial gain, escape from their family household, or a discovery of new cultures, nevertheless, it imperative
that each participation shares their personal reason. An integral part of authentic engagement with African American males is to provide the opportunity for them to tell their stories (Braxton-Newby & Jones, 2014). All too often, when it comes to this population, their stories are told by others… they are silenced. The one who takes the time to listen to and respect the perspective of the African American male is practicing authentic engagement (Braxton-Newby & Jones, 2014).

Joseph shared his family’s view on education and occupational path, and the factors that led him to enroll in college.

So, my mother has a Master’s degree and she really like our advocate for education cause [because]I mean other than hers. She’s still in accounting. Like my father he never went to college. Uhhh GED. Yeah, he’s out [of jail] and he’s a supervisor at a bakery. Grandparents they never went to college. So, like really you, if you never, you probably wouldn’t go to school either. Because I mean nobody else sees it as important. I’m 23 and a junior in college trying to go to medical school. [Reason for enrolling] I guess to, I mean I was looking for a challenge.

Joseph concluded his family except for his mother was indifferent about higher education, especially since his mom graduated with her degrees later in his adult life. His decision to enroll in college was solely based on his interest and self-direction. That grit the tendency to pursue long-term challenging goals with perseverance and passion was correlated with Black male collegians’ grades, holding all other factors constant, underscores the significant (Strayhorn, 2013). After overcoming the poor cultural examples of a Black family, financial barriers and identity confusion, young Black males are still less likely to enroll in higher education in comparison to their White peers. More importantly, they demonstrate a willingness to engage, to move beyond stereotypes and toward respect and understanding. (Braxton-Newby & Jones, 2014).

Randle shared his family’s view on education and occupational path, and the factors that led him to enroll in college.
We are all educated, but no not all. But mostly educated. And have, went to high school. Some went to college. A lot of them are educators. That’s my branch of the family. My mother was a teacher for many years. Then she became a special administrator. My sister got her masters from Mercy University like a year or two ago. Now she works at Syracuse University. My sister I think, hers is education. My sister was higher education. Well, my dad died my freshman year in high school. He went, I think he started college, but he didn’t finish it. From both sides of my family. No one is stupid. Seriously they can have a real conversation with any prestigious motherfucker you know, it’s just you know different circumstances. Different situations.

And now I’m going to be the first male really to graduate from college on my mom’s side. Cus [Because] they others went, they had some college, but then I don’t know what happened.

I came to school because I didn’t see there was shit else to do. I didn’t want to work just like work a weak job. I didn’t want to be at home, so you know why not go somewhere and go to college like I said I didn’t have to worry about money. I had like offers, other places, but I chose to go here because it was closer to home.

Although, Randle’s father died prior to him enrolling into higher education, he (Randle) was aware of the educational legacy his father left behind in addition to the low attrition rate of his family members collegiate experiences. Resiliency is an important attribute for low-income, first-generation college students in their persistence of completing an undergraduate education. Resiliency refers to the ability to overcome obstacles by meeting challenges and finding alternative ways to accomplishment (Miller & Tatum, 2008). Randle distinguished intellect in comparison to being formally educated. Randle understood his mom’s financial situation and his ability to work and make money, therefore he didn’t feel pressured leave for college. Interestingly, distance was also a factor and choosing his higher education institute.

Darrius:

My mom more than likely didn’t finish high school. My father didn’t either umm., my aunt that raising me now has two masters so that’s you know that someone I look too. She takes it very serious. Like some, it’s not something I have to do. It’s something I chose to do. I feel like it’s the best route for me. I’ve always been good in school so why not continue to go to school. It’s important. I’d say it’s important.
My mom worked a full-time job. She’s a sale associate at Ashley Stewart and she used to take care of us. Two government apartment for eight years of my life. First 8 years of my life, I always had a new pair of shoes. I always had my haircut. I always a meal. I always had new clothes. And then unfortunately, my mom got sick and my mom died 2006.

[After his mom’s death] I didn’t want to be home. Because where I lived at with my aunt, my life at home with my aunt wasn’t always that great. You know. Just in general. My entire life surrounding my family. Every decision I made was based on my family. So, I didn’t really … I was never really making decisions for media was always sacrificing and sacrificing putting myself last for someone else.

Similar to Randle, who lost a parent during their adolescent years, Darrius had to cope with upbringing. Despite, his mother who died later in life, Darrius was aware that neither his mother nor his father never attended college, let alone graduated from high school. Black males who overcame their environmental obstacles and became successful in graduating from high school and college (Scott et al., 2013). Darrius’ example of educational excellence derived from his aunt. His motivation for higher education derived from his desire to escape his home life. A benefit of some higher education institutions is they provide housing for their students.

Brian:

My dad I think he gotta an, either an, I think he got an Associate’s degree. He got an Associate’s degree. I think (mom) has a Master’s in Nursing. Something like that. I think she has a masters, she went back to school I know she has her bachelor’s degree. Then she went back to school, so I don’t know what she did. But had to be something for nursing.

(View of education) Well I don’t know. Important. I mean yeah, they think it’s important but they used to tell us. If you don’t go to college just go to trade school because I went to trade so before I came to college and like learned electricity. They was like you don’t have to go to college but you gotta learn how to do something. You gotta go to school to learn how to do something. So, you can get some money. Right because my father didn’t, my father didn’t, he went to college. He got an associate degree but he ain’t go to a four-year school so like. You can go to like college cus [because] he said it’s not for everybody so.

They told me and made me [go to trade school] they paid for it, so it was free to me. laughs. Yeah, they paid for it, so I went. Cus [Because] I have living there [at home] and had no money. *Laughs* I didn’t have any money to move out of my home, so I had nothing else to do. So, I had come to college.
Brian was the only participant to attend a trade school prior to enrolling in higher education. His rationale was simple. His parents offered to pay so he couldn’t decline the offer out of financial convenience. Similar to Randle, Brian did not have an overwhelming push to enroll in higher education, he simply had nothing else to do.

Anthony:

My mom went to Western [University] didn’t graduate then went to McKendry college got her masters and got an Associates too. In teaching and special education, I think. Dad never went to college. He went to college but did not graduate college. He works at an electrical company since I was born so like 20 plus years easy.

You have to graduate. But I think its valid my mom education she got a lot of degrees so education. Was her thing too. She’s a teacher so education. It ain’t no, it’s not no coming home and not graduating. Like you have to graduate, make a decent amount of money. That’s her thing.

I didn’t want to stay home. I feel like the school. The high school I went to it was mostly like, if you wasn’t good at sports, it was either you got to the military you got to SIUE or it’s like an up the street school.

The options of success was apparent from his parents’ ventures. His mom returned to higher education later in life and his father was successfully and gainfully employed for 20 years. This could have influenced Anthony that education was not the only means to a successful life. Through talk in the home, parents also stressed the importance and value of education because they, indeed, valued education themselves (Milner, 2013). Similar to Randle and Brian, choose to attend college to avoid staying home. It is important to identify what population of students are encouraged to attend college. In Anthony’s situation, his post-secondary education appeared to be already deciding upon depending on what category of student you belonged to. For example, athletic or demographic convenience.

Tobias:
My mom and dad, they graduated high school but never went further. My mom did. And my dad went to the military but he like got dishonorably discharged after 11 years. (View of education) I think it’s important because I don’t know. I don’t really understand. But like they think it’s important because there’s nothing else for us [Black people] in a way. There’s no, it’s not like you know how some parents like you know White parents have like ohhh if my kid get out of high school I most definitely get a job for them if he doesn’t want to go to school. Like Black people don’t got that. So, it’s not like I can work with my dad’s business. Cus [Because] I’ve heard stories about that. Like yeah, my dad owns this so I can just work with them and make money. All I have to do is show up, get paid and come home. Like what? Must be nice.

I honestly like school. Honestly, I don’t think there’s anything else for me to really do. I been in school you know forever, you know. After high school college is always like, if you ain’t going to college what are your going to do because I have literally like nothing else to do. There’s nothing to do at home. There’s no trades. You can sign up for a trades like get your CDL but who wants to drive a truck all day even though they get paid really well and they job never ends. I feel like I should be like a role model in a way and do more. Cus [Because] you know I have an entire family here.

Tobias’s realization of his interest level lead him to choose to enroll in higher education. For example, his limited knowledge of available trade opportunities and conclusion of the workload for the assumed pay. His decision also seemed to be influenced by the social norms and societal expectations to attend college after high school graduation. The connection between social identities and institutional structures is an especially important component of the notion of intersectionality (Dottolo & Stewart). Finally, instead of having concrete reasons to enroll in higher education for personal gain, he opted to be an example of educational excellence for his family. More importantly, they demonstrate a willingness to engage, to move beyond stereotypes and toward respect and understanding. (Braxton-Newby & Jones, 2014).

Kevin:

My mom was a schoolteacher. And then later like you know went into administrative things and like you know, assistant principal and stuff like that. And then also my dad, my uncles, aunts, older cousins and all that stuff. High school some of them you know, so all of the college and smart kids and this that and the third is all under my mama which is us. You know what I’m saying.
Kevin attributed his decision to enroll into college primarily to his mother’s direction and educational influence. He specifically noted all of the smart family members were from his mother’s side of the family. Like all students, Black collegians need to feel valued, safe, and accepted in order to feel at home, thrive during their time in college, and further develop into academically and socially well-rounded individuals (Woldoff et al., 2011). His recognition of educational excellence was apparent in his family; therefore, he followed suite as expected.

Charles:

She didn’t graduate high school. She dropped out because she … she was… she was having me. She knew, she knew not nobody else gon take care of me. so, she had to do it. My (dad) went and got his GED when he was in jail. But that’s it. The thing is. My dad is so smart. That man can fix cars. He can draw you if you wanted too. He could have been a tattoo artist or anything. I seen him build a whole car from scratch. You know just everything, but the thing is.

She’s (mom) a cook. Yeah, she has. Believe it or not. At first, she worked at goodwill then she was there for a long time.

Enroll in college… I can say I, I already knew I wanted to go to college since I was in middle school and I just looked at the way my parents lived. And I was just like man. I know it has to be more out there. Even with them I was like man I know I accomplish what they didn’t accomplish like my mom even though my dad did get his GED. I was just like ok, I want to be able to not reach, I can reach heights, but I want to go further. So, getting a bachelors is important.

Charles used his poverty and dysfunctional upbringing as a motivating factor to enroll in college. Charles could’ve settled into a stage of guilt and not attend college because did not get that same opportunity because she was pregnant with him. This is interesting because it was in contrast to the other participants who casually choose to enroll in higher education. He intended to surpass the examples of education around him. Black children have less-advantaged parents,
on average, which may disadvantage their asset accumulation in order to control for these
differences, I measure parental class with educational attainment, occupational prestige,
household income, and wealth (Killewald, 2013). His recognition that his father was able to still
obtain an education in his predicament, set a standard of acceptance for education goals.

Russell:

Well my mom and my dad… I think they are both first generation college students. And
they both masters too. So, it’s like my, so it’s like, if, since they’re both first gen, they
both have their masters… you’re going to college. Like you have to. So, I’m just like ok.
My mom she’s teacher. An elementary school teacher. And my dad… he works from
Exelon, I believe. I don’t know like what exactly he does. I think he plans, plans projects
but I don’t know what exactly he plans. He tries to explain it to me, but I just don’t get it.
*Laughs*

(Education) It’s very important. I believe, they believe it’s very important. Because like I
remember like, let’s just say I was in a really hard class in high school. And they see I get
a B and it’s just like why did you get a B in that class. I’m like class is hard. I’m trying
my best. It’s like try to get up to an A.

I just felt like the things that I wanted to do in life. I just feel like you need like a college
education. Or the things I was considering. You need a college education for it.

Russell appeared to follow the foundation and examples of educational excellence set by
his parents. Educational attainment level matters in terms of the amount of money most people
earn and consequently their ability to acquire material possessions (Milner, 2013). In Russell’s
experiences, higher education yielded careers with longevity. This academic expectation started
during his secondary education process. Unlike some individuals, Russell believed in the benefits
of higher education as opposed to succeeding without it.

Aiden:

Yeah actually my mom she didn’t get to go off to college because she was pregnant with
me. So, like she wants me to like go off and do the things she never got to do. Yeah, she
actually, she went to college. She went to Northeastern [University]. Yeah and she
finished. And my dad he has bachelors too. He works as a security. Yeah. So, like he’s
like the boss. I know my mom she’s a certified care giver.
(View on Education) It’s important. Yeah very important. Initially, I wanted to like stay in the city but like my parents they don’t want me to so like they pushed me to like go… go away to college.

Aiden’s parents encouraged him to attend college away from home, which is different from what his mother was afforded to do because she was pregnant with him. Parental engagement, in the form of actively discussing educational issues with Black males, increases their likelihood of being successful (Scott et al., 2013). In comparison to Charles’ mother who was unable to finish her collegiate aspirations due to her pregnancy. His parents’ insight of a college education, in addition to the collegiate environment is significant to the advocacy of higher education.

Donald:

I believe she (mom) has some college. She works in the post office. Well I know he (dad) was in the Navy. And I don’t know what he does now.

They didn’t want me like having like a dead-end job. So, they wanted like more opportunities for me. That’s mainly it. Right there. I just knew even my high school cus [because] I went to a college prep school.

(Reason to enroll) I don’t really know have my own reason I gotta figure that out. I just knew I didn’t want to just be at home. I was working but I didn’t want to be at home. I was working but I didn’t want to keep that job either.

Although, neither one of his parents graduate from college, they understood the necessity of a college education. Parental engagement, in the form of actively discussing educational issues with Black males, increases their likelihood of being successful (Scott et al., 2013). His parents’ decision to have him an attend a high school specifically designed to prepare students for college set the framework for education path. We have known for some time that students who perform well in high school also do well academically in college (Strayhorn, 2013).

Quentin:
My mom had a bachelor’s degree. She got her Bachelor’s from Olivet University. She got that when she was, it was a minute ago. About 28 years old when she got it. Yeah, she was 28. Dad? He… he doesn’t have a degree. He went to Western Illinois for six years, but he didn’t get a degree. He’s a … he’s janitor. My mom is a she’s going working on her doctorates right now.

My family believes education is a must. Like I had to go to school and I have to I have to be successful. And during, during at school. Cus [Because] I can’t you know, you taking out all of these loans and all of that you I know. Yeah school can definitely benefit you put you in positions to help you make connections with people. It can help you become a man. Cus [Because] you all on your own.

(Reasons to enroll) *Laughs* My mom definitely. I always wanted to go to college. Because it’s like that when you’re a kid. And you have a mom that’s or a family not even just my mom but my family. My grandma, my grandpa all of them. You know they always told me to go to school, stay in school. Why did they tell me when I was a kid to be successful? They think it’s a path to success. That’s not always true. That’s because you go to school that doesn’t mean you’re going to be successful. It’s the work that you put in school. And you know the different avenues that, it’s a lot of avenues that you can go. It’s a lot of routes you can take.

Although, Quentin differed in opinion about the means to success, he opted to follow his family’s educational expectations. Parents and mentors of Blackboys should talk with their sons about the importance of hard work and perseverance, dispelling any myths that assume “natural talent” or “sheer” over sustained effort (Strayhorn, 2013). Quentin differentiated the means of obtaining success, he specified the process of higher education, is the ultimate benefit in comparison to the end goal of graduating. His mention of the financial burden of taking out student loans can be deterring factor for some, but for him, it was a motivating factor to finish. Uniquely, Quentin believed higher education would positively impact him as a male.

Alexander:

I think. I don’t think my mom finished high school. She’s a bus driver right now. She’s the only one still working. She loves it. I don’t know why *Laughs* And my dad he started (college) but never finished.

(View on education) Very high…very high. Because they held me to the highest standard. So, if I came home with anything less than a B. Yeah, I would have
consequences. Like my mom would try to take my phone. She wouldn’t try it. She would take my phone.

(Reasons to enroll) My mom and my dad. They pushed me. They wanted me to come here like they wanted me to come to college see how it is. Get a better education and get my degree. Cus [Because] it’s something they really never done. Like in our family. Like I have cousins that that have like, but they’re older than me. they’re 30. In their 30s… 20s… And they just want me to get it for myself and help pave the way for my little sisters and my little brother. And my uncles played a big role in it too.

Although Alexander’s parents did not graduate from college, they thought it was important for him to go away to college and have those experiences. Black college students struggle with adjustment, which directly and indirectly affect their personal well-being, achievement, and odds of graduating from college (Woldoff et al., 2011). His extended family, specifically older cousins and uncles, did attend college, which resulted in his seamless transition to college because of the advice he received. Black students for being less sophisticated in their values, customs, and personal styles, for having limited life experiences, and for relying on local family and friends as their social networks while in college (Woldoff et al., 2011). However, he recognized the age gap of influence between his older cousins and his younger siblings.

Bernard:

And my mom, she’s a nurse as well. And my dad he’s a cab driver but he just went back to Nigeria like last month because he has a business out there. Let me see, so my mom she, she went to college. She went to college. She, she ummm she actually got done with her undergrad she took a break and then she came back for her masters. Got her masters. My dad he didn’t go to college but umm he’s still works every day. Still try to provide for the family.

They [his family] view education as very important. Actually, you know in today’s society. Being a Black male, you know like a necessity. So, it’s like it’s important to get an education. And they just want you, they just want us to finish college. Just because it’s like I don’t know why is that. To be honest. But I guess it’s just like a way of just like it’s like an accomplishment that you can’t really you know describe. Cus [Because] you, majority of you know of Black males they see, “oh yeah you can’t finish college, or you know in jail you going to end up as a statistic”. So just you know going to college making
a you know a future for myself. And making them proud. I guess they just want to see
that the most.

What actually made, made me want to go to college was 2006. Just actually just building
a future for myself and you know study occupational therapy and just being just having
like having the college experience. Now, I also my brothers went to college and my mom
went to college just like following in their footsteps and you know just trying to
accomplish what they ummm what their goal was as well. Not just making my parents
proud. I felt like you know having a college degree. I felt like that’s one of the best
accomplishments I can give them. That just you know beside you know giving them a
home. Which would be one of my main accomplishments and achievements to give back
to them and show them that yeah, I can do this on my own that you know me well
basically.

(Reasons to enroll) Ummm I’d say… (college) was not to close from home and not too
far from home. So, like you know in case of emergency I just felt like more home. It’s
like an hour 30 away. So that’s not a, that was a big part of it. Not too far not to close.

It’s interesting that Bernard mentioned his father had two occupations; in America, he
was cab driver, in his native country, he was a business owner. This difference is symbolic
epecially after discovering his father did not attend college. Wealth inequality between Whites
and racial/ethnic minority immigrants signals that factors like prejudice, discrimination, and
racism affect immigrant life chances (Painter et al., 2016). This difference could’ve set a
precedence of success according to America’s standard (Painter et al., 2016). In this way,
immigrants' racial/ethnic status—as well as their skin tone—affects their abilities to navigate the
social environment and influences their job opportunities, social connections and, ultimately,
assets and wealth (Painter et al., 2016). Despite obtaining success by a different standard, his
mother chose to pursue higher education and had the same expectation for Bernard and his
brothers as Black males in America. Bernard was aware of the stereotypical struggle Black males
faced to enroll in higher education. African American males resent being stereotyped (Braxton-
Newby & Jones, 2014). Like Randle, Brian and Aiden, distance was also a determining factor for
choosing this college.
Jimmy:

I never wanted to, to be honest. I didn’t think it was for me per se college was something I would want to do. Cus [Because] for some odd reason, I just never felt comfortable in school around students. Never had like a great time. I can remember. Within that community like students and everything. Without that I just didn’t talk to people. Ummm what changed and made me wanna come to college was the… the importance of getting an education. When I got to meet all these people my mother has now, now works with cus [because] she’s, sells, picking big bank like six figures wow and like all these people she’s met. And all the accomplishments they had within school. The benefits of having a degree at this time. Cus [Because] I mean how many people having these degrees going the entrepreneur route and you still need you know certification that you are capable of doing this job. You need longevity you need you know something that’s good for now. Like you need something that extends like I’m still making money. So, if this product doesn’t sell and you make more and now, I’m an entrepreneur and now where do I go now.

Well you better go to college. You ain’t staying here. You’re not going to work either. You, if you don’t know what you’re going to do. You better find something you, you need to do something. If that’s going to trade school, find a passion. Find a skill that’s you know you need some form of skills or schooling. You need to learn a skill.

Jimmy was the only participant to express his apprehensions of enrolling in higher education due to his previous social experiences in school. This demonstrates the variety of factors outside of socioeconomic status, access, and race that contribute to challenges for Black males in higher education. Black males who overcame their environmental obstacles became successful in graduating from high school and college (Scott et al., 2013). Like Russell, Jimmy observed the firsthand benefits of higher education in the form of a higher salary. He believed graduating was simply the ability to produce a receipt that you completed a task. Jimmy’s mother instill very strict guidelines for his options for post-secondary education, but they all revolved around being productive and acquiring some form of official training. Although school was a primary viable, option, like Brian, choosing a trade was a close second. Because he didn’t have the option to stay home and not contribute, despite his home life wasn’t volatile or unsafe.
Conclusion

This section was significant to the research in the identification of developmental factors of self and relationships with others, specifically from family background and influences. It is important to understand the varying reason Black males decided to enroll in college, higher education. More Black men in the United States are in jail than in college, specifically one out of every three young Black men is under the control of the criminal justice system (Walker, 2003). None of the participants stated they wanted to enroll in college to start their criminal enterprise, nor did they desire to become a negative statistic of Black male encounters with law enforcement officers. These negative statistics can appear in the form of excessive use force claims, contributing to the mass incarceration, or being unjustly surveilled by law enforcement officers. This section outlined the authentic reasons for enrolling into college. They were primarily to follow the social norm of attending college, being the first in their family to attend or to establish themselves as a viable candidate for employment. Low-income, first-generation students become a larger component of higher education, institutions need to dispel stereotypical ideas about disadvantage groups, more specifically, Black male college students are a unique, underrepresented population (Miller & Tatum, 2008).

View of White People

Through the 15 participant interviews, the code View of White People occurred repeatedly. There were three subcategories that emerged from View of White People as developmental factors for Black males’ perceptions of law enforcement officers on a college campus. The three subcategories were adolescent experiences of racism, cultural or social
differences of White people, and innate, perceived physical descriptors of law enforcement officers. Eight participants admitted having encountered what they considered a form of racism from White people during their early adolescent years. These encounters varied from harsh, isolating instructions from White authority figures, racial isolation during peer activities, and disruption of gatherings or events. 10 participants shared experiences of how they perceived White people to be noticeably socially or physically different from themselves, or Black people in general. These participant-led distinctions are significant to this research because it describes how they perceive and response to the differences between themselves and White people.

As mentioned in the previous section, Black Identity influenced the participants’ predisposition of mistrust of White people. For example, Randle, Darrius, and Kevin specifically shared family members had conversations with them about appropriate conduct both in public and private due to their race. To combat the negative impact of racial awareness, parents of children of color engage in conscious racial socialization, defined by one scholar as including cultural socialization, preparation for bias, and promotion of mistrust (Dowd, 2018). Despite these Black families’ preemptive, precautionary conversations, implementation of historical pride, and positive imagery of success with the Black households, these Black males in this research study still experiences long-lasting encounters of racism with White people. Interestingly, individually, but collectively the Black male participants expressed how these generated thoughts and first-hand experiences created a social division between themselves and White people. Subsequently, their Black, adolescent pasts are adversely associated with residual biases in White males who are now adults, specifically law enforcement officers. Young children have been characterized as having a strong, one-sided orientation to adults as authorities that is based on a reverence for age, size, and power (Laupa & Turiel, 1986).
This next section will detail the participants’ first experiences of racism during their adolescent development years. These experiences were significant to their influences of perception of White people as they transitioned into adulthood as Black males. Braxton-Newby & Jones (2014) argue Black adolescent males were socialized to mask their feelings and to control their behavior and they face danger, if they failed to do so.

Adolescents’ First Experiences of Racism

Joseph shared his first encounter of adolescent experiences of racism. He described the demographic changes in his neighborhood after the 2008 recession. Joseph associated his neighborhood with a low economic status, deteriorating businesses, and predominantly Black residents. For example, he noted the mass exodus of White residents replaced by an influx of minorities as the economy fluctuated. Joseph’s transition from a private, catholic school institution to a public school where most of the students were White or Hispanic. These social and academic transitions began to highlight Joseph’s recognition between himself and his peers:

Yeah. So, I mean I guess I… that’s like when I was around 9-10ish that when I really starting felling like I was Black and experiencing racism for the first time. So, when we first came over here. It was White people. Then they all moved out when they seen all of the Black people coming in. Then like when that whole 2008 recession thing hit. It was like nobody on the block and then now it’s all these Mexicans like coming over there. So, I went a Black catholic school but then we couldn’t afford to go there so then I went to another school which was White and Hispanic and that was like naw. That was horrible. Hmmm I guess when I went to the other school that’s when I really felt they was calling me niggers, snickers bar, they was calling me burnt steak. They was calling me all of kinda stuff. So, I started knock them White kids out.

*Laughs*

In addition to the financial transition of not being able to afford to continue to attend his previous school, Joseph had to transition to an educational system where his peers and teachers did not look like him. And regardless of schools chosen, challenges remain for Black parents to
prepare their children for implicit bias and stereotypes that devalue their children in school (Dowd, 2018). Joseph alluded to being called names and even racial slurs at his previous school, but declined accepting the name calling at his new school, where the kids were predominantly White. This is often a game of insults and put downs deeply rooted in the African American culture, where African Americans may understand this teasing as funny banter (Fisher et al., 2015). For example, Joseph differentiated the way he felt when his peers at his predominantly White kids called him racial slurs and then called him unfamiliar names, such as “burnt steak”.

The Imbalance of Power theory overlaps with the definition of bullying that highlights that bullying involves an imbalance of power between the bully and the victim (Fisher et al., 2015). Even though Joseph didn’t know what it meant, he knew the name calling referred to his skin dark color and physical differences.

This process of racial awareness and racial socialization intensifies in middle childhood, from six to twelve, when children to a greater degree move beyond their family and engage in the process of identity formation (Dowd, 2018). Instead of processing his hurt feelings, Joseph resorted to violence after his experiences of racism from his peers. This experience was problematic and further validated the notion that young Black males were violent, lacked self-control, and displayed disruptive behavior in school. Beginning in the 1980s, poor Black men were widely conceptualized as members of an “underclass” that was characterized by violence, aggression, and idleness (Dottolo & Stewart, 2008).

Similar to Joseph, prior to sharing his experience of racism, Randle first described the demographic makeup of his childhood predominately White neighborhood. According to Randle, the niceness of his neighborhood was defined by the number of White residents. Due to the demographics of his neighborhood and Randle’s residency there, it appeared as if Randle’s social
integration and acceptance was to be expected because he was among the residence in that affluent neighborhood.

My neighborhood, I lived close to Evergreen and Beverly. So, you know it’s a lot of White people around. So, when I had to go to camp. I had to interact with the White kids. But I hated camp. So, I had got kicked out cus [because] I just hate camp. I don’t like authority I mean I’m better now. But back then especially somebody who didn’t look like me. I was just like. Who are you? It’s just crazy, you know. A lot of you know growing up, you don’t really realize some things being racist. But now I look back like that’s what it was. It’s just like. I probably I didn’t know exactly what it was back then. But my mom always let me know that I’m Black. I can’t do what these White kids do cus [because] my consequences are not gon be the same as theirs. Well, it was my camp. It was in evergreen and yeah it was a lot of White kids and always getting picked last or the activities we would do was something, I, you know, I didn’t care for you know. They would try to relate to you know things I watched; they didn’t watch. Things they talked about. I was like what are y’all talking about. You know just differences in style, relatable at that age I just stopped like them cus [because] I honestly, I couldn’t relate to them. I guess, White people. Not, not liking them. Not being able to relate to them fully. Like I can’t relate some of our people.

Randle’s transition to his new neighborhood was just the beginning of his experiences of prejudice. Randle specifically described his difficulty of acclimation of White authority. He developed a dislike for camp after interacting with White kids and receiving instruction and correction from White adults. Children’s evaluations of adult and peer authority were based on a combination of age and position in the social context (Laupa & Turiel, 1986). Randle’s interaction with his White peers would later become as a significant factor in his feelings and attitudes towards law enforcement who did not look like him, White law enforcement officers. Moreover, children accept the legitimacy of commands not only from adults but also from peers insofar as they hold positions of authority (Laupa & Turiel, 1986). Randle also expressed despite his neighborhood, his mother still made sure he interacted with Black peers through various activities like church and cousins’ houses. Males and racial minorities may be socialized to be more resilient towards experiences of peer harassment or experience greater stigma to admitting
to being bullied (Waasdorp et al., 2013). Randle’s anticipation of backlash of racism resulted in welcoming violent encounters with White people.

Randle described another experience of adolescent racism from a White, adult male:

I was with my church and we went to navy pier and some White dude was on the sidelines talking to the kids and I was like who the fuck is this dude. I talked to him. He was like, I walked up slowly. I was like and he didn’t really notice me. I was like just lingering around and he was like y’all like watermelon and he was like y’all like chicken. He was saying ridiculous shit like that. So, I just got to flaming that shit out of his ass. Like, I might have said some racially insensitive remarks. But he was saying it to like kids and I’m like bro…what’s wrong with you. I was like I’m going to beat the shit out of you bro. Like get out of here.

Although, Randle was still a young adolescent, when he encountered an adult, White male making racist remarks, he felt the responsibility to challenge him. After Randle threatened the unknown, older White man with violence, then the racist remarks ceased, this began to build a pattern deciding to end racist remarks with violence. The threat of violence resulting from racism is prevalent early on and the theme of experiencing, confronting, and overcoming racism (Brooks & Hampton, 2005). In addition, to the race difference, Randle highlighted the older age difference of the male. This is an example of how White men used Black people’s lack of understanding and experience to challenge and stop firsthand experiences of racism. Understanding of racism was crucial, as this would not only help frame their experiences, but also contribute to a better understanding of their reality living within a predominantly White city (Waasdorp et al., 2013).

The influence of media also greatly impacted Randle’s anger towards White people. Randle recalled his reactions to various scenes of White kids being bullied. This was interesting because Randle did not say the White kids were being racist towards the Black kids, he simply recognized and restated the difference in race as a form of inequity of power. Later Randle
disclosed in this interview, these experiences in addition to movies where Black kids were bullied fueled his dislike of White people.

Uhh I mean… in my experiences you know in movies. It’s that Black kid and they getting bullied by White kids. It’s like when I was growing up seeing those movies, I was like I wish. I just wish, I’m just hoping for that moment that they really just try me.

Like Joseph and Randle, Brian also used his description of his childhood neighborhood as a precursor for confusion for the way he was treated by his peers. Class privilege does not insulate Black boys from racial profiling or police bias (Dowd, 2018). Once again, the higher number of White people seemed to determine the niceness of the area. Brian described how the racial makeup changed over time, after the older population of White people left the neighborhood, an influx of Black people entered.

But like Lynwood at the time, ok, it was like White people lived over here and Black people lived they were here. Yeah but it’s like as you grew older all the White people moved out so now it’s now majority Black people. So, I remember like the baseball team kids from the north like the White people they had brought them from the north side they was scared to like…they cancelled the games.

The power of race was demonstrated through two first-hand experiences. First, the repopulation of Black people in his neighborhood and the simultaneous exodus of White people and the fear of safely of White people having the ability and impact to cancel athletic games within a school district. The erroneous portrayals of crime and community, community race and class identities, and concerns over neighborhood change all contribute to place-specific framing of the crime problem (Chaney & Robertson, 2013). This type of structure of power can allow young Black youths to feel inadequate. Parents’ perception of neighborhood cohesion may partly determine the frequency and content of parents’ racial socialization messages and may account for variation in the degree to which parents’ experiences with racial discrimination forecast their racial socialization messages (Saleem et al., 2016). For example, their school and neighborhoods
are considered by others as safe enough for them, but not for visiting White people and their children. During adolescence, awareness of self and exploration of where one fits in society is critical in the formation of identity (Fisher et al., 2015). Brian then shared two experiences of racism through the use of racial slurs in his childhood and adulthood on his college campus:

Ummm has something like that I had called a nigger like uhh I was like in 2nd grade cus [because]I went to school in the suburbs like White kids.

So, I was coming outside and some White dude he was just nigger… nigger… nigger! I’m like what bro... I’m like this shit crazy. Yeah it was like down the street.

Like the White dude just, I think he was drunk because he just start screaming yelling it was me and another Black dude right behind me. I ain’t know. I thought he was talking to him. I thought he knew him and was trying to fight him. So. *laughs*

Brian’s casual acceptance of racism at any level or situation is problematic. In this case, Brian recalled the White male appeared to be intoxicated. Even more worrisome, he was with another Black male whom he did not know, but neither of them was bothered by this act of racism on a campus of higher education and by a male that was their peer. Further, White privilege, or the set of unearned privileges and advantages Whites receive in the broader society further complicates the imbalance of power hypotheses (Fisher et al., 2015). Even though, there isn’t a Richter scale for hurtfulness or detrimental impact of racism from the White peers or adults, it appears that experiences of racism can stem from childhood and actualize in adulthood experiences. It is the “cool pose” that the outsider must recognize if he is to assist the African American male to understand and work with him in adapting alternative responses, such as hurt, pain, a wanting to cry, all the range of human emotions there are; however, because of history, culture, and how some African American males are socialized, these emotions are buried deep inside (Braxton-Newby & Jones, 2014). Jimmy stated:
Shoot… Ummm I was little. Like, this is funny but uhh I wanted to go to a friend’s house. He’s a White boy. And we played on the baseball team together. And after the team got disbanded. I wanted to hang out with him. His mother kept putting me off. Every single time. Like ohhh next time…next time… next time. Like dang can I hang out with him or something. Then come to find out, she doesn’t really support you know a diverse friend group for her son. Son doesn’t know that, but she doesn’t support it so. That’s when I’m like damn. Can’t be a friend to this kid because now he’s being conditioned not appreciate a friend other than someone of his skin color. So that’s out the window. So, I can’t really kick it with him. So, I was like ok cool. Whatever.

Jimmy appeared to assume his social acceptance and team bonding with his White peers translated to acceptance by their parents. Jimmy experienced racism in the form of avoidance. Despite experiencing similar, or even higher, instances of victimization by their peers, minority and male students may be less likely compared to White and female students to actually interpret their experiences as bullying (Lai & Kao, 2018). Beyond the limitations of sports, Jimmy desired a continued relationship with teammate, but his feelings of disappointment and confusion from the constant rejection. Considerable research demonstrates that cultural socialization messages mitigate the adverse effects of racial discrimination on youth’s internalizing symptoms, (Saleem et al., 2016). Jimmy’s association of how the characteristics of racism was developed and the process of conditioning that occurred between his friend and his friend’s mom, is similar to the sentiments of transferred matters of bias into their adulthood and respective professions. Youths develop and experience different social expectations based on the intersection of their race and gender as maturing adults (Saleem et al., 2016).

Like Randle, Jimmy, and Brian, Anthony’s initial experience with racism occurred during peer-related activities. The Imbalance of Power theory overlaps with the definition of bullying that highlights that bullying involves an imbalance of power between the bully and the victim (Fisher et al., 2015). Anthony also described his predominantly White neighborhood where he attended summer camps:
It’s a lil bit in Illinois so it’s all southern Illinois so it’s like a real White town but that’s where my mom was going to school at. So, we had a summer basketball camp. So, I was there playing basketball this that and the third. And I remember they we separating teams. The only Black guy there or Black boy there and so they was like I was like an outstanding guy so when we first get there. We just practicing. Shooting hoops and sparring. Waiting to everybody finally arrive at the time. And so, we they separating teams already early. So, I remember. They was like… ooh go down there with the brown boy. And I remember he said that, and I was just like makes a face. Ok and then. I remember the dude called me and was like eh brown boy, so I look at my shirt do I have anything on me that’s brown. Like that that day I told my mom that like after the camp and she was like how did you like it. I told her like a week after that. Because I know my mom, she’s ghetto. “It also made me view like this world is big because in this White town like that where it’s a lot of White people, so I call it a White town. They viewed me as brown boy... but I can go 10 minutes down the street back and they’ll view me as Anthony.

However slight or intrusive, racism is still impactful. Many White people seem to fear that any action during an encounter with an individual from a different race, no matter how small, might be construed as harboring an individual prejudice and will thus expose biases (Whitehead, 2015). Although Anthony’s peer wasn’t blatant in his disparaging remarks, the racial difference by the individual making the comment was adversely impactful. Indirect bullying such as exclusion or verbal harassment does not capture experiences with racist harassment and name-calling, nor does it capture other forms of peer victimization (Lai & Kao, 2018). Prior to this experience, he was accustomed to living amongst and socially interacting with White people, despite not having any prior personal experiences of racism, Anthony understood that something did not feel right. In this situation, Whites find themselves with privilege in the broader society that may or may not transfer into settings in which they are the numerical minority (Fisher et al., 2015). Young Black adolescents appear to rationalize racism. Anthony went through the analytical process of what his White peer could have meant by his name calling. First, Anthony excused the actions away by taking wrongful accountability for the name calling. This is often how young Blacks began to acclimate being accused and surveilled. It
is important to note, how Anthony, like many young Black males, don’t address the perceived wrongdoing done to them by White people. That’s why he didn’t tell his mother, another adult and authority figure who had the power to rectify the issue. Lastly, even as young adolescents, Black boys are able to differentiate the difference in race even if they are unable to articulate it. Anthony then shared his adulthood experience with racism:

Like they told me like this guy racist. He’ll never get you to put the money in your hand. And cus I was the cashier. He would always put it on the table because he don’t want to touch you. Everyday. He would just (demonstrated throwing money on the table). And walk off and he and like I ain’t gon lie… don’t …certain White people that do stuff like that?

While working alongside diverse group of individuals, his co-workers were able to inform him that certain customers were racist. Anthony didn’t seem to be bothered or surprised by the accusation of the racist man nor his actions. Anthony appeared to rationalize this action not just with racist people, but specifically White people. Americans generally believe racism is a personal failing and an individual problem; to be a racist signifies ignorance of the appropriate ways for relating to difference (Whitehead, 2015). The association of negative behavior and actions with the character of White people was a common reoccurring thought amongst participants. Unlike the previously mentioned participants, although Quentin described his neighborhood to be nice, his experience of racism was unique. Quentin experienced racism at a place he thought he was familiar and safe at. He thought his ability to pay for his items and frequency in the store would exempt him from any forms of prejudice:

But the new employees bought the store I guess, and it was in my old neighborhood. So, I went in the store and umm it was a White guy. He was uhh or Caucasian guy. He was uhh he, he you know he rung up the orders and things of that nature. And I never stolen anything, so it was just like when I went in there and he accuse me of stealing. You know he was like you need to take off your hoodie. And I’m just like no ain’t no signs that say I gotta take off my whole hoodie. And didn’t have a shirt on under my hoodie at the time. So, it’s like I was going to be breaking the rules anyway. But didn’t even have my hood
on or nothing and he just you know profiled me right there, right then and there. And he thought I wasn’t going to buy what I was finna buy because I had a whole bag of stuff. Like I had a whole bag of chips and you know pizzas and stuff. And he just profile me, and he thought I wasn’t going buy, buy, buy what I had. And, and I ended up buying it. He kinda just looked like he kinda just looked stupid.

During Quentin’s interview, he shared that he frequently visited this convenient store and was familiar with the previous management, and new owners. Quentin relied on his past reputation as a paying customer to dispel any doubts that he was involved in any criminal activity, such as stealing. Like Anthony, Quentin surveyed himself to make sure he was abiding by the rules in order to avoid any potential negative encounter or problem. Although, there wasn’t a posted sign instructing patrons to remove their hoods from their hooded sweatshirts, but he also knew he couldn’t enter without a shirt. Racial identity taps into a specific discourse that constructs and stereotypes criminals as occupying intersectional marginalized social positions defined by race, class, and gender (Dottolo & Stewart, 2008). In addition to being surveilled by the police, Black males also are surveilled by White business owners. Quentin appeared offended by the small dollar amount of the food items he intended to buy. It is important to note that, despite the mistreatment, accusation, and feelings of shame, Quentin still made a purchase with this business. Black people continue to financial support entities of racism and racist encounters due to convenience. Social identities are not only multiple and complicated but result from social locations that are situated within systems of oppression (Dottolo & Stewart, 2008).

Unlike the above-mentioned participants, when asked about his experiences with racism, Russell had a counterexperience of racism. Russell also prefaced his answer with the disclaimer of describing the niceness of his neighborhood by including the predominant makeup of White people.
It was a good neighborhood. I mean like its mostly White neighborhood. But like there was like a couple of Black people on my street. The first middle school I went to in Naperville. It was like all White. It was just like mostly White school. So, I was in like sometimes, I was the only Black kid in the class. But something like predominantly White suburbs. I mean like sometimes teachers would recognize I was the only Black, only like Black person in the classroom. And sometimes, it’s just like special treatment like sometimes it just give me like a little bit extra help when I didn’t feel like I needed it, but yeah.

Russell highlighted his academic and social experiences as the only Black person in his class in a positive manner. He interpreted extra attention as a constructive factor towards his academic performance. As a result, it might be argued that the ill-behaved student can reasonably expect more favorable treatment from teachers, in terms of allocation of teaching resources and the application of evaluation and sanction procedures (Stevens, 2009). Although, he later revealed he had race-related experiences with White law enforcement officers, Russell did not have any additional information regarding his experiences any racism with any nonminorities. Interestingly, Russell’s view of White people has been overall positive and helpful. In comparison to the contrary data provided by the other participants who associate their adolescent experiences of racism as a contributing factor to their views of White people; therefore, developmental factor to their perception of law enforcement officers on a college campus.

This next section will share the participants’ experiences of adapting to the effects of whiteness through their everyday experiences as Black males. Economic, political, and social barriers create role strain, especially for African American males, that prevent them from carrying out traditional expectations of “being a male” in White society (Braxton-Newby & Jones, 2014). Alexander (2004) stated, “Whiteness has to be acknowledged as something that is performative, something that does something in the world, or at least in the moment of its
engagement, something that is linked with access, the social construction of power, worth and value that leads to the practice of privilege.” (p. 4)

**Perceived Social and Cultural Differences From White People**

While some participants struggled to comfortably define their Black identity, there were some key factors that they were sure of. For example, participants were certain they were different from White people due to noticeable physical features, such as skin tone, hair texture, and ability to inherit or acquire wealth. The minorities experience their mistreatment regardless of their individual differences in education and ability, in status, physical appearance or place of residence (Ogbu, 2004). This section of the paper will demonstrate the perceived social differences between the participants themselves and White people. Joseph stated:

But then like when I get around White people like I really just grasp on to that. I don’t wanna be one of them *laughs* Oreo type people. Just because I just hated them with a passion. So, it really made me grasp on being a Black person. You know I mean when you Black and you acting White. I mean I guess just wanting to fit in they culture. Now, if you grew up and your parents are well off. Then you just grow up in a better hand then that’s who you are. Yeah, that’s one thing. I’m not gon judge you but if like you denying who you are as a Black person .And you just trying to be White just to fit it with them. Then like…come on.

Joseph provided another example he equated with being different than White people:

Education, privilege. Yeah, all the things you can’t get. Mainly because we [Black people] holding ourselves back. I mean, I don’t think it’s like people love to say… “aww the White man this that and the other” but I’m like naw. I’m like I know for a fact when I was teenager before I was reading a book if was my guys who would be saying that like nobody White. I’m like yeah. When I’m walking down the street, I’m not looking for nobody White to run up on me, so like I feel like it’s It’s our community. So that’s bad.

While he previously shared how his mother scheduled regular visits with him and his sisters to museums to learn about Black history and become culturally aware, he disliked pretentious Black people who he thought “acted White.” Black Americans in general see
successful participation in White institutions as an assimilation, a one-way acculturation, or a subtractive process, that takes away their Black identity (Ogbu, 2204). In this act, he recognized the difference in family upbringing in comparison to assimilation for the sake of being socially accepted. Black students have strategies for coping with peer pressures against “acting White” such as family upbringing, continued parental supervision, including screening their friends, and monitoring their schoolwork (Ogbu, 2004). He also defined education as symbolic privilege of being White but offered a counterstory of its advantage. He believed Black people were responsible for the delay in resources or successful outcomes due to their own impoverished mindset. For example, instead of being positively recognized for reading by his Black peers, he would be teased, a common ridicule, namely, teasing and harassment, endured by academically achieving adolescents or “nerds” (Ogbu, 2004). Additionally, instead of fearing being robbed by White people, whom he was taught to not trust, he was more fearful of being robbed by someone who looked like him.

Randle also shared his experience of realization that he was physically different from his White peers.

Ok. I think the first time I realized. It was a difference was I think I was in either Macy’s or Carson’s and there was this White boy and he had like hella acne. And I was like “mom that ummm that White dude like look at his face it’s all red stuff “and she was like, she slap me and was like “aye that’s rude don’t do that.”

He continued,

Well it was my camp ummm it was in evergreen and yeah it was a lot of White kids and always getting picked last or the activities we would do was something I you know I didn’t care for you know. Ummm they would try to relate to you know, things I watched. They didn’t watch. Things they talked about. I was like what are y’all talking about. You know just differences in style, relatable at that age I just stopped like them cus [because] I honestly, I couldn’t relate to them I guess, White people. Not… not liking them. Not being able to relate to them fully. Like I can relate to some of our people.
He then shared how his childhood experiences impacted his academic choices in higher education:

Made me want to be in more Black studies courses. Mainly because most people in that class going to be Black and your teacher is going to be Black and it’s kinda like well my experiences in that environment I don’t really have to take notes because that shit just sinks in, but when it’s like a White instructor it’s just dry as hell and I have to write some shit down unless I’m going to fall asleep and completely forget about that shit. It’s just dry as hell. Like the way they teach it’s not for us. Like sitting down just sitting down and looking at a person with a dry ass tone of voice. I feel like for most Black students, they’re not, they not really aware. Like so I realize White people keep stuff for themselves they really do. So, we hear about opportunities and we like I never heard about that. They’ll be “what? An email came out about it?” And you’ll be like it must be emailed to White people because I didn’t an email.

Randle described his first realization of physical descriptors between himself and a White boy. His memory included being openly reprimanded by his mother due to his unfamiliarity with the differences in skin tone and complexion, ultimately races. Randle had to process this physical difference in appearance due to race between himself and another young White boy. After his first incident of learning the differences between himself and others, Randle and his family moved to a predominately White neighborhood. Randle described his firsthand interactions with White peers and White adults. Randle struggled to socially related to his White peers, which resulted in him feeling isolated.

Several theories such as the imbalance of power which correlates the group threat theory and constrict theory explain the dynamics of intergroup racial contact and potential contribution to peer victimization (Fisher et al., 2015). This division didn’t initiate from a source of dislike, rather lack of relatability or connection like many childhood experiences; this affected his adulthood view of White people. For example, Randle purposefully enrolled in Black studies classes where the majority of his peers, including the professor, were Black. With students of color, there may be a natural affinity between instructor and student, for example, Black students
and Black instructors may have prior experiences of discrimination in common, based on their daily experiences living in a society that is still struggling to overcome racism (Chiteji, 2010). He believed he learned better and was more receptive to authority figures that looked like him. Furthermore, he believed White people were secretive about academic and financial resources and did not inform Black people. This is problematic when the issue of equity for access and resources is questioned.

Similar to Randle, Darrius believed lack of information played a significant role in the difference between White and Black people.

I can see why Black events get shut down. Black people be tweaking I get it. Shit gets real sometimes. So, you now these Black people at the same time having a relationship having the guideline maybe a person in a situation would know I should do this… they bussing [extreme level of fun] party that’ll be dumb as hell you know what I’m saying that type of, it would be avoided most of the time. If we, like I said, we develop relationship with each other. So, I think that important as well. So.

Darrius referred to Black students’ lack of knowledge of rules and regulations regarding hosting social events both on and off campus. Darrius speculated if Black students were better informed about guidelines of hosting events as well as had a relationship with the appointed administration, then Black students would avoid disappointment and feelings of discrimination when an unsanctioned event is disrupted. Although Randle and Darrius had similar perspectives, Anthony added details about perks of understanding the cultural and social differences in both Black and White friends:

I realized that I, I need to I need I needed to have more Black friends and I needed a good balance of White friends cus to view the campus two different ways so I can find the middle which is the finesse line. The finesse line. Cus [Because] it’s always a finesse in everything. So, I’d say cus [because] you know if you have a good amount of Black friends, they know the finesse they know what classes to take to guarantee you get an A. That’s, that’s what you always need. We need ETT [an undergraduate course in Educational Technology, Research and Assessment]. We need kinesiology. Relaxation or whatever. I need them classes. I need A classes. But you also need them ESA [an
undergraduate course in the Department of Economics] classes to take to finesse around because them White kids well not the White kids but like yeah say, it’s like… mostly White people.

Jimmy and Charles noticed the differences in opportunities for social and cultural connections between Black and White peers on his college campus. The historical legacy of segregated schools and colleges can determine the prevailing climate on campus and directly influence the environment for racial and ethnic diversity, PWIs, have a history of exclusionary practices and limited access opportunities for minority students, meaning that White students constitute the majority of their student bodies (Karouti, 2016). Jimmy stated:

It comes from ummm lack of knowledge you know. You don’t know what’s really going on out here. Like for instance, we just had, had an issue with the White Greeks because they’re throwing a party on the streets you know. Loud music. All of that but they don’t realize why they’re doing that. Why they get to do that. It’s because we wanna always do things sneak. Sneaky and stuff like that. We wanna, always wanna try to break a rule. Why? Be... you know we always wanna …like you know… be defiant to rules and regulations. When you’re in a predominantly White town, White institution. 57% of them probably 13… [to] 16% of us, including Hispanics. We’re severely out numbered. But yet, you don’t understand the reason why they’re getting privileges we don’t get. We don’t put into our community. Our African American, our whole community, we don’t invest in things. They [ Black people] want to talk about. Oh, we put our money into other ventures and other avenues and stuff like that, but you don’t want to invest in what’s going on right now. We’re going through a lot. We can, people really think it’s just so many African Americans here. It’s not. This campus is so big. You don’t even know what’s going on here. You know up north, you know north a little bit you got Greek row. You know like you got uhh what’s it called Hillcrest; I think that’s what it’s called. Everybody, all the White folks, all the parties are there. Every day this week. You go like south side, east side, then like a little...little corner you got your little like pockets of Black, of our Black community and we all know each other. Yeah of course. And we don’t move…we don’t make moves. We don’t do anything. Cus we’re comfortable just little bit of opportunity. That’s our problem. We get to comfortable. I’m uncomfortable. That’s how I feel. I’m uncomfortable. That all these White folks. Have these opportunities. And get to do things and how it means to get extravagant events and stuff and we cannot get one thing off the ground because we don’t know how to just put our foot down and say, we demand more. We deserve for our people. We can, we are the culture right now. People want to be us. They play our music, every day. So, our campus is ill informed. Like our Black community, the Black community is ill informed. We don’t know what’s going on.
Jimmy spoke about the lack of understanding and resources that restrict Black peers from obtaining certain privileges granted to students on campus.

Charles stated:

The leaders as far as I don’t know all the leaders on campus but the people that’s behind the doors that, that make you know the laws or whatever for school, decisions for the school, they the ones that’s are really making sure that they have control of us. Right now. Blacks and I feel like the White…the White kids, they do as they please. Seriously they can. I’m, I looked at this when I first came. I was like ohhh they got more Greek houses for White kids. Why none for Black people. What’s wrong with that. That was just my thought. I was just very concerned about that too and then I’m like well why we don’t have why the Blacks. The center for Black studies so small. Every other center is so big. You know. But now they been talking about expanding it now, I heard. But that’s my main concern too. Why do they put us in a small hole and we, we the ones who created this? You know created certain things. We created a lot of things as a matter of fact.

Charles’ perception of cultural resources in problematic for a seamless transition for minorities into higher education. While some minorities are first generation college students, some require additional assistance to cope with leaving their families. The structural buildings are subtle reminders of the inadequacies students of color face on a college campus. the prevailing subculture at White institutions is hostile to Blacks, because faculty and deans remain insensitive to multicultural issue (Karouti, 2016). In contrary to Randle and Darrius, Anthony noted the differences between himself and his Black peers:

Cus [Because] I feel like it’s not a Black, not many Black males that out here. That can put you on to game like that because I feel like some Black people are more selfish as in not selfish but they know what their main priority is themselves, I can’t fault them for that because I get where they come from but at the same time it’s not always the fairest. Like, I honestly say a White kid if you viewed as his friend or his buddy or his pal or whatever he’ll definitely. Yeah, I finna go to the tutoring lab because I got this project due and he’ll do it with you. Or I, I just got this scholarship in the mail Anthony here look at this...cool. But then you’ll see like Black people, some Black people, they’ll once they certify they ticket, and they ticket punched. Then they’ll put you on they gotta make sure they certified first before they put you on. It’s because I feel like they think it’s a competition. I feel like it’s because there’s not that many successful Black people everywhere. They in the race with themselves. Where they feel like they in a race with everybody else. to actually be successfully like …and to me it’s not a race, but I get
where they coming from like I can miss out on this $1000 scholarship I put my homie on because what if it’s one more one $1000 left and its btw me and my homie. And they might pick him so let me make sure I get it first before they pick him.

Anthony recognized how a diverse friend group yields different resources. In order advance with academic ease, he believed Black people were more helpful, but under certain circumstances. For example, if the resources are limited, then the Black peers would withhold information until they have securely received their portions. This idea of self-preservation is still relevant to present day Black culture. Institutions with high proportions of White students adversely affect minority students’ academic achievement and create social conflicts, because PWIs limit the chances of cross-racial interactions, interracial friendships, and prevent students from attaining both social and educational benefits of diversity (Karouti, 2016).

Tobias shared his perspective of White people from a parental aspect.

You know how some parents like you know White parents have like ohhh if my kid get out of high school, I most definitely get a job for them if he doesn’t want to go to school. Like Black people don’t got that. So, it’s not like I can work with my dad’s business. Cus [Because] I’ve heard stories about that. Like yeah, my dad owns this so I can just work with them and make money. All I have to do is show up... get paid and come home. Like what? Must be nice. Like you know Black people don’t really get the same experiences as White people. You know like you know the job thing.

He continued:

Like my parents do this that and the other. Ummm I had knew a guy who literally was like, the not the worst of the worst, he was a super cool dude, but school-wise in a Black house. The stuff he did, would never, never even have a chance. He was like failing out of all of his classes. Ummm but yeah you know stuff like that, stuff White people talk about. I was at my mom’s house this that and the other and you know, they’re leaving for the weekend. My parents never left. My mom never the house like and when she did. Lights was on. She let only certain people know. I tried to bring somebody over she will see and hear everything. Like my parents ain’t never leaving the house. So, no parties at the house stuff like that. Man going on like trips. Ohh lets go to the sand dunes…I don’t even know where that’s at. Like and they would go on stuff like that you know how they talk….how they carry themselves completely different out of all of.
Tobias described the differences in family upbringing in regard to wealth and legacy. He shared the differences in post-secondary education options, which can determine one’s reasoning for enrolling in higher education. While racism can exist at multiple levels including institutional, environmental, cultural, and inter-personal, identifying individual racism may be problematic given that its identification is invariably based on one’s perception of a situation and/or interaction (Saleem et al., 2016). The stress factors that include the uncertainties of acceptance and employment may contribute to Black males’ apprehension to enroll into higher education. The possibility to mature independently and social responsibility was limited because Black parents don’t often leave their homes unattended or take vacations without their kids. While Tobias made a point about parental differences, he also referenced his disappointment in being unfamiliar with vacation places. Similarly, Kevin shared his belief that White people simply had different opportunities than Black people:

It’s like White people live in a fantasy land. Like a, like they lives is just more fun or something like it’s not the same as I didn’t think my life was going as a kid. But just like they just doing whatever they was doing I couldn’t even. This ain’t what we doing at home. If that makes sense. Uh huh or like you know having White peers or like richer Black peers. When I went to some schools and stuff. Right, so I remember, I had a friend and his daddy had a corvette right. And it was some people in my neighborhood you know like, they had cooler cars, but they didn’t have cooler cars for the reason that his daddy had a cooler car.

He continued,

And I shouldn’t be using it right because it’s not the case right. Ummm like I get this vibe of White people that they just like either they don’t like us or and mind you this is in general. I won’t just say White people don’t like us. They’re afraid of us. But they’re or they’re like…they don’t care about us. Like they’re indifferent about the outcome. Like and with each of those instances. There’s evidence. From this day and every day prior right. Ummm yeah, I just listen.

Kevin further explained his mistrust for White people,
I don’t know. I think some of it come from my parents. Don’t trust White people *laughs*. Ummm overreacting to things in the news and discussing things. Either from myself or with my peers and I’m just listening and maybe providing some news. But yeah, they always kinda let me know like man these White people, you know what I’m saying, these people not your friends. Right don’t get too comfortable around these people. Don’t let them to convince that they you know, that they are right. Like don’t fall for the okie doke [trap]. Right. So, even if you got one that’s cool, he one of the reasonable ones who got, don’t you feel me that don’t mean everybody in here cus somebody gon be the one who’s going you feel me somebody going to be the one to not care about you. Somebody going to be the one that going to do it to you. Somebody going to be the one who act like it’s with them but then when they sitting across from this people, they say you know what I’m saying, something different. Like and that’s something I’ve learned that they’ve instilled in me like when I was in school like these teachers ain’t your friends. Don’t get too comfortable when you talking to them. You know what I’m saying. Thinking that you can trust them and confide in them. And… And say you know talk to them comfortably you know what I’m saying because yes, some teachers is the ones that you can do that too. And then some of them say yeah, yeah ok. and then the next thing you know the dean walk up to you with a slip. Write down everything you was saying you know what I’m saying. You know. So, so it’s like it’s like a lack of I can’t really put too much trust in them right. So, I’m not always looking at them negatively but I’m always whenever, whenever the, the, you know what I’m saying, I’m like I’m on the other side with my hand on the gun *laughs* So, it’s like a metaphorical gun of course.

Kevin noted the difference in family upbringing with permissible acts that wouldn’t be tolerated in his household. Despite knowing “rich” Black people and White people, their demonstration of wealth was still different. Kevin made an interesting distinction of how his friend’s dad and males in his neighborhood both had nice cars, but the means in which they acquired them were possibly different. Kevin’s overall impression of how White people perceive Black people aligns with how the majority of young Black males feel. His statement supports the concept of family upbringing, generational knowledge, and impact of conversation warning of the woes of White people. White teachers tended to believe that the frequently misbehavior Black students contributed to their achievement gap. Perceived misbehavior may also be somewhat attributed to cultural differences and misunderstandings (Uhlenberg & Brown, 2002). Whether or not these punishments were deserved, being disciplined more often was disruptive to
a student’s opportunities for academic learning. The findings from this research inform intervention efforts designed to increase racial dialog among family members, help parents prepare their children for racial discrimination, and utilize neighborhood cohesion as a protective mechanism to help families address racial discrimination (Saleem et al., 2016). Kevin’s apprehension and interactions with White people transcends to White authority figures in education and later in law enforcement. Despite feeling this way, Kevin doesn’t dislike White people, but was weary of or cautious with them.

Donald also spoke about how his childhood experiences extended to his college campus:

Well when I was younger, I was sheltered so nothing really happened. Like as I got older. I still went to school in Chicago. Even though I was in the suburbs or whatever. And umm well, I felt comfortable in school cus [because] you know I went to school with a bunch of Black people, so you know it was just us. But like out of school say we go somewhere. Me and a couple friends go downtown or something I just feel weird. Because nobody’s really downtown, it’s like where are your people.

Donald provided another example,

Hmmm I mean this is not really that serious but like I went to an event or whatever at a school and they were having a bakery or something. And it was like… a lot of White people and me and my 8th grade class went. And it was just six of us and it was like 30 White people. And I’m like, I’m more, “Wow like it wasn’t like another … a Black person in sight so I guess that can be an event”. It made me feel like out of place. Like none of my people were there so.

Donald identified social differences with his White peers in the deficiency in number of Black peers around him and experienced the feeling of racial isolation. Racial socialization messages were examined separately; however, parents generally do not give racial socialization messages in isolation and the combination of racial socialization messages delivered may have different consequences for African American adolescents’ mental health (Saleem et al., 2016). In contrary to other participants, Russell and Aiden identified less issues of difference in the social differences with White people, specifically in academic settings.
Yeah cus [because] like the school I went too was like mostly, it was mostly like Black people [in the Caribbean], but there was like some people like different race like some people like Indian. Like some people like White, some people Mexican. But like that’s school was mostly Black and then when I came here. The first middle school I went to school in Naperville. It was like all White. It was just like mostly White school so. I just thought, I was just like wow. Just weird. Cus [Because] like I just think like people they were just so accepting of me. So, like I think like I remember that 6th grade year. I think it was really different to go to that school cus [because] everyone just so accepting of me and like I was just like hi my name is Russell and they, they just seem like generally, generally nice.

Russell presented a unique perspective migrating from another country. The notion of conceptualizing racism stemmed from the fact that they were viewed as different, having arrived from a country where they were the majority, racism, as a concept, was foreign to them (Waasdorp et al., 2013).

I feel like that same. The same. To me, the teachers are, they might teach a little different. But they all the same. Still help you no matter what. Haven’t really came across a teacher that just treated you a certain way because what you look like.

The incongruence between the White teacher’s indirect use of authority and the Black student’s expectation and respect for overt and direct use of authority can lead to conflict (Uhlenberg & Brown, 2002). Aiden didn’t feel any social differences but didn’t elaborate except from the teaching style of White teachers. While he didn’t experience any difference, adolescent males may find acclimation to academic settings from all Black to predominantly White, especially White authority figures.

**Law Enforcement Descriptors**

This section shares the participants’ perceived descriptors of an average law enforcement officer on their college campus. These generalized descriptors are critical to how the Black males in this study perceived law enforcement officers. This section is significant to this study because
it allowed each participant to express his preconceived perceptions of his expectations of the individual, he expected to encounter during an interaction with law enforcement. This expectation is a vital aspect of expected outcome and apprehension or distrust, despite any previous interactions or lack thereof with law enforcement officers. Previous research supports that citizens vary in their perceptions of White and minority officers and in whether they believe officers of a certain race behave differently than other officers (Brunson, 2007, Weitzer & Tuch, 2006).

All participants were asked to describe their created imagery of an average campus law enforcement officers on a college campus, 11 out of 15 participants described a White male. This validates the notion that Black male college students associate older White, males as authority figures with the power to impact Black privileges, events, and activities. This assumed posture of power and authority of White people is embedded in the ideology of whiteness and privilege. Scholarly discourse has long made whiteness visible by pointing to the privileges Whites enjoy by virtue of their racial position and the role these continued advantages play in the maintenance of structural racism in American society (Whitehead, 2015).

Law enforcement officers are historically White males tasked to enforce order and maintain peace in communities not reflective of the racial makeup of the profession itself. This is problematic because it presents issues of language and cultural barriers between communities of color and White law enforcement officers. Whiteness is only invisible for those who inhabit it, or those who get so used to its inhabitance that they learn not to see it, even when they are not in it (Ahmed, 2007). Black males have a higher propensity to interaction with White men who are majority law enforcement officers through consensual encounters, traffic stops, or calls for services (Brunson & Weitzer, 2009). The outcome of excessive force claims, death, mass
incarceration, or citations are more likely to occur due to frequency of interactions. Research supports there is an intersectionality of race and power (Weitzer & Tuch, 2005); therefore, the relationship of race and power needs to be examined. Race relations in the United States appear to have improved steadily over recent years, yet the divide between the Black community and law enforcement remains deep (Walker, 2003). According to DATAUSA: Police Officers, 77.1% of Police officers are White and 85.3% of Police officers are males, making that the most common race or ethnicity and sex in the occupation.

Each participant provided a broad description of their average campus law enforcement officers. Below are all of the words used to describe campus law enforcement officers, in a nonsequential order. Participants provided some negative descriptive words of campus law enforcement: Don’t trust them, top-flight, sucker, random, disingenuous, snitches, jail, brainless, bitch, pedophile, not friendly, not engaging, hawk, annoying, discriminative towards communities they don’t know, don’t care about Black people, negative, and party poopers. Participants provided some positive descriptive words of campus law enforcement: “Nice, willing to help, respect, sweet, understanding, and cool. Participants provided some neutral descriptive words of campus law enforcement: Direct, the law, regular old police (used three times), 12 [ slang for police], serious, ticket, protect and serve, and authoritative.

The description of campus law enforcement officers included physical descriptors, personality traits, education level as well as their perceived purpose on a college. This instinctive imagery is significant to this research because it can determine the individuals’ level of comfort in approaching and interacting with the law enforcement officer on their college campus. In cooperation with previous personal and vicarious experiences with law enforcement officers, these initial imagery plays a role in how Black males perceived law enforcement officers and
authority. Interestingly, while these participants were currently enrolled in an institute of higher education, their descriptions of the individuals in authority were not too far off from themselves, outside of the realm of race. For example, most campus law enforcement officers were described to be older, males with similar body frames, and some college education.

Each participant was asked to express their first thoughts pertaining to the description of an average campus law enforcement officer on their college campus. Below are excerpts of each participants answers to the outlined questions above.

Joseph described an average campus law enforcement officer as White male, approximately 20 to 30 years old with a racist personality. The highest education level would be a bachelors. The campus law enforcement officer’s only purpose was to “Ummm I guess the little White kids and stuff like from shootings on campus”. Joseph revealed his innate beliefs about all law enforcement officers. He stated, “Ummm I don’t know about experience half of them don’t have the experience they need that’s why they so wired. You know they been watching police movies all they life laughs and they finna play cops and robbers all day *laughs*. Joseph concluded by saying, “Ummm I mean just doing too much like if they stop you and stuff just kinda like… that’s how they do us”.

Joseph being a nontraditional college student was older than all of the other participants, at 23 years old with his Associate’s degree at the time of his interview. He made clear distinctions between the reference of race with White law enforcement officers and the expected inequality of treatment. He believed the average campus law enforcement officer’s priorities did not include protecting him as a Black male. Additionally, he expected the same type of treatment and interactions as he previously experienced with law enforcement officers from his past, which
is shared in the next section. Lastly, his portrayal of the law enforcement officers did not appear as a noble profession rather a childhood fantasy primed with the ambition of power.

Randle shared similar sentiments of his idea of an average campus law enforcement officer. Randle described an average campus law enforcement officer as White male, either chubby or frail body build with no facial hair wearing sunglasses. His personality would portray, “just like looking at Black people from a distance waiting for some shit can pop off so they can call backup or something”. The highest education level would range from a GED to some college experience. The campus law enforcement officer’s only purpose was to “Keep a safe environment I guess and to ruin Black people’s fun”.

Randle concluded by saying:

I mean I guess every campus needs a sense of security. So, I guess yeah… for people peace of mind. I feel like Black won’t really complain that much but I feel like White people would really complain if they didn’t have campus police because they would really feel unsafe, but I don’t know if they’ll feel unsafe if it was really just a White school, if it was a 100% White.

Randle’s physical description of campus law enforcement officers’ physical descriptors did not have a solid foundation of security, especially when the question at hand is the matter of protection. The small detail of sunglasses could also be significant factor for his ability to trust campus law enforcement officers. Making a point of taking your sunglasses off and letting someone look into your eyes can help open them up and make them feel comfortable enough to talk openly with you (PoliceOne.com). Randle’s perception of the said personality trait demonstrated that he did not need a firsthand experience because he already predetermined his approach and demeanor when dealing with a campus law enforcement officer. His perception of White males and their desire to disrupt Black activities and events was notable. The reason being was his perception reflects on his childhood interactions with White people in authority and their
ability to impede on Black people’s rights and privileges. Randle demonstrated that race played a significant role in the effects of perception of Black students’ sense of security on campus. His belief of White people not understanding or being mindful of Black people, appeared to be translated into campus law enforcement officers not protecting Black students.

Darrius described an average campus law enforcement officer as Black or White, female or male, approximately 5’7” to 6’4” in height with a “high alert” personality. The highest education level would be some college experience. The campus law enforcement officer’s only purpose was to “just to make sure campus is taken care of. Ummm you know orderly. In an orderly fashion conducted well with everything you know what I’m saying ran smoothly no issues no like I said just to take care of campus”. Darrius also stated, although he didn’t feel as if the campus law enforcement officers would be anyone he would want to talk to, he described them similar to himself. He stated, “Hmmm they human. They regular they like us. They just have higher authority. That’s really all I can say. They just regular human beings who have families like us”. Darrius concluded by saying, “I feel like when you look at the campus police a lot of them don’t like they don’t give no fucks about us”. *laughs*

While Darrius did not have a specific image of an average campus law enforcement officer, the underlying characteristics remain the same. Despite their race, he believed campus law enforcement officers were not approachable, but efficiently did their jobs. Darrius made the distinction that while campus law enforcement officers were charged with the tasks of protecting all students, they did not care about the students in general, not just the Black students. Regardless of these feelings about campus law enforcement officers, he was able to humanize them by recognizing their personable attributes. These personal attributes included doing similar
tasks as him and having their own family as well as not separating their profession and racial preferences.

Brian described an average campus law enforcement officer as White male, who was bald and chubby with a “jerk personality”. The highest education level would be two years of college. Brian did not understand the purpose of campus law enforcement officers seeing as there were several law enforcement agencies surrounding his campus. Brian shared that although he did not understand it, he wasn’t bothered by the additional police presence. He stated: “I don’t know in my head I went to school in CPS and in CPS you had to have like police officer inside the school”.

Brian’s description did not appear to be an individual who he was able to connect with. Specifically, the personality trait described as unhelpful and standoffish. Brian was also able to connect his experiences childhood academic experiences with her current experiences in higher education. He rationalized the presence of police in an educational setting, which is supposed to be an environment of growth and safety.

Anthony described an average campus law enforcement officer as a poorly shaped, fat, married, White male. Like Randle he also included the descriptor of sunglasses. He added with blonde hair, freckles, dirty shoes, mustache, goatee, and chews tobacco. Anthony described his personality to be of one who drinks, Michelob Ultra beer, goes to the bar after work, complains about bills, and picks his son up from soccer practice. Anthony was unsure of the highest education level. The campus law enforcement officer’s only purpose was to “To keep any like any and all peace on campus”. Anthony concluded, “I mean I just say hi and don’t do that because they police officers. I just do that because their authorities. I was just raised to say hi to authority”.
Anthony’s description was telling of his lack of confidence of campus law enforcement profession. His level of detail was reflective of his opinion of their true character. For example, as shown in movies, the dirty shoes, chews tobacco, aviator sunglasses and mustache is the stereotypical image of an arrogant, overly aggressive law enforcement officer. Anthony did not appear to believe law enforcement officers enjoyed their profession but devoted to everything else outside of work. Despite his displeasure for their appearance, he opted to showing signs of respect and deference by saying hello in passing. Like many other childhood lessons regarding White people, this deference with authority was also remembered and implemented in his adulthood life.

Tobias described an average campus law enforcement officer as very White male, medium size wearing a police uniform, bulletproof vest, with a pistol. Like Randle and Anthony, Tobias described sunglasses as a necessary accessory, but added with a stern and stubborn personality. The highest education level would be a high school diploma with some college. Like Brian, Tobias did not understand the purpose of campus law enforcement officers seeing as there are several surrounding law enforcement agencies. Brian stated, “Ummm honestly I don’t know. Cus [Because] I don’t know what they you I know they do. Actually, because I get emails all the time about Ummm what happens in the neighborhoods (off campus) and stuff”.

Tobias’s description was very straightforward. He more so described the outer uniform traits of an average campus law enforcement officer, which were symbolic of uses of force. The personality trait appeared to be indicative of one who is not interested in hearing anyone else’s opinion, which is problematic for encounters with campus law enforcement officers. Since Tobias already have this predetermined idea that his voice will not be heard nor will his opinion matter, it will be difficult for him to communicate with someone who does not look like him.
Kevin described an average campus law enforcement officer as White male, bald with sunglasses. The personality was described to be, “like yup sorry sorry Guy… that’s what I gotta do this to you.” The highest education level would be a GED or high school diploma. The campus law enforcement officer’s only purpose was to “Because people do stupid stuff. And somebody gotta come in and you know… not even do not even do something about it but just well for people to do stupid stuff. But also like to whatever degree they can be or try to be like a deter for potential stupid stuff. Or actual crime”. Kevin concluded by saying, “I have that similar point of view about police in general. Right because I’ve never seen you feel me… anybody I know that got shot like or whatever the case. I’ve never seen… the crime being solved. Or you know… somebody house get broken into you feel me. I’ve never seen nobody we got… we got the guy. We got the stuff back. We might not got the stuff back but we got the right guy... you know. He gon get charged and face justice. Like I’ve never seen it happen.”

Kevin’s description was simple, but his perception of personality trait was condescending. His idea that campus law enforcement officers were not genuine in their actions, instead he perceived them as punitive. The level of education was indicative of someone who may not be experienced with college aged students or their thought processes, which would lead to misinterpreting behaviors or actions. While Kevin admitted he understood the purpose of campus law enforcement officers, he was not convinced of their effectiveness. Kevin made clear distinctions that he wasn’t discrediting the purpose, but did not have any firsthand experiences of efficiency of campus law enforcement officers on his college campus. This reflection is significant because in order to believe a system of power, it is imperative to results of impact system.
Charles described an average campus law enforcement officer as bald White male, who was somewhat fit. Charles described their personality of, “they ain’t shit. They not. They think they shit … they think they the shit… in a way. And they even think that they… they better than the next officer”. The highest education level would be high school diploma. The campus law enforcement officer’s only purpose was to “It … the main reason that is… to protect… it says to protect us and everything. And to stop any bad harms from going on… on campus. Because anything could have on here. But in a way too… I feel like they just here to get paid”. Charles concluded by saying, “Because I feel like some police officers just feel like they have to do this because of they history behind who their family are. Or where they come from. This is why they have to do this. Because it’s their job. They like authority. You know... some people… I feel like when certain people get power. And they know…they can do whatever they want. They take that to the highest level. And just be like Ummm I’m the man. Or I’m the woman. And you gon respect me because this blue and White”.

Charles’s physical description was simple with minimal educational experience, but his perception of personality traits were concerning. His description of the officer’s arrogance superseded that of the students’ desire to respond in a disrespectful manner. Charles believes individual officers lack the ability to be governed by other officers. This is problematic because who will be the system of fairness or balance if a situation escalates. Furthermore, Charles believed the law enforcement profession was an inherited family tradition. This is an interesting connection between learned aspects of racism could be transferred into the campus law enforcement profession and experiences. The historical legacy of the less than collegial relationship between Blacks and law enforcement by stating the following: The average Southern
policeman is a promoted poor White with a legal sanction to use a weapon. His social heritage has taught him to despise the Negroes (Chaney & Robertson, 2013).

Russell described an average campus law enforcement officer as White or Black male or female, approximately 5’8” to 5’10” in height with a strict guardian personality. He continued to describe them wearing a full uniform with a gun. The highest education level would be a Bachelors’ in Criminal Justice. The campus law enforcement officer’s only purpose was to “Ummm because it’s a big school. It’s like 20,000 people around here. Maybe more than that. So, I think that there needs to at least be… campus police. cus it’s like…. The university saw itself. Is like a town inside of this town. So there needs to be like … people to like kinda protect it”.

Russell’s description was simple and did not have an ideal image of a campus law enforcement officer. His description of their personality trait resembled a parental role. Russell was the only participant who specifically distinguished the type of degree for campus law enforcement officers. He appeared to be under the impression in addition to the police academy training, campus law enforcement officers also were academically trained for their profession. Russell’s recognition of the large addition to the population validated the need for extra security.

Aiden described an average campus law enforcement officer as tall, White male. He was unsure of what his personality would be like. The highest education level would be an Associate’s degree. The campus law enforcement officer’s only purpose was to “ Hmmmmm I mean campus police… maybe to just protect. Or in quotations protect and serve”.

Like Russell, Aiden’s description was simple. His unfamiliarity with campus law enforcement officers and their job-related tasks made it difficult for him to provide any
additional insight to his opinion. Aiden resorted to the traditional motto of law enforcement profession to validate his initial response.

Donald could not provide an average description of a campus law enforcement officer. He stated he did not have an image of a specific person, just someone that wasn’t intimidating. The highest education level would be two years of college. The campus law enforcement officer’s only purpose was to “cus its… it don’t matter like how good something seems…. It’s always something going on. Someplace… and I just feel like they have them there to make sure like nothing happens. I guess. For our safety”.

Like Russell and Aiden, Donald’s description was simple. His unfamiliarity with campus law enforcement officers and their job-related tasks made it difficult for him to provide any additional insight to his opinion. While he didn’t have a specific image in his mind, he was confident the person was still not frightening. Nevertheless, he was confident in campus law enforcement officers to correctly do their job and ensure students’ safety.

Quentin described an average campus law enforcement officer as White male, approximately 5’9” in height years old with a rude personality and try to hurry and get their job done. The highest education level would be a bachelors. The campus law enforcement officer’s only purpose was to “you know make sure everybody is doing what they supposed to do. When somebody is not doing what they supposed to do. I mean it’s for every action it’s a reaction”. Quentin concluded by saying, “you know and its some of them that you know you can’t trust. I don’t know those I don’t know those campus police Ummm you know deeply, or I don’t have ties with any campus police with any campus police like that. But I would say they are some of them you can trust especially the Black police officers. I feel like you can trust the Black police officers”.
Like Brian, Quentin’s description was similar with an odd perception of personality trait. Quentin’s perception of the personality resembled one of low tolerance of interacting with others. This is problematic for Quentin’s confidence in campus law enforcement officers’ ability to conduct thorough investigations, if he believed their intentions were to quickly end all encounters. Despite his belief that campus law enforcement officers would protect all students equally, he opted to still not trust them. Quentin furthered explained his committed to distinguishing between race and treatment of Black and White officers. His correlation of race and familiarity with Black people

Alexander described an average campus law enforcement officer as tall, White male, approximately 20 to 30 years old, and approximately 5’8 to 5’9” in height. He described his uniform as Black pants, Black shoes with a gun, pepper spray, and handcuffs. He has a cool personality, but “Could be cus they like going thru some things in their life or you know…”. The highest education level would be a bachelors. The campus law enforcement officer’s only purpose was to “Cus I think that’s like bad… bad for the Ummm campus so in the school because they don’t want anything like that to happen or get out to see people fighting and then like no one is there to break it up”. Alexander concluded by saying, “Could be just sticking to the stigma of like it depends on if they pull over well it really doesn’t …like a Black person… Ummm it depends on what they’re doing…like they can.. be just like… in campus right. Say we just walking right…just walking and like if they’re having a bad mood, they’ll like probably try to take it out on the Black person or somebody with they think they can probably get away with. I don’t know why but they just don’t like… nothing in like a little have changed over the years but it’s still the same of what happened all the way back in the day. Not saying like… all the way back in the day like… I want to say back when like segregation and all of that… really nothing
has changed. Just you can go to a few places where everybody can still go. Like everybody can
go to a few places. Nothing really changed. Besides that.

Alexander’s description was unique. Initially, Alexander described his average campus
campus law enforcement officer with basic physical descriptors including the uniform and tools, but his
personality description varied. Alexander was the only participant to describe the life cycle
congruently with the campus law enforcement officer’s personality traits. His perception of
campus law enforcement officers’ personality was dictated by their status and changes in their
personal life. This perception was noteworthy. Alexander suggested the correlation of age, life
experience, and work-related circumstances could be a factor in behavior, action, and outcomes
of campus law enforcement officers. Alexander understood the purpose of campus law
enforcement handling basic complaints that occurred on campus, but his opinion differed
pertaining to students of color. This distinction demonstrated his lack of confidence that campus
law enforcement officers can enforce with bias rather allowing outside factors, such as their
mood and individual’s race determine the outcome. More importantly, his categorized a Black
person and an unknowing, ill-informed individual as one in the same. This is problematic
because the grouping of ignorance and race can lead to misinformation and intrusion of rights by
campus law enforcement officers. Alexander’s thoughts of the historical connection between
present day inequity of Black people and campus law enforcement as well as societal segregation
and acceptance thereof was also highlighted. Alexander’s expectation of poor treatment on his
institution of higher education by campus law enforcement officers demonstrates his learned and
validated distrust due to the historical, racial divides between Black and White people.

Bernard described an average campus law enforcement officer as White male,
approximately 5’11” with a “trash personality”. He thought that the highest education level
would be an Associates. The campus law enforcement officer’s only purpose was to “Ummm to protect the campus. To make sure the community is safe in case you know something you know an emergency goes on. Making sure that they could quiet it down and you know make it small before it gets to you know like a bigger a bigger problem. Bernard concluded by saying, “I feel like the campus police understand that we’re students and we’re getting you I know just here to you know have fun and stuff like that. I feel like they give us more leeway in a way”.

Bernard’s description was basic in its totality, but his personality description mirrored other participants. However, he believed while campus law enforcement officers were tasked with prevention and containment, he expressed an overall shared objective. Bernard explicitly expressed campus law enforcement officers differentiated and understood college aged students. This is significant because most college students enrolled in higher education to acquire life skills, financial gains, or continue family academic traditions; therefore, their intentions are not normally aligned with criminal activities. This distinction may be a comforting factor for college students to understand that they have an ally in law enforcement officers, instead of punitive authoritarians.

Jimmy described an average campus law enforcement officer as Black male, approximately 6’0” in height years old with a sociable personality. The highest education level would be an Associates. The campus law enforcement officer’s only purpose was to “In the same way as regular… you know town police officers do. But they are much more lenient than uhh an officer then at city (local) pd would be”. Jimmy concluded by saying, “We got chances…we got…we get like one chance. We get like one two chances then like you have to show us. Jimmy was the only participant to solely identify his average description of a campus law enforcement officer as a Black male. Like Bernard, Jimmy also believed campus enforcement officers would
be more understanding college aged students and mistakes. He appeared to have adopted a more guardianship of guidance before punitive resorts for college students. Jimmy did not have additional information on the purpose due to his lack of experience and interaction with the campus law enforcement.

Most of the participants did not provide a favorable description of their idea of an average campus law enforcement officer that instilled confidence, trust, or approachability. For example, four out of the 15 participants provided specific details about campus law enforcement appearances and negatively associated the use of the accessory of sunglasses. Most law enforcement officers used sunglasses as a tool because it is difficult to anticipate every event where ballistic eyewear could help protect your eyes, but wearing glasses and not needing them is certainly better than needing them and not having them available (PoliceOne.com). Law enforcement officers are well aware of the negative message that is conveyed with sunglasses. For someone you want to keep at arm’s length, leaving your sunglasses on can serve to keep them from feeling comfortable or establishing rapport with you (PoliceOne.com).

Young Black males, it seems, are not only the most frequent perpetrators of serious crimes in our central cities, they are in many ways its most tragic victims; therefore, policemen themselves tend to react with increased indifference due to the community’s lack of cooperation and from the official constraints imposed on them by the legal system and the department itself (Leinen, 1984). But the police, because of a gross underrepresentation of minorities among their ranks, a lack of sensitivity and understanding of minority concerns and culture, and, therefore, a lack of community support, were least able to deal effectively in the inner cities-precisely where they were needed most (Williams & Murphy, 1990). Additionally, there is a general and widespread misunderstanding on the part of the Black public as to what the police can and
cannot do in terms of protecting people from personal attack and property loss. These misunderstanding effects the factors of citizen attitudes and expectations that results in feelings of alienation from the Black community (Leinen, 1984).

This next section will demonstrate how initial participants’ interactions with law enforcement officers impacted their perception of campus law enforcement officers. Misconceptions meet reality when the participants shared their vicarious and personal experiences with variety of law enforcement officers. Brunson’s (2007) research study on the satisfaction of minorities and police interactions found that, holding neighborhood socioeconomic context constant, race makes a difference in how youth are treated by police and in their perceptions of officers.

Vicarious and Personal Experiences with Law Enforcement Officers

In this chapter, I analyzed participant responses coded into the category, Vicarious and Personal Experiences. Each category also included subcategories; Vicarious and Personal Experiences were coded into Humiliation, Accusation, and Discrepancy in Treatment due to Race with the law enforcement officers. Before I discuss the findings, the following information on the participants can provide helpful contextual information related to these codes revealed. Two of the 15 male participants were previously arrested prior to the research study, three of the 15 male participants had only positive interactions with any type of law enforcement officers, and all 15 verbally acknowledged despite the outcome of the vicarious or personal experience with law enforcement officers, there were three specific factors that left lasting impressions of the actual encounters with law enforcement officers.
After privately speaking with each individual participant, I was exposed to varying developmental factors that contributed to their perception of campus law enforcement officers on a college campus. There were three resounding codes that emerged from the 15 participant interviews. The first code was Black Identity, the second code was View of White People, and the third and final code was Vicarious and Personal Experiences with law enforcement officers. These three codes allowed me to cultivate an imagery of varying aspects that led to the development of Black male college students’ perception of law enforcement officers on a college campus.

First, I will share participant experiences with law enforcement officers both vicarious and personal experiences. Vicarious and Personal experiences are significant to the authentic comprehension of the developmental factors of Black male college students’ perception of law enforcement officers on their college campus. An analysis of the data revealed that none of the participants’ feelings, attitudes, or beliefs towards campus law enforcement officers initiated from actual experiences with their campus law enforcement officers. Therefore, it is imperative to explore all previous experiences that led to their feelings, attitudes, or beliefs towards law enforcement officers on their college campus. I chose to categorize Vicarious and Personal Experiences as one single code because not every participant had a personal experience with law enforcement officers; rather some had vicarious experiences, such as Alexander Pierson, Donald Newell, and Aiden Jones.

According to Paternoster and Piquero (1995), vicarious experiences are just as effective as personal experiences as they center around the core value of general and specific deterrence of punishment and punishment avoidance. Although some participants self-admitted that they have never had any police contact, they were able to recall experiences of a family member or friend
who had an experience with law enforcement officers. Participants’ vicarious experiences impacted their ability to trust, interact with, and relate to law enforcement despite not having their own personal experiences.

Although each participant had varying degrees of experiences with law enforcement officers prior to their arrival on their college campus; each participant conclusively stated all of their perceptions of law enforcement officers on a college campus were validated by how law enforcement officers made them feel during and after their interactions. Police brutality is defined as the use of excessive physical force or verbal assault and psychological intimidation, which Blacks are more likely to be the victims (Chaney & Robertson, 2013). Since police brutality encompasses psychological intimidation, this section will start with the demonstration of experiences through humiliating experiences with law enforcement officers.

This next section shares participants narratives of the humiliation they felt during and after the law enforcement interactions, the lack of concern or genuinity in the law enforcement officers’ tones, and lastly the law enforcement officers’ accusatory demeanor prior to receiving any factual information regarding the incident were the primary factors that greatly impacted their perception of law enforcement officers, which in turn led to their perception of law enforcement officers on their college campus.

**Humiliation**

The essence of humiliation is forced acquiescence in unacceptable actions or events that displace or exclude you from what you understand is your rightful place in the group, network or hierarchy to which you feel you rightfully belong (Smith, 2008). The feeling of humiliation or offense was described as one of the major factors that accompanied participants’ experiences
with law enforcement officers despite the manner of the interaction, such as severity of the crime or outcome of the interaction. For example, most participants did not complain that they received a state citation, ticket, or that they were arrested for criminal activity; their true complaint was how the law enforcement officer treated them during the interaction and made them feel. The actions or lack thereof of dignity of the law enforcement officer far outweighed the effects of the financial or detention consequence of the interaction. These actions included claims of excessive force, lack of discretion for privacy, or simple lack of respect, despite the initial reason for law enforcement intervention. In the following excerpts below, I will summarize participants’ stories who stated during vicarious and personal experiences with law enforcement officers, they experienced varying forms of humiliation.

Joseph Moore’s interview was both unique and challenging. Joseph described how his childhood contributed to his perception of law enforcement officers through his father’s vicarious experiences as a law enforcement officer for 12 years, and then later criminal activity that led to his (Joseph’s father) current incarceration. Joseph described his father’s personal infidelity and time constraints to his LEO profession took him (Joseph’s father) away from his primary household of him, his sister and mother. Decent dads are described as older, African American males with distinguishable characteristics—steady employment, community responsibility, and responsibilities as a father and husband (Parker & Maggard, 2009). Joseph stated:

Naw like he was... he wasn’t around that much. So, like I seen him come in and go to sleep, and then he was on call. Then he would just be up. Yeah, I mean so like he would come home a few hours a night other than that he was sleep and was on call a lot. Well that and you know he had a gazillion different families he was trying to raise all at once.
Joseph never thought the law enforcement profession was “trustworthy” after his father was accused of stealing evidence from his job and later convicted by his coworkers in law enforcement. Joseph thought law enforcement officers were similar to a gang member and their code of silence. For example, the mentality, where all individuals would all stand up for one another regardless of the situation. Joseph believed other law enforcement officers did not stand up for his dad during his legal troubles. Rather, Joseph expressed how they (law enforcement officers) “switched” on his by denying any further involvement in his father’s case. Police officers’ reluctance to report is the perception that the other officers would not report, the code of silence also negatively related to familiarity with the official rules, evaluation of misconduct as serious, and the expectation of harsher discipline (Ivkovic et al., 2016). Joseph concluded that he definitely did not have a realistic opportunity to be relinquished of any wrongdoing especially since he wasn’t a part of that work culture. Joseph stated:

Cause I feel like them supposed to be his people and they turned on him. So yeah. But then it was like it was another guy. I guess, I don’t know if they was together or what but like but when they went to court. He switched on him. Ummm they not trustworthy.

Additionally, Joseph reflected on how his father’s absence in his home adversely impacted his behavior and led to his involvement in countless criminal activities. Joseph mentioned aside from his father’s physical absence, his mother worked long hours, but continued to struggle financially to provide for him and his sister. Although his mother never asked for his assistance, Joseph felt obligated to financially contribute to his household. From an economic perspective, drug dealing is very profitable, a teenager can make from $300 to $1,200 and more per day selling drugs. The routine jobs are unable to compete with competitive wages for this adolescent age group in comparison to the instant monetary increase of selling drugs (Moore, 1995). Joseph referred to being under minimal to no supervision, hanging out in his
neighborhood with older adult males and engaging in illegal activities, such as selling drugs, robbing strangers, and fighting as “wilding.” Joseph stated:

I mean because I had a lot of stuff going on at home. My father was going to jail and all of that. Yeah and uhh yeah, I mean I just started wilding. *laughs* The first school, I just got suspended and then we had jumped somebody on the train. I had got arrested and all of that. Then I was like yeah, they was like you not coming back. Yeah well I mean it’s not even that.

Specifically, he recalled the final instance where he completely lost trust in law enforcement officers through their inappropriate behavior, he personally experienced. According to Joseph, though he had vicarious experiences through his father and his prior arrest, he was still expected to be treated with a level of respect despite his reputation of criminal activity, in this case, selling drugs. Youths who had a history of contacts with the same officers are harassed because of their previous misdeeds and reminded them of this and used the information to belittle them (Brunson & Weitzer, 2009). Joseph stated:

It’s just the second time, I guess that’s the one that really affected me the most. The first time, I mean. hey. I did what I did. I got locked up. That was my fault. Yeah, I mean the first time I already didn’t trust them but then the second time, yeah. I mean if they would have just locked me up and took me on my merry own way... I wouldn’t have a problem. Stripping naked in the street. Ummm well I was running then I tripped because I stepped in a pothole so then they umm... they like put the cuffs on me or whatever but then I was like in the middle of the street and they popped the trunk and got some gloves out of the trunk. And then they knew that like I sold drugs and oh like he probably like he got some drugs on him too. So, then they pulled my pants down like in the middle of the street and they was just lifting stuff up and spreading my butt cheeks all that in like everybody in the middle of the streets just looking at me. I’m like damn this is crazy. That was I was 16 so like 2000… like 2012 maybe somewhere around that time. I was in disbelief. Ummm I guess it’s how they were doing it. I mean it wasn’t the first time I been like arrested. I’m like damn y’all just got me naked in the street right now.

As Joseph expressed, I was in disbelief”. I could visibly see the residual effects of shock and displeasure as Joseph recalled this event. Joseph would often shake his head and look away from me as he told his story. The humiliation stemmed from Joseph being 16 years old, with his
pants pulled down exposing his naked butt in the streets as the officers retrieved plastic gloves to search him. As onlookers watched alongside of the road, law enforcement officers spread his butt cheeks apart in search of contraband. This humiliation in the form of psychological abuse would leaving a long-lasting negative impression that would adversely affect Joseph’s perception of every law enforcement officer.

Similarly, to Joseph, Anthony Cooper experienced a similar form of humiliation from law enforcement officers when he and his friends were pulled over for the offense of speeding, ordered out of their car, searched alongside a road for contraband. The law enforcement officers stated they smelled the odor of cannabis, or “weed”, and searched the car. During his interview, Anthony admitted to the initial offense of speeding, acknowledged the illegal ramifications of the possession of cannabis, but did not admit that his friend possessed any cannabis in the car. Anthony explained that he and his group of his Black friends were confused on what the law enforcement officers alluding to with the smell of burnt cannabis in his friend’s car. After a preliminary search, Anthony said:

They searching the car hard. He come back. He had like a little. He had like a strand of weed. Because I’m not defending my friend but honestly, I couldn’t tell if it was weed. A twig or a lil piece of leaf. It wasn’t big at all. It was like so, so, so small. It was so small like if I would have blow at his hand it would have disappeared. He was like “I think this is…look what I found”. He wasn’t even…it wasn’t this small (gestures a small measurement) it was like a hair size whatever. I don’t even want to say it’s weed. He was like you guys this is your last time. Come clean. And we just looking at him like we finna blow this out of your hand bro. Like, it’s not, it’s not weed. Like, we don’t know what you talking about.

The law enforcement officers continued to search Anthony’s friend’s car while they waited outside, despite them informing the law enforcement officers they were not in possession of any cannabis. Anthony specifically stated, it was “public humiliation” as he described the multiple police cars with flashing lights had him and friends sitting alongside of a main roadway
as they searched his car for drugs. Anthony described how they stopped in front of a public building, where he and his friends could’ve possibly waiting inside out of the cold and away from the public view, as the police conducted their search of his friend’s vehicle. Individuals acknowledged that they risked being detained by police due to their involvement in illegal activities, they still stressed the importance of being treated with respect by police (Novich & Hunt, 2018). Anthony expressed his displeasure about being displayed as a criminal as onlookers drove and walked by, especially after he and his friends informed the officers that they did not possess any contraband nor did they recently smoke in his friend’s care. Anthony described his experience to me:

It was like 45 mins in the cold. He was like yeah, I’m cold guys. We like man you pulled us over bro you chose to do this. We told you we didn’t have no weed. Just every, the public humiliation. We literally, they could have, we were so close to the alumni center, you know that little curve they could have pulled us over there. But we’re literally on the main street taking up the whole lane. On the side of the curb. Sitting down on the ground. In the cold. Like that’s the worst…and it’s like four or five police cars and it’s so weird.

Anthony acknowledged that his friend was indeed speeding and would have been willing to accept the consequence in the form of a state citation for speeding, but when his friend wasn’t given a state citation for speeding after the 45 minute ordeal in the cold, Anthony was confused and upset. Anthony stated: “Yeah… basically. They didn’t even give him a speeding ticket. I thought they was going to get a speeding ticket. Yeah wasn’t no ticket no nothing. It was like what was the point.” Lastly, another form of humiliation is degradation, which is a process, not just a condition. It is a key part of the dynamics of humiliation, resentment and response currently shaping our world (Smith, 2008). By Anthony and his friends being left in the cold for 45 minutes for a crime that they adamantly denied to participating in, it increased their resentment towards law enforcement officers.
Like Joseph, Charles Overton had many vicarious experiences with law enforcement through his (Charles’) father and uncles being arrested and incarcerated. Specifically, perceptions and experiences, including vicarious experiences, of police disrespect can contribute to a lack of confidence in police effectiveness, perceptions of officer racism and deceit and general concerns about police brutality (Novich & Hunt, 2018). During Charles’ interview, he explained the challenges he faced, starting at age seven. His father would constantly be arrested for committing new crimes, resulting in him growing up without his father’s guidance. Charles explicitly referenced the multiple arrests and current incarceration of his father directly affected his feelings and attitudes towards law enforcement officers. Charles stated:

Ummm the police you know just with ummm my dad because I seen that multiple times. No, he, he didn’t, well, he stayed in there [jail], but the thing is when he came back, he came back once upon a time in my life. But it didn’t, he didn’t stay there[jail] long. He did another crime.

Charles expressed the benefits he missed out on due to his father’s absence. For example, Charles stated he believed he would be more confident in himself as a man as well would have made better life decisions. Charles stated:

I feel like, I feel like in a way I could’ve been more outspoken. You know I have this thing with you know public speaking that I been trying to overcome for years. And it’s getting better. It’s getting better because I like to speak more now. But another thing is I feel like certain roads I wouldn’t have went down. You know almost having a kid before. Ummm you I know just sometimes when I was older, younger, I used to you know talk back a lot and I feel like that, that would have benefit to with not doing that. And just feel like I would have carried myself even now, I carry myself better I feel like. I did before. But I feel like a lot of things would have benefit from a man. From him. But by him being gone for so long. It’s like I couldn’t do that.

Charles also shared due to his father’s absence, he felt similarly like Joseph, with feelings of his obligation to financially provide for his mom, two sisters and younger brother.

Specifically, Charles described how often, they would go without meals due to the lack of money
and resources. the young Black male may be led to believe that he will be able to provide for the basic necessities and some of the luxuries of life through the profits gained via the distribution of drugs (Moore, 1995). Charles detailed how he discontinued all childhood activities, such as sports or involvement in any after school activities and resorted to selling drugs to supplement his mother’s low income and inability to provide for the family. The young Black male may therefore be enticed to sell drugs because of the large sums of money that can be made by doing so (Moore, 1995). Charles stated:

But I stopped playing sports. Because my mom was struggling. I felt that I needed to do something else and it was basically work. But I started just doing all type of bad stuff and it just I’m not saying that it was her fault or anything, but I had to work. It was no doubt about it. I couldn’t just sit up there be doing all these other things all these other kids was doing, going outside everyday, having fun with their friends. My friends be like “where you going? where you going?” I be like…. “I’m finna go try to make some money”. Well, first I tried selling weed. And It was cool at first, but I didn’t I knew it wasn’t for me. I didn’t like it. And my mom she never found out. But she knew that something was going on with me because I would come home at like 2 o’clock in the morning so. And I was just like sometimes she didn’t care, sometimes she did.

Charles’ vicarious experiences with law enforcement officers, due to his father’s criminal history, placed undue strain on his ability to experience average childhood activities, as he described his childhood as “rough.” Although Charles mentioned he believed his mother was often times oblivious and indifferent to his involvement in criminal activity, he stated his mother made a concerted effort to encourage him to avoid all contact with law enforcement officers. In the event, that Charles’ vicarious experiences weren’t a strong enough deterrent for him to avoid all experiences with law enforcement officers, his mother’s specific instructions towards interacting with law enforcement were added. She spoke to him about practices of avoidance and not trusting law enforcement officers. Charles stated his mother would often say:

Just… just stay clean because you know we have experience you know she know that my dad is in jail and he’s still in jail. My uncles and them been to jail. You know, she just
don’t want to see that for me. But, if I was to go to jail one day... I know I would have my family right behind me. But the thing is, I would feel like I failed them in a way. So, that’s why I never try to get, interact as much with the police because I really in a sense. I don’t... I don’t trust ... I just don’t trust them. I don’t.

With Charles’ vicarious experiences coupled with his mothers’ specific instructions, Charles managed to avoid all contact with law enforcement officers until his first personal experiences with a law enforcement officer on his campus college. Charles explained he was mindful of blatant illegal activities, so he stopped selling drugs, prior to enrolling into college, to avoid unwanted attention from law enforcement officers. However, he did not realize how a nondrug or violence related issue would elicit the same amount of attention from law enforcement officers. Charles described how he and his friend were talking in his friend’s car while being parked on the wrong side of the street on a side street in his college town. Charles stated:

The campus police? Ummm I only have one like little interaction with them with one officer. Ummm I forget his name. but I was in the car with my friend and he didn’t realize that he was parked on the wrong side of the street. But I told him... I was like… “ok we’ll move”… he was like “well next time you guys do this again... I’m just going to give you a ticket. And I don’t give a fuck.” I was just like dang all that because of what he did… how he’s parked on the street. I’m like… ok. Like you really had to say all of that.

Although, Charles did not trust the police and had previous vicarious experiences with his father and uncles being arrested after interacting with the police, he still decided to question this law enforcement officer’s actions by speaking up. According to Charles, the level of aggression displayed by the law enforcement officer was not justified for the situation, so he (Charles) became angry. According to Smith (2008), humiliation is a form of degradation that can lead to anger and action. Charles stated:
And then that’s just when it escalated. Cus [Because] I’m like ok you ain’t have to say all that to us. That’s just… that’s just me, you know. I can say if we was smoking or anything, but we wasn’t. We was just waiting on somebody to go to the gym.

Charles interpreted this nonviolent, noncriminal infraction did not warrant such an aggressive response from the law enforcement officer. Charles differentiated the act of illegal activity, such as smoking cannabis and its presumed consequences in comparison to his compliant demeanor and efforts to explain to the officer their perspective. The use of racial slurs appeared to undermine police legitimacy by weakening officers’ moral authority in the eyes of respondents, and even nonracist but disrespectful language was viewed as dehumanizing (Brunson & Weitzer, 2009). In this moment, Charles felt humiliated by the officer’s excessive use of authority, vulgar language especially after he was not met with any level of resistance or disrespect. This interaction further solidified Charles’ belief to not trust law enforcement officers.

Like Charles, Donald Newell, had prior experiences with law enforcement officers through vicarious experiences with his older brother and male cousin getting arrested and later incarcerated. During Donald’s interview he explained how due to his maturity and life experiences, he was now able to acknowledge the warranted reasons for the law enforcement interactions between his brother and cousin. Donald expressed now that he was older, he better comprehended the reasons his older brother had many personal experiences with law enforcement officers. Donald stated, “I mean... I was little I’m not going to say I don’t know why because now that I’m older. I think I know why… it probably cus its most likely cus he had drugs on him. But when I was little, I didn’t know that I just thought that they are taking my cousin away.” Despite Donald’s acknowledgement of these past experiences, he strictly
disagreed with the manner in which the law enforcement officers spoke to his brother. Donald stated:

Cus [Because] like when I was like growing up, they [police] were always pull over my brother and my cousin and stuff. Like the way they talked to them and as you grow up and having like I don’t want to say hatred for them, but I just didn’t like them. And I was always scared like and then when I got my first car.

This form of humiliation through verbal degradation and belittling adversely affected Donald. Subsequently, Donald’s dislike for law enforcement officers developed into a fear of the law enforcement officers. Police brutality is often used to refer to violent police practices that are utterly, ritually sanctioned by law (Rodriguez-Silva, 2012). Although his observations were initially, purely verbal abuse of power and authority, it later escalated to use of excessive force and violence. Individuals (youth and adults) understand it was appropriate and understandable for the police to arrest them for dealing but disrespectful to swear at them during the process (Novich & Hunt, 2018). This escalation of degradation further validated his perception of law enforcement officers. Donald described the last time his older brother was arrested:

Like he well when he was getting out of the car, but they like they had in like chokeholds and all of that stuff. And he’s not even doing anything. He’s not fighting back or anything. He’s not giving them a hard time. But they just want to show who has the authority and stuff. Who has the power in the situation?

Donald recognized whether or not his older brother resisted the arrest, excessive force was still being used against him, therefore introducing a sense of hierarchy relationship with law enforcement officers. Despite their (criminals’) understanding of this, choking was perceived as disrespectful as it was described as an overly aggressive use of force, a violation of personal space, and physical attack on their person (Novich & Hunt, 2018). Despite Donald's brother compliance, he was still met with an unnecessary level of force.
Donald then stated: “So yeah that’s how I thought it’s not happening to me? Why do you need four people (officers)?” The second moment of humiliation is relegation, being pushed downwards within the social hierarchy of respectability and worth, in other words, degradation (Smith, 2008). Although Donald’s initial interactions with law enforcement officers were experienced vicariously, he also witnessed them firsthand. This resulted in his personal takeaways revolving around prevention and distancing himself from those types of possible experiences with law enforcement officers. Alternatively, those who have been humiliated may equip themselves with the skills, knowledge, and muscle power needed to change the social structures and processes that are degrading them (Smith, 2008). It is possible that recipients of vicarious experiences will equip themselves with the proper education to defend themselves against future situations of humiliation, but it impossible to predict every situation where humiliation is imminent with law enforcement officers because there are so many forms of humiliation. Another form of the effects of humiliation can result in shame or offense (Smith, 2008).

Similar to Charles, Bernard Braxton did not have any experiences with law enforcement officers until he interacted with the law enforcement officers on his college campus. Bernard experienced a form of humiliation that resulted in offense during an encounter with law enforcement officers. Bernard described how he and his friends left an on-campus party, but they waited in his friend’s car and decided to go to their next location. Bernard’s friend was parked in a campus parking lot in a handicap only parking spot. Bernard’s friend was also the owner and driver of the vehicle that displayed a visible handicap sticker on windshield. Bernard stated:

It was like a party after the rec so I pretty sure it was campus police that was there. So, I mean… he (Bernard’s friend) Ummm so he …he …he got off crutches so a few months ago. So, he had the handicap sign on his car. So, he parked in the handicap spot, so
Ummm I guess they was like outside or playing music or something after the party. So just chilling or talking and then Ummm I guess one, one of, he said one of the police officers came to his car and asked him why are you parked here? He say and he showed him the pass. “What you mean… like why I park here? You see that… you know it’s a handicap pass. I can park here”. And then he the police officer asked him “Oh, what’s wrong with you?” But you know he… my friend took offense to that.

Through Bernard’s story, it was apparent that Bernard nor his friend did not know their rights, specifically rights under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). HIPAA where it states gives you rights over your health information and sets rules and limits on who can look at and receive your health information. The Privacy Rule applies to all forms of individuals' protected health information, whether electronic, written, or oral (HHS.gov n.d.). Bernard questioned his compliance during his interaction with the law enforcement officer: “Do I have to ask…. Do I have to tell you what’s wrong with me? just you see the pass here so I’m not without a pass to park here. And after he said that the police just walked away”. After challenging his right to comply, the law enforcement officer disengaged from the encounter, further validating Bernard’s vicarious experiences that led to a distrust of law enforcement officers. As Bernard spoke about this experience, he often shrugged his shoulders in uncertainty.

Bernard concluded, “Just like just seeing on tv just you know like officers just harassing young Black males. Even though even though it’s not like it’s always a good cop bad cop. You just like instantly think every cop is I would say not necessarily bad, but you just don’t see every cop as you known as being on your side”. While this was a challenge that yielded positive results and the law enforcement officer disengaged the encounter, it is not plausible to assume every challenge will yield the same result. Therefore, it is imperative for individuals to adequately educate themselves to be safeguarded as the most common experiences with law enforcement officers. The double standard gives members of law enforcement the freedom to do things that
civilians could never get away with: others recounted personal, traumatic experiences with the police that involved the use of excessive force, stripped them of their dignity, violated their civil rights, and, in some cases, put their lives in danger (Chaney & Robertson, 2013).

This next section shares the participants’ experiences of being criminally profiled due to the color of their skin, style of dress, and social affiliation. Johnson (1995) argues Black males to believe that by just being a black male they become an automatic target of suspicion for virtually any crime and they express these sentiments of this unfair treatment in the forms of social media post, rap lyrics, and informal discussions amongst peers.

**Accusation (Targets of Suspicion)**

Throughout history, America's criminal justice system has been inundated with racial biases against minorities, particularly against African Americans; and beyond making Black persons targets of suspicion when a crime is committed, race is also used in defining crime (Johnson, 1995). The same notion holds true for the majority of Black male college students that participated in this research study. Randle, Darius, Anthony, Russell, Alexander, and Bernard all shared their personal experiences where they were targets of suspicion by law enforcement officers without just cause. Targets of suspicion include the act of being surveyed, approached for questioning, or unjustly detained and accused of committing a crime, despite the outcome of a warning, arrest or citation issued.

This section will demonstrate how each participant felt they were targets of suspicion by law enforcement officers. Among the responses as to why they were surveyed, participants were told they matched specific, physical descriptors of a person of interest or suspect. This information is problematic since Black culture is readily apparent in young Black males. For
example, depending on the weather, popularity of a hairstyle, or cultural insignia, young Black males may emulate and demonstrate the same physical characteristics. More specifically, if its wintertime, then most young Black males may wear puffer coats, and in the summertime, most young Black males may wear solid, white t-shirts with basketball shorts and athletic shoes. Also, as for hairstyles depending on the trend in Black culture, natural hair may be more popular; therefore, more young Black males may wear some sort of twists, locs, or haircut extenuating their natural textures. This is a perfect illustration of Skolnick’s “symbolic assailant”—an individual whose mere attire, demeanor, or language is construed by police as a cue that the person is a potential threat or involved in illegal activity (as cited in Brunson & Weitzer, 2009).

The following excerpts below detail how during participants’ Vicarious and Personal Experiences with law enforcements officers they were targets of suspicion. Many cases like these are numerous and can be traced throughout history, the overriding message remains that Black males are often targets of criminal suspicion (Johnson, 1995). The result is that Black men have become scapegoats for society's most feared crimes. Although it is inappropriate, it is possible for private citizens to mislabel criminals or what they think to be suspicious solely based on race; therefore, it is inexcusable for trained law enforcement officers to make the same grave, judgement call.

Randle Cross described a personal experience with law enforcement officers that resulted in an arrest. On a Saturday around midnight, Randle accompanied by his Asian male roommate, a White male friend and a Black male friend as they walked downtown in their college town. They decided to take a shortcut back towards campus by cutting across a set railroad tracks when they noticed graffiti markings alongside the wall. As a group, they stopped and took pictures of the graffiti markings, Randle described three squad cars pulled up next to them and the officers
exited approached them with their hands on their guns. The law enforcement officers immediately began to question their actions and accused them of criminal trespassing on the railroad tracks. Randle and his friends insisted tried to share their side of the story and inform the law enforcement officers, they did not see any sign with a criminal trespass warning. After a brief search for the sign, law enforcement officers located a graffiti covered sign and showed it to Randle. Subsequently without reservation, he and his friends were handcuffed and arrested. Randle made sure to mention, that he was accompanied by a variety of races and was all the more confused when they were approached and arrested. Randle rationalized he would have been less surprised if it was a “bunch of Black kids.” This comment demonstrated Randle’s acknowledgement and acceptance of being a target of suspicion solely based on his race:

Like I got arrested out here like my sophomore year. Like it wasn’t a bunch of Black kids, it was my roommate he’s Asian. One boy he’s White and another Black boy and we was like downtown DeKalb and we didn’t feel like walking all the way down, so we was like let’s cut through here. We start crossing the track and there was hella graffiti and it was like oh damn… this is raw. Take a couple pictures that’s when portrait mode like just came out so it was like portrait mode and take pictures in front of the graffiti then it was like alright let’s leave. Then it was like the train start coming we like ohhh yeah definitely time to leave but it’s like 12 on a Saturday. We like hmmm let’s just go back to the car and we like just walking and then 3 squad cars just walk up with their hands on their guns and just like what are you guys doing... you guys are trespassing. We was like trespassing. We don’t see no sign. And dude was like you don’t see no sign then like took like 2 minutes to find the sign. And there’s the sign right there. And we look at it there was nothing but graffiti on it. You can’t even see no trespassing. All you saw was paint. I was like Bruh that’s not even readable…and we weren’t even like… and we was just walking pass bro. and they was like nope… cuffed us. And took us to the station like we got out but situations like that was just dumb as hell… like motherfuckers just crossing the track.

Randle had another personal experience with law enforcement officers which occurred on his college campus. Randle described how as he and his friend, Quan, who resembled him walked out a residence hall en route the campus library, they overheard a commotion in the cafeteria. Randle described his friend Quan to be a six-foot, Black male with dreadlocks.
Although, Randle wasn’t involved in the commotion, he noticed a White female law enforcement officer and immediately anticipated being approached:

We was going to go to the library and then we were walking and then like … Ummm I mean we hear about something happening in the cafeteria or something and then like a White cop comes she’s walk with her head down. I’m like what the fuck. I’m like fuck is she on. Then I’m like let’s keep walking towards the library. Then I just kept my eye on her, and she tried to like sneak up on us. Like literally tried to sneak up on us. She parked her car right in front of the student center. So, it’s like Neptune and the student center, you know that little turnaround. She just parked right there walked, put her head down and I was just like looking at her using my peripheral vision. Hit the curb and start walking like fast as hell behind her I’m like “aye!” I just turned around like what are you doing… she like, “ohh well ummm where are you guys coming from… are you guys students?” I’m like nahhh I’m just on campus motherfucker… yeah, I’m a student fuck… now I’m not pulling my id I don’t want this motherfucker to just shoot just cus they a bitch. Yeah so, I’m like yeah, we’re students. They where you coming from… we just left a BSU meeting… they ooh we got a call a Black male six feet with dreads and then my friend Quan, which was a six feet, foot Black male with dreads.

Randle expressed feelings of anxiety and anticipation, as he described her lurking around them as they walked by. Randle anticipation was accurate, before the law enforcement officer could address him, and he turned towards her, acknowledged her presence and intentions. Randle was defensive and asked her, “What are you going?” Without explanation or additional information about the possible crime being investigated, she began to question Randle’s whereabouts. Due to Randle’s normalization of distrustful law enforcement encounters, he began immediately to provide details about where he was coming from and specifically named an affiliated student group on campus. Additionally, Randle shared his desire to prove he belonged on campus, but he was hesitant due to being afraid that law enforcement officer would shoot him for reaching into his pockets. After voluntarily providing this information, the law enforcement officer then informed him of brief details that they were attempting to locate an individual that matched the description of his friend, Quan. However, the reason for encounter was never revealed. This level of misinformation and accusatory approached further validated Randle’s
distrust for law enforcement officers. This mistrust, anger, and fear of police authority by Black males cannot be quickly erased regardless of how minimally intrusive an investigatory stop may be (Johnson, 1995). This constant sense of surveillance and strategizing for law enforcement officers was also experienced by Darrius Gates.

The sense of belonging is also a resounding theme among participants as it pertains to law enforcement officers and locations. The experience of negation, of being stopped or feeling out of place, or feeling uncomfortable, does not ‘stop’ there (Ahmed, 2007).

The acceptance and use of the out-of-place doctrine have proven to be devastating to the minority community; for instance, there are far more predominantly White areas than predominantly Black areas. Therefore, minorities will be deemed "out of place" more often than Whites (Johnson, 1995). Darrius described his personal experiences with law enforcement officers at the age of 12. Prior to telling me about his experience, Darrius was sure to provide explicit details about what he was wearing and the socioeconomic status of his childhood neighborhood without being prompted. It appeared as if, Darrius was trying to defend how his encounter with law enforcement should not have been threatening or suspicious. Darrius described his childhood residence to be a luxury apartment complex in a predominantly White neighborhood. Darrius recalled that he wore a hoodie, sandals, and headphones. As a young adolescent, he had the privilege to walk to the local convenient store, 7Eleven, to purchase snacks. After noticing the law enforcement officer parked in the apartment complex’s driveway adjacent to his, Darrius strategized the route to take to return to his apartment complex. Darrius concluded that since he wore sandals and it was a rainy, evening, he would take a walk across the grassy lot to avoid the police encounter:
Ummm so I lived in an apartment complex. A luxury living apartment complex so Ummm it was down the street from a 7/11 on the corner. I would go there a lot, the 7/11. They had all of the snacks. I had on a hoodie and Ummm as I was walking back to my house. I usually cut across the street to go through the grass, but it was rainy, and I had on sandals, so I was like I was gon walk through it. So, this police officer just like… I had my hoodie and my headphones on. And he’s just like. Turn on his flashlight. He was sitting across the street, so across the street was another complex across the street from mine. And there’s a driveway so he was sitting like to go where you enter the parking lot at the other, other complex. He was sitting there parked facing the street. He turned is flashing on my face…I’m like fuck… what are you doing. And he was like “oooh just checking to see because you look suspicious”. I’m like … I put my headphones back in and walked off on his ass. I was just like dude stop talking to me in his face like. Just being a stereotype.

When the law enforcement officer noticed him, he (the law enforcement officer) turned on his vehicle flashlight and pointed it at Darrius from across the street. Darrius grimaced as he recalled how the law enforcement officer shined the vehicle’s flashlight in his face. Similar to Randle, Darrius was mentally prepared for this law enforcement officer encounter. Darrius immediately addressed the law enforcement officer and asked, “What are you doing?” The law enforcement officer responded and informed Darrius he appeared suspicious. Darrius did not challenge this accusation, instead he internalized his frustration and continued to walk home. Darrius accepted being a target of suspicion despite not doing anything or being involved in a report of criminal activity. According to Darrius, his acceptance of being a target of suspicion was attributed to the “stereotype” of being a Black male. For instance, there are far more predominantly White areas than predominantly Black areas. Therefore, minorities will be deemed "out of place" more often than Whites (Johnson, 1995).

Darrius recalled a vicarious experience with law enforcement officers where his Black male friends were targets of suspicion because they matched a physical description of a suspect. In such abusive practices, Black males are readily associated with criminal activity without any individualized suspicion and as a result, Black men have become the profile of crime in America
(Johnson, 1995). During Darrius’ recollection of his vicarious experiences with law enforcement officers, he shared a common reoccurring incidence. For example, several of his friends shared with him where they were stopped, detained, and questioned because of both their race and clothing description matched that of an some accused of a crime. His friends all complained that they were stopped regardless of their demeanor, apparent noninvolvement in the accused situation, rather because they wore a hooded sweatshirt and was Black:

Ummm … being stopped. Ummm because they fit the description of a suspect for a crime that happened off campus. You know what I’m saying like ok like oh what you Black with a Black hoodie. Like you know like damn near 90% of Black males owns a Black hoodie. You know that’s a description you know it’s like those types of things… those counter measures. Those experiences just …it scares you. It’s just like what if the suspect that actually did it was a murderer, or some shit and you thought I was a murder and you shot me. You know what I’m saying just it’s not the fact that what happened is what could have happened. That scares me. I think that a lot of times where police officers don’t understand. This situation could… can go somewhere totally where it doesn’t need to be if you just you know what I’m saying calm down you know. Think logically real quick. Instead of thinking what you see in the paper. You know what I’m saying.

Darrius acknowledged the similarity of the style of dress and resemblance of a majority of young Black males, he along with his Black male friends could easily match the descriptors of the suspect. Subsequently, Darrius expressed his fears, frustration in misunderstanding, apprehension towards law enforcement that he felt due to the possibility of matching a description of a criminal. Darrius provided the implications of being linked with descriptors of a murder suspect and the real possibility of being killed due to this association of criminality. This notion further supports the psychological impact of being the target of suspicion for Black males and the feelings of uncertainty for the next encounter with law enforcement. For instance, fear, paranoia, or hatred may result from the feeling of being under constant surveillance in the majority of areas in this country (Johnson, 1995).
The feeling of being under constant surveillance in the presence of law enforcement officers appears to be normalized by some of the Black male participants. However, what are the implications if you’re under constant surveillance unknowingly by everyday citizens. The saying, "being in the wrong place at the wrong time" holds especially true for Black males (Johnson, 1995). Anthony Cooper shared his personal experience with law enforcement officers that occurred at his residential home.

Prior to telling me about his personal experience with law enforcement officers, like Darrius, Anthony was sure to provide explicit details about his parents’ tangible wealth, such as type of house and brand cars they owned as well as a description of his childhood neighborhood without being prompted. It appeared as if Anthony tried to defend how his encounter with law enforcement should not have been threatening or suspicious due to the societal acceptance of his status and portrayal of wealth in his predominantly White, gated neighborhood. Anthony described his house to be a 3-car garage home, with a minimum of three luxury vehicles two BMWs, one JEEP, and sometime a regular sedan parked outside in a “long” driveway. On a weekday, when his parents were out of town, he parked his JEEP, around 8pm, he left his home, but forgot to get his keys in his house. Anthony had a strong sense of belonging to his home, neighborhood, and class. His thought process appeared to be logical to enter through a side window to gain entry to his house in order to retrieve his keys. Anthony was successful and gained entry to his house, but as he exited, for law enforcement officers in four separate squad cars approached him:

He said I broke into the house. I was like… what you mean… so it was one day after a basketball game. I came home. I remember it was like 8oclock. I left the basketball game at 749. It was like 8 something. I had a Black jeep…. Black jeep. Like my dad… we had a 3-car garage and so… 3 cars would always be in there so…if not it’s like 4 cars. So, we had it was a BMW. It was a silver BMW. Navy BMW that’s my steomoms and then. I’m
trying to remember the car we had. Or it was another car. Or he would just not use the… it was like a smaller garage... 3 cars. The 2-car garage then the separate one car garage. Sometimes it would be something in there. So, the jeep… like I don’t need to pull out the driveway to go to school. It would be right by the side of the mailbox. It’s a long lil area… you can park it right there. So forever. It would always be — it’s always right there. Like ever since I had the car. It was right there. So, my parents went out of town. They went out of town. I’m finna park in the driveway. Parked in the driveway. I opened the garage. Well I closed the garage door. And then I noticed I’m finna get in the car. Don’t have my car keys. I’m like ahhhh…. Dang. So, I’m like ok how I’m going to get in the house. I’m like cool… let me go through the back door. I look… the back door is not open I’m like ugh…ok. Front door. Let me see if anything with the front door. No. no front door. Like… like ugh. You know what… the side door. It’s like a lil window on the side. You can get in through the basement. Side window. Get in through the basement. Open the door. Open the garage door. Next thing I know… put the car in the car. The next thing I know… police coming. Like “your neighbors called the police. do you live here?” I’m like “yeah… I live here.” They was like do you. Yeah, I do. They was like do you have any id proving that you live here. I’m like luckily, I just got a new state id that say I live here… well my driver’s license. I just got my license. Fine. Sure. He’s like oohhh and its funny so my dad is Anthony Cooper and my name is Anthony Cooper, so we have the same name, the name that’s on the house. Is the name that’s on my ID. He was like “oh well I still gotta call your parents and tell them what happened.” This that and the third. “To let them know… are you the right person that’s supposed to be here.” I’m like “ok. Whatever.” And then he said, “your neighbor across the street called the police.” And I’m like … and I knew it was him. I saw him smoking a cigarette looking at the police. It was crazy because it was like… I thought it would be like them lil impala police cars… naw it was them trucks. Like them lil dark lil trucks… like this like the explorer. It was like them explorers. It was 2 came from … I stayed on the curve so 2 that came from one side the other and one came from around and the other one. Came from the main gate entrance. Cus It was kinda like… it wasn’t a gated community, but it was like a fence. That’s at the… that said the estate name. it was 4 police cars. I’m like wow. All cus y’all think I broke into my house. With my keys. I’m like wow. But it was like… they… ever since then I never really like go outside. And he told me, “the guy said he didn’t recognize the car.” And I’m like…

As Anthony recalled this incident, he still appeared shocked and insulted by the association of criminal behavior. Anthony assumed his class and social status would overrule his race and perception by others. Because Blacks are labeled as violent threats to society, the criminal justice system in America still seeks to control Blacks and protect White citizens from Black violence (Johnson, 1995). Regardless, the outcome Anthony was still subjected to being a
target of suspicion with the unsolicited assistance of his White neighbor with whom he was acquainted with. In addition to the racial implications, the out-of-place doctrine may impinge upon Black males' constitutional due process rights, specifically the rights to travel and associate. By making certain areas "off limits" to Black males, this segment of the population is restrained from moving freely in our society (Johnson, 1995).

Russell Stephens shared his unique, personal experience with law enforcement officers. Russell described walking by a park in his neighborhood and noticing multiple law enforcement officers drive by in their police cars. As the law enforcement officers drove by him, they stared at him. During this experience, law enforcement officers did not speak, engage, or approach Russell. As he spoke, Russell appeared to be having a moment of realization for the way he felt during that experience with law enforcement officers. He concluded that he was uncomfortable.

“I think it was just mainly like just the police. because it’s just like… I remember. I would just sometimes walk to like the park that’s like nearby my house. And like sometimes. I would just be walking, and I’ll just see like a cop car past by and they would just … cop car …cop car… pass by and just them just like look. And like I don’t know… I don’t know if it was just like a stare or something cus like I couldn’t tell because like they got like sunglasses on. But like…I don’t know every time they did that; I just felt a bit uncomfortable.”

Johnson (1995) argued slightly intrusive police behavior can inflict great racial harm to others. For instance, fear, paranoia, or hatred may result from the feeling of being under constant surveillance in the majority of areas in this country (Johnson, 1995). Russell’s personal experience was a significant example of how being a target of suspicion does not necessarily have to involve a conversation, interaction, or outcome. However, the result of him being surveyed left him feeling uncomfortable and paranoid.

This next section will share the participants’ accounts of their feelings of the inequities in treatment they felt compared to their White peers. Previous research supports White youth held a
mixed view of the police (both positive and negative), whereas Black youth regarded the police as “bullies in uniform.” Compared to Whites, young Blacks had “virtually no conception of the police as guardians

**Discrepancy in Treatment Due to Race**

Participants shared their developmental factors of perception of law enforcement officers on a college campus was also attributed to their experiences of discrepancies of treatment or outcome of nonminorities. Empirically and politically, race is the most important fault line along which Americans divide over policing, and three decades of research have documented racial and ethnic differences in assessments of the police and in patterns of police–citizen interactions (Weitzer et al., 2008). The following participant excerpts describe Vicarious and Personal Experiences where participants felt they were surveyed, dispersed, or the outcome of the encounter with law enforcement officers was dictated solely due to their race. During the interviews, without provocation, participants compared the racial make-up of their social gatherings, acknowledgement of perception of crimes, and lastly hypothesized the outcomes of incidents, if nonminority individuals experience the same encounter with law enforcement officers. Whether or not the perception is accurate, participants’ belief has adversely impacted their perception of law enforcement officers on a college campus. Citizens’ beliefs and expectations can affect their demeanor in encounters with police officers, their compliance with officer demands, and their willingness to assist the police by reporting crimes and serving as witnesses, and it can affect larger political and racial tensions in a city and the very legitimacy of the local police department (Weitzer et al., 2008).
Although Joseph Moore admittedly was familiar with the criminal justice system due to both his own wrong actions and vicarious experiences with law enforcement officers, he expressed his perception of inequity of treatment with nonminorities. Joseph sold drugs in his neighborhood and did not discriminate against any buyer; however, he stated he observed the consequences differed between White and Black buyers:

Uhh well it was actually... one time that it was some White guys that came to our neighborhood and bought all these drugs and like we seen the police take all of the drugs. He had the guy in handcuffs. He took all the drugs out of his pocket and then he just gave him a lecture and let him go. So that’s why I feel like it’s the same neighborhood like I know if was a … other way around we would be locked up.

Joseph recalled an incident in his neighborhood where he frequently sold drugs, where a group of White males came to his neighborhood and purchased drugs. Since Joseph had been previously arrested for the same exact crime, selling drugs, he knew the process of apprehension and final outcome resulting in an arrest. Due to the low-income neighborhood and overpopulation of crime, specifically the sale of drugs, Joseph wasn’t surprised that the White males were stopped and handcuffed by law enforcement officers for purchasing drugs. Blacks are more likely than Whites to report that they have received unfair or disrespectful treatment from officers, thus contributing to their more critical views of the police (Weitzer et al., 2008). Joseph watched the familiar process proceed. Except this encounter with the law enforcement officers and White males greatly differed from his recent experiences with law enforcement officers for the exact type of drug offense. Although, the White males were handcuffed and their drugs were confiscated, the law enforcement encounter ending with a lecture. Joseph was convinced race was a factor in this encounter due to his own and vicarious experiences for offense of buying illegal drugs.
Similarly, as Joseph, Darrius believed that in the event he was personally involved in a drug related offense, the outcome of the law enforcement encounter would have been different due to his race. Public perceptions of police misconduct can be just as important as actual misconduct (Weitzer et al., 2008). Darrius shared a hypothetical story of his White friend’s experience with law enforcement officers where the drugs were confiscated, and no arrest was made. Darrius believed based solely on race, the experiences with law enforcement officers would yield different consequences:

Laughing … being let off. After having drugs. You know I’m just like … stuff like that. I did ask for that idea. Punishment come in where you may feel like its each (inaudible) 3 grams 4 grams you know what I’m saying of drugs and nothing happened to them. And I was just like … if it was me? They makes you think ok now. What if it’s me? What if this was me? You know what I’m saying as a Black man. What if it’s me? What if I was in that situation, would I be arrested immediately. Would it just be confiscated? What would happened?

While Darrius, did not have an actual example of a vicarious or personal experience with law enforcement officers, he questioned the integrity and ability of law enforcement officers to provide such leniency with him during a drug related offense. Although, at the time of Darrius’ interview, the miniscule amounts of cannabis whether three or four grams were still considered criminal, that amount did not have to result in an arrest by law. Alternative repercussions could have been a verbal warning, city ordinance, or a referral to Student Conduct. Instead of the same, across the board, result in consequence, Darrius was unsure of the possibilities of outcomes if he was personally involved in this situation because he’s a Black male.

But what if the experiences with law enforcement officers aren’t criminal rather involved another aspect of enforcement. The next seven out of eight participant experiences both vicarious and personal involved the comparison of law enforcement outcomes at social gatherings, or a party. Randle, Darrius, Charles, Kevin, Russell, Alexander, and Bernard each shared their
experiences with law enforcement officers dispersing an off-campus party on the basis race and identity of the party goers instead of a perceived crime being committed. This is problematic because young Black males’ perception of inequity in treatment in comparison to their White counterparts adversely impacted how they perceived law enforcement officers on their college campus.

Randle was quite direct and clear about his feelings with law enforcement officers. As mentioned in previous excerpts, Randle acknowledged his participation in previous criminal activities, took responsibility for his involvement, and rationalized the outcome of the encounter. Randle’s primary qualm about his experiences with law enforcement officers have been the manner in which he or other minorities were treated in comparison to the severity of the crime. Due to his numerous experiences with law enforcement officers, Randle concluded, “Police just suck. Yeah.” This sentiment was echoed among participants for their response to law enforcement officers for their discrepancy in treatment when it came to Black and White off-campus parties, where underage drinking, noise violations, or amount of people were a factor:

I’m serious. (laughs). You can’t throw no parties. One time we threw a party we rented out a place in a basement and it was right across from a White frat and White frat called the police on us while they had drunk girls outside. And they was bringing drunk girls into they shit and drinking outside but then came in and turned our shit down. And it was like that’s really crazy like yes, it’s their property but look these girls are clearly intoxicated … I doubt they’re 21. They’re probably going to get raped like and y’all ain’t doing shit about it, but you want to break up our shit. We just having fun. We not even outside.

Randle expressed his displeasure with being overly surveilled and poorly treated by law enforcement officers for suspicions of crimes. He was adamantly disturbed that he along with other minorities weren’t granted the same privilege to equally party as college students. For example, in Randle’s interview, he suggested that law enforcement officers should recognize and
understand college students were enrolled in college with goal to better themselves and graduate; however, college students wanted to have fun as well. Randle recognized the disparities in being unable to host an off-campus party due to previous unsuccessful attempts and locations around campus. Randle recalled this incident where he specifically chose a location where other parties were occurring, specifically parties with the majority of White partygoers in order to minimize the possibilities of noise violations or other disturbance calls. Randle’s attempts to circumvent this outcome was thwarted. Randle stated that despite the blatant crimes of public intoxication, criminal sexual assault, and underage drinking, at the surrounding, “White” parties; his party with majority of Black party goers contained inside and no signs of crime was shut down. Americans believe that racialized policing is common in their own neighborhoods, in their cities, and in the nation as a whole (Brunson & Weitzer, 2009).

Similar to Randle, Darrius had the same feelings towards law enforcement officers in regard to “Black” parties. Darrius shared his perspective about law enforcement officers and Black events, where the majority of partygoers were Black. Darrius noted the obvious increased amount of law enforcement, lack of presence of criminal activity, and existence of bias that led to these discrepancies in treatment:

Just look at … look at the Black events. A party that a Black org is throwing. Just look at how many police officers be there. Usually a lot of times I see why but laughs. I see why, you know what I’m saying... laughs. I get that. But just the idea that it’s like whenever a Black situation occurs the police shows up fast as hell. But if it was a something a White situation it wouldn’t be that much… be that underage of deal… it wouldn’t be that big of a deal. It’s evident. You see it. You witness. I’m watching it. I live here. You know what I’m saying so like... I think it kinda like look even more suspicious when you have 20 cars pulling up to a issue with a Black person. When it’s like none for a White person you know what I’m saying, so, I don’t like that. I think that something that has to be addressed. Well that’s where you are always going to have bias being thrown into conversation. You have that type of reaction time with certain situations. Involving different colored people, you know what I’m saying so.
Interestingly, Darrius described the discrepancy in the law enforcement response and response times to social gatherings where it’s a majority of Black party goers. He stated, there was an increased law enforcement presence during all Black hosted events in compared to White hosted events. Race makes a difference as well: Minority youth in the United States are more likely than Whites to be viewed with suspicion and stopped by the police (Brunson & Weitzer, 2009). For example, if an incident occurred, Darrius believed law enforcement officers showed up quicker and with a stronger presence to deal with one person of color. This description demonstrated Darrius beliefs of the appearance of Black people and their association with violence, aggression, and crime. Despite his disagreement in the inequality of the number of law enforcement officers working the respective events, Darrius briefly joked and alluded to understanding why this discrepancy existed. Darrius referred to the fights and disorderly conduct of party goers that solicited undesired but needed law enforcement presence to deter unsafe behaviors. Darrius stated, he was aware that bias played a role in law enforcement response in regard to the treatment of Black and White individuals. Blacks are often cast as menaces to society through the labeling of certain acts as deviant and criminal; however, criminal studies show that Blacks are no more dangerous than any other segment of the United States population (Johnson, 1995).

Like Randle, Kevin also recognized the disparities in being unable to host an off-campus party due to previous unsuccessful attempts and locations around campus. Kevin recalled this incident where he specifically chose an empty, open parking lot adjacent to the campus recreation center in order to minimize the possibilities of noise violations or other disturbance calls. Randle’s attempts to circumvent this outcome was unsuccessful:
Right. And the campus police... pulled up and they was like y’all making too much noise right here. But y’all can go to the convo party lot with this. And we was like whoa... you know what I’m saying... we expected them to pull up like it’s over with. y’all might as well wrap it up. And it just put them speakers away. We got all of these cars out there. And they like man Aight its late y’all can’t be blasting music right but ain’t nothing going on in the convo parking lot at 12 in the ...you feel me. y’all can go right there and go set y’all music do y’all thing or whatever. And Ummm later DeKalb police pulled up like oh hell naw. laughs Shut this down too. But that’s one of the things I remember that I thought that was interesting.

Despite Kevin’s effort to host a party with the majority of partygoers were Black in a desolate location, it was still dispersed by law enforcement officers. As Kevin recalled this incident, he laughed at his attempts to comply with the noise ordinances by altering the location but was still unsuccessful. He didn’t seem frustrated by this repetitive failure of compliance with no positive results. Kevin appeared to normalize this outcome of being unable to host any social gathering without law enforcement disruption.

During Charles’ interview, he was asked about any stories whether positive or negative that his friend, Black or White, had with law enforcement officers. Charles made it clear that while he had White friends, he did not have any White friends that he could openly discuss issues of race and law enforcement. Unlike Kevin, Darrius, and Randle, Charles did not have any personal experiences with the discrepancy of treatment; however, he hypothesized the outcome of an encounter with law enforcement officers:

No cus Ima just say that as far as with White friends. I got some but you know they haven’t really had any negative encounters with the police. you know. Now I can say for Black friends ... you know... they always get caught for doing something that they shouldn’t be doing. And that’s why the police do come. You know as far as having a big ole party and you know people just doing what… do as they please. But that’s it. Nothing really else … I haven’t seen or encountered it.

Charles stated he did not have any negative experiences with law enforcement officers, but his awareness of the negative experiences of his Black friends. Charles appeared to place the
blame or onus on his Black friends for their outcome with law enforcement officers. Charles seemed to be convinced regardless of the situation, his Black friends were at fault, or responsible for the solicited encounter with law enforcement officers. Similar to Darrius, who acknowledged deviant behavior associated with young Black people, Charles also made a similar association of race and irresponsibility. For Charles to simplify the privilege of sanctioned socially gatherings and correlate race with disobedience was noteworthy. This account illustrates both the way in which privilege is associated with active and apparently successful resistance of police harassment, and the ways in which intersectional identities operate to construct the profile of a criminal of a Black, economically disenfranchised man (Dottolo & Stewart, 2008).

Both Alexander Pierson and Bernard Braxton, respectively, identified and acknowledged the racial make-up of the group of individuals at separate off-campus parties as a factor in the unmerited dispersal. Unlike the previously mentioned excerpts, the following two stories resulting in dispersal without any information provided by law enforcement officers. Weitzer (2002) argued Blacks and Hispanics are more likely than Whites to believe that the police frequently engage in misconduct, and when compared to Whites, minority groups tend to view instances of officer misconduct as being more serious and disturbing partly because the victims are disproportionately minority group members.

I met with everybody else they were all there having fun. And the police pulled up and just liked flashed her lights on them. They said they flashed their lights on them. I was inside already, and he flashed their lights and he was telling everybody that they had to clear out. Cus at the moment everybody outside was Black.

Alexander recalled his only personal experience with law enforcement officers, which occurred on his college campus. Instead of using some form of communication to inform partygoers of the perceived crime or violation that occurred, law enforcement officers used
nonverbal communication as a means of dispersal. In addition, to be ill-informed for the reason for dispersal, Alexander could only note the racial makeup of all partygoers were Black. The lack of communication and race is common barrier for citizens and law enforcement officers.

Bernard experienced a similar encounter with law enforcement officers as Alexander did. It was a similar setting of an off-campus party where nonverbal communication was used to disperse the partygoers. Bernard tried to justify the actions of partygoers by further explaining, they were partying on a weekend rather than irresponsibly during the weekday as classes were in session. Once again, it appears their right to belong, in this case a party, was consistently being questioned:

Cus [Because] usually like just from experience like at parties and stuff like that…especially the party over the weekend. Ummm so they came…it was like…a kickback. Wasn’t nobody was really too loud nobody was fighting or nothing like that, but they came in and tried to shut it down. And it was just like…we just out here having fun. Like we just college students trying to have fun you I know. It’s the weekend.

Bernard expressed confusion of the dispersal of the party since no one was engaged in criminal or violent activities. In both experiences, neither Alexander or Bernard stated law enforcement officers did not offer information or explained the reason for dispersal.

Communication and information can greatly influence the response and interactions between citizens and law enforcement officers. The findings suggest that, holding neighborhood socioeconomic context constant, race makes a difference in how youth are treated by police and in their perceptions of officers (Brunson & Weitzer, 2009).

In comparison to other participant experiences, Russell and Jimmy had more favorable vicarious experiences with law enforcement officers. Their experiences positively influenced their perception of law enforcement officers, seeing as they did not have their own personal experiences of discrepancy of treatment due to race.
No, not really. None of my Black friends really said anything about campus police. So, my White friends? They only things that they said… is just like…the campus police… like they just really like make sure like make sure like things safe or like as long as like you’re not doing anything stupid. They won’t come and like intervene.

Russell’s White friends appeared to have more trust and viewed law enforcement officers as allies. Compared to Whites, young Blacks had “virtually no conception of the police as guardians (Brunson & Weitzer, 2009). Instead of being accused of a crime or any wrongdoing, Russell’s White friends looked to law enforcement officers for assistance without prejudice. It has been argued that Whites enjoy a “racial halo effect” that reduces the chances of being viewed with suspicion by police officers, but this halo appears to dim in these three situations of guilt by association (Brunson & Weitzer, 2009).

Lastly, Jimmy recalled a positive, vicarious experience with law enforcement officers. Jimmy’s Black friends shared their story that occurred at an off-campus party, where they needed the assistance of law enforcement officers to voluntarily disperse a party that had grown to be too large for capacity.

Oh, a friend of mine…he had…he throw a party. He needed people to get out because it was getting to wild. So, he called. Campus police. he was like alright…he’s like…kinda come in and make sure…make it seem like the party getting shut down. They did that. They like actually came to the house. We talked…. everybody left. And it was really cool. It was really weird. It was like whoa… they actually here. And then just like cool.

Jimmy’s vicarious experience with law enforcement officers appeared to work in tandem with the Black male college students to solve a problem. As Jimmy recalled this story, he seemed surprised and conflicted about the outcome of solicited law enforcement involvement. Although Jimmy did not elaborate on his expectations on the outcome of interactions with law enforcement officers, based solely on his response it appears he expected some sort of opposition or indirect consequences. It should be noted that of all the 15 participants, Jimmy was the only participant
who had both a positive personal and vicarious experience with law enforcement officers. When treated with dignity, even when stopped on suspicion of criminal behavior or arrested, alternatively they expressed frustration and anger when subjected to seemingly disrespectful and inappropriate behavior and language. These responses indicated that expectations for respect and positive interpersonal treatment hold regardless the nature of the stop (Novich & Hunt, 2018).

As mentioned above, participants were asked to provide descriptions of themselves, preferred descriptions and then lastly descriptions of campus law enforcement officers. I concluded the focus group interview by asking each participant for their desired description to be perceived by campus law enforcement officers. This is significant to this study because similarly to the feelings the three Black males, I encountered outside of the Student Center, who peaked my interest in this topic of research, are the same shared perspectives of the Black males in this study. The shared perspectives for Black male college students, all revolve around the idea of being invisible, presumed guilt, and simply wanting to avoid the encounter with law enforcement officers.

Upon first sight, Joseph Moore, Randle Cross, Brian Rivers, Anthony Cooper, Tobias Samuels, Kevin King, Russell Stephens, Donald Newell, Quentin Crawford, and Bernard Braxton wanted law enforcement officers to avoid any and all contact with them. This desire appeared to supersede the annoyance of being surveilled or accused, but a plea to be humanized and worthy of freely living and moving without restrictions. Non-Whites learn to fade into the background, but sometimes you can’t or you don’t (Ahmed, 2007).

The following responses provided below are not in sequential order or specific to any participant: “Leave me be… let me go about my business”, “I ain’t come to start no trouble… I just here to graduate and get an education”, “I feel the same… just leave me alone”, “I don’t put
my trust in another man to protect me than may or may not like me… so I don’t really need the police for that”, “I’m not bothering nobody”, “I would say do your job the right way… don’t …don’t let personal feelings… don’t let my skin color in between this encounter that me and you having. I’m trying to be successful. Just leave me alone”, “Leave me the fuck alone. That’s that!”, “Can I go now? Cus [Because] they always trying to stop you and hold you there for 20 minutes for nothing. I just want to go home. Alive!”, “Don’t be so quick to ummm assert yourself over people you what I’m saying like we human just like everybody else”, “We’re all the same”, “Like whatever you do whatever energy you put into the universe will deposit negative or positive energy out… put positive energy whoever you stopping”, and “Yeah ummm you never know what’s going to go on further in life just you have a badge like your kids may get stopped by some cops and they might know… you’re a cop’s kid and sometimes when they do know they just don’t give a fuck”.

These participant responses highlights the most basic desire for the Black males in this study to be accepted by their White peers, adults and authority figures. Additionally, Black males in this study want to dispel all perceptions of aggressive, dangerous, and criminal stereotyping. It appeared as if, they did not want law enforcement officers to allow the appearance of their Black skin color to dictate their treatment or guilt.

Conclusion

In this section, I analyzed participant responses coded into the category, Vicarious and Personal Experiences. Each category also included subcategories; Vicarious and Personal Experiences were coded into Humiliation, Accusation and Discrepancy in Treatment due to race with the law enforcement officers. Although, the majority of experiences with law enforcement
officers did not occur on their college campus, nor was their first experiences with law enforcement officers on their college campus. Participants still relied on those experiences as precursors for anticipating the outcomes of encounters with law enforcement officers. Through participant responses, a common cultural narrative of criminality, as it is experienced, in everyday lives of young Black males was determined. The perception of disproportionate use of force and inappropriate language becomes central to their feelings of disrespect as it sends signals of indifference towards their status as members of the community (Novich & Hunt, 2018). These responses helped outline the Black male college students’ developmental factors of perception of law enforcement officers on a college campus.

This chapter shared the findings of this research study. I chose to seek the opinion of college students, specifically Black males, about their developmental factors of their perception of law enforcement officers on their college campus. In order to understand Black male college students’ perception of law enforcement officers on their college campuses, it was imperative to first examine their identities as individuals, then discuss their perceived barriers of interacting with law enforcement officers on their college campus, such as Black culture, history, or family upbringing. Too often in the analysis of Black boys, Black families, and Black communities, any evidence of what is perceived as a negative is read quickly against a persistent script of racial inferiority and blame of family and communities, rather than confronting the strength and persistence of racism, its structural manifestations, and state culpability (Dowd, 2018). Lastly, in addition to coping with college life, distance from family, and making new friends, they must learn how to navigate in a rural atmosphere with a larger, White community of people who have had minimal exposure to and familiarity with Black people and urban culture (Woldoff et al., 2011).
CHAPTER 5
FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

This final chapter summarizes the findings of this study, which study sought to understand the perceptions of Black male college students towards law enforcement officers. Then I discuss implications for theory and practice followed by the conclusions.

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this study was to understand the perceptions of Black male college students towards law enforcement officers. The participant narratives can help educators consider how life experiences prior to enrolling in higher education, such as developmental factors and identity can influence Black male students’ perceptions and interactions with campus law enforcement officers. Understanding how these perceptions were developed can provide insight about how to effectively work with students of color. This study answered several research questions. First, I will discuss the research question how Black male college students described their relationship with campus law enforcement officers on their college campus. Subsequently, I will discuss how Black male college students describe their life experiences and perceptions of campus law enforcement officers on their college campus.

In this study, the majority of Black male college students had an overwhelming dislike towards their campus law enforcement officers. This finding was consistent with previous studies that surveyed Black males’ satisfaction with law enforcement officers (Brunson, 2007; Dottolo & Stewart, 2008). This negative perception of law enforcement by Black males can be
traced back to CRT as well as the ideology of whiteness. You may recall, CRT’s first tenet is the intercentricity of race and racism with other forms of subordination (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Brunson (2007) similarly argues Black males have always felt targeted by law enforcement officers. The Black males in this study did not view campus law enforcement officers as community allies because they experienced inequitable treatment compared to their White, student peers. Rather, Black males believed that despite their transition into predominantly White academic institutions, they still remain a primary target of crime for law enforcement. The majority of Black youths said that they routinely attracted police attention regardless of whether they were involved in criminal or suspicious activities (Brunson & Weitzer, 2009). The Black males in this study perceived campus law enforcement as an unnecessary service provided by the University. This finding was unusual and had not been previously explored by other research studies.

The Black males interviewed in this study believed their anger towards Whites in general, justifiably supported their anger towards White law enforcement. The student responses support the belief that adolescents’ experiences of racism innately become transferred as an intensely felt adult belief and emotion. For example, the Black males individually described most law enforcement officers as White males. Subsequently, due to the adolescent experiences of racism, they immediately transferred their ill feelings about White people towards law enforcement officers. This finding was consistent with numerous reports that support this negative image that Blacks harbor toward law enforcement (Johnson, 1995; Leinen, 1984; Weitzer et al., 2008; Williams & Murphy, 1990). The notion that Black males learn through shared negative experiences and emotions is supported in the ideology of whiteness. Guess (2006) argues “Whiteness is the moral, social, symbolic, and intellectual to real or manufactured phenotypical
features which justify and give normality to the institutional and societal dominance of one population over other populations materialized in resource mobilization, control over power, authority and prestige privileges, and ownership of the means of production’’ (p.658).

The theories, critical race theory, the theory of Nigrescence, and the ideology of whiteness together support Black male students’ perceptions towards law enforcement officers. Kincheloe (1999) argue that whiteness is innately involved with issues of power between White and non-White people. Likewise, in this study, students interviewed saw White law enforcement as the dominant culture whose primary purpose is the oppression of Black males. Through participant narratives, it is widely believed that law enforcement have the authority to adversely affect Black males’ freedom, movements, and finances through fines and arrests. The police always operated as a regulating force, limiting, restricting, and threatening the freedom of Black men in particular (Dottolo & Stewart, 2008).

The second major finding revealed that adolescent life experiences were some of the participant perspectives on the developmental factors of Black male students’ perceptions of law enforcement. In fact, although only two of the Black males had any interactions with campus police, all participants expressed having a negative image of law enforcement. Participants repeatedly addressed the excessive use of physical force and unwarranted surveillance among their personal experiences. Several spoke of unjust arrests and false accusations of crime. Weitzer et al. (2008) argue police characterize certain neighborhoods as being more problematic which leads officers to stereotype residents as uncooperative, hostile, or crime prone; therefore, police are more likely to approach residents with greater suspicion, behave more aggressively, and to act more punitively than they do in other kinds of neighborhoods.
Furthermore, these narratives were predominantly highlighted by conversations of mistrust and hostility towards law enforcement. Most participants acknowledged that the negative treatment of Blacks in the news reports was a resounding reason for their hostility toward law enforcement as well. The disproportionate focus of law enforcement on Black offenders derives primarily from media images depicting “gun-toting black teenage gangs”, which is racially biased and highly damaging to black males (Johnson, 1995. p.644). As mentioned earlier, for the most part, these negative and hostile feelings towards law enforcement were ingrained within these participants during their adolescence. Thus, it is quite apparent from these discussions that community and culture exert a great influence upon the perceptions of Black male youth. Solórzano & Yosso (2002) stated, “the experiences of people of color generate from a legacy of racial privilege, they are stories in which racial privilege seems natural”. Obviously, it would be understandable to conclude from the narratives of these participants that feelings of negativity would harbor against any law enforcement officer. For these Black males, racial injustice is affirmed through a system of racial dominance (Bonilla-Silva, 2015); specifically, law enforcement. Critical race theory validates the notion that our judicial and criminal justice system is structured to disfavor people of color. Negativity and hostility may be the only reasonable response to a dominant culture of injustice.

The third and final major finding revealed that Black males in this study wanted to disguise all cultural expressions of themselves. These disguises manifested themselves as alterations to their appearance through style of dress, changes in hairstyle, language, and tone of voice. More specifically, some of the Black males in this study stated that they wanted to hide their affiliation to the hip-hop style of dress by wearing khakis instead of jeans, or pulling their pants above their hips instead of wearing them below their butt. Other participants discussed how
they attempted to change their language, and sometimes lowered their voice or tone. Some Black males provided examples of having to be mindful of their volume of voice, use of profanity, or animation when speaking with White people. They also shared how high collars and long sleeve shirts helped to hide their tattoos. In this study, the desire to conceal or disguise one’s sense of Blackness was deeply rooted in their perception of the dominant culture. Specifically, the Black male students believed that the White dominant culture harbors negative stereotypes of themselves. These stereotypes included the perceptions that Blacks are lazy, aggressive, criminals, and lack academic competence. Therefore, at least in the minds of these participants, these disguises offer a smooth transition to assimilate into the predominant White culture. It is significant to note, there was no significant socioeconomic or class difference among the student participants. DeCuir-Gunby (2009) argues “although race is defined in both biological and social terms, the social component most influences identity development” (p. 104).

Likewise, Solórzano and Yosso (2002) reveal that there are advantages of being White from salary to life expectancy. Blackness is an expression that is embedded within the Black community itself. It is developed through cultural exchange and social role acquisition (Erikson 1950, 1968). Erikson (1968) states that race is one of the most significant socially constructed variables within the development of one’s identity. Moreover, adolescence is the most critical period for the development of racial identity. Given the dominance of White privilege on their campus, Black male students saw little benefit in expressing their Blackness. Black males in this study further expressed feelings of being ostracized or reprimanded when presenting ideas that embraced their Black experience rather than being rewarded or acknowledged. Black males also shared their feelings of the burdensome responsibility to speak on behalf of Black people in relation to anything involved with Black culture. Since all of the Black males within this study
were between the ages of 18 and 24 years old, it is imperative to understand that they were still within the critical and transformative years of development. According to the overwhelming perceptions of what they perceived as negative stereotypes of their Blackness, one could easily understand their willingness to shift, or assimilate towards the prevalent White campus culture.

This move to assimilate towards the prevalent, dominant White campus culture was supported by the Nigrescence model better known as the Black Identity Development model. This model describes how racial identity develops for Black youth during their adolescence and adulthood. Erikson (1950) explained, “the importance of adolescence by describing how it serves as a buffer between childhood and adulthood. He further found that race is a prime example of cultural connotations and social roles that bridges the stage of young adulthood. In regard to childhood experiences, Black males in this study, summarized how they felt they were stereotyped due to their Black identity despite their affiliations with predominantly White neighborhoods, educational status, and student organizations. Unlike Black identity, Guess (2006) argues, whiteness is a social construction in that it can be invented, lived, analyzed, modified, and discarded. The third stage of Nigrescence, Immersion, aligns with their experiences (Cross, 1991). During the immersion stage, Black people decompress all the negative stereotypes associated with being Black, and view being Black through a different lens (Ritchey, 2014). The fourth and final stage of Nigrescence, Internalization-Commitment, aligns with the Black male college students’ experiences in higher education. Black males expressed, in the face of adversity, how their maturation and transition into higher education despite their initial challenges of enrolling did not insulate them from presumptions of poverty or criminal profiling by their White peers or adults. Internalization-commitment focuses on the long-term interest of Black affairs over an extended amount of time (Cross, 1991).
The CRT affirms that racial inequality is a result of a system of racial domination (Bonilla-Silva, 2015). These participants’ feelings were supported by the principles outlined with CRT. CRT validates that how the majority of White people have control of the judicial, criminal, and societal structures. This is problematic because these systems were not designed to benefit people of color. Therefore, in this instance regarding law enforcement, the system is set up to be one-sided. There is a perception that Black males tend to defend themselves from the social structure of racism in policing. Black males are aware of who are in charge of these systems, majority White people. Subsequently, the reasons why legislation is passed is due to the initial interests of the White people, it seeks to protect. Like the CRT, Black males recognize racism is more than the individual officer perspective, it pertains to the greater criminal justice system.

Contribution to Existing Research

This study contributed to existing research by expanding the understanding of how cultural experiences profoundly affect individual attitudes towards law enforcement. Previous research has shown that people of color have a largely negative image and mistrust of law enforcement (Biafora et al., 1993; Brunson, 2007; Dowd, 2018; Johnson, 1995). Understanding how these negative attitudes have developed could lend insight towards policy and programs that could ease their transition into campus life. Weitzer et al. (2008) found that young Black men were two to three times more likely than young White to hold negative experiences with police. They further explained how negative experiences have a greater cognitive and emotional salience than positive experience (Weitzer et al., 2008). However, few have ventured to explore the reasons such attitudes have been developed.
This study provided insight on how Black males’ early life experiences and how cultural exchange heavily influence their perceptions of law enforcement. This study revealed that Black male students typically arrive upon predominantly White campuses with pre-determined negative attitudes towards their White peers, administrators, and law enforcement. This study confirmed that despite the efforts of the intent to distinguish campus law enforcement officers from noncampus law enforcement officers, Black males associate them all the same. All law enforcement officers represent a system of power, oppression, and inequity for communities of color, specifically black males. Additionally, it is important for first- and second-year academic programs to tailor their educational curriculum with factual information regarding minority students. For example, the understanding that although, the incoming students did not have any adverse interactions with their campus law enforcement officers, a variety of contributing factors may dictate their (new students’) feelings and apprehension with campus law enforcement officers for the sake of reporting and interacting. The book, “Teaching for Black Lives” is an example of current literature that seeks to help educators positively depict black stories and lives (Watson, 2018). Currently, there is no literature available on any higher education institutions that implements curriculum for first- or second-year students on law enforcement interactions. Despite the major academic contribution, the social and personal contribution to academic research is the unheard stories of black male college students. By validating and listening to Black voices, research informed policies can be developed, if we are to demolish social injustices in higher education and the criminal justice system.
Implications for Theory and Practice

This section will provide sustainable recommendations to the field of study to improve the practices of campus law enforcement and its relationship with communities of color.

For Black Male College Students

Black males are often underestimated and devalued. It is time to regain your power and rights as citizens. I wanted to empower you to advocate for yourself and those who look like you as well as other people of color. You are capable of securing your future, protecting your rights, and demanding justice. I implore you to complete processes of filing formal complaints when you believed you have experienced injustices. This process of follow-through extend beyond the realm of the criminal justice system. For example, if you experience injustice, bias, or blatant racism in the classroom, campus, or surrounding city, do your due diligence to ensure accountability is met by the offending party. I challenge you to attend academic and city council meetings and engage in conversations and movements that affect your greater community. Additionally, be confident to assume leadership positions to be among policymakers and community influencers. Although, in communities of color, working in any aspect of the criminal justice system is often times considered being a “sellout”. However, in order to demand “real change”, you may have to become a stakeholder in that part of broken systems to initiate positive change. Being a law enforcement officer or lawyer, is not the only option. As Black male college student, you have already broken through social barriers and stereotypical norms by seeking to obtain higher education degrees. There are a variety of professions where your input, perspective and power is needed to advance progressive agendas and advocate for the
underserved. In the meantime, connect with Black faculty and staff on campus and build relationships that provide a variety of intellectual and spiritual resources.

For Research

While the developmental factors of perception for campus law enforcement officers were achieved, revealed, there is still much research that is needed. A future study might expand the scope and brevity of this study. For example, the scope of this study can be expanded by surveying college students on multiple campuses. Another future study can include an examination of Black females’ perception towards law enforcement. Of equal importance, it would be interesting to examine Black males and females in a longitudinal study. This type of research study may measure the correlation of educational attainment and confidence to navigate their social and academic environments Another study can interview White law enforcement officers regarding their perception towards Black males. A future research study should interview campus law enforcement officers and their perception of black male college students in relation to cultural competency. Additionally, this study will also seek to reveal how black and White campus law enforcement officers’ ability to recognition of differing cultural experiences and challenges of interacting with students of color. Another future study should focus on the surrounding law enforcement agencies of a college campus and their perception or ability to distinguish between black male college students and black males at a similar age not enrolled in higher education and does the educational enrollment and attainment matter for effective means of interacting with that specific population. This study will seek to reveal the training ideology of law enforcement officers to perceive black males as threats, criminals, or a contributing member of society. Lastly, another future research study will seek to explore college campuses that have
a minimum, some college educational requirement for campus law enforcement officers and the
difference in their police philosophies, interactions with students, and satisfaction of both faculty
and staff on that college campus. The motivation behind this study will be to examine how
campus law enforcement officers’ level of educational attainment impacts the officers’ ability to
effectively communicate and enforce policies and laws in a higher education environment due to
their personal experiences in higher education.

For Policy

Although, this study did not focus on the incongruencies of treatment among Black and
White student social gatherings, several participants made mention of the impact this had on
their experiences in higher education at a predominantly White institution. Participant narratives
highlighted the discrepancy in treatment of predominantly Black social gatherings on campus in
comparison to predominantly White social gatherings off campus. Most state universities require
all students to read and sign a statement of conduct. This study will implore the university’s
Student Association to engage in conversations to examine the current policies in regard to the
social event policy for on campus events. The campus law enforcement administration should
partner with the campus Student Affairs to create an on-campus event staffing model that mirrors
staffing requirements for off-campus events. This will help remove any appearance of bias in
how events are staffed and the related academic consequences for our Black students. This is
important because most on campus events are student organization funded. Without the proper
student funds, on campus events are more tightly regulated by school administrators including
campus law enforcement, whereas off campus events do not have to pay for security to regulate
events occurring on private property.
Another implication for policy should directly be initiated by the campus law enforcement for new officers before to being released on their own. A majority of law enforcement agencies require new hires to complete an “in-house” training program after the completion and certification at an accredited police academy. This policy can coincide with the department’s current standing Field Training Officer program, which is a structured composition of tasks, trainings, and demonstration of skills to be completed by new officers under direct supervision of qualified, veteran officer. Campus law enforcement agencies should initiate a new training policy that mandates all new officers to complete an 8 week to a full, 16-week semester course on cultural competency. This course will be unlike the paramilitary and mundane police trainings. During the duration of this course, new officers will be taught by different facilitators within the university that provide a variety of expertise and perspectives. Last and most importantly and impactfully, these courses will compromise of university students, faculty, staff, community members who independently decide to enroll in these respective courses. This benefit is to allow new officers to be amongst the community members they will serve in an academic and inclusive environment.

Another implication for policy for campus law enforcement agencies is the implication of a cooperative, Citizen Complaint Board. This board will be responsible for the review of complaints filed against officers. The benefit of this policy is to include the community as a stakeholder in the accountability of officers’ actions and responses during citizen contacts. It is similar to the ideologies of Restorative Justice, but drastic reformative of its principles. Braithwaite (2004) stated, “Restorative Justice has adopted a process where all the stakeholders affected by an injustice have an opportunity to discuss how they have been affected by the injustice and decide what should be done to repair the harm (p. 28)”. Although higher education
institutions have made progress in identifying ways in which campus programs can bridge diversity efforts, the essence of the dominant White narratives and colorblind approaches are still prevalent and daily demonstrated (Bonilla-Silva, 2006).

Lastly, in addition to a Citizens Complaint Board, each campus law enforcement agency will run its own independent Internal Affairs. This sector of the agency is not solely responsible for the recommendation of discipline for officers, but the proactive review and mediation of officers’ actions. This list includes but is not limited to an audit of officers’ completion of mandated trainings, report writing accuracy, and body and dashboard camera footage. The premise will be based on corporate policies on quality control for customer service. Law enforcement agencies will based their quality control on the adherence and execution of daily operations with consistency to department policy and standards.

For Practice

This study calls for the reform of campus law enforcement training and practices. The majority of participants shared they had an inherent fear of law enforcement because of their apparent Black identity. Additionally, participant narratives expressed how law enforcement did not recognize them as college students with aspirations to graduate and better themselves. This study calls for reform of both preparation courses in higher education and campus law enforcement training and practices.

It is imperative to consider Black males’ identity, family background, and life experiences prior to engaging in recruitment efforts for higher education. If we, as educators, are determined to recruit inner city or underserved populations, then we must consider the sustainability of the university’s capabilities to keep these sensitive populations supported and
safe. Most higher education institutions developed a transition course designed to assist new students adjust to academic and campus life. All first-year and transfer students should receive an accredited, orientation course for possible interactions, expectations, and purpose of campus law enforcement. Currently, there is no literature available on any higher education institutions that implements curriculum for first- or second-year students on law enforcement interactions. Additionally, campus law enforcement officers need to receive comprehensive, bi-annual training beyond the state mandated standards that educates officers on the possibility of students’ inherent fear of law enforcement prior to their arrival on campus. Currently most state colleges and universities adhere to their version of ethics training.

As a standard practice, all campus law enforcement officers should be required to have a college degree prior to employment. This will bridge the gap in culture, communication, and understanding of students enrolled in higher education. It is important for campus law enforcement officers to have personal, collegiate experiences including, but not limited to an on-campus residential living, participation in student-led organizations, as well as the social aspects of a campus life. In 1829 Peele argued for the need for a professionally trained police force; 87 years later, in 1916, August Vollmer, the father of modern policing, argued the necessity on professional training and college degrees for law enforcement (National Institute of Justice, 1995). Hence, the college initiative for law enforcement-degree seeking programs of developed by the University of California (NIJ, 1995). A degree in higher education will assist in law enforcement officers’ efforts in identifying students’ and best employing resources to correct student behavior. This academic requirement can create a culture of inclusion and empathy for these young adults navigating through their academic and professional aspirations. This approach will lead to better means of communication, willingness to utilize on campus resources, such as
counseling, and more importantly add to law enforcements’ resistance to stack criminal charges. For example, law enforcement officers have engaged in the poor practice of stacking criminal charges on individuals, especially minorities. Johnson (1995) argued discrepancies in sentencing for the identical crimes committed by blacks and Whites remain an overall problem in our criminal justice system. This practice can be detrimental to students’ future application and acceptance of specific professions involving medication, firearms, or children.

For Public Opinion

This study revealed some of Black males’ personal and vicarious experiences resulted in unjust treatment by law enforcement officers. Although, the participants expressed they were not empowered or did not possess the knowledge to pursue filing formal complaints against officers. Clear instructions and transparency in the bias incident reporting process are imperative for improving the accountability of law enforcement actions. The public, specifically the college community, should be made aware of the departmental process for reporting incidents of bias or complaints. Additionally, a citizen’s advisory board should be established as a liaison program within the community responsible for communicating concerns of practice, policy, or incidents that occur. The International Association of Chief of Police (2015) explained a citizen’s advisory board may be asked to conduct research, generate new ideas or solutions, or provide informed recommendations on public policies and practices, but should not be a policy-making body.

For the Broader Community

For those who still believe all lives matter or don’t understand the connotations of Black Lives Matter. It’s not okay. To hide among the masses of not being overtly racist, isn’t enough.
Just to know “good” or “safe” Black people to appease your White conscious is no longer sufficient. It is time to address the aspects of whiteness and White fragility looming in our communities. Although, you interact with your Black colleagues, enjoy Black entertainment, including music and sports, or have that one Black friend, combating and overcoming systematic racism, whiteness, and requires more. It’s about independently standing for justice when it’s not convenient. Like using your privilege and power to advocate for others. Hiring and valuing people of color. According to the literature, whiteness is social control of dominance and privilege. The research participants in this study considered whiteness to be present in any area where they were unable to be their true, authentic Black self in fear of being perceived negatively, less than, or mislabeled. The conclusionary thought of how to easily identity whiteness is simply any form of lessening your Blackness, in the regard to style of dress, expression of self, the shrinking of because of the pressure to assimilate or being accepted by White people. It is evident that the majority of White people dominant the criminal justice system and its legislation, but must also be vigilant of the masking of racism through curriculum, job promotion, and establishment of regulations that heavily restrict one group of people.

Conclusion

Black male college students are engaged in nonconducive academic environments while learning to overcome their sense of belonging, which distracts them from their primary academic commitments that their White peers do not experience. It has been suggested that the university develop policies and strategies to address these negative perceptions. It has been suggested that incoming freshman and transfer students be exposed to an experience that inaugurates them to campus life and the role of law enforcement. Lastly, further examination of this topic could
greatly enhance our understanding of the perceptions of students of color and law enforcement. Such understanding could improve our policies and strategies to create a more inclusive, learning environment for all students in higher education.

All of these recommendations should be strongly considered for the betterment of Black males’ perception towards law enforcement and attitudes of students of color. The findings of this study provides solutions and viable strategies provided directly by the individuals impacted by systemic racism and whiteness looming on predominantly White institutions. In order to resolve and combat familial and media influences, personal and vicarious experiences with law enforcement officers, it is imperative to have meaningful conversations that will result in thoughtful and just policies and practices. The profession of law enforcement will not be effective in communities of color, unless we involve people of color in the planning, implementing, and evaluation process of programming and services. It is time to allow the Black voices to be heard and adhered to, so we as a nation can progress in the preservation of Black lives.

Although the hostility and negative feelings between law enforcement and the Black community is not new, few studies have sought to understand why such perceptions are developed. This study was different from other studies in that instead of a quantitative approach, a qualitative approach was utilized. Though this exploratory study was quite limited and narrow in scope, it did provide preliminary insight as to how and when such negative feelings were developed. It appears that adolescence is the prime developmental period wherein cultural influences take center stage. As a result, family, friends, and media heavily influenced the development of perceptions prior to campus life. The comprehensive premise that holds true for all of the participants and their experiences of injustices, is the fact that nothing was done to rectify this
offense. It appeared as if, these Black males, like so many others, have been conditioned to accept this disparity in treatment by entities of authority. This is the epitome of the crisis with communities of color and law enforcement officers. This discreet finding was the unsettling reality of the entire study and validates Black males’ desire to achieve invisibility around law enforcement.

Reflection

While I thoroughly enjoyed researching, interviewing, and documenting this research study, it was simply emotionally overwhelming for me. My identity as a Black female police officer was challenged by my own feelings, past practices, and interactions with Black male college students. I understood the cries of concern, feelings of inequity, and disdain for law enforcement by young Black males. Often times, I found myself listening to the participants with my heart bursting in agreement of their feelings of the noticeable difference in treatment and their frustration of being constantly surveilled and accused. Likewise, I empathized with the level of integrity and respect many of the participants had for their family’s traditions, means of discipline, level of confidentiality for familial any perceived wrongdoings. For example, despite, the circumstances of shortcoming or deficiencies of resources or insight, most participants followed up with similar sentiments, “They were doing the best they knew to do”. And other times, I found myself being disconnected from some of their family upbringing and experiences in regard to the level of poverty and neglect some of the participants had to overcome. Additionally, I had to exercise a lot of restraint in not overtly agreeing or finishing their sentences when they appeared at a loss for words. For example, some participants had difficulty
in describing themselves as Black males because they’ve never been asked about their Black male identity prior to this study.

I truly believe this research study was timely and relevant for the contribution to academic and professional research. During the initial phase of my doctoral journey, the murders of Trayvon Martin and Tamir Rice were high profiled cases that involved young, unarmed Black males. I thought to myself surely, we as a nation and profession, have come along way of betterment and humanity. I would have like to believe we have evolved from the outdated police methods of inequity, injustice, and brutality from the eras of Rodney King, Amadou Diallo and Sean Bell. However, the conclusion and submission of this study occurred during a global pandemic of COVID-19, the murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Rayshard Brooks. This timeline of senseless murders Black males is still a national crisis. In 2020, there is still a call for numerous protests for end to police brutality, equitable hiring practices for minorities, and legislation on gender equality. Despite, the advances in technology, medicine, and education, the value of a Black life has remained stagnant and nonexistent as it appears during the civil rights era.

As a researcher with multiple identities, I was aware but did not fully comprehend the gravity of what I was asking of the participants in this study. While some of the participants recognized me as a campus law enforcement officer due to past interactions or familiarity of face, they were much more inclined to lend their time and effort to me because I was a Black female college student. This was noted and much appreciated. However, it is my belief that if I started my research at the prime of these incidents, my data, research participants, and findings would be starkly different. I believe the participants would be more reluctant to participant in this study. The reason being is the integrity of the anonymity of participant identity this research
would be severely questioned. The participants would be cautiously’ concerned about the intended research audience. Specifically, the concerns of who would ultimately receive this data and be able to connect the data to both the individual participant or Black male college students as a whole without fear of retaliation of being openly perceived as angry or resentful on their college campus. For example, during the research study, participants often leaned into the audio recorder and jokingly stated, “Hey White people, if y’all are listening, don’t be mad. I’m just speaking the truth”. Another reason the participants would have been apprehensive to participate in the study was due to lack of belief that their voice would lead to impactful reform in the campus law enforcement profession and its surrounding agencies. This defeated mentally can be supported by participants’ inability to pursue complaints against unjust treatment. Lastly, in regard to the data, I believed participants’ narratives of their personal and vicarious experiences would have been higher in number of incidents and harsher than reported. For example, due to the high stress of connecting with recent events, it is possible that participants would have compacted all their interactions or encounters with law enforcement, and perceived them as prejudice, instead of just unfavorable because of the outcome or demeanor of the officer. The actions of all law enforcement officers reflect the perception of other law enforcement officers. This law enforcement perception across the nation affects the response of citizens regardless of the capacity of the interaction. I believe, if these excessive use of force incidents or murders occurred on a college campus, involved campus law enforcement officers, or specifically Black male college students, then the participants narratives would have differed as well. For example, due to the collegiate affiliation, some participants believed they were insulated from racial injustices. However, if the recent incidents were committed by campus law enforcement officers,
then the participant narratives may have reported more harmful perceptions towards campus law enforcement officers.

Overall, it was rewarding to see the participants experience self-revelations about themselves. The participants vulnerably shared their childhood experiences, family values, educational progress, and accomplishments. More importantly, they expressed their abilities to triumph over prejudice, bias, and systematic racism with aspirations to graduate from a higher education institution. I was motivated by the participants’ stories and courage to share their experiences with me for the enhancement of research on behalf of Black males. I have great faith and expectation that their stories will inspire other Black male college students to persevere in a higher education environment regardless of their Black identity, family background, or past experiences with law enforcement officers.


Yale University Police Department (2017). *Campus police history.* https://your.yale.edu/community/public-safety/police/history-ypd

Interview Questions: Black Male College Students’ Perception of Law Enforcement Officers on a College Campus

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to examine Black males’ perception of law enforcement officers on a college campus.

Research Questions

1) How do Black male college students describe their life experiences and perceptions of law enforcement officers on a college campus?

2) How do Black male college students describe their relationships with law enforcement officers on a college campus?

First Interview Guide Questions

1. Tell me about yourself?

2. Describe your family.

3. Who lived in your house?

4. Describe your childhood.
   a. What was your most memorable childhood experience?

5. Describe your neighborhood.

6. Describe your support system.

7. Tell me about your experiences in grammar school.
   a. Are there any experiences that stand out?

8. Tell me about your experiences in high school
   a. Are there any experiences that stand out?
9. Tell me about your most memorable teacher(s) or mentor(s) in your education experiences. Be specific.

10. What was your involvement in sports or activities/clubs in high school?

11. Tell me about your family’s education experiences.

12. Tell me about your family members’ occupations.

13. Tell me about your family’s view on education.

14. How do you describe your identity?
   a. How would you describe yourself to others? On stage introduction?
   b. Complexion, hair, physical features etc.
   c. How would a peer describe you to others?

15. What events happened to make you aware of your Blackness?

16. How is Blackness present in your everyday activities?

17. Tell me about your experiences as a Black male.

18. What factors influenced you to enroll in college?

19. If you were to describe your college campus, what would you say?

20. Describe yourself as a Black male college student. You’ve told me about yourself as a Black male and what your college campus looks like… now describe yourself as a Black male college student.

21. Tell me about your daily activities that impacts you as Black male college student.
Law Enforcement Directed Guide Questions

*follow-up on any previous interview questions*

1. Tell me what words come to mind when you hear the word campus law enforcement officer/ campus police?

2. Tell me why you choose those descriptive words.

3. Describe your idea of an average campus law enforcement officer?
   a. Physical descriptors?
   b. Personality Traits?
   c. Education experience/ status?

4. Tell me why you think there are law enforcement officers on your college campus.

5. In your opinion, does the campus law enforcement officers serve their purpose on your campus in comparison to a city or county agency?

6. Tell me about your experiences with law enforcement officers on campus?

7. What have you shared about your experiences with your friends? Family? Co-workers?

8. Describe your relationship with law enforcement officers on this college campus?

9. Tell me about a memorable story that your Black male friends shared with you about their experiences with law enforcement officers on campus?
a. Is there an event that you observed, but wasn’t involved in pertaining to the campus police that you want to share?

10. Tell me about a memorable story that your White male friends shared with you about their experiences with law enforcement officers on campus?

a. Is there an event that you observed, but wasn’t involved in pertaining to the campus police that you want to share?

11. If you were to describe your campus law enforcement officers to your friends and family, what would you say?

12. How did you acquire your perspectives (feelings/ judgement/ opinion) on law enforcement officers on a college campus?

Focus Group Activity

1. What characteristic make you identify as a Black male?

2. How does your college campus influence your Black identity?

3. Tell me about your experiences as Black male college student and your perception of the campus police officers.

4. If you were to describe the differences between your campus police officers and surrounding agencies? How do you distinguish the varying agencies?

5. Display of 9 images of Black different males. The Focus group is allowed to make their observatory statements of the displayed images and then share their assumptions
according to law enforcement officers’ perspectives of the displayed images. (This is connected to how they perceive others view them [Black Males]). They will initiate the conversation of perceptions and developmental influences of perception.

a. What do you see?

b. Use the first word that comes to mind to describe each picture.

c. How would law enforcement officers describe each individual in each picture?

d. What is a positive Black image versus negative?

6. What could influence the development factors of Black males?

a. (My example, parents instructing their children to not talk to the police or threatening them with police involvement for bad behavior)

7. Is communication and acknowledgement from the Black community/students important for law enforcement officers to do their job? Relationship building? Investigations solving?

8. What do you want law enforcement officers to see when they see you?
APPENDIX B

IMAGES OF BLACK MALES