

THE IMPACT OF POLICE RACIAL BIAS AND BRUTALITY TOWARDS  
UNARMED AFRICAN AMERICANS ON AFRICAN AMERICAN FAMILIES WITH  
MINOR CHILDREN

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BY

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my son, Devin Tre’Jone Miller, my parents, Sanders James Parkman and Mary Virginia Miller, my grandparents, Moses Parkman and Flora Mae Manning-Parkman and Frank Miller and Annie Mae Miller-Johnson, my brother, Milton Lewis Womack, my niece/my twin, Monique Ashley Thomas, my father-in-law and mother-in-law, Charles and Dorothy Felton, my sister-in-law, Latasha Darlies Miller, my feisty chihuahua Tiga-Lily. My dearly departed loved ones, words can not express how much I love and miss you all and your loving, kind, and genuine spirits. Thanks for loving me during our time together. I felt everyone’s energy from the beginning to the end of my doctoral journey. Until we meet again.

Love, Tina (Tee-Niney)

To the victims and families impacted by racism, police racial bias and brutality towards unarmed African Americans, may you find faith and peace in “GOD’S” Word: <sup>43</sup> Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.<sup>44</sup> But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;<sup>45</sup> That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.<sup>46</sup> For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? <sup>47</sup> And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others?

do not even the publicans so? <sup>48</sup> Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect (KJV, Matthew 5:43-48).

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## ABSTRACT

CATINA MILLER, B.S.W., M.S.W., M.S.

### THE IMPACT OF POLICE RACIAL BIAS AND POLICE BRUTALITY TOWARDS UNARMED AFRICAN AMERICANS ON AFRICAN AMERICAN FAMILIES WITH MINOR CHILDREN

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In the United States, the recent exposure of the increased rate of police racial bias and brutality towards unarmed African Americans is of specific concern to all who values and expects “justice and equality for all.” This dissertation presents an overview of the historical complexity of racism and police racial bias and brutality towards unarmed African Americans and the impact on African American families with minor children. The theoretical framework that was utilized for this qualitative study is critical race theory (CRT). CRT was used to analyze if the 18 interviewed African American familial systems have been impacted by police racial bias and brutality. Particular attention was paid to how the African American parents discuss racism and police racial bias and brutality towards unarmed African Americans with their minor children, how the African Americans’ experiences with police officers and law enforcement impacts their mental health, and the impacted African American families’ sources of strength. The findings revealed that African American parents are using “The Talk” approach to discuss racism, police racial bias and brutality towards unarmed African Americans with their minor children. It was also revealed that African Americans are mentally impacted by both their

direct and indirect encounters with racially-biased police. Lastly, the primary sources of strength for African American families are their faith in “GOD,” prayer, and family.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

“There are those who are asking the devotees of civil rights, ‘When will you be satisfied?’ We can never be satisfied as long as the Negro is the victim of the unspeakable horrors of police brutality” (Chaney & Davis, 2015, p. 269). These are the words declared by the late Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., on August 28, 1963, while citing his well-known speech, *I Have a Dream*, during the civil rights era of boycotts and protests. Since then, police brutality towards unarmed African Americans has continued to be a national issue.

Dating back to the slavery era, African Americans have been victims of racism and racial bias, which sometimes elevates to the brutality towards innocent individuals (Chaney & Robertson, 2013). According to Turner, Giacomassi, and Vandiver (2006, p. 186):

Literature clearly establishes that a legally sanctioned law enforcement system existed in America before the Civil War for the express purpose of controlling the slave population and protecting the interests of slave owners. The similarities between the slave patrols and modern American policing are too salient to dismiss or ignore. Hence, the slave patrol should be considered a forerunner of modern American law enforcement.

In the United States, police are responsible for the death of more than 300 African Americans yearly (Bor, Venkataramani, Williams, & Tsai, 2018). In general, African

Americans are almost three times more likely to be murdered than Caucasians. These deaths account for more than 40% of the victims murdered by police nationwide.

Statistics show that at least one fourth of the individuals murdered by police are unarmed, and unarmed African Americans are 5 times more likely to be murdered by police than Caucasians.

According to Pieterse, Todd, Neville, and Carter (2012), the murder of unarmed African Americans strengthens the supremacy of White life and negatively impacts the mental health of African Americans in America. In addition to the sufferings of the victims and their families, results from a study conducted by Bor et al. (2018) showed that police murders of unarmed African Americans also had spillover effects on the mental health of individuals not directly related to the murders or to the individuals involved, which led to worse mental health. These findings indicate that not only do police murders of unarmed African Americans have a significant impact on the mental health of the victims and their families, but African Americans in the general population as well.

In response to living in an environment that historically and universally takes part in racist and discriminatory practices aimed towards people of color, some African American parents feel impelled to racially socialize their children to better prepare them to survive in an environment in which they could be victimized (Edwards, 2017). Racial socialization is very important to African American parents, as family is their primary source of socialization and protection against racism (Sewell, Horsford, Coleman, & Watkins, 2016). Imparting morals, beliefs, values, and norms throughout generations is

practiced to increase racial awareness and to prepare individuals to endure environments plagued with racist practices. African American parents believe that gaining a sense of cultural pride, resilience, and security also provides their children with psychological protection against discrimination and racial prejudice. Protective socialization is very important as it represents the difference between living and dying at the hands of police officers, a reality of many African Americans due to racist police practices. Wistfully, it has become a salient reality for African Americans, as they are essentially more likely to report incidents of police brutality (Smith & Holmes, 2003) while Caucasians are rarely convicted of causing harm to African Americans (Cush, 2013).

### **Statement of the Problem**

The recent series of highly publicized police murders of unarmed African American males in the US have evoked national outrage (Hall, Hall, & Perry, 2016). The increasing rate of police using excessive force or murdering unarmed African Americans (or other persons of color) has caused a heightened local and national analysis of law enforcement agencies (Stuart, 2011) due to law enforcement generally failing to hold police officers accountable for their unjust actions towards unarmed victims; the non-indictment of police who murder unarmed African Americans (Chaney & Robertson, 2015); the manner in which African American parents feel forced to discuss law enforcement with their children (Sewell et al., 2016); the physical and mental health impact of racism on African American individuals, families, and communities; and the lack of resources for African American families impacted by racist and discriminatory practices.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify the impact that police racial bias and brutality towards unarmed African Americans have on African American families with minor children as a whole. Specific attention was given to African American parent-child communication styles in relation to police officers and law enforcement, the impact that an African American experiences of police racial bias and brutality towards unarmed African Americans has on their mental health, and the impacted African American family's sources of strengths and resources used to cope with the structural racism within the judicial system.

## **Research Questions**

This study aimed to answer the following questions:

RQ1: How are African American parents discussing racism, police racial bias and brutality towards unarmed African Americans with their minor children?

RQ2: Do African Americans' experiences with police racial bias and brutality towards unarmed African Americans impact their mental health?

RQ3: What are the sources of strengths for African American families impacted by racism, police racial bias and brutality towards African Americans?

## **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework that was utilized for this study is critical race theory (CRT). CRT seeks to understand the latent racial dynamics related to social phenomena that generally go unrecognized by laypersons, scholars, and society as a whole (Closson, 2010). According to Bell (1992), CRT identifies how race is structurally ingrained in

institutional systems, such as law enforcement, intensifying the declaration of White power and increasing the likelihood of disparate treatment of minorities (i.e., African American males and other men of color) to keep them inferior. CRT aims to review the conditions in which race and racism have been negotiated in American awareness and to regain and modernize the extremist tradition of race-consciousness among African Americans and other people of color (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995). Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) concluded that CRT focuses on race supremacy and racism and their interrelatedness with varying forms of subordination, challenges the dominant belief system, is devoted to social justice, and assigns high value to societal empirical knowledge.

### **History of Critical Race Theory**

Developed in the mid-1970s, CRT emerged in an environment in which legal scholars analyzed the continuity of racism during the post-civil rights era, an era that anticipated freedom from racial hostility (Ladson-Billings & Tate IV, 1995). CRT evolved as a counterbalance to the Critical Legal Studies (CLS) movement due to CLS' failure to recognize the manner in which race is an essential element to the same systems of law being questioned. Informed by civil rights scholarship and feminist concepts, CRT was originally introduced to US law schools, linking issues of race, racism, and power to address power imbalances, specifically since these are racialized. In 1989, after continued discontent with the deficiencies of CLS, several lawyers abandoned the group and developed critical race theory, which is characterized by themes addressing race-related concerns (Martinez, 2014). The five tenets of CRT are: (1) CRT acknowledges that racism



is native to American life; (2) CRT expresses disbelief of the dominant legal declaration of impartiality, neutrality, ideology, and color blindness; (3) CRT questions the lack of concern for history and demands a contextual/historical examination of the law. Critical race theorists believe that racism is partially responsible for all modern phenomena of group advantage and disadvantage; (4) CRT demands acknowledgement of the experiential knowledge of People of Color and their communities of origin; and (5) CRT is multidisciplinary and works towards ending racial oppression as part of a universal goal of ending every method of oppression (Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993).

### **CRT Examining Police Racial Bias and Brutality Towards African Americans**

According to Chaney and Robertson (2015), CRT is an effective theoretical method to use to examine police murders of unarmed African Americans in America. Especially significant in addressing the issue of racism and police racial bias and brutality towards African Americans are the basic assumptions of CRT with which most CRT theorists concur. First, racism is the normal way that society conducts business; it is a common, ordinary, and daily experience (Schiffer, 2015). Chronicling to the time that Africans were brought to America under false pretenses, this population has been subjected to racist and discriminatory practices, created and justified by law enforcers. Recent attention has been brought to the increasingly normalized incidences of Caucasian police officers not being held accountable for racial bias and brutality towards unarmed African Americans, which has caused uproar in the African American community (Chaney & Robertson, 2015). Taylor (2006) asserted that, beliefs of White superiority are so rooted in educational, political, and legal networks that they are almost

unidentifiable, because it is universal and continual and not easily acknowledged by those who benefit from the practice.

Second, current White dominance is perpetuated by not addressing racism, which makes it complicated to respond to, much less resolve (Schiffer, 2015). “White privilege is an institutional, rather than personal, set of benefits granted to those of us who, by race, resemble the people who hold the power positions in our institutions” (Kendall, 2013, p. 62). Research has shown that Caucasians in power tend to justify police brutality towards African Americans due to the racial hostility that they hold against this population (Tonry, 2011).

Third, color-blind solutions only correct overt and apparent occasions of racial discrimination, while perpetuating the daily conduct that strengthens existent power systems (Schiffer, 2015). Color-blindness is the belief that all human beings should be judged as individuals without consideration of one’s race or ethnicity (Ryan, Hunt, Weible, Peterson, & Casas, 2007). While color-blind solutions are the expectation, White elites are known to condone or support racial advancement for people of color, only when the advancement benefits White self-interest (Martinez, 2014). Weitzer (2015) asserted that although some Caucasians support reforms to minimize police misconduct, this does not mean that they believe that there are issues to be corrected. In fact, most are confident that African American and Caucasians are treated equally by the police. Hence, reforms may bring about minimal restrictions to patrol officers who normally relish in a significant amount of discretionary authority. Most of these officers patrol alone, unburdened with checkups from a supervisor or fellow officer. Due to this freedom, it can

be expected that incidences of officer misconduct, including unjust murders will increase in the future (Weitzer, 2015). This is partially due to the refusal to switch from mid-level managers, patrol officers, and police unions (Skogan, 2008), but mostly due to actual talk of policing on the ground where a substantial amount of freedom is granted (Weitzer, 2015).

Lastly, and conceivably most significantly, critical race theorists assert that racial groups are classifications that society creates, manipulates, or revokes when convenient (Schiffer, 2015). According to Armour (1997), a concept that Caucasians use to manipulate the system is “Negrophobia.” Negrophobia is an irrational fear of African Americans, which involves a fear of being victimized by African Americans, which could result in African Americans being shot or harmed by Caucasians due to racial/criminal stereotypes. The preceding racialized stereotypical beliefs may be harmful, as they may be used by Caucasians to justify shooting African Americans based on the slightest pretense (Gabiddon, 2010). Hence, Caucasians view African Americans as disproportionately prone to participate in criminal activity and are deserving of harsh punishment by the criminal justice system (Peffley & Hurwitz, 2007). It is imperative to acknowledge that in the United States, although any racial group may perceive themselves as superior, the White group is the only one with the power to systemize that belief into culture, practices, policies, and laws to subordinate others based on their institutionalized power (Kendall, 2013).

## **How Families Discuss Racial Bias and Police Brutality towards African Americans**

Violence of African Americans by law enforcement is often connected to strained racial divide between African Americans and Caucasians. According to Johnson (2015), the majority of African Americans believe that police officers are generally too quick to apply deadly force and that it is more likely to be used against African Americans. In contrast, most Caucasians believe that police officers usually use deadly force when it is necessary and that race does not play a role in the officer's decision to execute deadly force. CRT was used to guide the inquiry of how law enforcement's institutionalized and protected maltreatment of African Americans impacts African American familial systems as a whole. CRT allowed the exploration of the words and phrases used by the victims and their family members, to identify how police racial bias and brutality impacts their familial systems, both physically and mentally. Specifically, CRT was used to identify if the recent publicized incidents of police racial bias and brutality towards African Americans impacts the manner in which African American parents discuss law enforcement and police brutality towards African Americans with their minor children; if the individuals and families suffer from mental health issues related to law enforcement; and the sources of support for the impacted families.

## **Benefits of Using CRT to Analyze Families Impacted by Police Racial Bias and Brutality**

The CRT perspective is fundamental in addressing racial bias and police brutality towards African Americans, because it presents a framework that explains how racism, racial oppression, and racial discrimination is moderately responsible for People of Color

being a disadvantaged population who are not viewed equally by society or law enforcement. CRT pulls from a wide-ranging body of literature, which expands to the field of law and can be expanded more to the field of police brutality (Solórzano et al., 2000). The narratives of the African American families, who have been impacted by police racial bias and brutality, were analyzed through the lens of CRT to identify why African American parents deem it necessary to educate their minor children on how to stay safe and alive when interacting with police officers, how police racial bias and brutality can cause mental health issues in individuals and families, and the impacted families' support systems in place used to cope with the injustices played out by law enforcement. Being informed of the assumptions of CRT when studying African American families with minor children impacted by police racial bias and brutality toward African Americans can provide marriage and family therapists and other clinicians studying and working with this population with information and knowledge of how to be more effective when treating those significantly impacted by injustices from law enforcement.

### **Definition of Terms**

- African American- Individual whose origin can be traced back to Africa (Baruth & Manning, 2016). (For the purpose of this study, African American and Black will be used interchangeably).
- Black- Individual of African ancestral origin. Generally, in power struggles or politics, Black refers to all non-White minority populations (Comstock, Castillo,

& Lindsay, 2004). (For the purpose of this study, Black and African American will be used interchangeably).

- Media- Mass communication via news broadcasting, Internet, and publishing.
- Police brutality- “The use of excessive physical force or verbal assault and psychological intimidation” (Walker, 2011, p. 579).
- Police racial bias- Include racial profiling of drivers, racial prejudices amongst police officers, and discriminatory treatment of minorities and minority communities (Weitzer & Tuch, 2005).
- Racial bias- Difference in an individual’s behavior that is linked to the race or ethnicity of another individual or group (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018).
- Racial profiling- A form of discrimination in which law enforcement uses an individual’s race, ethnicity, or national origin when deciding to stop, search or detain (Glaser, 2014). Profiling violates basic human rights, weakens trust in public institutions, and has serious consequences for victims and society at large (Weitzer & Tuch, 2002).
- Racism- “An ideology, or belief system, designed to justify and rationalize racial and ethnic inequality” (Marger, 2012, p. 19).

### **Delimitations**

The following delimitations were utilized for this study:

- 1) Participants must be African Americans aged 18 and older.
- 2) Participants must be parents of children between 5 and 17 years of age.

### **Assumptions**

The following assumptions were made:

- 1) The participants volunteered for this study.
- 2) The participants responded openly and honestly.
- 3) The participants provided responses that will prove beneficial to this and future studies addressing this and similar topics.

### **The Researcher as a Person**

I am an African American female, Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist Associate, Licensed Professional Counselor Intern, and a doctoral candidate in Family Therapy at Texas Woman's University. I am the proud mother of eight, five sons and three daughters. I chose this research topic for several reasons. First, I believe that it is very important to give a voice to the familial systems that have been victimized by police racial bias and brutality, due to the many negative effects attached to the unjust treatment. This is of importance to me because as an African American woman victimized by police racial bias, my voice was silenced by law enforcement when I spoke up against the unfair treatment that I received from a police officer due to me "Driving While Black (DWB)." DWB refers to racial profiling, or racially motivated traffic stops made by the police (Lundman & Kaufman, 2003). It is the belief that when compared to Caucasians, African

Americans and other minorities are more prone to be scrutinized by police while driving due to the color of their skin (Harris, 2002). Second, being the mother of eight African American children and the grandmother of four, I live in constant fear of the possibilities of my children and grandchildren having not-so-positive interactions with unethical police officers. Last, but not least, I find it appalling and heartbreaking that police officers are rarely held responsible for brutalizing and/or murdering another human being due to stereotypes and personal biases linked to the color of one's skin.

During my doctoral program, for previous research assignments, I conducted the following research: (1) "Exploring the Public's Response to African Americans Fighting Back Against Police Brutality;" (2) "What Effect Does a Parent's Race Have on How They Discuss Racial Bias and Police Brutality with Their Children?"; (3) and "African American Victims of Deadly Excessive Force of Police Officers." Each assignment's findings showed that most agreed that police brutality towards unarmed African Americans is a major issue. While there are several other studies documenting the frequency and severity of police brutality towards African Americans, I find it necessary for further family therapy studies to be conducted to document the lived experiences of African American families affected by police racial bias and brutality for the following reasons: (a) the negative effects on the victims; (b) the negative effects on the victims' families; and (c) law enforcement not holding police officers accountable for murdering unarmed African Americans. It is expected that this study will yield information that will be beneficial to not only the participants in this study, but also other victims and their



families, the general population, law enforcers, and clinicians working with the impacted victims and their families.

### **Summary**

The recent increased rate of police racial bias and brutality towards unarmed African American is of specific concern to any clinician who will be working with the impacted population. Although several studies have examined police brutality towards African Americans, a need still exists for the exploration of the lived experiences of African American families who are victimized by those who are expected to “protect and serve.” The purpose of this dissertation was to gain a better understanding of how African American families with minor children as a whole are impacted by the systemic racism and bias perpetrated and upheld by law enforcement and the criminal justice system. Specifically, this study focused on how African American parents are discussing police racial bias and brutality towards unarmed African Americans with their minor children; the mental health impact that police racial bias and brutality towards unarmed African Americans may have on African Americans; and the support systems in place utilized by African American families impacted by police racial bias and brutality towards unarmed African Americans.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Overview**

Historically, African Americans in the US have experienced infinite forms of oppression and repression that stem back to slavery (Archbold, 2013). After slavery was abolished, groups including the state militia, the federal military, and the Ku Klux Klan overtook the responsibilities of earlier slave patrols and were known for being more violent than their predecessors. Generations later, African Americans are still coping with unequal treatment from police (Sewell et al., 2016), which generally leads to the unethical and unjust acts of police brutality (Chaney & Robertson, 2013). This presents a valid concern of how a society that officially affirms equality, can support an environment in which police malfeasance thrives.

Spanning over four centuries extending into the early 21st century, attention has been brought to the malicious police murders of African Americans (Rembert, Watson, & Hill, 2016). African Americans are still suffering from overt and covert methods of surveillance and over-patrolling (Sewell et al., 2016). Today, these methods of hyper-surveillance perpetuate constrained and antagonistic relationships between law enforcement and African American communities. This has led to a pattern of volatile interactions between law enforcement and African Americans. As a result of discrimination and hyper-surveillance, African Americans suffer from physical, social, and mental health challenges. These chronic environmental stressors have adverse effects

on not only the individual, but one's family and community as well. Rembert et al. (2016) concluded that, "Black lives in the United States do not matter, because they do not. They have never mattered" (p. 227). This qualitative study was conducted utilizing a critical race theoretical perspective employing a phenomenological approach to examine the impact of police racial bias and brutality towards African Americans on African American families, with specific attention to the manner in which African American parents are discussing these sensitive topics with their minor children, the mental health effects on the family, and the impacted family's sources of support.

### **Discrimination, Racism and Racial Bias Against African Americans**

Dating back to the time that Africans were brought to America by coercion, they have been victimized by discriminatory and racist practices that have been encouraged and upheld by the creators and enforcers of the law (Chaney & Robertson, 2013).

Discrimination is "the behavior aimed at denying members of particular ethnic groups equal access to societal rewards" (Marger, 2012, p. 57). Racism is "an ideology, or belief system, designed to justify and rationalize racial and ethnic inequality" (Marger, 2012, p. 25). Defining these two terms early on is important as they impart the lens for us to view how law enforcement has a history of discriminatory and racist practices (Chaney & Robertson, 2013).

Racism in societal organizations may influence shortened socioeconomic mobility, prejudicial access to favored resources, and substandard living conditions that may negatively affect an individual or group's mental health (Williams & Williams-Morris, 2000). In spite of the amount of research citing blunt differences by race and establishing

immense racial inequalities, many Caucasian Americans maintain that racial disparities are decreasing (Sue et al., 2007). Additionally, countless Caucasian Americans perceive themselves as normal, moral, and believers of equality, which discredits beliefs of discrimination or prejudice (Sue, 2004). This is the colorblind perspective, which believes that discrimination no longer exists and disagrees with the reality of race and current racial inequality. This approach asserts that we must treat individuals as human beings, instead of racialized beings (Plaut, 2010). According to Bonilla-Silva (2010), color-blind racism infers that racial discrimination no longer exists, individuals are being treated in a color-blind fashion, and all differences seen in the success of racial groups are due to innate differences in the groups themselves. Colorblind beliefs conclude that we have done all that we can possibly do. For many Caucasians, the election of President Obama proves their beliefs of a colorblind nation. While many naively accept this belief as non-racist, it reinforces and revives modern systemic racial inequality by denying its existence. These storylines have become part of racial myths that are shared, used, and believed by the dominant race. They are storylines because there are similarities between the ideas, words, and phrases.

Bonilla-Silva (2010) also asserted that color-blind beliefs consist of four key frames that construct our ideas about racial inequality: abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and minimization of racism. First, abstract liberalism is built on the language of political liberalism, alluding to hypothetical concepts of equality, rationality, freedom of choice, and individuality (i.e., discrimination is no longer an issue, and anyone who works hard can be successful). Second, naturalization reexamines existing continuing inequalities

due to natural processes instead of social relations (i.e., segregation today is due to the natural bias of individuals to live near individuals of the same race). Third, culturalism reexamines continuing inequalities due to cultural differences between racialized groups. Last, minimization of racism infers that today we have a fairly balanced society in which every individual has equal opportunities to be successful, and racism is no longer a real issue.

The current issue of racial profiling in America has brought attention to the broad issue of police racial bias. Racial profiling is a form of discrimination in which law enforcement uses an individual's race or ethnicity as a blueprint to engage in various forms of enforcement. According to Carson (2014), in the US, when compared to other groups, African American men are more likely to be targeted, profiled, incriminated, investigated, unjustly committed, harshly sentenced, and imprisoned for crimes. Profiling violates basic human rights, weakens trust in public institutions, and has serious consequences for victims and society at large (Weitzer & Tuch, 2002). Police racial bias includes racial profiling of drivers, prejudiced actions of police officers, and discrimination against minorities and their neighborhoods (Weitzer & Tuch, 2005). Although racism occurring in America is significantly more covert and implied as opposed to previous methods of overt and straightforward methods of racial aggression, it is still a major issue for people of color. Scholarship shows that different methods of racism have evolved, such as microaggressions that involve customary racist beliefs without being straightforward by using race, but still using other customary American values to justify why people are unsuccessful (Smiley & Fakunle, 2016). Microaggressions are acts of disliking people of

color based on biased views (Franklin, Boyd-Franklin, & Kelly, 2006). Some examples are, microassaults (purposeful discrimination, name-calling, ignoring), microinsults (disrespect, assumptions of negativity, diminishing others), and microinvalidations (refusing to acknowledge White privilege, denying oppression or racism, downplaying or disregarding targeted individual's statements and feelings (Sue et al., 2007). Receivers of these acts of disrespect, as with other racist conduct, may feel invisible due to their personhood being rejected and disrespected (Franklin & Boyd-Franklin, 2000). Marger (2012) concluded that history has shown that a significant sector of the Caucasian population has exhibited an unparalleled amount of racial hostility towards African Americans.

### **History of Policing and Police Brutality Towards African Americans**

In southern America, the modern police emerged from a system of citizen slave patrols that were in charge of managing the system of enslavement and organized racial control, prohibiting revolutions or insurgence, and apprehending runaway slaves (Dulaney, 1996). The plantation supervisor policeman or "patroller" was permitted to engage with immunity and administer heinous methods of injustices, which included, but were not restricted to beatings, sterilizations, dismembering, and lynchings. Lynching was such an effective method of policing the lives of African American men in the South, that between 1880-1950, at least 3,500 lynchings occurred. Moreover, most of the victims lynched were African American men who were superficially accused of defying a racial norm of some sort (Loewen, 2007). Today, this type of injustice is called police brutality. According to Walker (2011), police brutality is "the use of excessive physical force or verbal assault and psychological intimidation" (p. 579). Chaney and Robertson(2014)

asserted that police brutality is not only harmful to the victim, but also his family and community members.

Research shows that when compared to Caucasians, African Americans are more likely to be victims of police brutality (Kane & White, 2009), to make complaints of police brutality (Smith & Holmes, 2003), to be stopped for “Driving While Black,” and to underreport the recurrence of being pulled over due to heightened social desirability influence (Tomaskovic-Devey, Wright, Czaja, & Miler, 2006). Weitzer and Tuch (2005) noted that accused African Americans are more prone to be victims of racially influenced encounters with law enforcement and are more susceptible than Caucasians to have familial members subjected to similar malfeasance. African Americans also experience an unreasonable amount of biased incidents with police due to the derogatory beliefs that police maintain about them. These beliefs are notably responsible for delayed response time, decreased police services, officer misconduct, and the unjustifiable use of physical and deadly force (Kane & White, 2009).

### **African Americans Murdered by Police Officers**

Nullifying African American lives can occur at any time in the life cycle of the African American due to some Caucasians’ belief that African Americans always create a threat. Hence, the murder of an African American by the governing system of the American State, the police, is always preemptive. Historically, the African American body was marked in a manner to maintain White supremacy and the “wages of Whiteness” as initiation (Rembert, Watson, & Hill, 2016). African Americans owe their

inheritance and their existence to Caucasians and as a result cannot defend their self-autonomy or disagree too long that their lives do not matter.

The current unjustified police violence targeting African Americans is not an anomaly. It is historic and endemic to White dominance (Rembert et al., 2016). A report from the Malcolm X grassroots organization analyzing the extrajudicial murders of African Americans by police officers, security guards, or self-appointed enforcers of law, from January 1 through June 30, 2012, found that law enforcement or someone acting in a similar capacity murdered one African American every 36 hours, totaling 120 individuals (Operation Ghetto Storm, 2012). While the majority of the murdered victims were African American men, 5% were African American women. Of those, 46% were unarmed. The police alleged that 36% had weapons, in which a cane, a toy gun, and a bb gun were found on the scene. While police murders of African American men are well-known, incidents of police murders of African American women are given less attention. Dating back to 2010, some of the unarmed African American victims of police brutality are Shareese Francis, Rekia Boyd, Sharmel Edwards, Shantel Davis, Malissa Williams, Kyam Livingston (Chaney & Robertson, 2015), Sandra Bland, and Mya Hall (Ellawala, 2016).

Research shows that African American children are not exempt from police brutality either. Howard (2013) noted that data from US schools continues to show how African American children are viewed as a problem. In fact, one study showed that African American boys as young as 10 years of age may be viewed as less innocent than their Caucasian peers, are more likely to be misjudged for being older and perceived to be



guilty, and become victims of police brutality if they are accused of participating in a crime (Goff, Jackson, Di Leone, Culotta, & DiTomasso, 2014). According to data collected from the US Department of Health and Human Services and the US Department of Education (2014), during the 2012-2013 school year, although African American children made up about 18% of all students in school, 40% of these students received one or more out of school suspensions. In addition, they accounted for 32% of children arrested and 40% of all children and youth in residential homes in the juvenile justice system. Over the past few years, there have been several reports of African American students having questionable interactions with school resource officers (SROs). In September of 2015, a 13-year-old boy in Maryland was arrested for “assault” for kissing a girl. Baltimore police confirmed that although no one was injured during the incident, the boy faced a second-degree assault charge for giving a 14-year-old girl an unwanted kiss (Howard, 2016). Six-year-old Salecia Johnson, a kindergartner was arrested and taken to police headquarters after it was stated that she was “a threat to herself and others at Creekside Elementary School.” In November 2015, a SRO placed Caden McCadden, a 7-year-old, in handcuffs in his Flint, Michigan school, for his refusal to sit down and “unruly behavior.” Even after Caden calmed down, SROs were not able to immediately remove the handcuffs for 30 minutes as the officer was not able to locate the keys. What seems evident is that although safety is stated to be the reason that SROs are on school campuses, African American students across the US are disproportionately targeted for police intervention, and are frequently disciplined when intervening for unjust and inadequate treatment of their peers (Howard, 2016).

An FBI supplemental homicide report revealed that from 1980 to 2012, police officers have been linked to over 12,000 homicides (Gabrielson, Jones, & Sagara, 2014). The report showed that when compared to Caucasians, African American males, between 15-19 years of age, were more likely to be murdered by the police. The analysis also showed that while African American police officers were responsible for only 10% of police murders in which 3% of the victims were African American, Caucasian police officers murdered 91% of Caucasians and 68% of people of color. In addition to police murders that have been reported, under-representation by some police departments is also a major issue, due to police departments not being mandated to report fatal shootings. Several studies have shown that some police departments have failed to supply the FBI with data in relation to the number and instances of fatal shootings for years. Therefore, current statistics on police murders of unarmed African Americans may not be accurate due to such underreporting.

### **Lack of Accountability for Taking African American Lives**

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator, with certain unalienable Rights, that among us are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as

to them shall seem most likely to affect their Safety and Happiness (Jefferson, 1776).

An essential assertion in the Declaration of Independence is the belief that every human being, regardless of ethnicity, race, political or socioeconomic background, gender, age, ability, or orientation, has the right to live a full and rewarding life, to be treated equally and to self-identification. Thus, the Declaration prepares for political shifts when citizens believe that they are refused these rights. Most alarming, a violation of the right to live has occurred, ending in the deaths of unarmed African American males due to police shootings, which has caused an urgent call for resolutions (Moore, Robinson, & Adedoyin, 2016).

In 2011, the findings from Michael Tonry's *Punishing Race* study revealed that most Caucasians tended to justify police brutality towards African Americans due to their personal prejudices held against them (Chaney & Robertson, 2014). The study also revealed that many Caucasians believe that when African Americans are involved with the criminal justice system, they deserve harsh treatment. According to *The Washington Post* and Bowling Green State University analyses that were based on public records and interviews with legal experts and law enforcement, it was revealed that since 2005, police officers were only charged 54 times for murdering civilians (Kindy & Kelly, 2015). Also, two-thirds of the murdered victims were people of color (all except two were African Americans) and three-fourths of the officers charged were Caucasian. Of the officers charged, 43 were involved in the following situations: victims shot in the back, video recording of the encounter, incriminating testimony from the accused officers'

colleagues, or allegations of a cover-up. Of the 54 charges against officers, 35 of their cases were resolved, 21 of which were acquitted or the cases were dismissed. The officers who were convicted served on average four years in jail, with some just a few weeks. Feagin (2014) asserted that many Caucasians generally have an issue with viewing African Americans as true victims and therefore may have greater issues with acknowledging African Americans' humanity. African Americans penalized by Caucasians in powerful positions establishes an environment in which the inequitable treatment of African Americans is accepted, supported, and justified (Chaney & Robertson, 2014).

### **Media Coverage of Police Brutality Towards African Americans**

On March 3, 1991, unarmed motorist Rodney King was approached by four Caucasian police officers, and was brutally beaten while others observed without intervening. The videotape made by a bystander of Mr. King's beating was seen as proof of the unjust animosity that police officers possess against African Americans. Immediately after the incident, Rodney King became the American face of police brutality, a phenomenon that was generally acknowledged by most African Americans who lived in and outside of the inner city (Bonilla-Silva, 2009). Almost two months after his brutal beating, King voiced the words, "I just want to say—can we all get along? Can we get along?" (Chaney & Robertson, 2014, p. 108). According to Chaney and Robertson, immediately after he uttered those words to Los Angeles residents, King became a stimulus for hope and change against a law enforcement system historically abusive to African American males.

Modern apathy to police brutality towards African American men is reinforced

and granted traction through negative depictions of these men in the media (Chaney & Robertson, 2013). The originating source of the media's negative portrayal of African American men in the media can be traced back to Thomas Rice, Stephen Foster, Dan Emmett, and E.P. Christy, the founders of Blackface minstrelsy, which was introduced in the 1830s (Patton, 2008). Almost 20 years later, the "jumping Jim Crow" character became a universal concept of 'Blackness' on stage. Provided the racially deplorable ramifications of the "jumping Jim Crow" character, the strongest supporter of contemporary racially-negative media depictions appeared in D.W. Griffith's 1915 film, *The Birth of a Nation* (1915). Although this film was portrayed as a cinematic classic, it notably advanced the goals of White Supremacy (Loewen, 2007). Specifically, this movie had a damaging effect on African American males due to the manner in which they were portrayed as barbarians whose lone desire in life was to rape White women and sabotage the White man's life.

Today the media continues to support Caucasians' justification of violent, unethical behaviors towards African Americans stemming from police and the larger criminal justice system (Embrick, 2015). As in the past, the media continues to stereotype minorities as violent offenders who need to be disciplined. Both male and female African Americans are generally portrayed on television, in movies, and on the news in a discriminatory manner (Baynes, 2003). Research has shown that the inaccurate depictions of African Americans identified in the media cause universal hostility towards African American males, lack of recognition, or compassion for African Americans, and distorted beliefs about violence and criminality within the African American community (Entman & Gross, 2008). These negative effects result in systematic repercussions (Dong & Murrillo, 2007). Media misrepresentation has also been connected to African Americans

getting less attention from medical professionals, harsher sentences from judges (Rachlinski, Johnson, Wistrich, & Guthrie, 2009), and increased chances of being shot by police (Greenwald, Oakes, & Hoffman, 2003).

The media is also known for altering or misrepresenting language and images in ways that grants privilege to Caucasians who are generally characterized as blameless victims. White lawbreakers are almost never portrayed by the media in the manner that minorities are. For example, the media's coverage of the fatal shootout involving White biker gangs (or biker clubs as reported by some media channels) in May 2015 in Waco, Texas, neglected to comment on the White on White crime, and also neglected to mention how Caucasians were causing significant damage to their own communities. This may not have been an issue if other commentaries would not be in the practice of discussing in detail and criticizing similar behaviors of minorities. This example alone shows that White privilege permitted what was conceivably one of the most violent and savage current events in Texas history, to go unanalyzed and disappear from possible discussion, even though there were nine fatalities and 170 arrests (Embrick, 2015).

A recent study of journalists covering the Ferguson protest in honor of unarmed Michael Brown, Jr., who was murdered by a Ferguson police officer in 2014, revealed that the journalists' tweets marginalized the protestors and characterized the police officers as impartial defenders of social order (Araiza, Sturm, Istek, & Bock, 2016). One theme identified was *police officers as dispassionate protectors of social order*. The journalists started every evening with suspicious beliefs about the protestors who were active in the streets. The tweets seldom challenged the allegations made by police officers. While the police officers' emotions were never discussed, as the journalist labeled them unbiased, the protestors were labeled as immensely emotional individuals.

The journalists also asserted that the police had to defend themselves from an “angry mob,” instead of the protesters defending themselves from an extraordinary militarized response. Another theme noted was *protests as violent riots perpetrated by law-breaking protestors*. The journalists identified the protests as fights that countered the police officers against the protesters. The tweets did not describe the protests as a time that individuals were exercising their rights to assemble due to the Michael Brown, Jr. shooting. Instead, the protests were likened to a war zone. Rather than challenging the police department’s extraordinary militarized response and the legality of shooting tear gas on individuals exercising their right to assemble, the journalists emphasized the legal violations of a few protestors. The journalists also used the word “they” which established the protesters as a mob of “others.” Other tweets were more direct, mentioning words like “defiance,” due to the protesters positioned yards away from the police officers, or the phrase “angry mob” in speculative terms. The study showed that the only time that the journalists showed sympathy towards the protesters was when both protestors and journalists were exposed to police tear gas (Araiza et al., 2016).

### **The New Civil Rights Movement: The Black Lives Matter Movement**

Historically, African American parents have fought hard to mediate stressors related to raising their children in a society plagued with racial hostility. Generations of African American families have persistently struggled to improve life for future generations. Improving life usually meant that the succeeding generations would face less racial hostility, segregation, and violence than the preceding generations. Emerging from slavery throughout Jim Crow to the Civil Rights era, African Americans have persistently sought racial, social, and economic justice (Person, 2013). The Civil Rights era opened the door for racial integration in America and ended when the first African American

president was elected. To some, the election of President Barack Obama indicated that the United States was no longer a country suffering from a racial divide (Burnett, 2012). Yet, within the last few years and coincidentally, during President Obama's terms in office, the highly-profiled tragic incidents of the unarmed African Americans murdered by police officers, angered motorists, and concerned communities triggered a revival in dialog and activism in relation to these historical stressors (Person, 2013).

Launched with the #BlackLivesMatter movement, the "New Civil Rights Movement" has brought national recognition to the long and disgraceful history of racism and violence practiced in the US. It addresses an extensive history of institutionalized abuse of African Americans (Deetz, Chapman, Edwards, & Wilayto, 2015). African Americans have been owned and abused by the right of law due to the initial slave codes established. In 1705, the Virginia Assembly recognized a slave code declaring:

And if any slave resist his master, or owner, or other person, by his or her order, correcting such slave, and shall happen to be killed in such correction, it shall not be accounted felony; but the master, owner, and every such other person so giving correction, shall be free and acquit of all punishment and accusation for the same, as if such incident had never happened (Deetz, et al., 2015, p. 4).

Created by Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi, as a call to action for Black people, #BlackLivesMatter (BLM) emerged after George Zimmerman was acquitted in the murder of Trayvon Martin (Garza, 2014). On February 26, 2012, Martin, a 17-year-old African American male, who was visiting his father in Florida, was shot and murdered by Zimmerman, a Hispanic neighborhood watch captain in a gated community. The case became a media-frenzy, invoking comments about the murder from civil rights leaders, political experts, politicians, and even President Obama. The main



goal of the BLM movement is to challenge colorblind racism and change the American systemic structures that respond to Black lives in a non-caring manner. The criminal justice system is one of the systems that the BLM movement is working to reconstruct. However, in order for change to occur in the criminal justice system, a broader change in the general society must take place (Van Cleve & Mayes, 2015).

The BLM movement aims to serve as a political and ideological mediation in a society where Black lives are systematically and deliberately targeted for demise. The plan is to reestablish the Black liberation movement. The movement is attempting to change the thought processes of Americans from “us versus them” and while doing so, Black lives will be free from inequality (Siscoe, 2016). The BLM movement operates on different levels seeking to create societal change as a means to promote changes in the criminal justice system. It recognizes that the general population’s views about crime and racism work counter to any type of reform to decrease the racial inequalities that are spread throughout the criminal justice system. The movement is attempting to guide the conversation to show how race matters in the criminal justice system as well as in society. Although policies within the criminal justice system are written in a race neutral manner and attempt to ensure that no race is negatively impacted more than the other, that is not the reality of what is actually occurring. The objective of the BLM movement is to transform from colorblindness into color consciousness (Siscoe, 2016).

The BLM movement declares that when a murder occurs at the hands of police officers, the responsible officer should be held to the same amount of accountability as the general population because Black lives should be valued the same as non-African

American (Chaney & Robertson, 2015). Unfortunately, modern day insensitivity to police brutality towards African Americans continues to increase partially due to the media's negative coverage of African Americans in general. According to Ghandnoosh (2015), the BLM movement has been labeled as a rallying outcry in light of proof that the criminal justice system is neglecting this basic truth. In the words of Malcolm X, "I for one believe that if you give people a thorough understanding of what confronts them and the basic causes that produce it, they'll create their own program, and when the people create a program, you get action" (Deetz et al., 2015, p. 4).

In spite of its efforts to improve and save the lives of African Americans, the BLM movement has faced a fair amount of criticism. One the main campaigns against it is changing the name into a response called All Lives Matter. This response is a socially acceptable way to challenge the BLM movement. Most social movements have a counter movement that challenges their beliefs in an attempt to shut them down. All Lives Matter counters the BLM movement. It challenges the BLM movement for the civil disobedience it provokes and rejects the movement all together. One criticism is that the BLM movement needs to move away from protests if it intends to gain the public's attention and make societal changes. This excuse is used as an attempt to prevent the BLM movement from bringing attention to the colorblind racism in America. It disregards the implied "too" that follows Black Lives Matter. By doing this, the AllLives Matter response overlooks the statement, the movement and the issue of colorblind racism in America (Siscoe, 2016). Alicia Garza (2014), one of the BLM movement founders, summed up the Black Lives Matter philosophy by asserting: "When we say

Black Lives Matter, we are talking about the ways in which Black people are deprived of our basic human rights and dignity” (p. 3).

### **Race-Related Trauma Causing Mental Health Issues in African Americans**

Racism is a type of trauma and emotional abuse for racial and ethnic minorities due to it involving rejecting, negative, and humiliating societal directives that weaken self-esteem (Franklin et al., 2006). Routinely, ethnic minorities are faced with the task of coping with both covert and overt phenomena of racism on individual, cultural, and institutional levels. Covert and overt methods of daily racism in the lives of people of color involve ethnocentrism, harassment, degradation, and institutionalized traditions that hinder their aspirations and goals. These perpetual reminders weaken the psyche and over time can develop into an accumulative experience of psychological trauma and emotional debility. The inability to resolve the trauma related dismay may lead to race-related stress, depression, chronic anger, or substance abuse (Franklin, 2004).

The US Department of Health and Human Services (2001) reported that discrimination and racism negatively affects the health of racial minorities and put them at a greater risk of mental health disorders. This is especially true for African Americans. The report asserted that three possible ways in which discrimination and racism negatively affect the mental health of minorities are: (a) internalization of negative racial stereotypes that damages their self-worth; (b) the effects of chronic stressors of living in poverty due to historical and institutional racism; and (c) the effects of chronic or discrete stressors due to encounters of discrimination and racism. English et al. (2017) conducted a study measuring Black men’s police-based discrimination experiences. The findings

align with empirical evidence that shows a positive relationship between Black men's experiences with discrimination and symptoms of depression. Another qualitative study's findings revealed that Black men reported anger, depressive symptoms, and negativity due to their unfavorable interactions with police, law enforcement, and incarceration (Perkins, Kelly, & Lasiter, 2014). Franklin et al. (2006) contended that it is more precise to evaluate the impact of racism as cognitive and emotional harm than as a mental disorder due to the impact of racism stemming from the sociocultural environment, not from an anomaly that exists within the individual.

### **African American Parental Racial Socialization**

A primary responsibility for parents is preparing their children to thrive in society. This involves teaching them the societal rules and values including expected future behavior (Clausen, 1968). Throughout this socialization process, people gain an understanding of accepted statuses, roles, and assigned behaviors and identify themselves and other individuals in social systems (Thornton, Chatters, Taylor, & Allen, 1990). For African American parents, this responsibility requires more as they feel forced to prepare their children to survive in a prejudiced and conceivably deadly racially motivated environment (Burt, Simmons, & Gibbons, 2012). This preparedness is called racial socialization. Racial socialization is a combination of dialogue and practices that parents anticipate will provide their children with the necessary tools to survive in environments where they are not accepted and rarely appreciated. Parental racial socialization may involve dialogue about discrimination and racial pride, hypervigilant parenting and unconscionable discipline.

According to Hughes (2003), racial socialization refers to the implied, straightforward, intentional, and unintentional ways in which parents' views and behaviors communicate beliefs about race to their children; the principal practice used by African American families and communities to aid children in coping with discrimination and other race-related problems. It involves exposure to cultural traditions and objects, aims to promote pride in and knowledge about African Americans, dialogue on discrimination and coping mechanisms, and strategies for being successful in mainstream society. Although current evidence shows that most African American parents engage in racial socialization, the content and frequency of the messages varies (Brown et al., 2007). As a result, studies on racialization have concentrated on the four types of racial socialization commonly used by African American parents: cultural socialization, preparation for bias, promotion of mistrust, and egalitarianism. Cultural socialization pertains to parental practices that teach children about their ethnic or racial history and heritage; which promotes cultural traditions and customs; and encourages children's racial, cultural, and ethnic pride, either intentionally or innately (Hughes & Chen, 1999). Preparation for bias, an essential component of racial socialization, involves parents' attempts to promote their children's consciousness of discrimination and prepare them to develop coping mechanisms. Promotion of mistrust, refers to practices that stress the need for caution and mistrust in interracial interplay. Egalitarianism involves increasing children's understanding of their own sociohistorical backgrounds in addition to those of other races while salience about race pertains to parental conversations that avoid discussing race all together. It forgoes a focus on race and instead emphasizes

characteristics and virtues. Utilization of these different methods of racial socialization varies by parental gender (Thorton et al., 1990), child gender (Howard, Rose, & Barbarin, (2013), the home environment (Caughy, Randolph, & O'Campo, 2002), neighborhood (Caughy, Nettles, & Lima, 2011) and socioeconomic status (Hill, 1999).

Studies show that racial socialization has potentially positive and negative youth outcomes, considering relationships differ based on types of measures utilized and the type of racial socialization examined (Hughes et al., 2006). Studies that have analyzed cultural socialization have consistently reported less externalizing behaviors, decreased frequency in fighting and improved management (especially amongst boys), increased self-esteem with peers, decreased externalizing issues, and improved cognitive outcomes. Studies that have examined preparation for bias have mixed findings. Studies involving children and youths have shown that potential protective properties of preparation for bias are linked to fewer favorable outcomes when youths establish expectations for discrimination and distrust of other groups (Stevenson, 1997). Constantine and Blackmon's (2002) findings about negative relations between egalitarianism and school self-esteem, along with Bowman and Howard's (1985) findings that no dialogue on race is linked to lower grades, act as a reminder of the thin line between strategies that undercut youths' abilities and goals and strategies that cause them to be unprepared for the racial realities they may experience. While differing studies evaluating children during early and middle childhood were discussed, the findings have been very similar across the age ranges (Hughes et al., 2006).

## **“The Talk”**

For decades, the impact of racism on African American familial structure has been challenged. What has remained consistently truthful, specifically for African American parents, is that the same rules applicable to Caucasian children are not applicable to African American children (Burnett, 2012). These differing rules are generally unstated but widely recognized by African Americans. A distinct unspoken stressor is that African American children are assigned different consequences for exhibiting the same behaviors as other races. Still, the most agonizing, yet unspoken fear, is that African American parents may not possess the power or ability to prevent their children from suffering such consequences (Amber, 2013).

The recent events combined with an increased sense of powerlessness within the African American community, have stimulated renewed debates and brought attention to African American parents taking part in possibly one of the most inconceivable, unpleasant, and heart-breaking aspects of racial socialization, “The Talk” (Hanley, 2012). “The Talk” has been stated to be shameful, nauseating, and very uncomfortable. Yet, having “The Talk” is believed to be a fundamental rite in African American households and is a cultural tradition that has been in effect for generations. The roots of this conversation can be traced back to the Emancipation Proclamation, when newly freed slaves prepared for confrontations with previous slave owners in which they were totally powerless, even though they were freed individuals (Burnett, 2012). Newly freed parents, same as their enslaved counterparts, did not have any legal grounds in which they could challenge the abuse of their children. Hence, they made efforts to protect their children by

safeguarding them to the best of their abilities to prevent them from receiving negative attention from those in power (Whitaker & Snell, 2016).

“The Talk” is a conversation that involves preparing young African Americans, specifically boys, to survive when interacting with police officers and other authoritative figures. The consistent content of this conversation is generally passed down from generation to generation (Thomas & Blackmon, 2015). Contradictory to what some believe, “The Talk” is not about bypassing criminal behavior. Instead, it is about avoiding the belief of criminal behavior. Unlike other significant parent-child conversations, “The Talk” is not about assisting the child with taking responsibility for one’s actions; instead it is about preparing a child to accept the responsibility for the actions of the adult one may interact with (Burnett, 2012). While some African American parents had hopes of not having this conversation with their children in the new millennium, given the reality of the times that we currently live in, bypassing “The Talk” with African American children may be viewed as parental neglect of responsibility, which could make these children more vulnerable and susceptible to being harmed (Burt et al., 2012). Peters and Massey (1983) asserted that:

“The knowledge that in America there is a pervasive negative stigma attached to being Black motivates some parents to emphasize Black identity, to teach children to respect, understand, and accept themselves as Black. [Black parents feel] that they have a dual task: to give their children a positive Black identity and to teach children how to cope in a hostile world” (p. 230).



## Summary

Based on the literature discussed and the recent exposure of occurrences involving African Americans and police officers, it is indisputable that police racial bias and brutality towards African Americans is a major issue. The literature discussed various cases in which Caucasian police officers have unjustifiably murdered African Americans (men, women, and children). The literature has also revealed how most of these officers are not held accountable for their abuse of power and criminality. Studies have shown that, since 2005, on average, police officers convicted of murdering innocent and unarmed African Americans were only incarcerated for 4 years or less. Studies have also revealed that, almost two-thirds of those officers charged had their cases resolved, with one-third being acquitted. Based on these results alone, it is expected that most participants will agree that police racial bias and brutality towards African Americans is a major issue that needs to result in the creation of new laws to protect innocent citizens. This study's participants will provide in-depth details of their familial system's lived experiences of belonging to a population that is more prone to be treated unfairly by police officers based on the color of their skin. It is also expected that this study will yield themes that will identify the importance of African American parents having racially socialized discussions with their minor children as a measure to prevent them from becoming victims of police brutality, while parents of other races take a more educating approach.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

The study applied qualitative methodology utilizing in-depth, face-to-face audio-recorded and participant observation interviews. The goal of the interviews were to identify the impact of police racial bias and brutality on African American familial systems with minor children, with specific attention paid to probable mental health issues linked to police racial bias and brutality towards unarmed African Americans, the manner in which African American parents discuss law enforcement and police racial bias and brutality with their minor children, and the impacted family's sources of strength. The interview questions were mostly open-ended with a few that were close ended followed by open inquiries. The semi-structured interviews allowed the participants to provide broad to specific and detailed responses. The interview's structure also provided the researcher with an opportunity to further probe the participants' responses when clarification of a response was needed to report accurate information.

#### **Phenomenological Approach**

The methodological approach that was utilized for this study was phenomenology. A phenomenological approach aims to examine, interpret, and evaluate the meaning of the lived experiences of an individual: "how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others" (Patton, 2002, p. 104). Borrowed from the German phenomenology philosophy, this familial approach generally involves long, in-depth interviews with individuals who have

experienced the phenomena being studied. The similarities in experience between the participants in the study are examined as unique expressions and then compared to identify common themes (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Utilizing a phenomenological approach in the inquiry of the impact of police racial bias and brutality towards African Americans on African American families with minor children, allows the personal experiences of the participants to be contextualized and deconstructed using the lens of CRT. Phenomenological research illustrates the significance of the lived experiences of a phenomenon or perception of several individuals (Groenewald, 2004). Phenomenologists aim to interpret commonalities between participants as they endure a phenomenon. The primary purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences of a phenomenon to an explanation of the common meaning. Phenomenological research allows the researcher to collect information from participants who have experienced a specific phenomenon and establish a combined narrative of the significance of the experience for all participants. This narrative includes “what” the individuals experienced and “how” they experienced it. When using a phenomenological approach, it is important to understand the commonalities of the participants in order to establish policies or practices, or to acquire a broader awareness about the characteristics of the phenomenon.

### **The Researcher as a Person**

As previously stated in my introduction, I am an African American, female Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist Associate and Licensed Professional Counselor Intern, and a current family therapy doctoral candidate at Texas Woman's University. My

mental health experience dates back to my junior year in high school, when I was a peer counselor. While I did not receive any mental health training for the position that I served, my passion for assisting my peers in need is what caught the attention of school administrators who assigned me the position. My gift and commitment of helping others was strengthened after my family and I survived the wrath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005. After surviving Katrina, I changed my major from nursing to the mental health field. I made this change due to the beneficial mental health assistance my family and I received as we learned to cope with our losses (family, friends, homes, personal possessions, jobs, etc.). After finishing my first session with a client, I knew that I made the right choice.

Speaking from the perspective of an African American woman, daughter, mother, sister, aunt, student, friend, professional, and human being, it is quite heartbreaking to live in a society, being aware that at any given moment, my family and I, and other African Americans and People of Color, may be treated in an unfair and unjust manner by the police, other law enforcers and others, solely based on the color of our skin. This is especially distressing due to law enforcement holding the position in which society as a whole expects to “protect and serve” all citizens equally. Complicating this disturbing phenomenon, is accepting the fact that the majority of the murders of innocent, unarmed African American victims, will usually not render a “guilty” verdict for police officers who commit these horrendous and unjustifiable crimes. This is due to the systemic racism that has traditionally viewed African Americans as “guilty until proven innocent” (Chaney & Robertson, 2015, p. 64). Unfortunately, for most victims and their families, even after innocence has been determined, the murdered innocent lives cannot be restored

and apologies -- regardless of sincerity -- are not enough. It is my hope that this research has provided valuable information that will capture the attention of lawmakers, law enforcement, marriage and family therapists and other clinicians, and others in a position to end the continuous inequalities of African Americans and other People of Color that will motivate them to implement new laws that would guarantee justice and equality for all.

### **Range of Emotions Throughout Study**

As I conducted my face-to-face interviews with each participant in this study, I experienced a range of emotions that included sadness, anger, anxiety, fear, distrust, trust, and joy. My anger, anxiety, fear, and distrust stemmed from me being face-to-face with individuals sharing the same racial identity as myself, detailing their personal negative encounters with police. Hearing the personal lived experiences of the participants provoked the different emotions due to me sharing similar direct or indirect experiences with police officers or other members of law enforcement. As I asked each question, I monitored and documented (in my field notes) each participant's verbal and non-verbal body language as they responded. At one point or another during each interview, I observed and notated a level of uncomfortableness for each participant. Most of the participants' verbal responses included hesitation, deep sighs, decreased and increased tone, and a request to take a break. The participants' non-verbal responses included teary eyes, pinched lips, looking away from researcher, fidgety hands (twisting, flexing, and balling up), and nervous legs (shaking, tapping feet, and twisting).

At the end of each interview is when I experienced trust and joy. Both of these emotions came to life when each participant identified their familial sources of strength utilized to cope with negative encounters with the police or law enforcement. As an advocate for human rights, it was reassuring to me that these families possessed the necessary tools needed for them survive during their current trials and tribulations. Hearing that most participants believed that their faith in “GOD,” prayers, and family, are key in obtaining equality and justice for all, made me reflect on my faith in “GOD” and dependence on prayers and familial cohesion and communication as the answer to equal treatment for all. Recognizing that my family and I are not in this battle alone, brought joy to my spirit, mind, body, and soul.

Although I experienced a range of emotions during the interviews, as a researcher and professional, I took several steps to prepare myself to not allow my personal emotions, feelings or biases hinder me from conducting a professional and unbiased study. First, due to me being aware that I was researching a sensitive topic that I am very passionate about, prior to each interview, I said a silent prayer or meditated to myself as a method to keep me calm. Second, whenever I felt emotional during an interview, I secretly reminded myself of the importance and benefits of my study, which assisted me with maintaining a professional appearance, posture, stance, and line of questions. Lastly, whenever I recognized that a participant was overly emotional (crying, increased tone, etc.), I immediately asked if the individual was okay to continue, needed to take a break, or wanted to discontinue the interview without suffering any consequences. Taking these

steps ensured me that as a researcher and a professional, I conducted an ethical, unbiased, valid, and informative study.

### **Participants**

Participants in this study were African American parents at least 18 years of age, with at least one child between the ages of 5 and 17 years old. Participants were biological, step, adoptive, and/or foster parents, and legal guardians. All genders were invited to participate. Participants with children falling in the above age category were included in this study, because children of this age are normally attending school and are likely to engage with diverse races and school resource (police) officers, and are able to comprehend age appropriate discussions about the topics being discussed.

### **Participant Demographics**

The participants completed a demographic questionnaire, prior to their recorded interviews, providing data on their age, gender, racial/ethnicity identity, and highest level of education (see Table 2). Of the 18 participants, 9 were female and 9 were male. The participants ranged from 33 to 59 years old. The females were 33-58 years of age and the males were 34-59 years of age. Eight of the participants identified as Black, seven as African American, two as Afro American, and one as Black American. The participants' highest level of education reported was: six with a four-or-more-year degree; one with a two-year degree; six with some college; three with certifications; one with a GED; and one with high school diploma.

Table 1

*Participants' Gender, Age, and Highest Level of Education*

Participant	Gender	Age Range	Highest Level of Education
1	F	30-40	Some College
2	F	30-40	Some College
3	M	30-40	GED
4	F	30-40	4 or More Year Degree
5	M	30-40	High School Graduate
6	F	40-50	Some College
7	M	40-50	4 or More Year Degree
8	F	40-50	2-Year Degree
9	M	40-50	Some College
10	F	40-50	Certification
11	F	40-50	4 or More Year Degree
12	F	50-60	Certification
13	M	50-60	Some College
14	M	50-60	4 or More Year Degree
15	M	50-60	4 or More Year Degree
16	F	50-60	Some College
17	M	50-60	4 or More Year Degree
18	M	50-60	Certification

The participants also provided information on their and their spouses' occupations and annual household income. The participants' occupations included four technicians, three religious leaders, three managers, two teachers, two postal workers, a realtor, a cosmetologist, and a member of law enforcement. One of the participants was unemployed. While 13 participants reported a spouse, only 11 listed their spouse's occupations. The participants' spouses' occupations included three managers, three technicians, two customer service representatives, a paraprofessional, a government worker, and a vocational counselor. One participant listed her spouse as unemployed,



while another declined to answer the question. The average annual household income reported ranged between \$60-150,000 (plus).

Table 2

*Participants' Occupation, Spouses' Occupations, and Annual Household Income*

Participant	Occupation	Spouses' Occupation	Annual Income
1	Front End Manager	Fast Food Manager	\$40-59,999
2	Unemployed	N/A	N/A
3	Commercial Tech	Marketing Technologist	\$100-149,999
4	Teacher's Aide	Unemployed	\$60-79,999
5	Fast Food Manager	Retail Manager	> \$20,000
6	Mail Clerk	N/A	\$150,000 plus
7	Coach/Teacher	N/A	\$80-99,999
8	Cosmetologist	I.T.	\$150,000 plus
9	Mail Clerk	Customer Service	\$100-149,999
10	Law Enforcement	Paraprofessional	\$60-79,999
11	Realtor	N/A	\$100-149,999
12	Lab Technician	Unemployed	\$40-59,999
13	Auto Technician	N/A	\$80-99,999
14	Minister	Government	\$150,000 plus
15	Senior Pastor	Vocational Counselor	\$150,000 plus
16	Manager	Retired	\$60-79,999
17	Minister	Customer Service	\$40-59,999
18	Glazier Technician	Manager	\$60-79,999

**Sampling Procedures**

Snowball sampling was used to recruit participants from the Dallas Fort Worth (DFW) area. Snowball sampling is a form of sampling which involves current participants recruiting their acquaintances as future participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Sampling continues until data saturation (Naderifar, Goli, & Ghaljaie, 2017). Due to my study covering a sensitive topic, snowball sampling was an effective method, because it is used when it is difficult to recruit participants with the target characteristics.

I utilized several techniques to advertise my study and to recruit participants. I contacted victims of police brutality support groups in the DFW area and requested permission to post participant recruitment flyers at their organization. After approval was granted, I posted recruitment flyers in locations of victims of police brutality support groups in the DFW area; emailed recruitment flyer to students in TWU's list serve; posted flyers at TWU's Denton campus; and individually texted recruitment flyer to all parents in my phone contacts, which included diverse, professional and non-professional individuals. After contacting me and meeting the parental requirements, each accepted participant was encouraged to reach out to their family, friends, and colleagues to invite them to voluntarily participate in this study.

### **Protection of Human Subjects**

Qualitative research involves establishing trust, maintaining good relationships, honoring the norms of mutuality, and sensitively acknowledging ethical concerns. These concerns require the knowledge of organizational politics in addition to sensitivity to human exchanges. Interpersonal skills are chief since the conduct of the study generally revolves solely on the relationships the researcher establishes with participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

In all qualitative research, validity, trustworthiness, and goodness criterion should include the researcher's plan to protect the participants in the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). After the Institutional Review Board (IRB) application for this study was approved by Texas Woman's University's IRB, additional measures were taken to protect participants in this study. Prior to participating in the study, I detailed the specifics of the

study and the consent form with all potential participants and answered all questions posed. After the individuals agreed to participate, prior to obtaining a signature on the consent form, I reiterated that participation was voluntary and that participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any point without being penalized. All participants were provided a copy of their signed consent form before moving forward with the demographic questionnaire. After each participant completed the coded demographic survey, I hand collected the responses and secured them in a locked bag that was only accessible to me to reduce the risks of breaching confidentiality. All interviews were recorded on a voice recorder only accessible to me. At the conclusion of each interview, the participants' responses were secured in a locked file cabinet only accessible to me minimize the risks of breaching confidentiality.

I also provided all participants with at least three counseling referrals should they need them due to the sensitivity of the topic being discussed. Participant confidentiality was maintained throughout the study, as there was not any identifying information used on any documents, besides the signed and secured consent forms. All questionnaire responses, transcribed interviews, and field notes, was secured in a locked file cabinet in my home, in an area that is only accessible to me. All secured research documents will be shredded after five years.

### **Data Collection Methods**

The following are the data collection methods that were utilized for the purposes of this study: demographic questionnaire, face-to-face audio-recorded interview, field notes, and analytic memos.

### **Demographic Questionnaire**

Prior to taking part in the interview, participants completed a basic demographic questionnaire. (see Appendix D). Also included was a disclosure statement informing participants that completing the first survey served as their consent to participate in the entire study. Another disclosure was included in the first survey informing participants that taking part in the study was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without being penalized. After each participant completed the demographic survey, I hand collected the responses and secured them in a locked bag that is only accessible to me to reduce the risks of breaching confidentiality.

### **Face-to-Face Audio-Recorded Interview**

After each participant's demographic survey was secured, I conducted a face-to-face, audio-recorded interview with each participant. The interviews were recorded on a voice recorder only accessible to me. At the conclusion of each interview, the participants' responses were secured in a file cabinet only accessible to me to minimize the risks of breaching confidentiality. The 17 interview questions that were asked can be found in Appendix F and Table 3.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions were designed to guide the data collection and analysis processes. The three questions were: How are African American parents discussing racism, police racial bias and brutality of unarmed African Americans with their minor children? Do African American's experiences with police racial bias and brutality towards unarmed African Americans impact their mental health? What are the sources of strengths for

African American families? The connection between the three research questions and the interview questions are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

*Connecting Research and Interview Questions*

Research Questions	Interview Questions
<p>How are African American parents discussing racism, police racial bias and brutality towards unarmed African Americans with their minor children?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. As you are aware, part of the reason that you are in this study is because you have at least one minor child between 5 and 17 years of age. Will you please tell me your child's age? Racial identity?</li> <li>2. Do your personal experiences with police and/or law enforcement impact the way you discuss White people with your children? Why or why not?</li> <li>3. Do you discuss racism, police racial bias, and/or police brutality with your minor children? If so, how and why this approach? If not, why not?</li> <li>4. How do these conversations come up?</li> <li>5. How do you define racism for your children?</li> <li>6. How do you define police racial bias and brutality for your children?</li> <li>7. Do your children know about your experiences with police officers and/or law enforcement? If so, how do they feel? If not,</li> </ol>

Do African American's experiences with police racial bias and brutality towards unarmed African Americans impact their mental health?

- why haven't you shared your experiences with them?
8. Has your child experienced police racial bias and/or brutality? If so, please provide details of incident(s). How did this make your child feel? How did this make you feel?
  9. Will you please help me to understand why this topic is of particular interest to you?
  10. Will you please tell me about the personal experiences that you've had with police officers and/or law enforcement? How did this make you feel?
  11. Have you ever experienced police racial bias and/or brutality, either personally or through someone close to you?" If so, please tell me about that experience. If not, how do you feel about this topic?
  12. Do you connect your experiences with police to your identity as an African American? If so, how?
  13. Describe your views of police treatment of diverse ethnic groups.
  14. Do you agree with the manner in which the media (internet, TV, radio, published papers, etc.) portrays police brutality towards unarmed African Americans?" "Why or why not?
  15. Stress can be a contributing factor of mental health issues. How do you believe that your experiences with police racial bias and/or brutality may have impacted you?

What are the sources of strengths for African American families impacted by racism, police racial bias and brutality towards African Americans?

Your children? Your extended family?

16. Please tell me what do you believe are your family's sources of strength? Why is this your belief?
- 

### **Field Notes**

While conducting interviews, field notes were notated to get a feel of each participant's desired interview setting. Field notes are written documentation of the researcher's observation of participants, that may contain the researcher's personal and subjective reactions to and understanding of social action experienced (Saldaña, 2009). Field notes may also include invaluable assertions and intuitions that focus on the suggested categories for analytic memo reflection. Hence, personal field notes are probable sites in which valuable analysis may transpire.

Prior to conducting each interview, I observed and documented the scenery both inside and outside the setting of the interview. While conducting each interview, I notated each respondent's facial expression and body language as each question was answered. At the conclusion of each interview, I made journal entries describing the entire experience. After all interviews were conducted for the study, I typed all hand-written field notes and audio recordings in a Microsoft Word document. To provide validity to this study, I listened to each recording a minimum of two times before concluding the typed transcriptions. When developing conclusions and themes based on each participant's responses, reliability involved me being comfortable, open-minded, resilient, non-biased,

and nonjudgmental of the information that was collected (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

### **Interview Procedures**

Participants for this study were located through a recruitment flyer (see Appendix A). As individuals contacted me expressing their interest to participate, each was screened to determine if they met the requirements for the study (see Appendix B). After meeting the requirements, interested participants and I agreed upon a day, time, and location for the interview, which included the participant's home, the participant's college campus, the location of the support groups, and any other agreed upon safe locations. All interviews were conducted in private, quiet rooms. Prior to conducting each interview, I observed and documented the scenery both inside and outside of the setting of the interview. While conducting each interview, I notated each respondent's facial expression and body language as each question was answered. At the conclusion of each interview, I made journal entries describing the entire experience.

At the beginning of each interview, I reviewed the specifics of the study, specified the expected duration of the interview and answered any questions that the participants posed. After each participant agreed to participate, I went over the consent form (see Appendix C) and answered all questions. The consent form included specific details of the study, confidentiality, benefits, risks, voluntary participation, and the right to withdraw from the study at any time. After signing the consent form and receiving a copy, participants were provided with a list of counseling resources (see Appendix D) as a reference should professional help be desired. Participants then provided demographic information (see Appendix E). The demographic questionnaire identified the participant's



gender, race, age, occupation, income, marital status; number, race, age, and gender of children, number of children living at home, and parent's affiliation with law enforcement (if any).

After each participant's demographic questionnaire was secured, I conducted a face-to-face, audio-recorded interview with each participant. An audio-recorder was used to capture the exact words and meanings expressed by the participants for the use of accurate transcription. I used an interview guide (see Appendix F) to ask mostly open-ended and a few close-ended questions inquiring how police racial bias and police brutality towards African Americans impacts African American familial systems as a whole.

### **Data Analysis**

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of African Americans families impacted by police racial bias and brutality towards unarmed African Americans. This section details how the data collected from the participants was analyzed. Since the topic being studied was chosen because not only it is a national phenomenon, but also because I share the same racial identity as the participants, steps to avoid researcher bias were taken. According to Marshall and Rossman (2016), research designs should include a reflection of one's self and a sense of expression and views, sensitivities, and assumptions. This is important, because some research project are sparked from passion, excitement, and insight, which stems from an individual's identity, reality, and values (biases). They should be identified as features of the researcher's role, ethics, and data management, analysis, and reporting. Once the features are acknowledged, they were easier to manage for the reader to evaluate the final report and

evaluate how these identity features affect the outcome of the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

### **Member Checking**

Throughout the entire interview and transcription process, member checking was utilized to validate the participants' responses and findings. Member checking is a method used in qualitative studies that involve both solo and/or team coders, consulting with participants throughout the analysis process as a way to validate findings (Burant et al., 2007). According to Ezzy (2002), while still in the field, there are several strategies that researchers may utilize to check the progress of their analysis. Although team researchers may implement these strategies into their research, lone researchers may benefit from these recommendations most as they evaluate the trustworthiness of their accounts. First, researchers can confirm their developed interpretations with the participants themselves. Second, researchers can code as they transcribe interview data. Third, researchers can manage a reflective journal of the project with detailed analytic memos.

### **Analytic Memos**

Analytic memos were used to notate and reflect on while coding. Analytic memos are a site for researchers to “dump your brain” in relation to a study's participants, phenomena, and/or processes being investigated by thinking and hence documenting and hence thinking more (Clarke, 2005, p. 202). Analytic memo writing is used to document and reflect on a researcher's coding process and code choices; the formation of the analysis process; and the developing patterns, categories and subcategories, themes, and ideas in one's data, likely leading to theory (Saldaña, 2009). Codes are not to be thought

of as just a symbolic word or phrase used to label data, but as a stimulus or trigger for documenting reflection on the rooted and complex meaning it incites. According to Mason (2002), “thinking critically about what you are doing and why, confronting and often challenging your own assumptions, and recognizing the extent to which your thoughts, actions and decisions shape how you research and what you see” (p. 5).

Analytic memo writing and coding are simultaneous qualitative data analytic methods, as there is a reciprocal relationship between the coding development system and the evolution of interpreting a phenomenon (Weston et al., 2001, p. 397).

### **Coding**

Two cycles of coding were used after all interviews were transcribed and categorized according to meanings. A code in qualitative studies is generally a word or phrase that typically appoints a summative, pertinent, meaningful, and/or expressive characteristic for a fragment of visual or language-based data (Saldaña, 2009). The data may be composed of interview transcripts, field notes, literature, videos, photos, journals, and other elements. During First Cycle coding, the fragment of data to be coded may extend from a single word to a complete sentence to a whole page of content to a flow of moving images. Second Cycle coding processes involve coded fragments that can be the same units, longer passages on content, and a rearrangement of the previously developed codes.

When working as a lone ethnographer, having discussions with a mentor or colleague in reference to one’s coding and analysis progress can be beneficial. It is also advantageous for solo and team coders, to consult with participants during the analysis

process. Sharing coded field notes and discussing challenges with coding and analysis creates support from peers and can also assist with identifying better correlations between categories in progress (Burant et al., 2007). Discussions can provide an opportunity to enunciate one's internal thinking processes, as well as create additional opportunities for clarification of one's emerging ideas and probable new views about the data (Saldaña, 2009).

### **Data Analysis Process**

I listened to each of the audio-recorded interviews from the 18 face-to-face, audio-recorded interviews at least two times prior to transcription to ensure accuracy. Then I examined the participants' responses in relation to the research questions in preparation to analyze the data. Marshall and Rossman (2016) noted that a typical analytic plan includes seven phases: (1) organization of the data, (2) immersion in the data, (3) developing case summaries and probable categories and themes, (4) data coding, (5) providing interpretations through analytic memos, (6) searching for alternative insight, and (7) writing the report.

First, prior to collecting my data, I purchased a portable file organizer with a lock to keep data organized. I was the only individual in possession of the key to gain access to my study's data. My organizer had at least eight separate labeled compartments, to store my recruitment flyers, initial telephone script, consent to participate, blank demographic questionnaires, completed demographic questionnaires, interview guide, counseling resources, and miscellaneous. Second, I immersed in the data collected by taking notes during each interview and listened to each audio-recorded interview at least

two times before transcribing. Third, after transcribing each interview, I developed categories and themes based on the words and phrases expressed by the participants. During transcription and the development of categories/themes, when clarification of a participant's response was needed, I contacted the participant via the contact information provided and used the follow-up telephone script (see Appendix G) to obtain clarification. Fourth, after identifying common categories and themes, I began the data coding process. Fifth, after coding my data, I analyzed all of the codes, interpreted their meanings, and documented what I learned thus far. Sixth, after developing my analytic memos, I searched for alternative meanings of the data. Lastly, after deciding the final meanings, I wrote my report with a draft of my findings.

Prior to finalizing the findings, I reexamined my themes and identified the major themes to ensure accurate reporting. Reexamining the initial themes is one way that I ensured accurate reporting in effort to avoid researcher bias. Marshall and Rossman noted that the ethical issues that may emerge when transcribing and translating the words of others is fixated on how we depict our participants, how we display respect for them when transposing their actual words into text that we influence and write-up. I avoided this to the best of my abilities by transcribing the participants' exact words and phrases and reflecting back on my notes from each interview to make sure that I documented their responses accurately. Throughout the entire analysis process (transcribing, development of themes, coding, and finalizing results), I consulted with a faculty mentor to ensure trustworthiness in my analysis.

## **Reliability and Validity**

Qualitative research is generally used to examine issues identified by advocates and more currently post-modern social scholars. In qualitative research, there are no statistical tests that may be utilized to check reliability and validity as there are when conducting quantitative research. However, there are methods to establish confidence in the “truth” of the study’s findings. This is called confidence “trustworthiness,” which hints that there are four criteria of trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Sutton & Austin, 2015).

First, credibility is the confidence in the truth of the findings (Sutton & Austin, 2015). I ensured credibility by utilizing triangulation. Triangulation is viewed as a qualitative strategy utilized to test validity through the combination of information from several sources (Patton, 1999). Of the four types of triangulation identified by Patton (1999), for this study, I utilized method triangulation. The different data sources that I utilized were face-to-face interviews, observation, field notes, and analytic memos. I also strengthened my credibility by comparing individuals with different views. Second, transferability, shows that the findings are applicable in other context (Sutton & Austin, 2015). I ensured transferability by documenting ways in which my results were generalizable to other populations and settings. Third, dependability, shows how the study’s findings are consistent and may be repeated. I ensured dependability by requesting that my chair ran an inquiry audit to examine my data collection, data analyses, and the findings of my study. This was necessary to make sure that my findings are accurate and are supported by the collected data. Fourth, confirmability, identifies the extent to which the study’s findings are formed by the participants and not researcher

bias, interest, or motivation (Sutton & Austin, 2015). I ensured confirmability by keeping a reflexive journal to document my values, interests, biases, and personal experiences as they were related to my study. I also reflected on my background and my position. At the conclusion of my study, I reflected back on my journal entries to keep ethical, unbiased, and truthful when documenting the findings of my study.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to utilize a phenomenological approach to analyze the lived experiences of African American parents with minor children, between the ages of 5-17 years of age, who have been impacted by police racial bias and brutality towards unarmed African Americans. Information was collected from at least 20 African American parents who met these requirements. All interviews consisted of sixteen open-ended questions, one close-ended question, followed up with prompt questions when the participants got stuck or I believed that a response was incomplete. I listened to all audio-recorded interviews and transcribed them individually, before the themes were finalized for coding. The findings were reported identifying common themes, which also included verbatim responses from all participants.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

This chapter presents the findings of this phenomenological study, conducted utilizing a critical race perspective analyzing the impact of police racial bias and brutality towards unarmed African Americans on African American families with minor children. The three research questions for this study were: ‘How are African American parents discussing racism, police racial bias and brutality towards unarmed African Americans with their minor children?’; ‘Do African American’s experiences with police racial bias and brutality towards unarmed African Americans impact their mental health?’; and ‘What are the sources of strengths for African American families impacted by racism, police racial bias and brutality towards African Americans?’ The data were collected from 18 African American parents during face-to-face interviews, which included mostly open-ended with a few closed ended questions. All interviews were transcribed and then compared for commonalities. The commonalities were then categorized and coded. Meanings emerged from the codes and themes were derived. After the initial themes were notated, seven major themes and several sub-themes were identified.

#### **Analysis of Data**

Prior to analyzing the data and developing categories, meanings, codes, and themes, I took several steps as a means to confirm accuracy of this study’s findings. First, during each interview, I documented analytic memos and field notes that included notes on verbal and non-verbal body language of each participant. Second, during the



transcription process of the interviews, I contacted several participants via their listed points of contact to clarify their responses and my assumed meanings made during the recorded interviews. Third, all interviews, analytic memos, and field notes were transcribed. Fourth, in order to maintain trustworthiness of the entire interview process and study's findings, which included interview conduction, transcription, and identification of categories, meanings, codes, and themes researcher reviewed results several times before concluding results.

### **Findings**

The participants' responses to the interview questions revealed the phenomena of their beliefs and views of interactions with the police and law enforcement. The first finding revealed that African American parents are discussing racism, police racial bias and brutality towards African Americans with their minor children, utilizing "The Talk" approach. The second finding revealed that most participants and some of their family members' mental health have been impacted by their interactions with the police. The third finding showed that "GOD", prayers, and family are this study's participants' main sources of strengths.

The first research question aimed to determine the manner in which African American parents are discussing racism, police racial bias and brutality towards African Americans with their minor children. After analyzing the participants' responses, three themes and six sub-themes emerged. The three major themes were *Necessity of "The Talk"*, *Reasons for Having Discussion*, and *Have Not Discussed* (see Table 4).

Table 4

*Research Question 1 (RQ1) Themes and Sub-themes*

Themes	Sub-themes
1. Necessity of “The Talk”	a. “Do or die!” b. Respect can save your life
2. Reasons for Having Discussion	a. Personal experiences led to discussion b. Recent media exposure led to discussion
2. Have Not Discussed	a. Will discuss in the near future b. Will not discuss

The second research question aimed to determine if an African Americans’ experiences with police racial bias and brutality towards unarmed African American’s impact their mental health. After analyzing the data, two themes and four sub-themes emerged. The two themes were *Impacted* and *Not Impacted* (see Table 5).

Table 5

*Research Question 2 (RQ2) Themes and Sub-themes*

Themes	Sub-themes
1. Impacted	a. Direct contact with police b. Indirect contact with police
2. Not Impacted	a. Direct contact with police b. Indirect contact with police

The third research question aimed to identify the sources of strengths for the African American families. At the completion of analyzing the participants' responses, two themes and four sub-themes emerged. The two themes were *Beliefs and Values* (see Table 6).

Table 6

*Research Question 3 (RQ3) Themes and Sub-themes*

Themes	Sub-themes
1. Beliefs	a. Faith in "GOD" b. Prayer
2. Values	a. Family b. Avoidance

### **Presentation of Themes**

The themes identified from the data collected from the participants interviews are presented in this section. The first research question was designed to identify how African American parents are discussing racism, police racial bias and brutality towards unarmed African Americans with their minor children. The second research question was designed to determine if the mental health of African American families are impacted by their experiences of police racial bias and brutality towards unarmed African Americans. Lastly, the third research question was designed to identify the sources of strengths utilized by African Americans families impacted by racism, police racial bias and brutality towards African Americans.

**Research Questions (RQ1): How are African American Parents Discussing Racism, Police Racial Bias and Brutality Towards Unarmed Americans with Their Minor Children?**

**RQ1- Discussion- Theme 1: Necessity of “The Talk”**

The first theme that emerged from Question One was *Necessity of “The Talk”* approach. The parents’ responses revealed that all except for one used “The Talk” approach when discussing racism, police racial bias and brutality towards African Americans with their minor children. “The Talk” includes specific instructions developed by African American parents, for their minor children to follow when interacting with the police. The parents believed that the step-by-step guidelines are in the best interest of the safety and well-being of their minor children’s lives when interacting with police officers. “The Talk” generally stresses respect of authority and includes “do or die” rules to be followed when approached by the police. These two specific methods of “The Talk” are believed to decrease the chances of losing another innocent African American life at the hands of police.

**RQ1-Discussion-Sub-theme 1a: “Do or Die!”.** “The Talk” sometimes includes “do or die” guidelines that African American parents instruct their minor children to follow if they are ever put in a position to interact with the police. The step-by-step survival technique for African Americans generally includes instructions on where to pull over; where to place their hands; where to leave their cell phones; when to speak; when to reach for their driver’s license, car insurance, and other requested items; how to be dressed (no hoods on head); and no matter what, follow all instructions. The parents

expressed that since it is a known fact that police are known to make quick stereotypical assumptions when interacting with Africans Americans, following the “do or die” guidelines is one of the most effective methods of saving innocent African American lives when interacting with the police and other members of law enforcement.

Um, I feel as a parent, because I’m not with them all the time. I feel as a parent to make sure that I go over some real crucial, um, I don’t know if you want to call them details or whatever. If she get pulled over by the police, how to conduct yourself, because of all the, the latest shootings... You know even the other brutality that we don’t even hear about... Put your hands, if they get pulled over... make sure they see your hands at all times. Make sure you say ‘yes sir’ ‘yes ma’am.’ Provide, just provide everything they ask you without no back talk or nothing like that (Participant #7).

No, I don’t teach my children to look at them differently or not to do this. But I do tell them to be careful o the way, the way that they carry themselves. And the way that they act out in public. And just to always make sure if they are stopped by a officer, their hands is up where they can see ‘em. I don’t, because I just seen a lot of things go on with police officers taking kids and saying that they thought they had an object in their hand. Just like it could be a gun. Or it could be a cell phone. And children lose their lives behind that. So, this is what I really talk to my children about (Participant #10).

I tell my children how to handle themselves with the police...I mean be polite. Um, have your hands visible...because all police officers are not bad police officers (Participant #12).

Uh, like I said, being in law enforcement, and seeing events take place on television, I've shared with them that when you get pulled over, make sure that you sit still. Make sure both hands are visible to the officer. Whether they're Black, White, Hispanic, Asian. Make sure your hands are visible. And whatever you do, don't reach for your insurance, don't reach for anything until they tell you to reach for it. And I even, I've even uh, told them don't put your insurance card in the glove box. Put it on the visor. So that way, you never have...you don't give this officer a reason to suspect that you gonna reach for something in your glove box, because your insurance card is right on your visor. And you're just reaching your hands straight up. So, once again, don't move until they tell you uh, that they want to see your license and insurance (Participant #15).

**RQ1-Discussion-Sub-theme 1b: Respect can save your life!** Five of the participants stated that when having “The Talk” with their children, they stress the importance of their children being respectful during all interactions with the police. The participants stated that while it is a known fact that African Americans are frequent victims of police racial bias and brutality, all police are not ‘bad’. Therefore, most parents stress that no matter what the situation may be, their children should always give all officers the utmost respect. Even in situations when their children are being targeted due to the color of their skin, the participants believe that when given respect, the biased

officer may possibly spare their innocent child's life. All participants believed that respect given to racially biased officers is one of the most effective approaches to save the life of innocent African American potential victims.

Then you also want to you know, teach, tell your kids about authority. And that's kind of one of the biggest things that I've always done with my sons. That, that, you have to respect authority. And respect, I tell them, will save your life. And, the lack of respect, can cost you your life (Participant #3).

I just you, tell my son to be respectful, you know. First of all, do what you can not to be put in that situation. Um, (sighs), so I uh used to tell him how. Now, I just have to tell him to, you know, if ever, um put in that situation, you know, just to make sure that you know, he doesn't make silly mistakes. Like you know, putting your hands in your pocket. You know? It's simple stuff that they could take as a threat to their lives and that would take away his. I take this approach, because of everything that's going on. Um, every, everything that I see on social media. I mean, I'm scared on a daily basis (Participant #8).

I talk to my son about police not, sometimes not in a good way. But in a fear(ful) way, because I never know what a police officer would do to, to my son. Because I have to teach him, you know the way to talk to them. The way, you know, the way to carry himself around them...I just tell him you know, you're Black and you know you might encounter this, because for some reason they target us. And no matter how much your parents may do. No matter what neighborhood you're in. Your car, you know. You get targeted. And I just talk to

my son about it. And I just tell him man, you have to be careful. When you, when you around police, you have to be respectful. No matter what, yes sir, no sir. And you move on. You move on to live another day. You have to be respectful...I take this particular approach, because we've been racially profiled and pulled over for no reason (Participant #9).

I do let them know in conversations that you know that, the position that we take as believers, as Christians, is that we respect all races. And if there is anything unfair, or it it's with Caucasian officers, there is always a way to handle it and do it...Hey listen, just do what the law says, and don't break the law. There's two things here: When you get arrested, get pulled over, respect the officer. And then, if you're...not guilty of violating the law of the land, they at least should give you that kind of respect (Participant #17).

I do what my mother taught me. It's to always listen and obey what the officer is telling you, first of all. So, I try to let them see that all police officers aren't bad. So, they have to respect all of them too. So, it's best that they follow directions when a officer giving them directions and to do those things. ...Because it's the safest approach. Because, even if you're innocent and you're trying to explain yourself, the average officer will tell you to shut up and don't say nothing. So the more aggression that you show them, the worse they as officers (Participant #18).



## **RQ1- Discussion- Theme 2: Reasons for Having Discussion**

The second theme that emerged from Question One was *Reasons for Having Discussion*. Fifteen participants acknowledged to having discussed racism, police racial bias and brutality towards unarmed African Americans with their minor children. The parents' narratives revealed that due to the continuous increasing loss of innocent, unarmed African American lives at the hands of police, the conversation is mandatory. The parents stressed that discussing these topics with their children as is a matter of life and death for all African Americans, regardless of one's age, gender, educational background, or social status. They believed that avoiding this topic was not an option, due to it being viewed as a method to save innocent African American lives from being prematurely taken away at the hands of unjust police officers.

I do talk to them about it, because it's so much going on now-a-days. And I just want them to be aware of the world that we are living in and the things that's going on in the world when it does...do come to uh, police officers and Black children. Um, they are...I just feel like they are being handled differently. And I just want my children to uh, be aware of this...I just keep them up on what's going on in this world. I just feel like it's not fair (Participant #10).

I've seen Black men be incarcerated for crimes they didn't commit. I've seen family members of mine that's been incarcerated for crimes (that) they didn't commit...The judicial system here is not for a Black, a Black male (Participant #12).

**RQ1-Discussion-Sub-theme 2a: Personal experiences led to discussion.**

Thirteen participants, including two law enforcers expressed that their personal experiences with police officers and/or law enforcement led to their discussions of racism, police racial bias and brutality of African Americans with their minor children. The participants discussed being targeted, pulled over, verbally and physically assaulted, unlawfully searched, falsely accused and arrested due to the color of their skin. Some expressed that they believed that education is key in saving their children's lives from those who are expected to protect and serve. The participants believed that discussing the topic with their children was the first step in preparing them to survive in a world in which they are targeted due to the color of their skin. Most stated that today, African Americans are fighting to stay alive in a "White man's world." They believe that if they do not have police race-related discussions with their minors, another unarmed, innocent African American's life could be taken by unethical police officers.

I tell my kids, you know, I, I went through that with a cop before. I've been in that situation before. I then...you know, I tell them how I handled that situation before. I then, you know, I tell them how I handled the situation before...If I didn't have no good words, you know, this how you should handle the situation. No matter what I did, or what someone else done, you should, you should do it like this here. Think first. You know what I'm saying? I try to tell them right what I didn't do (Participant #5).

Not for them to turn on all White people, because all White people are not the same. It's just that I just told them the way I that I feel like uh, it's a saying about this is a "White man's world"... They uh, just feel like they are the makers of the world... Recently, I experienced a race issue on my job (law enforcer). Uh, it was some uh White people calling me out of my name. I took, I, I took it until I just couldn't take it no more. Until they got confrontational, right up unti... in my face. I had to call Dallas police to let them know what was going on. Uh, when I did speak with the operator, it seemed to me, that she, when she took my, the story from me, she kind of like was hesitant about just sending the officer out there, because she felt like, by me working in um, law enforcement, I should be able to handle it . But I felt like my life was being threatened at the time. So when the officer did come out, uh, and took my side of the story, and took their side of the story, I just felt like they just went along with the other race, instead of just going along with uh, me being a law enforcer, enforcer, as well. I feel like they took the other person's side, because they was the same race as them, until I pulled out my private investigation card and I told them that I know my rights, because they was trying to uh, give me some type of warning, because, they just couldn't. I felt like they wasn't listening to my story and they tried to uh, tell me that I was being, outweighed. When they 're standing here looking at this other person just cursing me out in their presence. Continue to curse me out why they was standing there. But the moment I opened up my mouth, it, it, they just seemed like I was just this crazy Black person, just going off because I was working in law enforcement. And they just felt like I was just trying to uh, just use

my authority over the person that I was trying to get off the property. So I do feel like it's a race issue when it comes to Black people and another race. And I just don't agree with it. And it also makes me not want to be in law, law enforcement anymore (Participant #10).

I also experienced the police beating my, my uh, my second son inside of my mother's house. Um, he was standing outside in front of the door. And the police stopped and asked him what he was doing here. He told them that my grandmother lives here. My uncle lives...my uncle's here...They ran him in the house without a search warrant. They caught him. They beat him...For no apparent reason. But nobody was there but one of my other nephews. Had he not been there, they would have beat him even more. And I went to internal affairs and they dropped the charges or whatever, because they know it was racial profiling. You can't tell a man not to stand in front of a relative's door. He wasn't doing anybody anything (Participant #12).

Well uh, with police officers, I've had some good and bad. Uh, good, because I have worked in law enforcement. Uh, I worked in law enforcement for 11 years. At the Tarrant County Sheriff's Department. I worked with some officers uh, who were real good people. Uh, judge people based on what was right. What was wrong. Uh, and dealt with them according to the law and not based on them according to the color of their skin. However, there were those who I worked with that did uh, some wrong and judge people based on the color of their skin. Uh, my personal experience um, I got pulled over one night by a DPS officer. A White

fellow and he wanted me to get out of the car after I asked him several questions. Like, why didn't you stop the car that was going next to me? He was going the same speed. Matter of fact, that car passed me, but you pulled me over. And of course, at that point, he wanted me to step out of the car. And uh, that was very surprising the way he talked to me and wanted me to step out of the car. Um, and then, there's a bank right around the corner from my house. If I go in with a jogging suit on, there's a security guard at the desk, anytime I go in with a ball cap and a jogging suit, he gets up out of his chair and he stands up and he's watching me the whole time. Few weeks ago, I went in there with a suit on, he didn't even realize I was the same guy. And he never, uh, got out of that chair (Participant #15).

**RQ1-Discussion-Sub-theme 2b: Recent media exposure led to discussion.** Two participants stated the recent media exposure of police brutality of unarmed African Americans was the triggering point for them to discuss police racially biased encounters targeting African Americans with their minor children. One of the two participants expressed that while he has personally experienced police racial bias, his experiences do not have any bearing on him discussing racism or police maltreatment of African Americans with his children, because not all police officers are bad. He stated that due to his sons many questions about police racially biased interactions with African Americans exposed on social media, he stated that a conversation had to take place. The other participant expressed that even though she has never had a negative encounter with the police, she has discussed police treatment of African Americans with her son due to him

having questions about the media's frequent exposure of African Americans being harassed and mistreated by racist police.

I have talked to my son about the climate of the world that we in right now...Kids have more access than just a conversation that you have with them at home. Like, they have the internet. They see things and they kind of have a general idea of racism, uh just without the conversation. Without me having the conversation. And, and so when you look at videos of uh, a cop pulling some Black guy over, and then like, shooting him five times, with a kid in the car. I mean you obviously have to have a conversation about that (Participant #3).

I do uh, speak with them, with my son, because it's all over social media. It's all over the regular media. Uh, and he comes to...comes to me and ask me questions about what do I think about certain incidents that's occurring now in the US and all around the country with Blacks and um, police officers. And I do you know, let him know that it's not right...He knows that it's not right. But he just wants to have my opinion on it. And we discuss things like that, because I don't want him to be brought up sheltered. I don't want him to be brought up with a closed mind and not understand or know what's going on outside of the four walls, you know, that we live in...So, I want him to be aware of what's going on out there and how he can prevent...being uh, I guess attacked or approached by uh, racist people (Participant #4).

### **RQ1- Discussion- Theme 3: Have Not Discussed**

The second theme that emerged from Question One was *Have Not Discussed*.

Three participants reported differing reasons for not discussing racism and police related issues with their minor children. One participant reported that she would not be discussing the topic with her children due to the makeup of her family. The two remaining parents expressed that while they have not discussed these topics with their minors, due to the frequency and severity of the issues linked to police and law enforcement's maltreatment of innocent and unarmed African Americans, the discussion must take place in the near future as a preventative measure to prevent future African Americans from being victimized by those whom have taken an oath to protect and serve.

**RQ1-Discussion-Sub-theme 3a: Will discuss in the near future.** One participant stated that she has purposely delayed the conversation with her 6-year-old son, because prior to her participation in this study, she believed that her son was too young for the discussion. The participant stated that due to her participation in this study, she recognizes it is imperative for her to have an age-appropriate discussion with her son about how to conduct himself when interacting with police officers. The participant stated she is now comfortable with having the conversation with her son, because he is starting to understand things better as he frequently interacts with diverse races.. The other participant stated that he could not provide a reason as to why he had not had the discussion with his 13 and 17-year-old granddaughters. The participant expressed that reflecting on his interactions with the police as a part of this study was a reminder of the importance of having discussions about race and law enforcement with his grandchild.

I have not yet, uh at this particular time. But I do feel that since he's getting older, he understands things. The topic does need to come up. It does need to be discussed, because he needs to know how to handle that...I think they'll come up, because I think with a child, he'll probably see how he's being treated differently versus White children...they could probably do some of the same things he do and he'll get in trouble for something and they won't (Participant #2).

I have discussed it with my older children...Discussed it with my grandchild...I haven't really talked to her uh, in detail about that...I've not shared with her uh, after having this interview with you, it definitely opened my eyes that uh, uh, I probably need to do that (Participant #15).

**RQ1-Discussion-Sub-theme 3b: Will not discuss.** One parent reported that due to the make-up of her family, she will not be discussing racism, or police racial bias and brutality towards African Americans with her minor children. The blended family consists of a single African American mother and her five minor children: one African American male, biological son, one African American female, adopted daughter, and three Caucasian males, adopted sons. The mother stressed that she believed that if she discussed racism and police racial issues aimed at African Americans, it would cause a racial divide within her cohesive family. She expressed that a conversation of the sort is unnecessary due to her and her minors not having any negative interactions with the police or law enforcement. The mother stated that her familial conversations with her children consist of her telling her children that they are all equal, the law of the land, and "right and wrong."



We don't discuss White people, because I'm raising White people and Black people. So, I cannot have Black and White conversations inside of my household. We don't discuss color. I just tell my kids they all equal. That's just how I raise them. And I don't say, oh you could do one thing and the other one can't...I discuss right and wrong with my kids. And I discuss the law of the land. And just as well as I give the rules of my household, they know what they supposed to do by law. I mean, they know they got to respect the police officer just as well as they got to respect their teachers (Participant #6).

**Research Questions (RQ2): Do African American's Experiences with Police Racial Bias and Brutality Towards Unarmed Africans Impact Their Mental Health?**

**RQ2-Mental Health-Theme 1: Impacted**

The first theme that emerged when inquiring about the possible impact that an African American's experience with police racial bias and brutality towards unarmed African Americans may have on one's mental health, was *Impacted*. Thirteen participants reported that their mental health has been negatively impacted due to their direct and indirect interactions with the police. The participants reported that either they or a family member suffers from anxiety, depression, and/or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) due to unfavorable police encounters. All stated that they live in constant fear of the police harming them, their family members or other innocent African Americans. Most stated that their personal experiences or knowledge of other African Americans' traumatic experiences with police or law enforcement, has left them feeling unequal, dehumanized, degraded, disrespected, and unprotected by the police. At one point or

another during their interviews, when describing their experiences with police officers, all 13 participants used words such as afraid, concerned, distrust, fear, nervous, scared, uncomfortable, and worried. Several expressed that due to their mental health challenges, their home, social, and work lives all have been negatively impacted.

**RQ2-Mental Health-Sub-theme 1a: Direct contact with police.** Five of the participants expressed that their direct contact with the police has impacted them mentally. The parents' direct contact with the police during racially profiled police stops included: verbal and physical assaults, unlawful searches, false accusations, and other sorts of harassment. The parents reported suffering from PTSD, depression, and anxiety. Some participants are still negatively impacted by their encounters with police officers which stem back to their childhoods. Based on the oldest impacted participant's age (59), this groups' mental health issues related to their adverse interactions with the police, go back almost 40 years. In addition to having a long history of being mentally impacted due to their personal unfavorable experiences with the police, four of the participants reported being mentally impacted by negative police encounters experienced by their children and other family members as well.

Um, it impacted us...it impacted, well I think all of us. It makes us worry (Participant #1).

Well you know, I have friends and I have family...Sometimes when we see police, it's like a tense moment, because a lot of times, we don't trust police. Like I said, all police are not bad. But the bad ones make it hard for us as uh, Black males to trust them (Participant #9).

Uh, wow! Like, we just can't say anything...and just have a right to voice our opinion. (Sighs) or we're doing something wrong. We gotta keep our mouth shut! This is what, 2018? And they wanna treat us (like we're) back in...slavery time? Like we can't say anything. Unless you get lynched! I'm about to get pissed. I'm really about to get pissed! I think I need to stop (Participant #16).

It can really be a stressful situation when you are done an unjust...So that means, you're riding to work and you're thinking about this unjust and stress comes up on you (Participant #18).

**RQ2-Mental Health-Sub-theme 1b: Indirect contact with police.** Eight participants expressed that they have been mentally impacted by their indirect contact with the police. The participants, which are composed of parents, grandparents, and guardians of minors, expressed that they suffer daily due to fears of their minor children and other African Americans being harmed by racially biased police officers. Similar to the parents who suffer from direct contact, some of the indirect mental health issues stems from family and friends being targeted, harassed, verbally and physically assaulted, unlawfully searched, falsely accused and arrested, and other forms of police related harassment. Several parents also mentioned the high-profile cases of police brutality of unarmed African Americans, such as Sandra Bland and Michael Brown as the triggers of their police-related stress. Similar to the parents who suffer from direct contact with police, parents who suffer from indirect contact also cannot function normally with family or friends; at work or school; or in other social environments when their stress levels are high in relation to police racial bias and brutality towards African Americans.

Several participants stated that they will continue to be mentally impacted as long as the judicial system continues to allow police officers to target and murder innocent human beings.

It's funny how the first thing that you think when your male cousins, when you see them take a picture, when they're going to the club or anything...and you think, you think, "Man, I just hope and pray, like you know, that they can get home safe and they, you know, they won't get in trouble with no police"...Like for nothing. And they could lose their life...So it's a mental thing (Participant #1).

I'm afraid just to give my son the, the average normal freedom that a White child would have. I, I just can't do it! Um, he wants to go out, and you know, hang out with his friends, and you know and do things that (comes along with) being 12 years old. I'm always telling him he can get caught up at any moment (Participant #8).

Well, I do believe that it stresses me out, because I do have four Black children and I'm not going to be here to always to hold their hands or coach them on how to live with others in this world. And I am afraid as a Black parent for my Black children, because I see that the system is just, is not, it's just not working for a lot of Black people. It's just not fair the way that they're treated...I'm stressed, because I, I, I wonder what's gonna ha...happen to...could it be one of my children that's next? (Participant #10).

## **RQ2-Mental Health-Theme 2: Not Impacted**

The second theme that emerged was *Not Impacted*. Five participants reported that although they had either direct or indirect interactions with the police, their mental health was not impacted. Although four of the five reported direct negative police encounters, their responses showed that they were adamant not to give the police anymore control of their lives than what the police's abuse of power had already attempted to control. All except for one parent, expressed that although they were not mentally impacted, they were aware of the frequency and severity of police racial bias and brutality towards African Americans; therefore, they did not invalidate the experiences, fears, and/or beliefs of others in relation to the police and/or law enforcement.

**RQ2-Mental Health-Sub-theme 2a: Direct contact with police.** Four of the five participants stated that although they have had unfavorable direct contact with the police, they refuse to allow it to impact them mentally. The parents believe that the judicial system has basically put the lives of all African Americans in the hands of police to take actions as they choose, whether justified or not. Finding themselves in this situation, the parents stated that they refuse to grant the police total and complete control of their lives. The parents have decided to use tools such as education on how to interact with the police and changing locations to upper scale environments as weapons to maintain their mental health. The parents believe that if they allow negative police encounters to control their minds, it will negatively impact their familial, professional, social, and work lives.

I've never really dealt with police brutality. Nobody in my immediate family, that I know of dealt with police brutality. So, I don't really have an answer for that question (Participant #3).

You know, we're not gone let this consume us. Not become a prisoner of it (Participant #11).

Um, I don't have any interactions with the police where I am now. Um, it's uh, I guess you could say an upper scale neighborhood. So, the police don't visit much. Unless they're called (Participant #13).

That's why I tried to educate them and share with them how to deal with police officers so you won't experience that um, that mental stress part...I haven't experienced as far as mental stress. So, uh, like I said, once again, it goes back to the education of teaching our children, grandchildren, how to respond when an officer does approach you (Participant #15).

**RQ2-Mental Health-Sub-theme 2b: Indirect contact with police.** One of the five participants stated that neither her nor her minor children's interactions with the police have impacted them mentally. The mother reported that her blended family composed of African American and Caucasian minors has a great relationship with the officers in their county. She reported that when summoning the police to her home to assist her with keeping her sometimes rebellious teens in order, they have never experienced any negative, racially motivated, or biased encounters when interacting with the police. The mother viewed the police as her number one support system. The single mother depends on the police to assist her with raising her children and therefore views

them as her children's 'fathers'. The participant stated that her indirect contact with the police through her friend's children interactions with the police has not impacted her mentally either. The participant stated that while her friend and others may not agree, she believes that the police's actions with her friend's children were justifiable, due to the children's poor choices.

I know the whole story with my friend's children. I feel like the cops are justifiable for what they do...my friend's children are negative kids...So I mean, I really don't care when they call me and tell me what they did to their kids. Good, they should have been done something to them long time ago. I believe...right is right and wrong is wrong (Participant #6).

**Research Questions (RQ3): What are the Sources of Strengths for African American Families Impacted by Racism, Police Racial Bias and Brutality Towards African Americans?**

**RQ3-Strengths-Theme 1: Beliefs**

The first theme that emerged as the main source of strength utilized by African American families impacted by racism, police racial bias and brutality towards African Americans was *Beliefs*. Beliefs are composed of values and attitudes, in addition to personal knowledge, morals, biases, experiences, opinions and other explanatory views of the social world (Wolcott, 1999). Beliefs are basically our personal views that we hold to be true. Twelve participants recognized "GOD" as their primary source of strength. The participants credited their religious parents with instilling the fear of "GOD" in them. Out of that fear grew intense love for, honor of, and faith in "GOD". Of the

twelve, five also acknowledged prayer as a familial strength also. The participants stressed that their faith in “GOD” and being in “HIS” presence during prayer is what keeps them sane. The parents were optimistic that as long as they continued to honor “GOD” as the “HEAD” of their lives, “HE” would answer their prayers and deliver them from being targeted by racially biased police.

**RQ3-Strengths-Sub-theme 1a: Faith in “GOD”.** Twelve of the 18 participants reported “GOD” as the leading source in their lives. The participants stated that “GOD” was their strengthening source during life’s unexpected and unavoidable challenges, including the suffering linked to being purposely targeted by the police. The participants linked their strong faith in “GOD” to the teachings of their parents that have existed for many generations. All participants stressed the importance of them continuing to teach their children “GOD’s” word as instructed by the Holy Bible. One of the scriptures frequently referenced by the participants was “GOD’s” promise to, ‘lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil’. This scripture seemed to bring solace to the parents as they referenced it.

Um, I come from a religious family. So, “GOD” is our source of strength (Participant #2).

The only thing that I tell my children that, that we can depend on is “GOD”. That’s it. Because without “HIM”, we’re in a world of trouble. And with “HIM”, we going to have some struggles or whatever. But with “GOD”, we’re going to overcome ‘em (Participant #12).



Uh, our source of strength as far as a family and me, I still depend on “GOD.” I just follow “HIM.” Uh, “HE” “HE” sees what’s happening. “HE” knows what’s happening. And then even when you look in the bible and see how, certain people, kings that were in charge, there were some evil kings. They did evil things and the people suffered. Uh, but “GOD” allowed it. Uh, so even in this day and age, I see, “HE’S”, “HE” allows it. But there are some suffering because of the son of our kin. But the way we get through it...through multiple stress, is that our faith is in “GOD.” So we know that “HE’S” watching us. “HE” protects us. And whatever we go through is for a reason. And you know it won’t last too long. You know, we will come out. We have the victory (Participant #14).

Well, our sources of strength, of course is our faith in “GOD.” And then our close family connection and communication. Always being open with one another. And we can share with one another...Our faith, our church, our family connection, uh, is our source of strength (Participant #15).

Number one, we have to believe in “GOD.” And know that everything goes through “HIM.” And number two, we have to educate our children...And we have to show ‘em things that they have to do as citizens of the United States that other citizens or children their age do not have to do. And so we have to be very careful in teaching our kids that. Either we are teaching that or we’ll be burying them (Participant #18).

**RQ3-Strengths-Sub-theme 1b: Prayer.** Five participants stated that prayer is their second source of familial strength. The participants stated that while they had strong

faith in “GOD”, it was their belief that “GOD” would not grant them their heart’s desires if they did not dedicate time to pray to “HIM”. In effort to support their belief, some referenced a biblical scripture in the King James Version of the Holy Bible. The verse, which comes from James 2:14, states, ‘What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?’ When referencing this scripture, some stated, “faith without works is dead.” The parents stressed that prayer is the ‘works’ being referenced in the bible. All stressed that faith in “GOD” along with prayer is the most effective method for African Americans to use to claim victory over those who targets and unjustifiably harms them.

Prayer. I feel like prayer is number one. In our household we pray about a lot...So, we go through things that are negative on the outside of our household by praying together and talking it out with each other (Participant #4).

The “LORD” is all in control anyway. So pray to “HIM” and “HE’LL” help you. No doubt about it (Participant #7).

We just pray together as a family and just hope for the best for not just our children, but for African Americans that’s going through the same problem (Participant #10).

### **RQ3-Strengths-Theme 2: Values**

The second theme that was recognized was *Values*. Value is the significance that we ascribe to ourselves, other individuals, things, or ideas (Saldana, 2009). Values are the people, places, and things that are important to us. The participants’ responses revealed that their sources of strengths were family and avoidance. All except for two participants

reported at least two strengths utilized by their family as coping mechanisms to maintain strong familial foundations in times of strife. The participants stressed the importance of engaging in regular family communication to discuss life's trials and tribulations in relation to their daily fight to stay alive in a racially biased world. Due to the stress related to be targeted by the police, familial discussions were stated to be therapeutic for some and a calming effect for others. Strength in avoidance was valued by one participant. The participant expressed that he does his best to avoid race-related stressors as he has more important things to focus on. All participants stressed the importance of maintaining their strengths, as they are optimistic that they will one day overcome being targets of racism, police racial bias and brutality.

**RQ3-Strengths-Sub-theme 2a: Family.** Ten participants identified family as one of the main sources of strengths valued by their families. The families depend on regular familial communication to maintain closeness within their families. Familial communication also serves as the voice of reason when faced with unexpected trials and tribulations. One participant stated that her familial strength is the police, whom she views as family. She depends on them to assist her (a single parent) with raising her blended family, which includes five minor children. The participant reported that she has such a great relationship with the police department, that she has been given some of their personal phone numbers to call when she needs assistance. She stated that she views police officers as her children's fathers, as they are assisting her with keeping them out of trouble.

For me, it's therapeutic when talking about it and sharing our feelings on it, because the more and more you hold that stuff in, the more and more it affects you mentally. So, for me, talking about it with my parents, or even with my husband, really helps (Participant #1).

My family source of strength is...uh, they have a parent, which is me, which they automatically know, if they commit any crime, I'm gonna...put my finger strength and dial 911 and turn them in myself. My kids automatically know, whatever they do wrong, I'm not holding the secret. So they know not to come to my house with it, Don't bring nothing in my house negative. And don't come around me talking...because I'm gone call the cops my own self. Because the cops are my friends, All of them. The ones I be needing. They here to protect and serve. And I'm looking forward for them to protect me (Participant #6).

Knowing you have that family um, there to support you. You not standing alone. That to me is very important for our children to realize. They not alone. And you gotta talk about it (Participant #11).

Uh, we just talk about it. It's, it's always like a family discussion...My husband is the one that really keeps me and my daughter calmed down with it...He see's that we be getting stressed out about it (Participant #16).

**RQ3-Strengths-Sub-theme 2b: Avoidance.** One participant stated that his familial strength was avoidance. Reflecting back on his teen years, the participant stated that due to living in a predominantly Black neighborhood, neither him nor his friends could avoid being harassed by two police officers who frequented their neighborhood.

The two officers, whom the neighborhood children playfully named ‘Starksy and Hutch’ (television sitcom police officers), frequently visited their neighborhood and harassed them just for doing normal teenage activities. The participant stated that whenever the officers entered their community, there were forced to stop playing basketball or just “hanging out”. This became the participant’s turning point that made him lose trust in the police.

I suffered when I was younger. Um, it, they were two cops. We used to call them Starsky and Hutch. They used to come around and harass us almost daily. You know, we all... whenever they saw us in a congregation, they stopped us. They, they frisked us. They searched us for, for nothing. They made us go home or break up what we were doing. And we were just hanging out just like any normal young person would do... any kids. You know, just walk in the neighborhood or playing basketball in the, in the street or doing other things that normal kids do... when they young or teenaged. So, that was, that was the biggest turning point that made me kind of distrust the police. And distrust Caucasian police at, at the most... I’m not around it like I was younger... I just keep uh... I just keep um, I guess I just avoid... is what I do (Participant #13).

### **Summary**

This chapter discussed the study’s findings. The participants’ interview transcripts and the researcher’s field notes and analytic memos were analyzed and coded. A phenomenological approach was utilized in the inquiry of the impact that police racial bias and brutality towards African American families with minor children, allowed the

participants' personal experiences to be viewed from the lens of critical race theory. The themes and subthemes were utilized to gain an understanding of how African American parents, grandparents, and/or guardians are discussing racism, police racial bias and brutality towards African Americans, with their minor children and/or grandchildren; the mental health impact that police racial bias and brutality has on African American families; and African American families' sources of strength.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### **Introduction**

“We cannot get to post-racialism without first eliminating the racialism from our midst”

(Bonilla-Silva, 2015).

This qualitative phenomenological study examined the impact of racism, police racial bias and brutality of unarmed African Americans on African American families with minor children. Three research questions guided the data analysis of this study. The three research questions were:

- 1) How are African American parents discussing racism, police racial bias and brutality towards unarmed African Americans with their minor children?
- 2) Do African Americans’ experiences with police racial bias and brutality towards unarmed African Americans impact their mental health?
- 3) What are the sources of strengths for African American families impacted by racism, police racial bias and brutality towards African Americans?

Information about this phenomenon was derived from the participants’ questionnaires, face-to-face interviews, field notes, and analytic memos. This chapter includes a summarization of the study and discussion of the themes, conclusions, recommendations, and limitations. This chapter concludes with proposed recommendations for African American parents and future research.

### **Summary of the Study**

This study utilized CRT to explore the impact that racism and police racial biases have on African American families with minor children as a whole. Recent media coverage of incidents involving police officers murdering innocent unarmed African Americans has triggered national outrage (Hall et al., 2016). This study's main focal points explored were: the manner in which African American parents are discussing racism, police racial bias and brutality towards African Americans with their minor children; the mental health impact that police bias, and brutality has on African American families; and the sources of strengths for African American families.

Snowball sampling was used to recruit 18 African American parents of minor children between 5 and 17. The participants were recruited through flyers that were hand delivered, sent out via mass text and email, and by word-of-mouth. Participant questionnaires, face-to-face interviews, and follow-up questions were used to gain a clear understanding of the African American parents' familial views and experiences of direct and indirect interactions with police and law enforcement. The participants' audio-recorded interviews were transcribed, analyzed, and coded for major themes. As a measure to ensure validity of the data, member checking was used. Seven themes and fourteen sub-themes were derived from the participants' responses.

### **Critical Race Theory**

CRT stresses that focusing on "rights" does not inevitably arouse activism, community empowerment, critical analysis of history, economics, consciousness, and diversity (West, 2001). In CRT, scholarly advocacy, and community organizing unmask



and alters oppressive racism and power dynamics. CRT also stresses daily biased experiences, hence, personal narratives are essential. Counternarratives weaken dominant beliefs, providing a voice to oppressive occurrences, including slavery. Current personal narratives from African American men and women in the US are informative of interpersonal racism and must be critically heard. CRT asserts that racism is ordinary and is the normal way that society conducts business (Schiffer, 2015). A recent study's findings showed that African Americans unanimously agreed that today, racism is subtle, therefore the US is not post-racial (Hall & Fields, 2015).

### **Necessity of “The Talk”**

When exploring the manner in which African American parents are discussing racism and police racial bias and brutality towards unarmed African Americans with their minor children, the first theme that emerged was *Necessity of “The Talk.”* All except for one participant acknowledged to either having the “The Talk” or expressed that they will be having the discussion with their minor children in the near future due to the recently exposed law enforcement and police murders of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, and other unarmed African American victims. This finding is consistent with Thomas and Blackmon (2015), according to their study examining the influence of the Trayvon Martin shooting on racial socialization practices of African American parents, “The Talk” is a discussion that includes preparing young African Americans, particularly boys, to survive when engaging with police officers and other figures of authority. The consistent content of the discussion is customarily passed down from generation to generation.

Based on the participants' responses, "The Talk" sometimes includes "do or die" guidelines that African American parents instruct their minor children to follow if ever put in a situation to interact with the police. The step-by-step survival technique generally includes instructions on where to pull over; where to place their hands; where to leave their cell phones; when to speak; when to reach for their driver's license, car insurance, and other requested items; how to be dressed (no hoodies); and no matter how severe the situation may present itself, follow all instructions and be respectful. Most parents stressed that following this script is a must, due to the police frequently viewing African Americans as a threat in which they must use deadly force, even when there are no obvious signs of a posed threat. In fact, social psychological research has shown that Caucasians "superhumanize" African Americans and assign extraordinary physical, super natural, and mythical powers to their person (Waytz, Hoffman, & Trawalter, 2014).

According to Burnett (2012), racism has had a major impact on the African American familial structure for decades. Based on this study's findings, what has consistently remained truthful, particularly for African American parents is that the rules that are mandated for African American children are not the same as those of importance to Caucasian children. While scripts such as "The Talk" are seemingly mandated for African American children to follow when interacting with the police, Caucasian children do not share this responsibility or the fear associated with it. Research has also shown that some Caucasians believe that African Americans possess a higher pain tolerance than them (Trawalter, Hoffman, & Waytz, 2012). These findings suggest that some Caucasians, including the police, believe that an increased level of force (such as multiple

shots into one's body) is needed to "stop" African American males. This supports CRT's assertion that race is a socially constructed concept that Caucasians use to manipulate the system to their advantage. By painting a picture of fear when interacting with African Americans, most police are not held responsible for racially targeted attacks on innocent and unarmed individuals.

### **Variations of "The Talk"**

The second theme that emerged from this study's findings was *Reasons for Having Discussion*. While most parents in this study reported that having "The Talk" with their children was a familial norm, others initiated the conversation for differing reasons. Several felt forced to have the conversation in reaction to the media's frequent exposure of police brutality of African Americans of all ages, genders, and social statuses. After recognizing that their once spared pre-teen sons and daughters' lives were no longer being excluded from becoming victims of police racial bias and brutality, several parents reported that they hesitantly had the conversation with their minors as a precautionary measure. Out of fear and frustration, one participant, a mother of a teen girl, tearfully reflected on the death of Tamir Rice, the 12-year old African American boy who was murdered by police due to him possessing a toy gun. Another parent reflected on her 12-year-old son's close-to-death encounter with the police in which the police targeted her son due to him "being Black" while having fun with neighbors in their community pool. Due to the officer believing that the African American pre-teen was lying to him about being a resident of the community, he threatened him by saying "my bullets don't mind getting wet." After being threatened by the police, the mother reported

that her son who has been an avid swimmer since he was a toddler, is so traumatized that he is not only afraid of police officers, but that he has vowed to never swim again. The pre-teen's response is in alignment with a study conducted by Goff et al. (2014) analyzing the consequences of dehumanizing Black children. The study showed that African American boys as young as 10 years old may be seen as less innocent when compared to their Caucasian peers, are more likely to be assumed to be older and guilty, and fall victim to police brutality if accused of taking part in a crime. Hence, some African American parents prefer not to have "The Talk" with their children. The reality of the times that we are currently living in means that avoiding "The Talk" with African American children may be perceived as neglectful, because it could make innocent children more vulnerable and inclined to being harmed (Burt et al., 2012).

For some participants in this current study, having the discussion was due to their direct contact with biased police officers. Notably, two participants who were members of law enforcement (one current and one former) were strong supporters of "The Talk" due to their not-so-positive experiences of working closely with racist and unethical police officers and other members of law enforcement who covertly and overtly abused their power when interacting with African Americans. In fact, both participants stated that they were personally harassed when not in uniform. Having been in both law enforcement and civilian shoes, both participants stated that one of the hardest things to accept as law enforcers was the fact that the officers who purposely targeted and violated the rights of innocent African Americans were protected by the 'law.' Though one participant is currently not working as a law enforcer due to the demands of another job,

he expressed that he is not sure if his law enforcement career is over. The participant stated that due to the police consistently being exposed for brutality towards African Americans, he is contemplating working as a part-time law enforcer to make a difference in how law enforcers interact with African Americans. Although frustrated with law enforcement as a whole, the current member of law enforcement has decided to continue to “protect and serve” to the best of her abilities. While she was not optimistic that racism and racial bias aimed towards African Americans would end in the near future, she believed that if she made a positive change in the life of at least one person, her job as a law enforcer was half done. The participant believed that the other half of her job is to get the ‘bad cops’ off of the streets.

The third theme that emerged from the findings was *Have Not Discussed*. While 17 of the 18 participants expressed that having “The Talk” with their minor children was mandatory, one participant stated that she refused to have “The Talk” with her minors due to the make-up of her family. The single mother’s blended family consisted of one biological African American son, one adopted African American daughter, and three adopted Caucasian sons. The mother stressed that due to her raising both African American and Caucasian minor children, having “The Talk” could possibly be offensive and cause a racial divide within her close-knit family. The mother stated that she does not want any of her children to feel superior or inferior to the other. Contrary to the mother’s beliefs, according to Vittrup (2018), an adult’s silence in relation to race-related conversations may indirectly send children a message that race should not be discussed and that there is something wrong with individuals of a different race. This may cause

children to develop prejudice. Opposite to the views of the other participants, who were uncomfortable with being in the presence of the police, the mother stated that she did not have an issue with calling the police to her home when her children did not obey house rules. The mother stressed that none of her family's interactions with the police were racially motivated, biased, or harmful in any manner.

### **Impact on Mental Health**

The fourth theme that emerged from this study's findings was *Impacted*. Due to their direct and indirect unfavorable encounters with the police, several participants reported that their mental health had been impacted. The participants reported that when directly interacting with police or in close range of the police, they were immediately overwhelmed with increased levels of fear, anxiety, stress, depression, and PTSD. The participants reported that since their mental health has been compromised, their familial, personal, work, and social lives all have been negatively impacted. Most believed that as long as African Americans are targeted and unjustifiably murdered by the police, their mental health will forever be challenged. These findings are similar to the findings of two recent studies. One qualitative study conducted by Perkins et al. (2014) found that Black men reported negativity, anger, and depressive symptoms due to their negative encounters with police, law enforcement, and incarceration. Similarly, the findings of a study conducted by English et al. (2017) measuring Black men's police-based discrimination experiences, revealed that they were consistent with empirical evidence showing a positive correlation between Black men's negative experiences and depressive symptoms.

*Not Impacted* was the fifth theme that emerged from this study's findings. Of the

seven participants in this current study who reported that their mental health has not been impacted, all except for one acknowledged that racism, police racial bias and brutality towards African Americans is a major issue that must be addressed. Hence, those not impacted vowed not to give racially biased police any more power or control over their lives than what they believed the unfair and racially biased judicial and criminal justice systems have already granted. The participants' responses and the 2017 study's findings are in alignment with a CRT assertion. CRT details various views in which Americans perceive and maneuver ethnic and racial grounds. The extent to which ethnic minorities consent to specific ways of perceiving racial issues and the degree to which these perceptions impact how ethnic minorities navigate through racial terrain may be linked to the outcomes of psychosocial health, through either positive or negative interventions of stressors and/or triggers of mental disorders (Graham, Brown-Jeffy, Aronson, & Stephens, 2011).

### **Sources of Strength**

When exploring the participants' familial sources of strength, the sixth and seventh themes that emerged were *Beliefs and Values*. All except for three participants acknowledged their faith in "GOD," prayer, and family as their family's primary sources of strength of achieving social justice. Most acknowledged that their strong faith in "GOD" stemmed from the strict religious teachings and practices of their parents that have existed for many generations. The participants believed that without their faith in "GOD" to "deliver them from evil" they would not have survived in a world in which they are preyed upon by those who took oaths to "protect and serve." In addition to their faith in "GOD", several parents declared prayer as source of strength that works inseparably with their faith. The parents supported their beliefs by quoting several

biblical verses from the King James Version of the Holy Bible. The most frequently used verse came from James 2:20, which states, “But wilt thou know, that faith without works is dead?” The faith-filled parents optimistically stood firm on their beliefs as they await “GOD” to hear their prayers and have mercy on their distressed souls. The parents stated that they refused to fight for justice using violence, as they believed that “GOD” has everything under control. They also believed as outlined in the Bible, coming from Matthew 20:16, “So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.” Many African Americans identify “GOD” as the core of their coping (Bell-Tolliver & Wilkerson, 2011). According to Long (1997), African Americans have utilized their spiritual convictions to overthrow Caucasian, racist, and patriarchal dominion; gender and racial identities, incite for social justice, and manage a sense of community. The participants’ responses fall in line with a goal of CRT as CRT’s approach, similar to other interpretive lenses, may also initiate a call for action and change, with the goal of achieving social justice (Morrow & Brown, 1994).

Although one participant identified and valued family as her family’s source of strength similar to several other participants, the family that she referred to was not blood or marriage related as was the case for the other participants. The single mother of five minors, two African American and three Caucasian, referred to the police as her ‘family’. She stood firm on having a totally different relationship with the police when compared to the other participants. The single mother stressed that she has such a close relationship with the police in her county, that when having issues with her minor children, she no longer has to call 911. She reported that police have provided her with their personal cell phone numbers, should she need help with keeping her children on the right path. Most interesting, when discussing her interactions with the police, the mother frequently



referred to them as her ‘children’s fathers’, due to her viewing them as stepping in for her the absent fathers. While some African Americans may not agree with the mother’s trust of the police, a CRT approach to parenting demonstrates that fathers, mothers, grandparents, and guardians all have unique roles to play in nurturing, protecting, and educating their children. Most of this parental involvement may be indistinguishable to individuals who are viewing familial behaviors from a cultural racism or White normative mindset (López, 2001). An important factor that the other participants had to be mindful of was that the mother practiced not seeing color due to her raising both African American and Caucasian children.

Standing apart from the common sub-themes, one father identified strength in avoidance. The participant believed that his family had managed to avoid unjust police encounters due to them purposely avoiding certain people, places, and things. The participant stated that as a child he recognized that most racially-biased police officers targeted innocent African Americans residing in low to middle income, predominantly Black neighborhoods, which had its share of crime. The participant reported that his family no longer had any police-related issues due to them residing in the suburbs. Supporting the participant’s observation of police-related issues in low-income communities, research shows that neighborhoods with increased crime are where police-community relations turn problematic (Fagan & Davies, 2000). While attempting to reduce crime, police are likely to be aggressive with residents. Residents living in such areas are more likely to be stopped, verbally abused and physically assaulted (Fagan & Davies, 2000). An interesting fact about this family is that the participant’s teenage son

desires to become a policeman soon after high school, because he has never had a negative experience with law enforcement. Since the participant does not want to negatively affect his son's positive view of police officers and law enforcement in general, he has purposely avoided sharing with his son, his personal experiences of being racially targeted, harassed and physically assaulted by the police. Although this study's participant and his family found strength in avoidance, the findings from a study conducted by Hall and Fields (2015), analyzing the narratives of Black adults about microaggression experiences and related health stress, showed that when African Americans avoided race-related issues, the avoidance fostered social isolation. The study also revealed that African Americans frequently utilized giving a pass and moving on as a strategy to cope with daily microaggressions suffered on the job. Thus, being silent, moving on, and walking away only cultivated internalized negative feelings.

### **Conclusion**

The findings of this study revealed that African American families with minor children have been significantly impacted by racism and police racial bias and brutality towards African Americans. African American parents are now feeling forced to have "The Talk" with their minor children due to the frequency and severity of African Americans being targeted, harassed, and physically and mentally harmed by the police and other members of law enforcement. African Americans' mental health has also been negatively impacted due to negative police encounters. As a means to survive in a racially hostile environment, African American families' main sources of strength and coping are faith in "GOD", prayer, and family.

The lie of African American inferiority is the foundation of the frequently unconscious prejudices against African Americans that has led to discrimination in all areas of their lives, which includes policing and the use of deadly force (Grills, Aird, & Rowe, 2016). This lie continues to cause harm to African Americans' emotional and psychological well-being. It also diverts scrutiny and energy away from their fight for self-determination, community building and social justice. As a measure to advocate for racial justice of policing methods within the United States, African Americans must expose the core of racial injustice that is linked to the lie of African American inferiority, its psychological effect on individuals both in and outside of the African American community, and the essential need for an evolution for emotional liberation. Taking this stance is one way that African Americans will release themselves from the harmful stereotypes that have burdened them and forged the world's negative beliefs of them for centuries.

### **Recommendations for African American Families**

This study revealed valuable information that could improve the lives of African American families who have been negatively impacted by racism and African American and police relations and interactions. Based on the responses revealed, there are several recommendations that could be of benefit to African American parents and their families as a whole. First, due to the fears of innocent lives being lost at the hands of police officers, it may be beneficial for African American parents to have "The Talk" with their minor children as this is their perceived best approach of saving innocent African American lives when interacting with the police. This is a recommendation due to most

parents believing that not having “The Talk” may be a ‘matter of life and death’ for innocent African Americans. Second, due to the participants’ reports of anxiety, depression, stress, and PTSD related to their fears of interacting with racially-biased police, it is important for African Americans to be aware of the potentially negative impact that their encounters with police officers, whether direct or indirect may have on their mental health. In addition to monitoring their anxiety and stress levels when engaging with the police, seeking help from a mental health professional may be beneficial. Third, in an effort to decrease the fears of police officers, as some parents acknowledged that “all cops are not bad”, African American parents of African American minors may benefit from visiting their local police station and having a conversation with the police as a means to decrease their fears and bridge the gap of misunderstanding. In addition to their recognition of “GOD”, prayer, and family as their sources of strength, African American parents may benefit from receiving support from outside sources, such as local support groups, church members, therapists, or other mental health professionals when they are faced with unmanageable crises.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study’s findings revealed that there is a perceived racial divide between African American civilians and Caucasian police officers. All except for one African American reported incidents of racially motivated police encounters that negatively impacted them and their family as a whole. The participants referenced many incidents of being targeted, pulled over, verbally and physically assaulted, unlawfully searched, falsely accused and arrested, due to being African American. Based on the participants’

determination to continue to respect authority as a means to bridge the gap between African Americans and the police, several topics could be explored further to improve African American and police-related interactions. Future research should analyze the differing expectations African Americans and the police have for each other. Additionally, an assessment of police officers' thoughts and reactions when interacting with African Americans may provide insights into the concept of "kill or be killed." Finally, more research is needed on the impact of cultural diversity training on police officers' relationship with African Americans.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Several limitations of the study have been identified. First, due to the exclusion of non-African American parents, this study's findings are not generalizable to other races. Second, the exclusion of adults without children, increases the study's chances of disregarding valuable viewpoints related to the topic from adults who are not parents. Lastly, limiting the study to the DFW area, due to limited time and resources, prevented the researcher from obtaining the viewpoints of participants in other geographical areas.

### **Summary**

This chapter discussed the study's findings utilizing critical race theory as interpretive lens. Also discussed were the recommendations for African American parents that were derived from the study's findings. Future qualitative research could be beneficial in exploring the views of non-African American parents in relation to police racial bias and brutality towards African Americans. Exploring the views of police officers and their perception of their interactions with African Americans and how their

encounters may impact African American families as a whole could prove beneficial as well.

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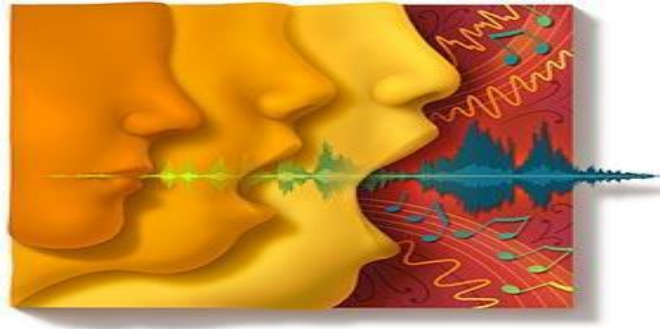
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APPENDIX A  
Recruitment Flyer



# YOUR VOICE MATTERS!



If you are an African American parent, who is at least 18 years old and have at least one minor child between 5-17 years old, you are invited to be a participant in a study conducted by Catina Miller, a doctoral student at Texas Woman's University.

**The purpose of this research study is to allow you to use your voice to discuss your views of law enforcement if you believe that you and/or your family have been impacted by police racial bias and/or brutality towards African Americans.**

All interviews will be conducted by Catina and held at a location and time convenient to you. All identifying information will be kept private. The interview process will be approximately 2 hours. Your participation may advance the current knowledge about the impact that police racial bias and brutality towards African Americans has on African American families.

Your participation in this research study is voluntary in which you may withdraw at any time. If you are interested or would like to know more, please feel free to contact Catina Miller, LPC-I at (972) 302-8667. You may also contact my academic advisor, Brigitte Vittrup, PhD, at (940) 898-2624.

**APPENDIX B**  
**Initial Telephone Call Script**

### Greeting

“Hello, my name is Catina Miller and I am currently working on my Ph.D. in Family Therapy at Texas Woman’s University. Thanks for agreeing to participate in my study. My study focuses on the impact that police racial bias and brutality towards unarmed African Americans have on African American families with minor children as a whole, with particular attention to how African American parents are discussing police racial bias and brutality towards African Americans with their minor children, the mental health impact, and the impacted families sources of support. This is an opportunity for African American families to use their voice to express their familial experiences of coping with police racial bias and brutality of African Americans.”

### Purpose

“The purpose of my study is to conduct interviews with African American parents of children between the age of 5 – 17 years of age, to identify how these parents discuss police racial bias and brutality towards African Americans with their minor children. This may provide clinicians with beneficial information that may be useful when working with victims of racism, racial bias, and police brutality.”

### The Interview

“If you are interested, I will meet you at a time and location of your convenience. First, I will provide you with a consent form that we will go over together, which details the study, risks involved, and identity protection. If you agree to participate and sign the consent form, I will then obtain some background information before I start the actual interview. I will be asking questions about your parental experiences of discussing police racial bias and brutality towards unarmed African Americans with your minor children. The 2 hour interview will be audio-recorded to maintain accuracy.”

### Closing

“Your participation is voluntary in which you may withdraw from this study at any time. Please feel free to ask any questions that you may have. (Agree on location and time of interview). Thanks for taking time to talk with me today.”

APPENDIX C  
Consent Form

TEXAS WOMAN’S UNIVERSITY CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Title of Study: The Impact of Police Racial Bias and Brutality Towards Unarmed African Americans on African American Families with Minor Children

Investigator: Catina Miller ..... 972-302-8667

Advisor: Brigitte Vittrup, PhD.....940-898-2624

Explanation and Purpose of the Research

You are being asked to participate in a dissertation research study conducted by Catina Miller, LMFT-A, LPC-I, a doctoral candidate at Texas Woman's University. The purpose of this research to identify the impact that police racial bias and brutality towards African Americans has on American families with minor children, with specific attention to the manner in which parents discuss police racial bias and brutality towards African Americans with their minor children, the probable mental health effects, and the family’s support systems in place.

Research Procedures

As a participant in this study, you are being asked to spend approximately 2 hours completing the entire interview process, which includes our initial telephone call, a face-to-face, audio-recorded interview, and a follow-up phone call to confirm your responses. The location and time of the interviews will be scheduled at your convenience. The researcher will be the only individual conducting both phone calls and interviews. You will be asked questions about your personal and familial knowledge and experiences of police racial bias and brutality towards African Americans and how you discuss these topics with your minor children. Once completed, the interview will be transcribed for accuracy. In effort to maintain confidentiality, a code number will be assigned to your interview and all forms completed.

Potential Risks

Due to the sensitivity of the topic being discussed, potential risks to your participation in this study may involve emotional and physical discomfort. If at any time during the interview process you become upset, fatigued, or uncomfortable, you may take a break or withdraw from the study without any consequences. A list of counseling resources will be provided to you along with your signed consent to participate. Please feel free to use this resource as a guide for assistance should you desire to speak with a professional about any discomfort.

Another potential risk to your participation is the potential loss of confidentiality. Confidentiality will be protected to the extent that is allowed by the law. The interview will take place in a location agreed upon between you and the researcher. A code number, instead of your real name, will be used to protect your identity. Researcher will store the

master code list in a locked file cabinet (only accessible to researcher) separate from all other data. Only the researcher will know your identifying information.

The signed consent forms, completed demographic questionnaires, recordings, and written interviews will be secured and only accessible to researcher. Only the researcher will read the transcribed themes derived from your responses. The tapes will be erased immediately after they

are fully transcribed and the hard copy interview documents will be shredded within five years after the study is completed. The study results will be reported in the researcher's dissertation and possibly in scientific journals. Your name or other identifying information will be excluded.

Another potential risk is the loss of time. Interviews are expected to last approximately 2 hours. Each individual interview will be conducted in an efficient manner in effort to meet the expected time frame. At any time, you may withdraw from the study.

Researcher will recruit personal and professional contacts to participate in study, which poses the risk of coercion. Participation is voluntary, in which participants' decision to participate or not to participate in research study does not affect relationship with researcher.

Each interview is expected to last approximately 2 hours, which increases the risk of fatigue. Each individual interview will be conducted in an efficient manner in effort to meet the expected time frame. At any time, participants may withdraw from the study.

The researcher will attempt to prevent any issue from arising due to this study. During any point of your interview process, a problem arises, please inform researcher so that she can assist you. TWU will not provide any medical or financial assistance for injuries that may occur due to your participation in this study.

#### Participation and Benefits

Your participation in this research is voluntary and confidential, in which you may withdraw at any time without any penalties. One benefit of your participation, is that it may improve the field of family therapy in relation to the experiences of diverse individuals and families impacted by police racial bias and brutality towards African Americans. Another benefit is that you will be mailed a copy of this study's results upon your request.

#### Questions Regarding the Study

If you have any questions in relation to this study, you may ask the researcher. Her phone

number and email are listed on the top of this form. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this research or the way this study has been conducted, you may

\_\_\_\_\_ Initials Page 2 of 2

contact the Texas Woman's University Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at 940-898-3378 or via e-mail at IRB@twu.edu.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\*If you would like to know the summary of results of this study please indicate where you want them to be sent: Mailing address:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX D  
COUNSELING RESOURCES



## Counseling Resources

American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy

112 South Alfred Street

Alexandria, VA 22314-3061

Phone: (703) 838-9808 Fax (703) 838-9805

<http://www.aamft.org/imis15/aamft/Core/ContactUs/ContactUs.aspx>

American Counseling Association

6101 Stevenson Avenue

Alexandria, VA 22304

Phone: (800) 347-6647

<https://www.counseling.org/>

AAMFT Therapist Locator

[https://www.aamft.org/iMIS15/AAMFT/Content/directories/locator terms of use.aspx](https://www.aamft.org/iMIS15/AAMFT/Content/directories/locator_terms_of_use.aspx)

Psychology Today Therapist Locator

<https://therapists.psychologytoday.com/rms/>

TWU Counseling and Family Therapy Clinic

Woodcock Hall, Room #114

Denton, TX 76204

Phone: (940) 898-2600 (appointments and messages)

[twucounselingclinic@gmail.com](mailto:twucounselingclinic@gmail.com)

APPENDIX E  
DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

## Demographic Questionnaire

- 1) What is your current age? \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) How do you identify your racial identity?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 3) What is your gender?  
 Male  
 Female  
 Other
- 4) What is your highest level of education?  
 High School Graduate  
 GED  
 2-Year Degree  
 4 or more Year Degree  
 Some College  
 Certification  
 Other
- 5) What is your marital/relationship status?  
 Single  
 Married  
 Separated  
 Divorced  
 Cohabiting
- 6) What is your occupation? If applicable, what is your spouse's occupation?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 7) What is your total household annual income?  
 Less than \$20,000  
 \$20,000 to \$39,999  
 \$40,000 to \$59,999  
 \$60,000 to \$79,999  
 \$80,000 to \$99,999  
 \$100,000 to \$149,999  
 \$150,000 or more

8) How many children do you have? \_\_\_\_\_

9) What are the genders, ages, and race/ethnicity of your children still living at home with you?

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10) May I contact you in the future if I have follow-up questions? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No  
If yes, please provide your contact information on your consent form.

APPENDIX F  
Interview Guide

Participant's Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Introduction:

“Hello, my name is Catina Miller and I am currently working on my Ph.D. in Marriage and Family Therapy at Texas Woman's University. Thanks for agreeing to participate in my study. The purpose of my study is to identify how racial bias and police brutality towards African Americans impacts African American families with minor children. Your participation is voluntary in which you may withdraw anytime before or during the interview. This face-to-face interview is expected to last no more than two hours. Again, if at anytime you do not want to continue as a participant, you are free to end the interview at your discretion. Do you have any questions before we begin?”

“We will begin with the consent to participate. I'll go over the form in detail with you. If you have any questions, please feel free to stop me and ask for clarification. If you still decide to participate, you can sign the form before we move forward. I will provide you with a copy of the signed document for your personal records.” (Researcher and participant will review consent form for clarification before participant signs document). If participant decides to withdraw from the study, researcher will thank participant for his/her time and excuse the individual from the study.

“Before we begin, I would like to say:”

- “During our time together, you are free to take as many breaks as needed.”
- “If you need a break, I turn off the recorder until we resume the interview.”
- “If at anytime you feel uncomfortable, please let me know how you would like to move forward with this voluntary interview.”

“Do you have any questions before I turn on my recorder to audiotape your interview for accuracy?” (If participant has questions, researcher will answer).

“I am turning on the recorder now to start the interview.”

“We will start by going over a few background questions. If I ask you any question that makes you feel uncomfortable, you are not required to answer it. Please let me know if you have any questions.”

(Researcher will turn on recorder and ask participant demographic questions. Researcher will answer all questions. After questionnaire is completed, researcher will move forward with interview).

“Thanks for completing the questionnaire. Now we will move forward with the interview. Although I questions already prepared, as I am very interested in hearing how you

discuss racism, racial bias, and police brutality with your children, please feel free to add any information that you feel will be important to this study. You are free to take a break or discontinue anytime during this interview. Do you have any questions before we begin?"

(Researcher will answer all posed questions.)

"Will you please help me to understand why this topic is of particular interest to you?"

(Next)

"Will you please tell me about the personal experiences that you've had with police officers and/or law enforcement? How did this make you feel?"

(Next)

"Have you ever experienced police racial bias and/or brutality, either personally or through someone close to you?" If so, please tell me about that experience. If not, how do you feel about this topic?"

(Next)

"Do you connect your experiences from question two to your identity as an African American?" If so, how?"

(Next)

"As you are aware, part of the reason that you are in this study is because you have at least one minor child between 5 and 17 years of age. Will you please tell me your child's age? Racial identity?"

(Next)

"Do your personal experiences with police and/or law enforcement impact the way you discuss White people with your children?" "Why or why not?"

(Next)

“Do you discuss racism, police racial bias, and/or police brutality with your minor children?” “If so, how and why this approach?” “If not, why not?”

(Next)

“How do these conversations come up?”

(Next)

“How do you define racism for your children?”

(Next)

“How do you define police racial bias and brutality for your children?”

(Next)

“Do your children know about your experiences with police officers and/or law enforcement?” If so, how do they feel? If not, why haven’t you shared your experiences with them?”

(Next)

“Has your child experienced police racial bias and/or brutality?” “If so, please provide details of incident(s). How did this make your child feel? How did this make you feel?”

(Next)

“Describe you views of police treatment of diverse ethnic groups.”

(Next)

“Do you agree with the manner in which the media (internet, TV, radio, published papers, etc.) portray police brutality towards unarmed African Americans?” “Why or why not?”

(Next)



“Stress can be a contributing factor of mental health issues. How do you believe that your experiences with police racial bias and/or brutality may have impacted you? Your children? Your extended family?”

(Next)

“Please tell me what you believe are your family’s sources of strength. Why is this your belief?”

(Next)

“Is there anything else that you would like to add? If so, please feel free to share. If not, this concludes your interview and thank you for participating in my study.”

#### Prompts as Needed

“Will you please tell me more about that?”

“Will you please elaborate?”

“Will you please provide me with an example?”

“How was that for you as an individual?”

“How did you manage?”

“How did your family manage during that time?”

“Where do you get your strength from?”

“How did that impact you?”

“How did that impact your family?”

“Can you explain that?”

“Thanks so much for participating in my study and sharing your experiences. If I have any further questions or need clarification, I will be giving you a call if that’s okay with you. If you have requested a copy of my findings, I will be mailing you a copy to the address that you have provided. Do you have any questions at this time?”

(Researcher will answer any questions)

“Thanks again for your time and story. I really appreciate your contribution to my study. Please enjoy the rest of your day.”

APPENDIX G  
Follow-up Telephone Script

### Follow-up Telephone Script

“Hello, this is Catina Miller, from Texas Woman's University. How are you? I'm just following up with you to see if you have any additional questions about the study or if you would like to add more information that was not stated during your interview.”

### Member Checking

“In effort to make sure that I've transcribed your interview correctly, I would like to ask you a few questions for clarification. Is that okay with you?”

### Summary of Findings

“Again, thanks so much for agreeing to participate in my study. If you've requested a summary of the results, I will forward you a copy to the address that you have provided. Thanks again and enjoy the rest of your day.”