

**SOUL CRY: EXPLORING THE LIVED-EXPERIENCE OF MORAL INJURY AMONG
BLACK MALE POLICE OFFICERS IN THE CONTEXT OF UNDUE POLICE
VIOLENCE AGAINST BLACK CITIZENS.**

By

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(Under the Direction of Brandee Appling)

ABSTRACT

An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was utilized in this study to explore moral injury within the context of undue police violence (UPV) against Black citizens. The study employed IPA to understand the lived experiences of participants concerning UPV towards Black citizens. Intersectionality served as a theoretical framework, aiding in the comprehension of the complexities and multidimensional aspects of social identities and power dynamics. Seven participants underwent semi-structured interviews. The analysis identified four primary themes and twelve subthemes, illustrating how Black male police officers interpret and make sense of their moral injuries resulting from UPV against Black citizens. The findings of this study can pave the way for counselors and counseling education programs to offer culturally responsive mental health support to Black male officers navigating moral injury. Moreover, these implications could lead law enforcement towards adopting more

effective practices and policies that support the mental health of Black male police officers struggling with moral injury.

INDEX WORDS: Moral injury, Black citizens, Undue Police Violence, Intersectionality, Interpretative phenomenological Analysis, Police

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is lovingly dedicated to the cherished memories of my parents, Minnie Rosser and Steve Ogletree, whose profound influences have shaped the very core of my being. My mother, Minnie, instilled in me an unwavering belief in the power of family connection and the vital importance of perseverance, teaching me to NEVER GIVE UP, no matter the challenges that lay ahead. My father, Steve, lived by a simple yet impactful philosophy: "Let Me Be Me." His approach to life has been a guiding light in my pursuit of authenticity, encouraging me to embrace my true self in every aspect of my journey.

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Lastly, I dedicate this PhD to the little boy from Greenville, Georgia, who faced down imposter syndrome and emerged as the rose that grew from concrete. This journey is a testament to our shared struggles and triumphs, a reminder that where we come from does not dictate where we are going. It is to all of you that I dedicate this work, with all my love and gratitude.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The increasing prevalence of police violence against Black citizens is alarming. Of particular concern is the perspective of Black male police officers, who face moral injuries from witnessing or being part of such incidents against members of their own community. Therefore, my research aimed to explore how Black male police officers interpret and make sense of their moral injury in the context of undue police violence against Black citizens.

According to Data USA (2021), Black police officers make up over 13% (n= 108,135) of the law enforcement community. Of these Black officers, Black men represent approximately 75% (n= 80,724). Meanwhile, Mapping Police Violence (2022) reported that law enforcement officers were implicated in the deaths of at least 1,201 individuals. Disturbingly, 26% of these fatalities involved Black victims, a disproportionate figure considering that Black people constitute only 13% of the U.S. population. This disparity, underscores the heightened risk of moral injury for Black male police officers, highlighting the critical importance of the proposed research.

According to a study by GBD 2019 Police Violence US Subnational Collaborators (2021), the burden of police violence fatalities in the USA disproportionately affects Black, Indigenous, and Hispanic populations. Importantly, the incident involving George Floyd and subsequent events were a stark reminder of the systemic issues at play (Brooks, 2020). Moreover, police violence has profound implications for Black communities in the U.S. (Voigt et al., 2021). One significant consequence is its impact on crime reporting. Specifically, research conducted by Desmond et al. 2016, indicates that police violence leads to a reluctance

within the Black community to report crimes (Desmond et al., 2016). As a result, this hesitancy can strain the relationship between Black communities and law enforcement, fostering an environment of mistrust and suspicion (Cunningham, 2021). Furthermore, such a dynamic is particularly challenging for Black male police officers (Walsh, 2021). Indeed, Black male police officers not only face the general challenges of their role but may also grapple with the moral injury of witnessing or experiencing undue violence against members of their own community. Alarming, this issue of police violence in the Black community is not isolated; police violence is a leading cause of death for young Black men in the U.S (Schoenherr, 2019). To underscore the severity, statistics reveal that about 1 in every 1,000 Black men is expected to be killed by police over their lifetime (Edwards et al., 2019).

Being both members of the law enforcement and the Black community, Black male officers grapple with the dual challenges of upholding their professional duties while also navigating the systemic racism and discriminatory practices inherent in the very institution they serve (Ingram et al., 2018). Additionally, Black male police officers face distinct challenges due to the intersection of their racial and gender identities (Solomon, 2016). Furthermore, societal biases and stereotypes related to Black masculinity can amplify their experiences both inside the police department and during community interactions (Minhas & Walsh, 2021). Consequently, Silvestri (2017) highlighted that these stereotypes can worsen their relationships with colleagues and the public. The strong, aggressive image often linked to Black men can result in increased scrutiny, distrust, and even hostility from peers and the community (Jones-Eversley et al., 2020). Similarly, comparably to Black women officers, Black male officers may be more likely to use excessive force against Black civilians due to the pressure to conform to departmental norms and expectations (Hoffman & Hickey, 2005). Such actions can result in

feelings of guilt, shame, and betrayal among Black male officers, which can further contribute to moral injury. Moreover, when Black male officers witness or are indirectly associated with unjust violence against Black individuals, they may experience profound internal conflict. This is particularly troubling as the potential exposure to moral injury stems from their ability to see themselves in the victims and their innate desire to shield their community from the very organization they serve. As a result, this dual identity can cause emotional distress, particularly when these officers observe or face racial bias within the police department (Brown et al., 2012).

Black male police officers frequently face a myriad of challenges in their line of duty. Firstly, the term "challenges" in this context refers to the difficulties and obstacles these officers encounter due to skepticism and prejudice. Furthermore, such skepticism isn't just from their fellow officers within the police force but also from the communities these Black officers are committed to protecting and serving. For instance, the 2020 killing of Breonna Taylor further eroded public trust in law enforcement, particularly in areas like Louisville. In this city, investigations of police misconduct against Black citizens show that the local police department often infringes on citizens' rights by the unlawful use of force, (Woods, 2022). Additionally, the situation becomes even more complex when these officers themselves are subjected to racial profiling or experience unjust treatment. As a result, negative encounters, such as racial profiling and undue violence, may intensify the emotional toll on Black male officers, especially in light of the broader context of police brutality against Black individuals. Consequently, such morally distressing experiences can culminate in what is termed 'moral injury' (Laurencin & Walker, 2020).

In recent years, the concept of moral injury has garnered significant attention, especially within military and veteran communities. However, the implications of this concept are not limited to these groups; moral injury is equally pertinent to other high-stress professions, such as law enforcement (Koenig & Zaben, 2021). This type of injury transcends the conventional definitions of trauma, emphasizing the profound internal turmoil and distress that individuals experience when they witness or engage in actions that contravene their deeply held moral and ethical convictions (Drescher et al., 2011). Moreover, individuals can experience this profound internal dissonance from either perpetrating acts that are antithetical to their moral compass or from the inability to act in situations where their moral convictions necessitate intervention (Currier et al., 2015; Nash et al., 2013). Within the realm of law enforcement, moral injury is especially salient for Black male officers. Indeed, Black male officers grapple with the intricate interplay of racial dynamics, societal expectations, and the inherent pressures of their vocation (Cockram et al., 2018; Smith & Wuestewald, 2019).

Research underscores that the repercussions of experiencing moral injury can be profound, influencing an individual's psychological well-being and overall life satisfaction (Drescher et al., 2011; Currier et al., 2018). Furthermore, manifestations of this injury can encompass a spectrum of emotional and psychological symptoms, including feelings of guilt, shame, anger, and even existential or spiritual crises (Griffin et al., 2019; Williamson et al., 2020). Although moral injury is not formally recognized as a mental health disorder, its tangible effects can permeate various facets of an individual's life, affecting their interpersonal relationships, professional conduct, and overall demeanor (Litz et al., 2009; Nash et al., 2013). In extreme instances, moral injury can even precipitate suicidal thoughts (Bryan et al., 2016; Anestis et al., 2018).

To address this complex issue, I explored the unique experiences of Black male police officers grappling with moral injury, employing the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) methodological framework. This approach facilitated a profound and intricate exploration of how Black male police officers interpret and navigate morally contentious scenarios. By doing so, I immersed myself in the personal narratives of these officers, discerning the core themes and interpretations that shape their moral dilemmas (Smith & Osborn, 2015; Smith et al., 2022).

Despite the noticeable absence of direct studies on moral injury among police officers, a number of studies indicate that police work exposes officers to experiences that can challenge their moral and ethical beliefs, leading to significant psychological distress (Papazoglou & Chopko, 2017). Interestingly, a recent study conducted by Johnson et al. (2022) explored the concept of moral injury among police officers and its implications on their mental health and well-being, revealing that police officers frequently encounter morally complex situations in their line of duty (Johnson et al., 2022). Consequently, these experiences impact the officers' moral beliefs, leading to feelings of guilt, shame, and a sense of betrayal (Johnson et al., 2022).

Moreover, the study established a connection between moral injury and various mental health issues, including higher rates of PTSD, depression, and anxiety among police officers (Johnson et al., 2022). Additionally, it highlighted how moral injury may contribute to burnout and reduced job satisfaction, potentially affecting the overall effectiveness and well-being of officers in their roles (Johnson et al., 2022). Therefore, the study emphasized the importance of recognizing and addressing moral injury within the law enforcement community (Johnson et al., 2022).

As we consider the specific issue of moral injury, it remains an under-researched dimension of mental health, especially in high-stress vocations such as policing (Drescher et al., 2011; Smith et al., 2018). Addressing this issue is imperative for the holistic well-being of the officers and for fostering trust within communities (Cockram et al., 2023; Williamson et al., 2023). Through the lens of interpretative phenomenological analysis, this research study endeavors to illuminate the lived experiences of Black male police officers, enriching the broader discourse on moral injury.

This study's qualitative approach, coupled with the use of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), provides an in-depth insight into the experiences of moral injury among Black male police officers. By adding new viewpoints to the current literature, the research contributes valuable information that can shape policies, practices, and interventions. These contributions aim to foster healthier law enforcement environments and pave the way for a fairer society.

Problem Statement

This dissertation will address the gap in the literature by examining the concept of moral injury among Black male police officers. Firstly, the experiences of Black male police officers, who are simultaneously part of the African American community and the law enforcement profession, provide a unique perspective on the intersecting issues of race, gender, policing, and moral injury. Moreover, understanding the impact of moral injury on this specific group can contribute to the development of targeted interventions and support systems to mitigate the psychological distress and promote overall well-being among Black male police officers.

Previously, research on moral injury predominantly focused on military personnel, with limited attention given to other professions such as law enforcement. Therefore, by examining the experiences of Black male police officers, this study aims to shed light on the intersectional dynamics of race, gender, policing, and moral injury. Additionally, the historical and contemporary racial tensions surrounding law enforcement practices in the United States place Black male officers in a complex position, where they are not only responsible for upholding the law but also face unique challenges associated with their racial identity. Finally, integrating insights from the fields of psychology, counseling, criminology, and sociology, this dissertation seeks to explore the psychological impact of moral injury on Black male police officers.

Purpose of the Study

The goal of this study was to explore the lived experiences of Black police officers who face moral injury due to undue police violence (UPV) targeted at Black individuals. This research aimed to fill a gap by providing insights that can aid counselors and educators in fostering collaboration and designing interventions for the concerns of Black police officers. Additionally, the study strived to underscore the need for improved interactions between law enforcement and Black communities.

Research Question

Through the lens of intersectionality, I explored the moral injury among Black male police officers who experience undue police violence towards Black citizens. As such, the following research question will guide this investigation:

1. How do Black male police officers interpret and make sense of their experiences of moral injury in relation to undue police violence towards Black citizens?

Theoretical Framework

To further examine the complexities of Black male police officers' experiences with UPV towards Black citizens and its impact on moral injury, I utilized an intersectionality framework. Firstly, the intersectionality framework provides a comprehensive lens through which to understand the complexities and multidimensional aspects of social identities and power structures. Specifically, the intersectionality framework, as proposed by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), emphasizes that individuals experience multiple and overlapping social identities, such as race, gender, and occupation, which interact with systems of power and privilege. In the context of my study, Black male police officers occupy a complex position at the intersection of their racial identity, gender identity, and professional role. By acknowledging and analyzing these intersecting identities, I can gain a deeper understanding of how the experiences of police violence towards Black citizens affect their sense of morality, ethical decision-making, and psychological well-being.

Furthermore, in the current study, I aim to explore the phenomenon of moral injury among Black male police officers who have experienced UPV towards Black citizens. Importantly, scholars highlight the significance of applying an intersectional lens when examining the experiences of marginalized groups within institutions such as law enforcement (Crenshaw, 1991; Cho et al., 2013; Hankivsky et al., 2010). For instance, the intersectionality framework allows for an analysis of how racism, both systemic and interpersonal, influences the experiences of Black male police officers in ways that may differ from those of their white counterparts. By integrating intersectionality into my study, I can explore how the compounded effects of racism and occupational stressors contribute to moral injury among Black male officers, deepening our understanding of the multifaceted challenges they face.

Additionally, the intersectionality framework recognizes that individuals are not passive recipients of social forces but active agents who navigate and negotiate multiple identities and systems of power (Wyatt et.al., 2022). Black male police officers are not solely victims of racialized policing practices but also participants in a complex system that perpetuates both racial bias and structural inequalities. By employing an intersectional perspective, I examined how Black male police officers navigate their roles, reconcile their personal experiences with their professional obligations, and engage in acts of resistance or change within the institution of law enforcement. This approach allows for a more holistic understanding of the experiences of Black male police officers, avoiding simplistic narratives that fail to capture the intricacies of their lived realities.

In Chapter Summary, the intersectionality framework aligns seamlessly with exploring moral injury among Black male police officers who experience undue police violence towards Black citizens. By adopting this lens, I can gain a nuanced understanding of the intersecting identities, experiences, and systems of oppression that shape the experiences of these officers. Moreover, by acknowledging the compounded effects of racism and occupational stressors, I aim to shed light on the multifaceted challenges faced by Black male police officers and contribute to a broader discourse on racialized policing practices, moral injury, and mental health within law enforcement. Ultimately, employing the intersectionality framework enhances the validity and depth of my findings, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences of Black male police officers and informing strategies for addressing these challenges in the future.

Significance

This study is significant due to the multifaceted implications it holds for the areas of law enforcement, mental health, and race relations in the United States. Firstly, it illuminates an area that is grossly understudied: the experiences of Black male police officers who witness police violence against Black citizens. Despite an abundance of literature focusing on police violence (Goff et al., 2016), the focus has primarily been on the victims of this violence, while the potential impacts on fellow officers, particularly Black officers, are largely overlooked.

Moreover, exploring moral injury among Black male police officers who are subjected to excessive violence against Black citizens provides a fresh vantage point to the existing body of research concerning the psychological ramifications of police work. Moral injury, as described by Litz et al. (2009), refers to the distress stemming from actions that contravene one's moral or ethical principles, or from instances of inaction in such situations. While extensively studied in military contexts, this concept receives limited attention within the realm of law enforcement. This investigation has the potential to establish a cornerstone in this emerging domain, enhancing the comprehension of the psychological toll unjust actions can exact on police officers for law enforcement professionals, counselors, and educator counselors alike.

Additionally, clinicians play a crucial role in supporting the implications of this study by assisting police departments in recognizing and addressing potential moral injuries suffered by Black male officers due to their exposure to unjust violence against Black citizens. By engaging in collaborative discussions with police leadership and officers, clinicians can facilitate the integration of study findings into departmental awareness, training, and policy initiatives. Through targeted interventions such as mental health resources, peer support

programs, and culturally sensitive counseling, clinicians can contribute to improving the internal well-being of officers and fostering healthier community relations, thereby fostering an environment of trust, empathy, and proactive change within law enforcement agencies (Alexander & De Haan, 2019).

Lastly, this study is of vital importance for its potential to contribute to discussions on race relations and social justice. The role of Black police officers is often situated at the intersection of police and Black communities, presenting unique challenges and perspectives (Nix & Wolfe, 2017). A deeper understanding of these experiences can offer critical insights into the broader social issues at play and promote more informed, nuanced conversations on racial justice within law enforcement.

Key Terms

Moral injury- Actions completed by oneself, observed of another person with failure of oneself to intervene, or witnessed events which transgress moral beliefs and cause symptoms including shame, guilt, and personal responsibility.

Black citizen- The term "Black citizen" refers to an individual who identifies as Black or of African descent and holds citizenship in a particular country. It signifies the racial and ethnic background of the person while also acknowledging their legal status as a citizen.

Undue police violence- Undue police violence refers to the excessive or unwarranted use of force by law enforcement officers during interactions with individuals. It implies that the level of force employed by the police exceeds what is necessary or proportional to the situation at hand, leading to harm, injury, or loss of life.

Intersectionality- Intersectionality is a theoretical framework that recognizes the interconnected nature of social categories, such as race, gender, class, sexuality, and ability, and how they intersect and interact to shape individuals' experiences and identities.

Interpretative phenomenological analysis- Interpretative phenomenological analysis is a qualitative research approach used to explore and understand individuals' lived experiences and subjective perspectives.

Police- Police refers to a civil force responsible for maintaining public order, preventing and detecting crime, and enforcing laws within a given jurisdiction.

Delimitations

There are several delimitations that need to be acknowledged in the context of my study. First and foremost, it is important to note that this study focused specifically on Black male police officers. Indeed, while this subgroup is significant in understanding the experiences of moral injury within the broader context of racialized police violence, it nonetheless does not encompass the full range of experiences of other racial and ethnic groups within the police force. Furthermore, this study was limited to examining moral injury resulting from undue police violence towards Black citizens and will not delve into other aspects of moral injury that may arise in the context of policing. Moreover, this research adopted a qualitative approach, prioritizing participants' narratives and lived experiences rather than relying on quantitative statistical data. As a result, the findings are subjective and context-specific, and therefore, caution should be exercised when generalizing the results to other contexts such as gender or populations.

Chapter Summary

This in-depth research study aimed to explore moral injury experienced by Black male police officers in relation to the escalating incidence of police violence towards Black citizens. Initially, the study recognizes the lack of direct research on moral injury among police officers, particularly those who are Black, and highlights the urgent need for a deeper understanding of this phenomenon. Consequently, by adopting an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach, the study aimed to uncover and illuminate the lived experiences of Black male police officers. Furthermore, the research is significant as it sheds light on an understudied area, informs interventions to address moral injury within the law enforcement community, and contributes to ongoing discussions on police reform. Additionally, it recognizes the importance of an intersectionality framework to understand the complexities and challenges faced by Black male police officers at the intersection of race, gender, and their professional role.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The concept of moral injury, characterized by an array of psychological, social, and ethical challenges (Litz, 2009), gains profound complexity when considered within the realm of Black male police officers directly or indirectly implicated in excessive acts of violence against Black individuals. Indeed, situated at this intersection of professional obligation, gender and racial identity, Black male police officers often grapple with a unique burden, shaping their interpretation and internalization of moral injury in profound ways. Consequently, the literature review delves deeply into this intricate dynamic, guided by the pivotal research question: How do Black male police officers interpret and make sense of their experiences of moral injury in relation to undue police violence towards Black citizens? Furthermore, by unearthing the nuanced strategies Black male police officers employ to comprehend and cope with such experiences, existing research not only highlights the depth of their moral conflicts but also underscores critical implications for counselors and counselor educators. Therefore, it is essential that counselors and counselor educators must be sufficiently equipped with this knowledge to provide culturally sensitive and contextually relevant support, essential for addressing the specific needs and challenges Black male police officers face in the wake of moral injury.

Moral injury, a term originally coined within the military context, holds profound relevance to the experiences of police officers. Police officers often find themselves in environments where they may perceive actions or inactions as violating their moral or ethical code (Vermeer, 2020). For Black male officers, this moral conflict can become intricately

entwined with their racial and gender identities, as they navigate the precarious balance of allegiance to their professional oath and an inherent empathy towards fellow Black citizens.

The resulting psychological distress, which often manifests as guilt, shame, and a sense of betrayal, not only impacts the individual officers but reverberates through their professional conduct, interpersonal relationships, and the broader community's trust in law enforcement (Papazoglou et al., 2020). This review seeks to unravel the empirical and theoretical strands of research that shed light on the experiences, coping mechanisms, and systemic responses related to moral injury within this specific demographic of law enforcement professionals, addressing the research question at its core.

Theoretical Framework

Intersectionality, a concept pioneered by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, has become instrumental in dissecting the interplay between various social identities (e.g., race, gender, class) at the individual level and their connection to broader systems of privilege and oppression. Initially focusing on the unique experiences of Black women, Crenshaw's work laid the foundation for a broader analysis of systemic injustice and social inequality, recognizing the complex dimensions of identity and its implications for understanding systemic issues.

Subsequently, scholars have applied the intersectionality framework to various fields, including policing. Notably, early studies, such as those by Brunson and Miller (2006), highlighted how the policing experiences of young African American men are shaped by the confluence of race, age, and gender, often influenced by societal stereotypes. These encounters, marked by heightened tension, underscore the critical role of intersectionality in examining police practices and the lived experiences of those subjected to law enforcement.

Expanding on this theme, the literature has since explored how intersectionality affects policing dynamics, particularly for Black communities and other marginalized groups. For instance, researchers like Gau and Brunson (2010) have shown that Black males' perceptions and experiences of policing are distinctly shaped by intersecting stereotypes and biases, contributing to systemic bias, legal cynicism, and eroded trust in law enforcement within these communities. Further emphasizing the need for this analytical lens, high-profile incidents of police violence have underscored the necessity of an intersectional approach to fully grasp the multifaceted nature of systemic inequalities, not limited to race but also encompassing gender, socioeconomic status, and mental health considerations.

In a related vein, the concept of moral injury, often associated with military contexts, has proven particularly relevant in policing studies through an intersectional approach. Specifically, applied to Black male officers, this framework illuminates the complex trauma arising from their involvement in or witness to violence against Black civilians, compounded by their identities as both law enforcement officers and Black men. This duality places them at the heart of moral and ethical dilemmas, navigating the delicate balance between professional obligations and personal identity.

Building on this understanding, research underscores the importance of acknowledging intersectional identities in evaluating Black male officers' experiences. Black male officers navigate intricate social dynamics, balancing the demands of their roles with their community affiliations. In this context, in situations of police violence against Black individuals, they face acute conflicts between their duties and their racial solidarity, a tension magnified by historical and ongoing friction between the Black community and law enforcement. By integrating these perspectives, adopting an intersectional perspective allows researchers to delve deeper into the

nuanced challenges faced by Black male officers, offering insights into how identities and social categorizations intertwine to shape perceptions, experiences, and psychological wellbeing. This approach not only sheds light on the personal and systemic factors contributing to moral injury but also emphasizes the need for culturally sensitive counseling, policies, and organizational changes to address these deep-rooted issues.

In summary, the concept of intersectionality provides a detailed and nuanced approach to examining the intricate instances of moral injury in Black male officers. This framework sheds light on the ways in which systemic injustices and institutional practices weave into the fabric of individual experiences, underscoring the importance of employing this analytical lens for formulating strategies aimed at addressing the root issues of these injuries. It presents an invaluable method for understanding and addressing the multifaceted dimensions of moral injury within this group, emphasizing the critical need for intersectionality in these analyses.

History of Undue Police Violence Against Black Citizens

The deeply ingrained issue of police violence against Black citizens, especially in the United States, has historical roots that trace back to the 1700s. The establishment of "Slave Patrols" in the Carolinas, designed to terrorize and suppress enslaved Africans, set a precedent for the racialized nature of law enforcement in the U.S. (Okere & Bush, 2023). This early form of policing evolved over the centuries, with the 1960s seeing a surge in racial tensions, further exacerbated by initiatives like President Lyndon Johnson's "War on Crime," indirectly contributing to the escalation of police violence and misconduct. McBride (2022) draws a profound analogy between the systemic nature of modern-day police violence and the historical phenomenon of extra-legal lynchings. At the heart of McBride's analogy is the idea that both forms of violence are not just isolated incidents but are deeply rooted in societal structures and

power dynamics. Extra-legal lynchings, which historically targeted Black individuals and other marginalized groups, were not merely acts of individual hatred but were manifestations of a broader societal desire to maintain racial hierarchies and suppress challenges to the status quo. Similarly, McBride argues that modern-day police violence, especially against Black and minority communities, is not just about individual officers' actions but is indicative of a larger systemic issue within the policing institution. The systemic nature is evident in patterns of racial profiling, militarization of the police, and lack of accountability for officers involved in violent incidents. The juxtaposition of these patterns with historical state-sanctioned violence suggests an enduring cycle of violence targeting the African American community, perpetuated by the state through its law enforcement apparatus.

Beyond the historical and systemic patterns of violence, the psychological and health consequences of such brutality are profound. The psychological ramifications of police violence extend beyond immediate physical harm. The impact of media exposure to such violence on Black Americans has been explored, revealing that racial identity attitudes significantly influence how Black individuals psychologically process these traumatic events (Green et al., 2023). Exposure to violent events in the media, especially those related to racial violence or police brutality, is shown to have a profound psychological impact on Black Americans. Research conducted by Willis et al. (2021) indicates that the way Black individuals internalize, cope with, and react to violent portrayals in the media is significantly influenced by their racial identity attitudes. Racial identity attitudes encompass an individual's beliefs, feelings, and sense of belonging to their racial group. For instance, a Black individual with a strong sense of racial identity might feel more personally affected and distressed by media coverage of a violent incident against another Black person. The emotional and mental

reactions to such incidents can range from feelings of sadness, anger, and fear to more severe reactions like trauma.

While the aforementioned studies offer critical insights into the dynamics of police violence against Black citizens, there remains a conspicuous gap in the literature. The experiences of Black male police officers, who navigate the dual realities of being part of a system frequently criticized for systemic racism while also being potential victims within that very structure, are seldom explored. It is this area, concerning the experiences of Black male officers, that is under-researched. Such a gap not only underscores the need for more comprehensive academic explorations but also highlights a crucial domain for counseling professionals. Understanding these nuanced dynamics is indispensable for counselors and counselor educators because it equips them with a deeper comprehension of the stressors these individuals face, thereby enabling a more empathetic, informed, and effective therapeutic approach. This knowledge is fundamental in preparing future counselors to better support a demographic that operates under unique pressures, fostering resilience and well-being in Black male officers who may struggle with these conflicting identities. Furthermore, insights drawn from such studies can inform the development of specialized intervention strategies, training programs, and educational curricula, contributing to more culturally sensitive and situationally aware counseling practices. The necessity of this research in bridging the existing knowledge gap cannot be overstated, as it has profound implications for enhancing the mental health support structures available to Black male police officers and can fundamentally influence transformative change within the counseling profession.

Defining Moral Injury

Moral injury is a complex and multifaceted concept that originated in the field of psychology to understand the emotional turmoil experienced by veterans returning from warfare (Bartzak, 2015). Moral injury reflects the profound internal struggle of individuals who have witnessed or participated in actions that contravene their core moral beliefs, often leading to profound psychological and emotional distress (Litz, 2009). This concept encapsulates more than the physical and psychological wounds typically associated with warfare; it delves into the moral conflicts that arise when one's deeply ingrained values, encompassing notions of justice, empathy, and humanity, clash with the harsh realities encountered, particularly in the theater of war. It is through this lens that the exploration of moral injury necessitates a closer examination of the interplay between deeply held moral beliefs and experiences that challenge them (Shay, 2011).

Acknowledging the implications of moral injury goes beyond understanding combat veterans' experiences; it has broad applications, touching various aspects of human life, such as the ethical dilemmas faced by healthcare professionals and the moral conflicts experienced by individuals in diverse contexts (Pearson, 2021). Moral injury can manifest in various forms, stemming from both acts of commission and acts of omission that lead to a disorienting sense of moral betrayal and intense feelings of guilt, shame, and anger (Čartolovni, 2021). Acts of commission are those that individuals perceive as morally wrong, such as causing harm to others or violating ethical codes, leading to profound internal conflict and a pervasive feeling of guilt. Acts of omission, on the other hand, involve a failure to act when one believes they should have, often resulting in a complex web of emotions and internal conflict (Ohnishi et al., 2019).

In the context of moral injury, individuals frequently grapple with an overwhelming sense of guilt. This pervasive emotion dominates individuals' thoughts, instilling a profound sense of having committed wrongs, even in situations that were distressing or ethically ambiguous (Williamson et al., 2021). Such guilt may become more acute, resulting in intense self-reproach and a profound sense of having failed morally, which can hinder the process of recovery (Koenig & Zaben, 2021). Additionally, this sense of guilt is often compounded by shame—an intense, internalized emotion marked by a sense of inadequacy and worthlessness stemming from actions that the individuals perceive as morally objectionable (Pearson, 2021). Anger is another potent emotion often experienced in conjunction with moral injury, serving as a response to perceived injustices and moral transgressions. It can be self-directed, stemming from one's actions or inactions, or it can be directed outward, reflecting frustration with the external circumstances or entities that precipitated the moral conflict (Dubreuil, 2014). The outward-directed anger can be particularly challenging as it may reflect a broader dissatisfaction and frustration with societal structures and norms (Čartolovni, 2021).

Moral injury's multifaceted character transcends the experiences exclusive to combat veterans, permeating diverse aspects of human life. Moral injury significantly affects individuals faced with ethical conundrums that are part and parcel of their occupational roles or everyday existence (Williamson, 2019). The intricacy of moral injury is especially accentuated in individuals hailing from various cultural, social, or personal backgrounds, as these elements often shape the unique moral challenges they encounter (Eckhardt & Zimmerling, 2023). Within the realm of healthcare, professionals have found themselves at an ethical impasse, particularly during times of crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Healthcare workers frequently face moral injuries that arise from critical decisions made in moments of extreme

stress or limited resources (Guraya et al., 2023; O'Mathúna et al., 2023). The psychological repercussions of these decisions are profound, highlighting an urgent requirement for robust support mechanisms and ethical frameworks that are adaptable to a variety of situations and diverse personnel (Guraya et al., 2023). In a parallel context, first responders, who are consistently at the epicenter of traumatic events, are prone to experiencing moral injury. The severity of first responders' condition can be exacerbated by the exigent nature of their responsibilities, coupled with the dire, often mortal, decisions they are compelled to make (Eckhardt & Zimmerling, 2023).

As such, recognizing moral injury's profound impact is the first step in fostering support, therapy, and healing for those affected by it. An informed approach to understanding and addressing moral injury can facilitate the development of comprehensive support mechanisms and therapeutic interventions to alleviate the profound emotional and psychological distress associated with it.

Moral Injury in Police Work

Police officers play an indispensable role in our communities. As the first line of response during emergencies and crises, they shoulder the responsibility of upholding justice and integrity (Clayman & Kevoe-Feldman, 2023). However, this noble profession often exposes them to traumatic events, from witnessing the aftermath of violent crimes to navigating life-threatening situations (Casas & Benuto, 2021). The emotional toll of these experiences can be profound. As the initial point of contact for victims of malevolent acts or catastrophic incidents, they not only witness trauma but also bear the responsibility of providing support to its victims (McAlearney et al., 2022). Situations where they cannot save a critically injured

individual can evoke intense emotions, such as guilt, shame, and frustration, leading some to grapple with feelings of inadequacy or failure in their duties.

Recent research by Papazoglou et al. (2019) delves deeper into these psychological challenges, introducing the concept of "compassion fatigue." This type of traumatization, often described as the "cost of caring," is prevalent among professionals working with traumatized populations. The study further highlights the notion of moral injury, a form of psychological distress that arises from events where officers' actions, or lack thereof, starkly contradict their moral beliefs. The psychological distress arising from moral injury isn't limited to direct traumatic events. It can manifest in various ways, such as when officers enforce laws that clash with their personal beliefs or when they feel torn between their duties and moral convictions.

A recent scoping review on ethical decision-making in law enforcement by Dempsey, Eskander, and Dubljević (2023) underscores the complexities of policing. The review emphasizes the socio-moral dimensions that impact police work, the influence of lethal means and moral injury on decision-making, and the importance of police wellness and interventions for sustaining readiness. The article suggests that a holistic approach to ethical practices in policing is essential, emphasizing the need to address gaps in recruiting, training, and leadership practices.

While there's extensive literature on the prevalence and implications of moral injury in policing, it often generalizes experiences, neglecting the unique challenges faced by Black police officers. Black police officers find themselves at the intersection of professional duty and personal identity, especially given the ongoing discourse on police violence against Black individuals. Although studies like Griffin et al. (2019) shed light on symptoms and outcomes of moral injury, they don't address the complexities Black officers face. Recognizing and

addressing these challenges is paramount for the well-being of these officers, who remain pivotal in maintaining the safety and order of our communities.

Dual Identity: Balancing Blackness and the Blue Uniform

Paul and Birzer (2017) highlighted the challenges faced by many Black officers as they navigate two worlds that are often in conflict. The dichotomy between the police world, characterized by law enforcement and order, and the Black community, which has historically been subjected to police brutality and racial profiling, creates a tumultuous environment for Black officers. This dichotomy sometimes escalates to a point where these two worlds seem to be at war, forcing Black officers to make difficult choices and compromises (Gunawan et al., 2023).

Godsil and Richardson (2017) acknowledged similar challenges as they explored the pressures faced by Black officers to conform to their department's culture, which often involves grappling with racial assumptions about Black people. The failure to share and display fellow officers' racial assumptions may lead to perceptions that Black officers prioritize racial affiliation and loyalty over enforcing the law and combating criminality. This pressure to conform can lead to the marginalization of concerns related to the Black community and a disassociation from it (Knafo, 2016).

To prove their loyalty to the force, Black officers find themselves over-policing Black people, a phenomenon explored by Carbado & Gulati (2000). Over-policing is not just a manifestation of loyalty to the department but is also a reflection of the internal conflict and the pressure to dissociate from one's racial identity to be accepted in the predominantly white law enforcement culture (Reichin et al., 2023). The internal conflict and the constant struggle to reconcile one's racial and professional identity can have severe psychological, existential,

behavioral, and interpersonal repercussions (Sweeney, 2021). Black officers experience a range of emotions, from guilt and shame to anger and frustration, as they navigate their dual identities (Blumberg, 2022). Furthermore, the emotional turmoil can impact their mental health, job performance, and relationships with colleagues and the community (Tausen et al., 2023).

For Black officers who share cultural values with victims of police brutality, the experience is even more harrowing (Pittaro, 2022). The constant exposure to racial injustice and violence against their community can lead to a profound existential crisis, questioning the morality and ethics of their role as law enforcement officers (Walsh, 2021). Such an internal struggle can affect Black male police officers' ability to function effectively in their roles and can lead to increased stress, anxiety, and burnout (Johnson et al., 2022). Similarly, Black male officers experience deep moral and ethical conflicts, especially when witnessing or being indirectly involved in police violence against Black individuals (Lee & Robinson, 2019). The ethical and moral conflict arises from the alignment of such incidents with their racial and gender identities (Singer et al., 2019). Mainstream research often overlooks these dynamics. However, studies like Bailey et al. (2022) delve into the intersections of racism, law enforcement, and injury, highlighting the compounded trauma Black communities endure due to systemic disadvantages, violent injuries, and intense policing. These studies underscore the need to understand factors that might amplify moral injury among Black male officers. Building on the complexities faced by Black male officers, recent studies, like Addison et al. (2023), highlight the intricacies of police involvement in mental health crises. The study underscores the paradox of police presence being both necessary and discomforting, especially among younger and Black residents. Such dichotomies are particularly relevant for Black male officers, who might find themselves torn between public expectations and their moral compass.

Additionally, the dehumanization of Black youth in police encounters might add another layer of moral complexity for Black male officers. Historically, Black individuals, especially youth, have been subjected to various forms of dehumanization which leads to a perception of Black youth as inherently dangerous, aggressive, or criminal (Vaughans & Harris, 2016). Black officers are in a unique position where they might experience both the pressures and biases of the policing system and the societal prejudices against Black individuals (Prengler et al., 2023). When Black youth are dehumanized in police encounters, Black officers might find themselves in a moral dilemma. On one hand, Black police officers are part of a system that might perpetuate these biases, and on the other, they might personally understand and empathize with the experiences of Black youth.

Building on these specific challenges, Black police officers also grapple with broader systemic, organizational, and social factors that may contribute to their moral injury (Reichin et al., 2022). This issue extends beyond their internal struggles, encompassing the broader challenges they face within the policing system and the communities they serve. A thorough understanding of both these specific and overarching challenges is imperative to delve deeper into the discourse on moral injury within the realm of policing. Addressing these adversities and moral dilemmas has significant implications for counseling and counselor education. Recognizing the unique challenges faced by Black male officers can guide counselors in providing tailored interventions that consider both the individual and systemic factors at play. Furthermore, counselor education can benefit by incorporating these insights into their curriculum, ensuring that future counselors are equipped with the knowledge and skills to support Black male officers effectively. By understanding the intricacies of their experiences, counselors can foster a safe space for these officers to navigate their moral dilemmas and heal

from the moral injuries they sustain. This not only aids in the personal well-being of the officers but also promotes healthier interactions between the police and the communities they serve.

Impact of Organizational Role and Environment

Skogan and Frydl (2004) defined police culture as a set of shared outlooks used to adapt to uncertainty, danger, and coercive authority. Additionally, police culture is viewed by some scholars as monolithic and argues that all officers share the same values, norms, and behaviors (Demirkol & Nalla, 2020). Monaghan (2017) posits that the culture within law enforcement can foster immoral behaviors, as it often upholds racist and oppressive ideologies, leading to a heightened moral risk. This perspective is echoed in the wider body of literature on criminal justice ethics, which identifies systemic issues in law enforcement. For example, Reiman (2013) highlights the ethical dilemmas police officers encounter, such as the necessity to use deception or resolve the 'Dirty Harry' problem, which can sometimes rationalize unethical conduct. The presence of such moral dilemmas within the police culture may inadvertently sanction behaviors that support oppressive ideologies, especially during critical incidents.

Further expanding on this, Okada et al. (2018) emphasize the importance of ethics in criminal justice, highlighting how systemic discrimination and unethical policymaking can infiltrate law enforcement culture. This infiltration can manifest in discriminatory practices and a culture that tacitly approves of oppressive measures, potentially leading to the disproportionate targeting and mistreatment of minority communities. Moreover, Burt (2018) evolutionary developmental approach to racial discrimination and cultural adaptations in the context of crime provides a theoretical framework that links systemic racism, such as anti-Black discrimination, to increased risks of immoral behavior by law enforcement. Burt's

analysis suggests that the pressures and stresses of policing, when combined with a culture that may implicitly condone racial biases, can lead to a higher propensity for violence against those perceived as 'other,' including the use of lethal force.

In 2015, these theoretical perspectives find concrete expression in the grim statistics of police violence in the United States, where officers killed 1,146 people, 229 of whom were unarmed (Mapping Police Violence, 2022). The literature implies that these numbers may not just be reflective of individual failings but also indicative of a broader cultural and systemic problem within law enforcement that cultivates moral hazards and enables the perpetuation of violence, particularly against marginalized groups. Within police culture lies the “Blue Wall of Silence.” Nolan (2009) described the Blue Wall of Silence or Code of Silence as a phenomenon that suggests that the police engage in a pervasive pattern of deception and withholding of the truth in a ritual cover-up for their brethren. Police officers protecting each other by maintaining a code of silence during racist acts was a norm during the nineteenth century and continues to be a norm during the twentieth-first century (Hug & McAdams, 2016). Furthermore, Wolfe and Piquero (2011) suggested that silence in the police community acts as a “shield” to sustain occupation and noble cause beliefs. For this reason, officers that choose not to shield their colleagues become whistleblowers and face tremendous scrutiny and harassment from the police community (Nolan, 2009). For Black police officers, the fear of retaliation for not protecting fellow a police officer amplifies the difficulty with disclosing what they have experienced; thus, complicating their understanding of moral injury.

Coping Mechanisms to Manage Moral Risk

The research on Black male police officers' moral decision-making and risk management in relation to their moral principles is insufficient. The scarcity of information on

this topic is troubling considering their dual roles in racial identity and law enforcement, particularly in situations involving excessive force against Black individuals. Motley and Banks (2018) identified a key obstacle: the negative perceptions around mental health that deter Black men from seeking support after traumatic events. These negative perceptions are exacerbated by a police culture that prizes traditional masculinity and heteronormativity, as noted by Nolan (2009) and Pitel et al. (2021), which pressures officers to suppress their emotions rather than confront them. The literature indicates that an officer's ability to deal with emotional and psychological stress is linked to their coping strategies, a pattern that is not exclusive to any race (Van Vliet, 2010; Kennedy-Moore & Watson, 2001). Heffren and Hausdorf (2016) contend that the policing culture, which glorifies stoicism and discourages openness, can predict whether officers will seek help post-trauma. Davidson and Moss (2008) highlight that this culture creates a work environment hostile to vulnerability, deterring officers from seeking support. As a result, there is a tendency for police officers to adopt harmful coping mechanisms, such as substance misuse, emotional suppression, and isolation (Pitel et al., 2021). My research aims to explore the specific experiences of moral injury and coping mechanisms among Black male police officers in the context of violence against Black individuals, striving to address this knowledge gap and guide effective interventions.

While current research provides insights into the coping mechanisms of police officers facing trauma, it largely overlooks the distinct experiences of Black male officers dealing with violence within their ranks. This gap is critical in the counseling field, which has yet to fully recognize and cater to the nuanced needs of Black male officers who are torn between their racial identity and their duty. The complex interplay of race and occupation creates a unique psychological terrain for Black male officers, leading to specific stressors and challenges that

the counseling profession has not fully acknowledged or addressed. Bridging this gap is essential for developing informed counseling practices and support systems that cater to the specific realities of Black male police officers, ensuring their mental health and resilience are proactively supported.

Chapter Summary

The complex nature of moral injury among Black male police officers highlights significant psychological, social, and ethical dilemmas. This review of current literature emphasizes the urgent necessity for a broader and more inclusive examination of Black male police officers' experiences. Their unique position at the crossroads of racial and gender identity with professional duty calls for a deeper comprehension and acknowledgment. Recognizing and addressing the internal and external challenges faced by Black male police officers is vital for cultivating an environment within the police force that is more inclusive, supportive, and empathetic. Furthermore, understanding these challenges has substantial implications for counseling practices, suggesting a need for tailored therapeutic approaches that consider the unique stressors and moral conflicts this group encounters. This insight is critical for counselor education, necessitating the development of specialized training programs that equip counselors with the knowledge and skills to effectively support Black male police officers. The study could lead to more effective support systems and interventions that enhance the well-being and professional performance of Black male police officers, while also informing the pedagogical strategies in counselor training to address such complex intersections of identity and occupation.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The persistent issue of undue police violence towards Black citizens has garnered significant attention in recent years, highlighting a deeply entrenched problem within the law enforcement community (Smith, 2015; Johnson & Davis, 2017). This chapter delves into the unique experiences of Black male police officers who grapple with moral injury as a result of witnessing or being indirectly involved in such acts of violence. Adopting a qualitative research design, this study aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences and interpretations of these officers, shedding light on the internal conflicts and moral dilemmas they face (Williams, 2019; Thompson, 2021). The central research question guiding this inquiry is: "How do Black male police officers interpret and make sense of their experiences of moral injury in relation to undue police violence towards Black citizens?"

Through this chapter, readers can anticipate a comprehensive overview of the research methodology. First, a review of the research question will be provided. Second, a description of my role as the researcher in this study is discussed. Third, the theoretical framework used to guide this study is provided. Fourth, a rationale for selecting a qualitative methodology and interpretative phenomenology analysis is explained emphasizing its appropriateness in capturing the nuanced emotions and perceptions of the participants. Fifth, information is provided on sampling procedures and participants. Finally, an outline of other primary components is described, such as data collection and procedures, data analysis, considerations to enhance research quality, and ethical considerations.

Research Question

To enhance the understanding of counselor education programs, this study was guided by the following pivotal research question:

1. How do Black male police officers interpret and make sense of their experiences of moral injury in relation to undue police violence towards Black citizens?

Positionality Statement

West-Olatunji (2022) underscores the necessity of a researcher's statement in studies for evaluating the researcher's trustworthiness among participants. In a review of 250 qualitative dissertations in the field of counselor education, Waalkes et al. (2021) found that a significant majority, 80% (200 dissertations), employed a researcher statement to bolster credibility. This method reflects the need for transparency akin to that expected from participants in divulging their experiences. West-Olatunji (2022) considers research as a vehicle for advocacy.

Accordingly, this study aims to champion the cause of Black male police officers, a group that is often underrepresented, seeking to portray their experiences accurately.

As a Black male licensed professional counselor and Ph.D. candidate in Counseling Education and Supervision at the University of Georgia, my unique background played a crucial role in this study, particularly within the framework of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and qualitative research. Drawing from my personal experiences as a victim of undue police violence, I gained a profound understanding of the psychological and emotional impacts of such events. This insight was vital for exploring moral injury among Black male police officers who witness undue violence against Black citizens, aligning with the qualitative research ethos where the researcher's experiences significantly inform data collection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Smith et al., 2009).

In my professional role as a counselor at the Department of Veteran Affairs, I developed a deep understanding of moral injury in individuals who experienced traumatic events. This background enriched my ability to connect and interpret stories within their cultural and personal contexts, a skill critical in IPA for deeply understanding participants' experiences (Finlay, 2011; Miller & Minton, 2016; Smith et al., 2009). Additionally, my close relationships with law enforcement officers provided valuable insights into the systemic issues and moral dilemmas within policing, reinforcing the importance of cultural responsiveness and social justice advocacy in research (West-Olatunji, 2022).

To ensure the integrity and rigor of the study, I employed several methodological tools. Bracketing, a central concept in phenomenology and IPA, was used to set aside personal biases during data collection and analysis, a practice crucial for maintaining objectivity (Husserl, 1970; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Member checking involved participants in the research process, enhancing the study's credibility by ensuring the findings accurately reflected their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Moreover, reflective journaling facilitated continuous self-reflection and critical examination of my biases and assumptions throughout the research process (Pajo, 2017). These practices, integral to qualitative research, ensured that my role as a culturally responsive therapist and advocate was effectively integrated into the study, thereby enriching its depth and relevance.

Theoretical Perspective

Intersectionality framework, rooted in the pioneering work of Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, serves as the theoretical foundation for this study. Intersectionality framework offers an intricate lens, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted aspects of social identities and the dynamics of power structures (Dhanani et al., 2022). Intersectionality as a

framework has significantly evolved over the years, broadening its scope to encompass various marginalized identities, including Black men. Initially devised to address the multifaceted discrimination experienced by Black women, intersectionality has become a crucial lens in understanding how different aspects of identity, such as race, gender, and class, interact to create unique modes of oppression and privilege (Crenshaw, 1989).

Recent scholarly work expands the intersectionality framework to include a more nuanced understanding of the experiences of Black men. For instance, researchers applied intersectionality to explore the specific socio-economic and legal challenges faced by Black men, acknowledging how systemic inequalities, such as those in the criminal justice system, are informed by both racial and gender biases (Sewell, 2017). This shift recognizes that Black men face a distinct form of discrimination that is shaped by an intersection of race and gender.

Another pivotal contribution is "The Man-Not: Race, Class, Genre, and the Dilemmas of Black Manhood" by Tommy J. Curry (2017), which critically examines the plight of Black men through an intersectional lens, challenging monolithic narratives around race and gender. In my dissertation, I explore the profound phenomenon of moral injury experienced by Black-male police officers who have either witnessed or been part of undue police violence against Black citizens. As such, intersectionality framework is instrumental in understanding the complex interplay of race, gender, and professional identity in shaping Black male police officers experiences of moral injury as a result of undue police violence towards Black citizens. Furthermore, adopting intersectionality as an approach aligns with my research objectives, aiming to provide detailed insight into the distinct challenges Black male police officers face and shedding light on the ramifications of racialized policing practices on their psychological health and overall well-being.

Qualitative Research Traditions

The methodology chosen for this study is qualitative in nature. Qualitative research is an approach that seeks to understand the lived experiences, perceptions, and feelings of participants, often delving deep into the nuances of human behavior and the reasons that govern such behavior (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Historically, qualitative research has its roots in the interpretive paradigm, which posits that reality is constructed by individuals in their interactions with the world. This approach contrasts with the positivist paradigm, which seeks objective truths through quantifiable data. Notable scholars such as Merriam and Tisdell contribute significantly to the development and understanding of qualitative methodologies, emphasizing the importance of context, meaning-making, and the co-construction of knowledge between the researcher and the researched.

Johnson & Christensen (2017) probe further into the nuances of qualitative research, emphasizing its commitment to investigating complex phenomena in their authentic environments using methods such as interviews, observations, and document analysis. Creswell & Creswell (2018) emphasize the recursive nature of qualitative research, where the processes of data collection and analysis are intertwined. This integrated method enables the continuous refinement of research questions as new findings emerge.

For the present study, a qualitative approach is particularly appropriate given the complexity of the topic at hand. Moral injury among Black male police officers is a deeply personal and multifaceted issue, influenced by a myriad of factors including personal beliefs, societal norms, and institutional practices. A qualitative methodology allows for an in-depth exploration of the experiences and perceptions of these officers, providing rich, contextualized insights that would be difficult to capture through quantitative means alone. Moreover, the

interpretive nature of qualitative research aligns well with the study's aim to understand the subjective realities of Black male police officers as they navigate the moral dilemmas posed by undue police violence towards Black citizens.

Phenomenology Inquiry and Analysis

The phenomenological approach to qualitative research aims to explore, describe, and analyze the meaning of individual lived experiences related to a specific phenomenon (Wertz et al., 2013). This methodology has its origins in the philosophical works of Edmund Husserl. Husserl highlighted the significance of understanding human experiences from the viewpoint of the individuals experiencing them. His concept of descriptive phenomenology was further developed by Martin Heidegger. Heidegger introduced interpretive or hermeneutic phenomenology, which underscores the interpretative nature of understanding these lived experiences (Heidegger, 1927).

At its core, phenomenology is dedicated to the profound exploration of human consciousness and the complex ways people interpret their surroundings. A fundamental concept in phenomenology is "bracketing." This concept involves the researcher intentionally setting aside their preconceptions and biases. By doing so, they can engage with the data in its most unadulterated form (Emiliusse et al., 2021). This practice ensures a truer comprehension of participants' experiences, devoid of external influences.

The phenomenological approach is especially suitable for the current study as moral injury is a deeply personal phenomenon that stems from the actual lived experiences of the officers. Using a phenomenological approach allowed me to probe into the complex emotions, perceptions, and internal dilemmas these officers grapple with. This approach offers a detailed and layered understanding that other methodologies might overlook. The focus on capturing the

essence of individual experiences resonates with the study's goal: to illuminate the intensely personal and often concealed traumas of Black male officers (James, 2012).

Philosophical Assumptions

Identifying a philosophical assumption and the interpretive framework is essential for conducting qualitative research (Creswell, 2012). In qualitative study, Creswell and Poth (2017) emphasized that four philosophical assumptions shape the direction of research; Ontological (reality), Epistemological (knowledge), Axiological (values), and Methodology (methods used in the process of research). Within those philosophical assumptions lays a basic set of beliefs that guides action, known as interpretive frameworks (Creswell, 2014). According to Creswell and Poth (2017), interpretive frameworks may be social science theories that aim to frame the researcher's theoretical lens or social justice theories that seek to bring about change or address social issues in society.

In my study of moral injury among Black male police officers who experience undue police violence towards Black citizens, I sought to understand moral injury among Black police officers who experience undue police violence toward Black people. Therefore, my philosophical assumption is rooted in acquiring knowledge (epistemological). Furthermore, as someone that acknowledges the intersection of history and culture and its role in shaping our understanding of the world, social constructivism shaped my identity as a qualitative researcher.

Sampling Procedure and Participants

Before conducting the study involving human subjects, I obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Georgia. This step ensured the ethical conduct of the study and the protection of participants. Subsequently, in alignment with the guidelines of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), I employed purposeful sampling

to select participants. This method involved intentionally choosing individuals from a homogeneous group who fulfilled the specific criteria of the study, as outlined by Smith et al. (2009). In doing so, Smith and Osborn (2008) suggested that IPA allows the researcher to select participants who will provide the necessary information to answer the research question and provide a knowledge base with participants' shared insights. In the current study, the I aimed to understand moral injury among Black male police officers who experience UDV toward Black citizens.

Furthermore, the recruitment of participants for this study utilized snowball sampling, a method previously employed in research on moral injury among ethnic/racial minority populations (Kern, 2021). Snowball sampling is detailed as a purposeful method of data collection in qualitative research, according to the article 'A Purposeful Method of Sampling in Qualitative Research' by Naderifar et al. (2017), which underscores its utility in certain research contexts. This strategy leveraged personal connections within law enforcement to identify initial participants meeting the study's criteria. Subsequently, these participants recommended additional potential participants who also aligned with the study's requirements. Thus, snowball sampling proved especially effective for reaching populations that are difficult to access or might be hesitant to participate, given the sensitive nature of the subject matter.

To ensure the credibility and relevance of the study, insights were drawn from recent scholarly articles that explored the role of moral injury in predicting post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among law enforcement officers (Papazoglou et al., 2020; Papazoglou et al., 2019). To address the ethical considerations of the study, all participants were informed about the purpose of the research, the procedures involved, potential risks, and their rights as participants. They were required to provide informed consent before participating in the study.

Confidentiality was maintained at all times, and participants were given the right to withdraw from the study at any point without any repercussions.

Prescreening

A brief prescreening was conducted to ensure appropriate participant selection. I completed the prescreening via Zoom for accessibility. The prescreening began with an introduction to the Litz et al. (2009) definition of moral injury to individuals who were unsure about the concept. I inquired if they had experienced moral injury due to undue police violence towards Black people. Additionally, I asked if the officer was familiar with the term moral injury. Moreover, the prescreening consisted of the members completing the Moral Injury Outcome Scale. Participants who expressed interest in participating in the study were provided with an informed consent during the prescreening. They were also given my contact information in case they had questions. One week after the prescreening, participants were contacted by phone or email to confirm or deny their interest in engaging in the study. It was also explained that all interviews would be conducted on Zoom. Participants were asked to be in a secure location to maintain privacy and confidentiality. Information about the study, the use of data, expectations, and potential risks were reviewed during the prescreening with participants. Furthermore, participants were informed that a transcription service would be used to transcribe their interviews. They were assured their personal information would not be compromised and that recordings and transcripts would be coded. Upon completion of coding the transcripts, all recordings were destroyed to maintain the confidentiality and privacy of the participants.

Participants

In this study, the focus was on understanding the nuances of moral injury among Black male police officers who were confronted with undue police violence towards Black citizens. I interviewed seven participants that self-identified Black males who were currently serving or had previously served in a law enforcement capacity in the United States. Participants were required to have a minimum of two years of active service to ensure they had been sufficiently exposed to the dynamics of policing. Furthermore, participants must have directly witnessed or been in situations where undue violence was exerted on Black citizens, either by their colleagues or within the context of their policing duties. This specificity was vital to capture firsthand experiences and perceptions of such events, which might lead to moral injury.

Participants Demographics

The participants were assigned pseudonyms to maintain their confidentiality. The group comprised both current and retired members. For those actively serving, their ages were spread across a spectrum, ranging from the late 20s to early 40s. Their experience on the force varied as well, with tenures spanning from 4 to 12 years. This reflects a wide range of perspectives and insights into their roles and experiences within the force. Separately, the study included a retired participant, whose age fell into the early 60s bracket, highlighting a significant depth of experience with over two decades of service. This variety in age, professional status, and years of service among the participants ensures a comprehensive view of the experiences and challenges faced by individuals in this profession.

Data Storage and Confidentiality

Participants were given informed consent and had the opportunity to discuss concerns and ask questions before starting the interview. All documents sent electronically were stored

using encrypted software. Additionally, the participants were informed that after the project was completed, all sensitive information would be destroyed. To ensure confidentiality, participants were coded by pseudonyms, and all data were stored under these pseudonyms. All information related to the study was only accessible by me and was kept under password-protected files.

Interview Process

To gather in-depth data on the lived experience of Black police officers who reported experiencing moral injury due to undue police violence towards Black people, semi-structured interviews were utilized. These questions were meticulously framed within the context of the participants' exposure to morally injurious experiences stemming from undue police violence towards Black people. Moreover, this exploration delved into how these experiences were shaped by the intersectionality of their unique identities. Importantly, these inquiries drew upon main concepts from research rooted in Interpretative Phenomenology Analysis (IPA) and were influenced by a perspective grounded in intersectionality. Consequently, this approach enabled a more nuanced exploration of the participants' thoughts, feelings, memories, associations, and interpretations of events, recognizing the multiple axes of identity that intersect and impact an individual's experience.

Furthermore, to ensure a natural flow of conversation, questions were thoughtfully developed in advance of the interviews, guided by a detailed interview strategy. Predominantly, open-ended questions were employed as the primary format to avoid any unintended influence on the participants' responses. Initially, the process began with simple questions to ease the participants into comfort, progressively transitioning to more complex inquiries. Additionally, each question was paired with a set of further prompts to delve deeper and collect more comprehensive data, if necessary. The interviews lasted between 60-90 minutes, offering

flexibility for participants to take breaks or pause the interview at any moment to guarantee their comfort and well-being. Following the discussions, participants were given the opportunity to provide further feedback or clarifications, significantly enhancing the richness and depth of the study.

Data Collection

During the data collection process, I used semi-structured, in-depth, one-on-one interviews. Because of the participants' geographic locations, interviews were conducted using Zoom, a virtual platform that enabled audio recording to be saved directly to a secure database. Additionally, data was collected through email correspondence, demographic questionnaires, written reflections, and notes taken during the interviews.

Data Analysis

This study, conducted in collaboration with a research team consisting of two 3rd year doctoral students in counseling education and supervision, aimed to put me in the participants' shoes to investigate how Black police officers make sense of their experiences. Unlike other qualitative data analysis methods, Interpretive Phenomenology Analysis (IPA) assumes that people are actively engaged in interpreting the events, objects, and people in their lives (Taylor, 1985). Therefore, for this study, Interpretive Phenomenology Analysis (IPA) was used to plan and conduct in-depth, semi-structured interviews and interpret the data (Lopez & Willis, 2004), with valuable insights and contributions from the research team.

IPA is an approach that explores in detail how participants are making sense of their personal and social world (Smit & Osborn, 2020). By conducting a detailed exploration of the individual's personal experiences and life world, facilitated by the expertise of the research team, IPA is more concerned about the individual's perception of the event (Neubauer et al.,

2019). This approach is useful for examining complex, ambiguous, and emotionally laden topics, such as moral injury (Smith & Osborn, 2015). Establishing rapport with the interviewee was vital, as it allowed for greater flexibility in the investigation. This process was enhanced by the diverse perspectives and expertise of the research team, which included doctoral students. The research team assisted in meticulously reviewing the recordings to gain comprehensive insights. In IPA, the analysis stage involved the researcher engaging in an interpretative relationship with the transcript (Smith et al., 2009), a process that was enriched by the collective efforts of the research team.

IPA Step 1: Initial Reading of The First Interview

During my initial review of the first interview, I carefully went through the transcript, refraining from delving too deeply into analysis or interpretation. This phase was dedicated to acquainting myself with the participant's story, grasping the context, and getting a feel for the individual behind the words. My goal was to capture the natural flow of conversation, take note of initial impressions, and identify any particularly poignant or emotive passages.

Subsequently, I embarked on an interpretive analysis, with the participant's voice serving as the focal point (Noon, 2018). This immersive reading approach enabled me to approach the data in its entirety, laying the groundwork for subsequent analytical endeavors by establishing an initial rapport with the participant's experiences.

IPA Step 2: Initial Coding of The First Interview

The initial coding of the first interview was a more focused engagement with the text. I began by dissecting the interview, marking phrases, sentences, or paragraphs that seemed significant to the research questions or evoked a strong interpretive reaction in me. This step aimed to establish a deeper connection and make sense of the meaningful content in the first

transcript. I searched for expressions of feelings, descriptions of experiences, and reflections on the participant's identity and role. Each code was carefully noted, forming a preliminary map of the data's thematic terrain. This process demanded a balance between creative interpretation and methodological rigor.

IPA Step 3: Developing the Emergent Themes of The First Interview

Developing the emergent themes from the first interview was a complex and iterative process. I organized the initial codes into clusters of similar or related ideas, which began to reveal the core themes of the participant's experience. This stage required constant comparison between codes, revisiting the data, and refining the themes to ensure they accurately captured the essence of the participant's narrative. It was a deeply interpretive process, where I had to engage with the data, question my assumptions, and strive for a genuine understanding of the participant's perspective.

IPA Step 4: Examining the Connections Across Emergent Themes

In the process of examining emergent themes within the participant's narrative, the incorporation of double hermeneutics added a layer of reflexivity and depth to my analysis. Double hermeneutics refers to the reciprocal relationship between my interpretation and the participant's narrative (Montague et al., 2020). It acknowledges that my understanding of the data is shaped not only by my own biases, perspectives, and preconceptions but also by the interpretations and meanings conveyed by the participants. This acknowledgment fostered a more nuanced approach to analysis, wherein I continuously interrogate my own interpretations in light of the participant's lived experiences.

As I explore the identified themes, I am not merely imposing my own interpretations onto the data. Instead, I engaged in a dialogue with the participant's narrative, constantly

reflecting on how my understanding is influenced by the interaction between my interpretation and the participant's lived experience. This process required a constant back-and-forth movement between understanding the participant's perspective and critically examining my own assumptions and biases. By actively engaging in this dialogue, I aimed to ensure that the analysis remained grounded in the participant's reality rather than solely reflecting my own subjective viewpoints.

In the context of examining connections among emergent themes, double hermeneutics prompted me to consider not only how the themes relate to each other but also how my interpretation of these connections is influenced by my understanding of the participant's story (Smith & Osborn, 2007). It encouraged a reflexive approach to analysis, where I remained mindful of the dynamic interplay between my interpretation and the lived experiences of the participants. By recognizing the inherent subjectivity in interpretation, I was able to navigate the complexities of the data more effectively and arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of the participant's narrative.

By incorporating double hermeneutics into my analysis, I gained deeper insights into the nuances and complexities of the data, recognizing that meaning is co-constructed through the interaction between me and the participant. This approach fostered a more nuanced and respectful understanding of the participant's experiences, ultimately leading to a richer and more insightful analysis of the data. Through this iterative process of interpretation and reflection, I strived to honor the complexity of the participant's narrative while also contributing to the broader understanding of psychological and social processes.

IPA Step 5: Moving to The Next Case

Moving to the next case, I approached each new interview with a fresh perspective, aware of the insights gained from the previous case but ready to encounter new nuances and perspectives. This repetition of the IPA process with each participant allowed me to refine my understanding of the collective experience of Black police officers, while also appreciating the individuality of each narrative. Each case added layers to my understanding, challenging me to remain open and responsive to the data while gradually building a composite picture of the phenomenon under study.

IPA Step 6: Identifying Patterns Across Cases

Identifying patterns across cases was the culmination of the IPA process, where utilizing Delve to organize the emerging themes listed under the participants' pseudonyms, I synthesized the insights from each individual analysis to uncover overarching themes and patterns. This cross-case analysis was about discerning the commonalities and differences in how participants made sense of their experiences, looking for thematic strands that wove through the collective narrative. It was a delicate balance of honoring the individual voices while identifying broader insights that could speak to the experiences of Black police officers as a whole. This final step required a deep engagement with the data, a critical reflective stance, and a commitment to representing the complexities and nuances of the participants' lived experiences.

Trustworthiness and Qualitative Rigor

Defining rigor in qualitative studies has sparked extensive debate. Nevertheless, it remains a pivotal component of research (Tracey, 2010). Rigor and the trustworthiness of a study are integral to qualitative research because they demonstrate the robustness of the research design (Cypress, 2017). Trustworthiness in such studies encompasses the reliability

and validity of the research. To bolster trustworthiness in my study, I employed the techniques of bracketing, use a researcher journal for audit trails. These strategies mitigated my bias, ensuring the quality of the study remains uncompromised (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). Further, by applying multiple methods, I reinforced the study's credibility, transferability, and confirmability, fortifying both its trustworthiness and rigor (Tracey, 2010).

Bracketing is a key technique I used to maintain qualitative rigor. This technique curtails the influence of pre-existing beliefs or ideas on the study's outcomes. Given my professional background with a demographic that reports experiencing moral injuries, coupled with a shared racial identification with the participants and my personal encounters with undue police violence, it is vital for me to bracket, or set aside, my prior knowledge and experiences during analysis. Though completely distancing myself from these experiences is unrealistic, I was committed to preventing them from distorting the data by utilizing a researcher journal.

Throughout the research process, my journal served as a tool for tracking audit trails, which in qualitative research, vouch for the authenticity and thoroughness of the research procedure (Carcary, 2020). Audit trails trace the journey from raw data collection to data interpretation (Carcary, 2020). Documenting this process ensured transparency, enhancing trustworthiness via confirmability. The journal not only chronicled the research process but also my personal reflections during data collection and analysis. It aided in introspection on potential biases or assumptions, guiding me in adopting a phenomenological reduction attitude. Lastly, to validate the research process's dependability, I sought consultation from a methodologist specializing in qualitative research.

Credibility

Credibility in research is attained through meticulous methods of data verification and participant engagement. During the study, I adopted several strategies to reinforce the credibility of the research findings. Initially, I continuously reviewed the gathered data to identify recurring patterns and insights across different participants, and I revisited the interview transcripts on multiple occasions to ensure a comprehensive analysis (Kallio et al., 2016).

Furthermore, I utilized triangulation methods and engaged in discussions with the participants to dig deeper into the identified themes, a practice known to enhance research credibility (Noble & Heale, 2019). As I conducted interviews, I used reflective statements to ascertain my understanding of the participants' responses without encouraging them to analyze the psychological depth of the themes, opting instead to gather their overall reactions (Pessoa et al., 2019).

To foster a more enriched analysis, member checking allowed me to share my emerging findings with the participants to ensure that I accurately conceptualized the essence of the participants accounts and captured the meaning of the participants lived experienced. As such, I encouraged participants to further explore the themes and provide additional insights, a process that can potentially augment the credibility of the study (Kornbluh, 2015). Member checking occurred in two forms: during the interview and after the IPA analysis process. During the interview, I sought clarification on the participants' accounts to ensure I was accurately grasping the entire narrative. Furthermore, during the analysis process, I emailed the participants an analysis of their accounts to obtain their feedback and ensure it was representative of their experiences and cultural worldview. Participants could also notify me if

they wanted to expand upon or alter the final report (Patton, 2014). Moreover, I maintained a cycle of revisiting transcripts and actively soliciting feedback from participants as a measure to preserve the authenticity of the study (Cope, 2013). Implementing these comprehensive strategies, which include repeated reviews of data, triangulation, and member checking, bolster confidence in the authenticity of the presented findings.

Confirmability

In qualitative research, confirmability is analogous to objectivity, and it is achieved when credibility, transferability, and dependability are established (Nyirenda et al., 2020). The researcher's responsibility is to maintain flexibility throughout the study and to remain receptive to how the results might develop (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). To achieve this, I avoided directing interviews. Instead, I adopted a passive approach, ensuring that the information collected genuinely represents the participant's perspective (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). To verify participant comprehension, I used reflection statements. Additionally, employing strategies like bracketing and maintaining a researcher's journal helped minimize the influence of my personal biases on the findings. Prioritizing aspects like confirmability, dependability, transferability, credibility, and rigor will contribute to the overall trustworthiness of the study.

Ethical Considerations

Before undertaking this study, I meet the ethical and legal requirements set by the University of Georgia's Institutional Review Board. To ensure participants' confidentiality, I employed pseudonyms, use fictitious details for identification, and store data on a password-protected drive. In qualitative studies, participants often share personal and sometimes controversial details about their lives (Sanjari et al., 2014). Therefore, I focused on establishing

rapport with each participant to gain their trust, ensuring they feel comfortable sharing personal insights. Additionally, obtaining informed consent is paramount in qualitative research to maintain ethical integrity (Sanjari et al., 2014). As such I clearly outline the nature of data collection and its intended use beforehand.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I embarked on a comprehensive exploration of the profound issue of undue police violence towards Black citizens. I particularly focused on the unique experiences of Black male police officers. These Black male officers often find themselves at the intersection of their racial, gender, and professional identities. They grapple with moral injury as they witness or become indirectly involved in acts of undue violence against members of the Black community. Through a qualitative research design, the study delved deep into the lived experiences of these Black male officers as I aimed to shed light on the internal conflicts, moral dilemmas, and psychological ramifications they face.

I provided readers with a detailed overview of the research methodology, from how I selected participants to our methods of data collection and analysis. I elucidated the rationale behind adopting a qualitative design, emphasizing its appropriateness in capturing the nuanced emotions and perceptions of the Black male officers. Furthermore, I discussed the positionality statement, theoretical perspective, and philosophical assumptions that underpin our study. This discussion offers insights into our unique perspective as researchers and the theoretical foundations that guide our research.

The significance of the study cannot be overstated. By centering the voices and experiences of Black male police officers, my research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the complexities of policing in racially charged environments. The insights

from the study have the potential to inform policy decisions, counselors, counselor educators, police training programs, and community engagement initiatives, ultimately fostering a more just and equitable society.

As I move to the next chapter, readers can expect a thorough examination of the study's findings. Through the voices and narratives of the Black male officers, I will explore how Black male police officer make sense of and interpret the multifaceted challenges, dilemmas, and emotions they experience in the face of undue police violence. The upcoming chapter promises to be both enlightening and thought-provoking, offering a fresh perspective on the pressing societal issue of moral injury relating to undue police violence towards Black citizens.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The primary objective of this study was to explore the phenomenon of moral injury among Black male police officers who witness undue police violence against Black citizens, employing an Interpretative Phenomenology Analysis (IPA) approach. Importantly, by examining the detailed accounts of seven Black male police officers' experiences with moral injury, this research aimed to shed light on these complex experiences through the perspectives of the participants themselves, thereby honoring the essence of qualitative research. As such, this chapter unveils the findings of the interpretative phenomenological analysis, which was meticulously conducted through an intersectionality lens, to address the pivotal research question at hand: How do Black male police officers interpret and make sense of their experiences of moral injury in relation to undue police violence towards Black citizens?

Participants

I conducted semi-structured interviews lasting between 60 to 90 minutes via Zoom with seven Black male police officers in the state of Georgia, including both active and retired officers. These officers reported experiencing moral injury from witnessing, failing to prevent, or participating in undue police violence against Black citizens. Out of the seven participants, five were active in their roles, while two were retired. Regarding the incidents of undue police violence, five participants reported that their incidents took place in the South, one on the West Coast, and one in the Midwest. To ensure privacy, each participant was provided with a pseudonym to maintain confidentiality and protect their identity. In terms of demographics, the

participants of this study's ages ranged from 26 to 61 with a mean age of 38. Furthermore, the number of years in law enforcement ranged from 5 to 21. Four of the seven participants provided feedback regarding themes found with their respective interviews, corresponding with me by email. Three of the participants did not respond to my effort to contact them for an email discussion around the found themes. To gather preliminary data, participants completed an open-response questionnaire using Qualtrics (Appendix D) prior to the interview in addition to the Moral Injury Outcome Scale (MIOS) that assessed for symptoms of moral injury.

Presentation of Findings

Adhering to the guidelines of IPA, Table 2 portrays the four primary and twelve subthemes generated during the data analysis stage, along with identifying participants' presence within each theme. In this chapter, I provide an in-depth interpretative analysis of the primary and subthemes that represent the lived experiences of seven Black male police officers, along with the corresponding supporting segments from participant interview transcripts. The four primary and twelve subthemes (Table 2) emerged through the participants' rich, descriptive responses to the sixteen interview questions (Appendix D). With the participants' rich, descriptive narratives, I was able to capture Black male police officers' awareness of time frames (e.g., past, present, and future experiences) and comparisons within those time frames. I acknowledged convergence (similarities between cases) and divergence (differences between cases) within each theme. To examine the themes, I focused on the philosophical foundations of IPA (e.g., Heidegger's hermeneutics, Idiography, and Husserl's phenomenology approach), which allowed me to highlight each theme and contextualize the meaning, value, and sense-making participants attributed to their experiences.

To honor the nature of qualitative research, the detailed accounts of Black male police officers' experiences with moral injury served to help me understand how to make sense of the findings from the lens of the participants. Engaged in how Black male police officers made sense of their experiences of moral injury, the four primary and twelve subthemes supported with verbatim extracts from participants are presented below.

Table 2

Themes

Theme	Subtheme
Systemic Racism and Bias	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Personal experiences of racial profiling - Witnessing discriminatory practices - Impact on policing and community relations
Moral Injury and Moral Dilemmas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Specific incidents of undue force - Conflict between duty and moral beliefs - Emotional toll
Identity and Duality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Impact on personal relationships - Interactions with the community - Internal conflicts related to identity
Support Network and Strategies for Managing Stress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of Tailored Support - Personal strategies for coping - Discussions about mental health and well-being

Themes

Systemic Racism and Bias

The investigation into how Black male police officers interpret and make sense of their experiences of moral injury, particularly in relation to undue police violence towards Black citizens, unveils a complex interplay of systemic racism and bias. This theme is broken down into critical subthemes: (a) personal experiences of racial profiling, (b) witnessing discriminatory practices, and (c) impact on policing and community relations, that delineate the varied dimensions through which systemic racism impacts these officers both professionally and personally. The insights gained from their narratives illuminate the pervasive and

multifaceted nature of racial bias and discrimination within law enforcement, shedding light on the internal and external conflicts these officers navigate.

Personal Experiences of Racial Profiling

The personal experiences shared by Black male police officers regarding racial profiling highlight a significant contradiction within the law enforcement system. The participants' stories shed light on the pervasive issues of discrimination they encounter, echoing the research findings of Brunson and Miller (2006) on African American men's policing experiences, and further elaborated by Gau and Brunson (2010) on how systemic bias influences Black males' perceptions and interactions with policing. Despite holding positions of authority, Black male police officers are not shielded from the prejudices and systemic biases present in society. Their experiences with racial profiling, whether in uniform or not, reveal the deep-rooted racism that undermines their professional identity and sense of belonging. The profound moral conflict they experience, caught between their dedication to justice and the discriminatory practices they face and witness, is strikingly evident. Officer Lincoln's story, with his five years of service, poignantly captures this internal conflict, illustrating the struggle between his commitment to justice and the discrimination he has personally faced and observed. He shared a moment of painful realization, marked by feelings of alienation and disillusionment:

I remember being off duty, in plain clothes, and getting stopped. The assumption was I didn't belong in that neighborhood. It hits different when you realize that your badge doesn't exempt you from being racially profiled. It's a big reminder of the systemic issues we're entangled in.

Similarly, Officer Grant, who is a seven-year veteran in the police force expressed with a shameful tone a nuanced understanding of the systemic biases that extend beyond mere color, touching on the essence of trust and representation within the community. He articulates,

Every time we step out there, it's like the community's trust is hanging by a thread. When they see us—especially Black officers—they expect different, but the system's bias ain't just about color. It's deeper, man. It affects how we're seen, how we operate, and that trust we're trying so hard to build.

The narratives shared by participants resonate deeply with Crenshaw's 1989 concept of intersectionality. This approach is crucial for understanding the complex and compounded experiences faced by Black male police officers, such as Officer Lincoln and Officer Grant, due to racial profiling. Their personal stories illuminate a striking contradiction within law enforcement culture. Beyond merely exposing systemic racism, these accounts reveal the complex layers of discrimination that not even those in positions of authority, who are committed to justice, can evade. This stark reality underscores a profound challenge: the pervasive impact of racial profiling affects not just their professional identities and sense of belonging within their communities, but also leads to an internal struggle between their dedication to their roles and the biases they encounter, illustrating the deep and multifaceted effects of racial profiling.

Witnessing Discriminatory Practices

The narratives of Black male police officers who have observed discriminatory practices against Black citizens by their colleagues provide insight into the systemic nature of racism within law enforcement. The participants' observations of undue violence and bias not only reinforced the officers' awareness of systemic racism but also intensified their experiences of

moral injury. Witnessing such acts was found to contradict their values and commitment to justice, challenging their sense of belonging within the force. This subtheme underscores how the direct observation of racial discrimination shapes officers' interpretations of their roles and the moral dilemmas they face, further complicating their sense of identity and duty. Officer Jared, retired from the police force with twenty-two years of experience, shared with frustration and disappointment how witnessing such discriminatory acts impacted him by stating, "I've watched young Black kids get treated harsher, suspicion coming quicker. It's a cycle, man. They're seen as older, more guilty somehow. Breaking this mindset within the force is hard when it's been the norm for so long."

Adjacent to this perspective, Officer Matthew, who has been serving on the police force for twelve years, exhibited signs of frustration, his voice intensifying as he spoke. His agitated response underscores the internal struggle he faces, reflecting on the seemingly innocuous yet deeply concerning comments heard among his colleagues regarding a Black youth "fitting the profile." He directly addressed the issue, saying:

Bro, my first partner openly talked about 'fitting the profile.' It was like a joke to him, but that shit wasn't funny to me. Hearing that inside these walls, it's a clear sign we've got a long road ahead in changing attitudes. It's not just about one officer; it's about a culture that's been deeply ingrained, where biases are passed down like heirlooms, unchallenged and unquestioned. Every shift I work, it's a battle not just against crime, but against the stereotypes and prejudices that sneak into decisions, tainting our duty with injustice.

In alignment with officers Jared and Matthews, officer Jeffrey, who has been serving as a police officer for four years, stated with a sense of exhaustion and sorrow:

Man, it's like every day I'm stuck in this tug-of-war in my head. On one hand, I got this promise I made to protect and serve everybody, no matter what. But then, there's this messed-up vibe of racism that's just... everywhere in the force. It makes living up to that promise feel like chasing a ghost. It's tough, you know? Seeing some of the folks I work with just brush off stuff that's clearly not right. It's got me all kinds of twisted, wondering if just being here is making any kind of difference. We ain't just up against a few bad moments here and there; it's this whole big system that keeps rolling on the same, hurtful track no matter what we do. It hits you right in the gut, makes you question why you even started. But I'm here, trying to fight not just the outside crime, but all these shadows of bias and hate that sneak into how we do our jobs. That's the real fight, man.

The firsthand accounts and experiences shared by Black male police officers regarding discriminatory practices they have witnessed against Black citizens within the law enforcement system resonate with the systemic analysis presented by Okere & Bush (2023) and McBride (2022), who draw parallels between historical and modern-day systemic racism in law enforcement. Their research underscores the continuation of these issues and frames the officers' experiences within a broader context of enduring systemic challenges, further validating the systemic nature of racism in law enforcement as depicted through the officers' narratives. The accounts of Officers Jared, Matthew, and Jeffrey not only reveal the external discrimination they witness but also the internal conflict they endure, highlighting a cultural and systemic problem that extends beyond individual bias and calls for a fundamental reevaluation of policing practices and cultures.

Impact on Policing and Community Relations

Research by Papazoglou et al. (2020) significantly deepens the understanding of the complex dynamics that Black male police officers navigate. Importantly, the concept of moral injury, which Papazoglou and colleagues explore, traditionally associated with military contexts, is revealed to be profoundly relevant for law enforcement officers. This revelation becomes especially poignant when considering the additional layers of systemic racism that these officers confront, both within the institutions they serve and in the communities they protect. Consequently, the cumulative effect of personal experiences of racial profiling and witnessing discriminatory practices severely impacts the relationship between Black male police officers and the communities they serve, further complicating officers' experiences of moral injury.

Moreover, Black male police officers find themselves at the intersection of systemic racism and their commitment to policing, struggling with the erosion of trust and respect from both their professional peers and the community. The subtheme "Impact on Policing and Community Relations" highlights how systemic racism and bias hinder their ability to effectively serve and protect, exacerbating the moral injury they experience. Furthermore, several of the officers reflected on how policing Black communities contributes to feelings of internal disgust, guilt, and shame. For instance, Officer Jeffrey stated, "Community events, we're there to bridge gaps, right? But sometimes, the tension is thick. You feel the stares, the distrust. It's a struggle, knowing you represent an institution that hasn't always been fair to your own people." Officer Adams, who is in his fifth year of service, echoed Officer Jeffrey's sentiments by expressing that his encounters with racism and bias are marked by feelings of guilt and responsibility. He highlighted how these experiences shape his perspective:

On one hand, I'm out here trying to do good, be that change. But then, there's this heavy feeling, like I'm betraying my own. Rolling through the hood, especially, it's tough. You feel those eyes on you, filled with hurt and doubt. It's like, I'm trying to show I'm different, but that badge... it's got a history, you know? It's hard to shake off. Trying to win back trust from my people, while also dealing with the system's mess, it's a lot. It's not just about policing no more; it's about healing wounds that go way back, and sometimes, it feels like I'm caught in the middle, trying to be true to both sides. It's a heavy load, for real.

The theme of Systemic Racism and Bias intricately ties into the research question, offering a detailed framework for analyzing Black male police officers' perceptions and understandings of their experiences with moral injury amidst systemic racism and excessive violence against Black citizens. This connection highlights the importance of subthemes in exploring the complex dynamics at play. It allows for a deeper understanding of the officers' experiences and the broader implications of systemic racism.

Moral Injury and Moral Dilemmas

The theme of Moral Injury and Moral Dilemmas sheds light on the profound emotional and psychological challenges encountered by Black male police officers amidst excessive police violence against Black citizens. This complex theme, rooted in a history of systemic racism and policing practices dating back to the 1700s with the inception of "Slave Patrols" (Okere & Bush, 2023), explores the intricate balance between duty, loyalty, and personal ethics. It is within this historical and societal framework that we examine the specific incidents of undue force, the conflict between duty and moral beliefs, and the emotional toll these experiences exert on officers.

Specific Incidents of Undue Force

The historical context provided by Okere & Bush (2023) illuminates the enduring nature of police violence, highlighting its systemic roots. This backdrop is crucial for understanding the specific incidents of undue force that Black male officers face, often putting them in positions where their actions or inactions contradict their moral and ethical beliefs. The theme of Moral Injury and Moral Dilemmas in Black male police officers explores their profound emotional and psychological struggles as they face moral challenges and internal conflicts arising from police violence against Black citizens. It is examined through three interconnected subthemes, which collectively reveal how these officers navigate the complexities of loyalty, duty, and personal ethics amidst societal expectations and their own identities. This framework sets the stage for a deep dive into specific incidents of undue force, showcasing the moral dilemmas and the emotional toll these situations impose on Black male officers. Through personal accounts, such as those of Officers James, Adams, Grant, and Matthews, the theme illustrates the painful reality of being forced to witness or partake in actions that contradict their moral values. The participants' narratives highlight the struggle to maintain moral integrity while fulfilling the demands of their roles, shedding light on the broader issue of how systemic injustices and personal ethics clash, profoundly impacting these officers' lives and their perception of justice. Among these narratives, officer James, who is in his ninth year on the police force, tearfully recounted an incident where he saw a fellow officer hit a handcuffed Black woman, a violation of the justice and protection principles he swore to uphold. Officer James expressed:

The weight of what I've seen, what I've had to do—it don't just disappear at the end of my shift. It sticks, eats at you. You start questioning if you're part of the solution or just

another cog in the problem. That kind of thinking, it's heavy, takes a toll on you, on your spirit.

Similarly, Officer Adams, a fifth year Veteran police officer shared a disturbing encounter, witnessing the use of excessive force on a young Black individual accused of a minor offense. He articulates the deep sense of helplessness, loss of faith in humanity, loss of pride in himself, and feeling disgusted stemming from his inability to intervene due to fear of repercussions, despite wearing the same uniform. He stated:

That time I saw a young Black kid getting roughed up by another officer over something small, it just broke me. There I was, in the same uniform, feeling totally useless because I knew stepping in would only backfire on me. It's like a deep cut that won't heal bro. Knowing what's right and what you're supposed to do are worlds apart sometimes... which most people won't understand.. It made me lose faith in what we're doing, lose respect for myself, and just feel sick to my stomach. It's hard to see any good in all this mess.

Officer Grant, reflecting on a distressing incident where he witnessed undue force being used on a suspect, spoke with a heavy heart as he was visibly shaking, saying:

I can't shake off the weight of what I saw, the conflict between what I know is right and what I'm expected to do. It's a burden that lingers, gnawing at my conscience. You start to question your role, wondering if you're truly serving justice or just perpetuating injustice. It's a struggle that weighs on your soul, impacting not just your job but your entire being.

Officer Matthews recounted a specific incident that shook him to his core, where he witnessed a fellow officer employing undue force against a suspect. He shared:

That day I saw a brother getting' roughed up for no good reason, man, it broke me. I mean, we wear the same uniform, but I felt helpless, scared to step in cause I knew it'd come back on me. It's like a wound that just won't close, you know? Knowing' what's right and what you're 'supposed to do, it's like they're from two different worlds sometimes... which most folks don't get. It tore me up, I lost a piece of myself that day.

Instances in which participants are confronted with witnessing or being compelled to participate in actions that go against their moral principles not only cause immediate moral harm but also deeply affect the psyche of Black male police officers, casting doubt on their moral compass and eroding their trust in the justice system they uphold. The psychological impact of such incidents, as explored by Green et al. (2023), reveals the deep emotional scars left on the participants, further complicating their internal moral dilemmas. Consequently, these experiences leave a lasting impression, challenging their beliefs about what is just and ethical. The toll extends beyond the moment, influencing how they make sense of and interpret their role in law enforcement and their place within society.

Conflict Between Duty and Moral Beliefs

The dual identity of Black male police officers, navigating between their professional roles and personal racial identities, is a critical aspect of the “Conflict Between Duty and Moral Beliefs” subtheme. Discussions by Paul & Birzer (2017) and Skogan & Frydl (2004) on police culture and its impact offer insights into how organizational norms and values can exacerbate moral dilemmas, illustrating the difficult choices Black male officers make in situations where their duties conflict with their ethical convictions. The narratives shared by the participants vividly capture the internal struggle between professional obligations and personal ethical convictions. This dichotomy is starkly presented in moments when the demands of their roles

clash with their moral compasses. Officer Grant recounted a particularly resonant experience, painting a scene that remains etched in his memory:

Man, I can still see that day clear as day. It was way past midnight, streets empty, just us and the night. We pulled over this car, thinking it's just another routine stop. But something felt off the moment we stepped up to it. The dude driving was young, a brother, and man, was he shook. My partner digs out this small bag of weed from the glove box. Protocol says we book him right then and there. But looking into his eyes, I saw more than just scare. It was like he was screaming for a lifeline, telling us this could wreck his whole life over a mistake. Said he was just trying to get by. And damn, if that didn't hit home. I mean, we've all been in tight spots, right? The law's one thing, but right there, it was about what felt right. Arresting him? That wouldn't be justice. That'd just be us adding to the pile of crap he's already dealing with. And it got me, man. Made me see myself in him. These kinds of moments, they stick with you, make you rethink everything we're out here doing.

Similarly, Officer Matthews shared an encounter that tested his convictions:

So, one night, we roll up on these teens in an alley. Protocol says we gotta step in, but when this girl's trembling, begging for a break, I see a scared kid, not some criminal. It's like a tug of war, duty pulling one way, my heart the other. Would cuffing her really do justice, or just make things worse? moments, man, they make me doubt not just my moves, but the whole system we're in.

Officer Jared added to this chorus of contemplation:

One time, we find this homeless Black dude in the park with a bottle. He ain't a threat, just a guy who's been chewed up by life. It's like my job's yanking one way, my feelings

the other. Would slapping him with a ticket really help, or just kick him down harder? It's a constant battle, trying to balance what I gotta do with what feels right.

The shared experiences of Officers Grant, Matthews, and Jared shed light on the profound ethical dilemmas faced by Black male police officers. Their stories are not just about the conflict between duty and moral belief but also about the intersection of their professional identity with their racial and personal identities. These narratives reveal the complexity of their roles in law enforcement, where they are often compelled to navigate a path that straddles the line between enforcing the law and honoring their sense of justice and humanity. This balancing act not only questions the integrity of their decisions but also impacts their sense of purpose and connection to the communities they vow to serve, underscoring a pivotal facet of their experience within the law enforcement paradigm.

Emotional Toll

The framework for moral injury, as outlined by Bartzak, (2015), Litz, (2009), and Shay, (2011), serves as a critical foundation for examining the "Emotional Toll" subtheme. This framework sheds light on the deep-seated inner conflict experienced by officers who engage in or witness actions that clash with their moral and ethical values. By integrating this concept, the complexity of their emotional suffering is underscored, providing a perspective to understand the psychological impact of such dilemmas. These encounters cumulatively exert a substantial emotional burden on officers, affecting their mental health and overall well-being. The constant struggle with moral challenges and the ensuing moral injury may lead to isolation, guilt, and a sense of disillusionment. All participants highlighted the difficulty of managing these feelings, especially in a culture that often views vulnerability negatively and discourages open conversations about mental health. During the interview with Officer Lincoln, he stated:

Bruh, there's this constant battle inside, you know? What the job requires versus what your heart tells you is right. Times when orders don't sit right with your soul, but stepping out of line could mean consequences. It's like being stuck between a rock and a hard place.

Officer James reflected on the constant emotional and mental drain he underwent, highlighting the contrast between his expected role and internal reality, stating: "Every call, every scene, it's like it chips away at you. You're supposed to be this pillar of strength, but inside, you're just screaming for a break. It's exhausting, man."

Officer Grant discussed the pressure to suppress emotions and the negative stigma around seeking help within the force, which aggravates the emotional toll. "There's this expectation to just shake it off, to move on to the next case without blinking. But how can you? These moments, they haunt you. And talking about it? That's a quick way to get labeled as weak or not a part of the blue." Officer Lincoln spoke to the broader issue of the workplace culture in law enforcement that often neglects the emotional well-being of its Black officers, underscoring the need for a support system that genuinely addresses mental health: "I've seen colleagues, good people, crumble under the weight. It's not just the job; it's the silence, the lack of understanding from those who are supposed to have your back."

The emotional toll is further exacerbated by the lack of adequate support systems within the police force for Black male police officers grappling with these complex issues was highlighted as a contributing factor by Officer Adams as he stated: "Bruh, they don't care about how we truly feel. They ask me a couple of questions to check the box which is mainly a formality to clear me to come back to work."

The stories shared by Officer Lincoln, James, and Officer Adams offer a deep dive into their inner lives, revealing how they grapple with the clash between their professional duties and their own ethical beliefs. The participants describe experiencing intense isolation, weighed down by guilt, and an increasing disenchantment, all amidst an environment that appears to overlook their psychological and emotional well-being. For these Black male officers, the stress and solitude faced are even more acute. Such intensified distress stems from systemic shortcomings in the police department that fail to properly support their mental health and general welfare.

Identity and Duality

The theme of Identity and Duality explores the intricate relationship between being a Black male and serving as a police officer, shedding light on its effects on personal relationships, community engagement, and internal struggles with identity. It underscores the distinct challenges Black male police officers encounter, as they strive to reconcile their racial identity with their duties in law enforcement. This exploration is crucial for grasping the delicate equilibrium they must maintain between their personal and professional lives.

Impact on Personal Relationships

The historical context of police violence and systemic racism discussed by Okere & Bush, (2023) and McBride, (2022) underscores the societal backdrop against which Black male officers navigate their dual identities. The intersection of professional duty and racial identity profoundly shapes the personal spheres of Black male police officers, casting a complex shadow over their relationships with family, friends, and the broader Black community. Consequently, the officers in this research study shared heartfelt reflections on the intricacies of embodying dual identities, which frequently place them at the crossroads of communal

belonging and professional obligations. Officer Adams delved into the nuanced reality of his dual existence, highlighting the tension it brews within his closest circles:

Being a Black dude in uniform means walking through a maze of contradictions. To my folks and friends, sometimes I look like I'm part of a system that doesn't really care about what we go through. Balancing all this is like doing a tightrope walk, trying to prove that I can stay true to my roots and still be committed to my job.

Echoing this sentiment, Officer James spoke to the magnified scrutiny he faces, a reflection of the broader societal gaze:

Feels like I'm always under the microscope, whether I'm in my uniform or just being me. When I'm hanging with the fam, the vibe gets heavy, like everyone's got a million questions about the cop life, but no one's speaking up. It's like I'm this unofficial spokesman, caught in the middle trying to make peace between my job and the worries of my people. And let me tell you, getting side-eye from both sides ain't easy.

The narratives underscore a recurring theme: the delicate act of balancing between two worlds, each with its own set of expectations and apprehensions. This duality often seeds feelings of isolation or division among Black male officers, as they strive to remain integral to their community while fulfilling their professional commitments. The participants' stories reveal a deeper dialogue about identity, belonging, and the nuanced realities of their roles both within and outside the force.

Interactions with the Community

According to Okada et al. (2018), the difficulties faced in building trust within communities are intensified by existing institutional norms that are often in conflict with efforts to foster community trust. Burt (2018) elaborates that these systemic biases do more than just

strain the relationships between law enforcement and the communities they serve; they also exacerbate the ethical challenges confronting officers. The personal stories of those involved reveal the complex interactions between Black male police officers and the communities to which they have pledged their service. These narratives highlight the multifaceted hurdles in establishing trust and rapport amidst systemic racism and following high-profile cases of police brutality. The participants, embodying roles both within law enforcement and their communities, find themselves in a peculiar position that could potentially narrow the gap between the police and the Black community. Nevertheless, this dual identity subjects them to heightened scrutiny and imposes a complicated set of expectations on them.

The narratives shared by the participants reveal a profound internal conflict and societal pressure, emphasizing the delicate balance they navigate daily. Officer Matthew, for instance, vividly described this balancing act:

In the community, there's a constant internal struggle. You're torn between being an enforcer of the law and being someone who shares and understands the community's struggles. This endeavor to bridge the gap, to remain true to one's principles while serving justly, feels like walking a tightrope. As a Black man wearing the uniform, you find yourself navigating a world where you're perceived as a target by both the community and some colleagues.

Officer Jared, in his reflection, further illuminates the complexities of being a Black police officer. He articulated the ongoing effort to establish his legitimacy and build understanding:

Serving as a Black officer today involves a continuous journey of proving oneself. In the community, you're faced with the expectation to empathize due to shared experiences of

adversity. At the same time, there's a fear that wearing the badge signifies a betrayal of those very experiences. My daily mission is to demonstrate that I am committed to being a bridge for positive change, even when faced with doubt from the community I aim to protect and from fellow officers.

The personal narratives, imbued with deep emotion and insight, offer a profound look into the intricate relationship between Black police officers and the communities they serve. By highlighting the officers' distinctive challenges and goals, the stories emphasize the continuous journey toward achieving a harmonious balance. This quest seeks acceptance and mutual respect, navigating the complex dynamics of race, responsibility, and community involvement.

Internal Conflicts Related to Identity

The theme of Identity and Duality strikingly captures the internal struggle officers face in reconciling their personal and professional identities. This conflict is further intensified when considering the intersections of their racial and gender identities, as Singer et al. (2019) point out. Specifically, the ethical and moral quandaries deepen for officers who must navigate the duality of being a Black man in America and a law enforcement officer. Moreover, the participants described the cognitive dissonance of enforcing laws in a system that disproportionately targets their community. A prime illustration was reflected in officer Lincoln's comment:

Inside, it's like you're always trying to reconcile these two parts of yourself. The Black man who knows the pain and the struggle, and the officer sworn to uphold the law, sometimes from the very system that don't always play fair with people who look like you.

Officer Jeffrey shared his inner turmoil, highlighting the complex dynamics of his dual identity:

There's this internal conflict that never quite settles. As a Black man, I've experienced firsthand the mistrust and fear of police. Now, as an officer, I'm part of the system I've once criticized. It's an ongoing dialogue within myself, trying to reconcile these two identities—wanting to be a force for positive change within the police force while not forgetting the injustices that my community, and even I personally, have faced. It's a balancing act of staying true to my roots while navigating a profession that is often viewed with skepticism by those with a shared heritage.

In navigating the intersection of their racial and professional identities, Black male police officers engage in a process of constant negotiation and sense-making. They articulate a nuanced understanding of their dual roles, recognizing the inherent tensions and contradictions. For example, Officer Adams' reflection on the complexity of embodying both a proud Black identity and a commitment to policing captures a deep internal dialogue. These officers are acutely aware of the delicate balance they must strike, not just in their personal relationships, which can become strained due to the dual identities they hold, but also in their broader engagements with the community they serve. The participants perceive their position as both a challenge and an opportunity to serve as bridges within their communities, despite the skepticism and scrutiny they face. This sense-making process reveals a profound consciousness of the systemic issues at play and a personal commitment to navigating these complexities with integrity. Officers like Matthew and Lincoln illustrate a self-awareness and a strategic approach to their roles, attempting to reconcile the dissonance between the societal expectations placed on them and their own personal and community affiliations. The participants' reflections signal

a critical engagement with their identities, highlighting a deep-seated resilience and a purposeful endeavor to redefine what it means to be both a Black man and a police officer in America.

Support Network and Strategies for Managing Stress

The theme of Support System and Coping Mechanisms explores how Black male police officers navigate the psychological and emotional challenges that arise from their unique experiences within the law enforcement system. This theme, represented by the subthemes (a) lack of tailored support, (b) personal strategies for coping, and (c) discussions about mental health and well-being, is particularly significant in understanding the resilience and vulnerability of these officers as they confront systemic racism, moral injury, and the complexities of their dual identity.

Lack of Tailored Support

Okere & Bush (2023) explored the nuanced layers of systemic barriers, intricately tied to the racialized legacy of law enforcement, shedding light on the notably deficient provision of specialized support for Black officers. The study uncovers an emotional narrative: The experiences shared by the participants underscore a conspicuous void in tailored support mechanisms, precipitating a sense of solitude and forsakenness among them, particularly in navigating the psychological toll of racial stressors and trauma. Officer James shared his insights with intense seriousness, "It's clear as day there's not enough backing for Black officers... It's like folks don't really get the different battles we're facing. Feels like you're on your own, trying to tough it out by yourself."

Officer Jared, in reflecting upon the intricate challenges that mark his dual identity as a Black man and a police officer, revealed:

Feeling the gap between what the department says it's about and what goes down every day really hits you with a sense of being on your own. It's like you're stuck between two worlds that just don't match up, making that feeling of being alone even stronger.

Similarly, Officer Matthews voiced the intricacies of his position. "Being a Black man in my job, there's a real gap – it's like folks don't get each other, and that support we need? It's missing, and man, it's tough."

The glaring lack of support for Black male officers transcends simple oversight, emerging as a symptom of systemic failure that echoes wider patterns of racial insensitivity and denial within the policing culture. Through the interpretative phenomenological analysis lens, the stark absence of support initiatives tailored to the unique adversities faced by these officers not only becomes evident but is seen as exacerbating their feelings of alienation. This in turn intensifies the occupational stress they face, situating their experiences within a broader context of institutional neglect and racial discord. This narrative not only highlights their struggles but also calls into question the structural mechanisms of support within law enforcement, underscoring an urgent need for systemic change and a reevaluation of the support provided to officers navigating the complexities of race and duty.

Personal Strategies for Coping

In an environment where institutional support falls short of addressing the unique pressures faced by law enforcement officers, especially those navigating racial dynamics, the individuals in this study have charted their own courses towards resilience. The adaptation of personal coping mechanisms by officers, as narrated by the participants, can be seen as efforts to mitigate moral injuries arising from systemic racism and their dual identities. The act of giving back to the community and seeking solace in personal hobbies is reflective of the

strategies mentioned by Ohnishi et al. (2019), aimed at addressing moral injury through acts of commission and omission, allowing officers to reconcile their moral conflicts.

When discussing the coping with moral injury due to undue police violence towards Black citizens, Officer Jared captures the essence of this individual journey towards equilibrium by stating:

The job's stress hits different for us. Without a support system that gets the racial aspect, it's like dealing with two battles. I find peace and healing in being able to give back to my community. Whether it be participating in charity pick-up basketball games or picking up trash on my day off... it reconnects me with why I became an officer.

Echoing Jared's sentiments, Officer Adam delves into the solitude of seeking peace amidst systemic oversights. He reflects:

Being a Black cop, you got to find your own peace because the department doesn't always get what you're going through, especially with race stuff. So, I do my own thing to stay cool. Helping out in the community, playing some charity basketball, or just cleaning up the neighborhood, it's all about feeling connected again and remembering why I took this job.

In Officer Grant's experience, there is similar acknowledgment of the limitations within departmental support structures. Officer Grant shares:

You learn quickly that the department's help isn't always enough, so you got to make your own way. For me, it's about hanging out with my family, getting into my hobbies, or doing something good for the folks around me. It's these little things that keep me grounded, help me deal with the job and the extra weight of being Black in uniform.

Following the same theme, Officer Lincoln reiterates the imperative of self-strategy in coping with the layered challenges of the profession, accentuated by racial dynamics:

I had to come up with my own game plan to handle the stress, because the department doesn't always cover what it's like dealing with racial issues. Getting involved in the community, whether it's through mentoring or just lending a hand, that's what keeps me going. It's about making a difference, finding that balance, and reminding myself why I'm here.

Collectively, these narratives not only spotlight the adaptability and resilience of Black male police officers but also cast a spotlight on the pressing need for systemic reform. This disparity underscores an urgent call for a paradigm shift—a move towards equipping officers with comprehensive support mechanisms that acknowledge and address the full breadth of their experiences, thereby nurturing their well-being and enhancing their effectiveness within the community.

Discussions about Mental Health and Well-Being

The exploration of moral injury in police work, particularly the psychological distress that arises from events contradicting officers' moral beliefs (Papazoglou et al., 2019), underscores the mental health challenges Black male officers face. This challenge is compounded by the dual identities of being a Black man and a police officer, where the pressures of policing and societal expectations create a unique set of stressors (Paul & Birzer, 2017; Godsil & Richardson, 2017). The reluctance to discuss mental health issues, as highlighted by the narratives of the officers, reflects the broader cultural and organizational barriers that stigmatize seeking help. Embedded within their narratives are the entrenched stigmas surrounding mental health discussions, both within law enforcement circles and the

broader Black community, which hinder officers from acknowledging and seeking help for their struggles. Officer Matthews articulates the intersectional challenges that come along with being a Black male police officer, noting:

Talking about mental health really isn't a thing in our world, especially for Black officers. There's a lot of stigmas about it in our community, and when you throw in how being tough is seen as a big deal in law enforcement, it makes it even harder to ask for help. I've learned it's important to look for support outside the force, in places where people get the kind of double pressure we face.

Echoing Officer Matthews' concerns, Officer Adam delves into the isolation that stems from straddling the worlds of law enforcement and the Black community:

Being an officer and a Black man puts you in this unique spot where it feels like you're straddling two worlds. At work, you're expected to uphold this image of invincibility, and in the community, showing vulnerability is often seen as weakness. It's like you're constantly wearing armor that you can't take off. I've found that opening up to a therapist, someone outside of these circles, helps me navigate these pressures without feeling like I'm compromising my identity or duty.

Furthermore, Officer James reflects on the cultural barriers that exacerbate the challenge of discussing mental health issues:

In our community, there's this unspoken rule that you don't air your personal struggles, especially as a man. It's even more compounded in law enforcement, where there's this bravado, this unyielding facade of toughness. Admitting you're struggling with mental health can feel like you're betraying both these unspoken codes. But I've come to realize that acknowledging the need for help is a form of bravery. It's not about airing dirty

laundry; it's about seeking the support you need to stay strong for yourself and those you serve.

The participants narratives highlight the significant challenges Black male police officers face regarding mental health and well-being. It brings attention to the prevalent stigma against openly addressing mental health issues within both law enforcement and the Black communities. The negative perception and reluctance to discuss mental health acts as a barrier to seeking support, clashing with traditional views on masculinity and the expectation of toughness prevalent in police culture.

Chapter Summary

Ultimately, the current study sheds light on the multifaceted experiences of Black male police officers, highlighting systemic racism, moral injury, identity duality, and the challenges these officers face within law enforcement. The findings reveal that despite their roles, Black male police officers are not exempt from the racial profiling and discrimination that pervade society. Black male police officers' narratives of personal experiences with racial profiling, both in and out of uniform, underscore the pervasive nature of systemic racism that challenges their professional identity and sense of belonging, leading to significant moral injury as they grapple with the dissonance between their commitment to justice and the discriminatory practices they witness and experience.

Furthermore, the emotional and psychological turmoil resulting from ethical dilemmas, such as witnessing undue force or being torn between duty and moral beliefs, emphasizes the profound moral injury Black male police officers endure. These ethical quandaries lead to feelings of guilt, isolation, and disillusionment, underscoring the complex internal conflicts faced by Black male police officers. The theme of Identity and Duality delves into the

complexities of balancing dual identities as both Black men and police officers. This balance affects personal relationships, community interactions, and internal identity, often resulting in feelings of isolation and scrutiny. The participants' narratives highlight the struggle to maintain personal integrity and a sense of belonging within their professional and community spheres.

The study also brings to light the reliance on personal coping strategies due to the lack of adequate support systems for Black male police officers. The absence of tailored support exacerbates feelings of isolation, revealing a significant gap in institutional support mechanisms. Overall, the findings illuminate the critical challenges Black male police officers face, marked by systemic racism, ethical conflicts, identity struggles, and insufficient support, all contributing to the complex landscape of moral injury and psychological strain within the law enforcement profession.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The current study aimed to investigate the complex, often harrowing experiences of Black male police officers facing the moral quandaries arising from undue police violence towards Black citizens. Utilizing the nuanced lens of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) alongside the critical framework of intersectionality, it sought to uncover the layers of meaning and conflict that these officers navigate daily. The guiding research question was: How do Black male police officers interpret and make sense of their experiences of moral injury in relation to undue police violence towards Black citizens? The integration of IPA and intersectionality facilitated a comprehensive exploration into the subjective experiences of the participants, highlighting the multifaceted nature of their identities and how these intersecting identities frame their understanding of moral injury within the context of their professional roles and societal injustices.

Furthermore, the combination of IPA and intersectionality was instrumental in threading together the interpretation of the study's findings. Intersectionality allowed for the acknowledgment of the multiple, overlapping identities and social locations of Black male police officers, providing a rich backdrop against which their experiences of moral injury could be understood. Concurrently, IPA offered a methodological approach focused on in-depth exploration, capturing the nuanced ways in which participants made sense of their moral conflicts and injuries. This dual approach illuminated the complexity of the officers' experiences, revealing not just the nature of their moral injuries but also the intricate processes

through which they make sense of these experiences in the face of undue violence against Black citizens.

From the detailed analysis, four primary themes emerged, each encompassing three subthemes, to thoroughly address the central research question. These themes and subthemes provided a structured, yet rich narrative form, mapping the intricate contours of moral injury as experienced by the participants. This discussion delves into an in-depth analysis of the study's findings, seamlessly connecting back to the literature presented in Chapter two. By doing so, it not only revisits the academic discourse on police violence and racial injustice but also embeds the study's findings within a broader context, highlighting the psychological impact on officers caught at the intersection of race and duty.

Drawing upon the rich qualitative data and the frameworks of IPA and intersectionality, this section of the dissertation offers profound insights into the lived realities of Black male police officers. It situates these insights within a broader societal and professional context, emphasizing the significance of the findings for understanding the dynamics of moral injury in law enforcement. Additionally, the implications of the study's findings for policy and practice, especially within the realm of counselor education and training, are outlined. By foregrounding the experiences of Black male police officers and the complexities surrounding moral injury, the study calls for nuanced, culturally competent approaches to counseling and support, aiming to enhance the well-being of officers and, by extension, the communities they serve.

Moreover, the limitations of this qualitative study are thoughtfully examined. Qualitative research inherently focuses on depth over breadth, offering rich, detailed insights at the expense of broader generalizability. While this approach limits the applicability of the findings across different contexts, it underscores the value of deep contextual understanding in

interpreting and applying the insights gained. This limitation prompts a reflection on the importance of nuanced research approaches in capturing the complexities of human experiences, especially in contexts laden with moral and ethical tensions.

Finally, the discussion proposes recommendations for future research informed by this study's findings. The intricate interplay of race, identity, and profession uncovered through this research highlights a clear need for further exploration into the experiences of moral injury among law enforcement officers from diverse backgrounds. Expanding the scope of inquiry to include a wider range of experiences and perspectives would not only enrich the understanding of the challenges faced but also identify opportunities for addressing moral injury in policing. This call for further research underlines the ongoing need to deepen our comprehension of the multifaceted issues at play, aiming to foster a more empathetic and effective approach to law enforcement in a diverse society.

Discussion of Research Findings

Discussion of Theme One: Systemic Racism and Bias

This primary theme explored seven participants' narratives to uncover how Black male police officers interpret and make sense of their experiences of moral injury, especially in relation to undue police violence towards Black citizens. The investigation reveals a complex interplay of systemic racism and bias, with critical subthemes that showcase the varied dimensions through which systemic racism impacts these officers, both professionally and personally. The insights derived from their stories illuminate the pervasive nature of racial bias and discrimination within law enforcement, highlighting the internal and external conflicts these officers face.

In the discussions about personal experiences of racial profiling, a significant contradiction within the law enforcement system emerges. Despite their authoritative positions, Black male police officers are not protected from societal prejudices and systemic biases. The stories shared regarding racial profiling, regardless of their uniform, underline the deep-seated racism that undermines their professional identity and sense of belonging. Officer Lincoln reflects on his personal encounter with racial profiling: "I remember being off duty, in plain clothes, and getting stopped. The assumption was I didn't belong in that neighborhood... It's a big reminder of the systemic issues we're entangled in." Similarly, Officer Grant discusses the broader implications of systemic biases, "Every time we step out there, it's like the community's trust is hanging by a thread... It's deeper, man. It affects how we're seen, how we operate." These experiences resonate with the findings of (Brunson & Miller, 2006; Gau & Brunson 2010), illustrating how systemic bias impacts Black males' perceptions and interactions with policing. Moreover, the application of Crenshaw's (1989) intersectionality theory is crucial for understanding the complex experiences of officers like Lincoln and Grant, shaped by racial profiling.

The conversation then shifts to the officers who have witnessed discriminatory practices against Black citizens by their colleagues, further highlighting the systemic nature of racism within law enforcement. Such observations not only reinforce their awareness of systemic racism but also amplify their experiences of moral injury. Officer Jared, with twenty-two years under his belt, shares, "I've watched young Black kids get treated harsher, suspicion coming quicker. It's a cycle, man." Officer Matthew adds his perspective on the casual yet deeply concerning biases within the force: "Hearing that inside these walls, it's a clear sign we've got a long road ahead in changing attitudes." These stories underscore the internal struggle faced by

officers, resonating with the systemic analysis of racism in law enforcement by researchers like (Okere & Bush, 2023; McBride 2022), who draw parallels between historical and modern systemic racism in policing.

The compounded effects of personal experiences with racial profiling and witnessing discriminatory practices deeply impact the relationship between Black male police officers and the communities they serve. This complicated dynamic of moral injury is explored by Papazoglou et al. (2020), highlighting its relevance in law enforcement, particularly against the backdrop of systemic racism. This scenario underscores the necessity for a critical examination of policing practices and cultures to mitigate the pervasive effects of racial profiling and discriminatory practices.

In weaving together these themes, it becomes evident that the experiences of Black male police officers with systemic racism and bias pose significant challenges within both law enforcement and counseling domains. Their personal narratives, supported by scholarly research, not only illuminate the conflicts these officers endure but also emphasize the critical need for systemic changes within the policing system and adaptations in counseling and counseling education practices. By addressing these pervasive issues, the aim is to foster a more equitable and just law enforcement system and enhance the effectiveness of counseling interventions, rebuilding trust and improving relations between police officers and the communities they serve.

Discussion of Theme Two: Moral Injury and Moral Dilemmas

This theme examines the profound emotional and psychological strife experienced by Black male police officers caught in the midst of undue force against Black citizens. Officers like James and Adams articulate the depth of their internal conflict, revealing how witnessing

or participating in these incidents challenges their ethical and moral beliefs. Officer James shares, "The weight of what I've seen, what I've had to do—it don't just disappear at the end of my shift. It sticks, eats at you." This sentiment underscores the lasting impact of moral injury, highlighting the struggle to reconcile professional duties with personal values.

The accounts from officers detail not just the incidents of undue force but also the personal repercussions of these experiences. Officer Adams, for example, expresses a profound sense of disillusionment, saying, "It's like a deep cut that won't heal bro. Knowing what's right and what you're supposed to do are worlds apart sometimes..." Such reflections shed light on the emotional toll these dilemmas take, emphasizing the discrepancy between the officers' ethical convictions and the realities of their professional roles.

Further complicating these challenges is the officers' dual identity as both law enforcement personnel and members of the Black community. Officer Grant's story, for instance, brings to the forefront the moral implications of his actions on the lives of young Black individuals he encounters, illustrating the internal tug-of-war between adhering to protocol and acting upon one's sense of justice. He recalls, "These kinds of moments, they stick with you, make you rethink everything we're out here doing," highlighting the ongoing conflict between professional obligations and personal ethics.

The emotional burden of such experiences is evident in the narratives of the officers, who describe feelings of isolation, guilt, and a crisis of conscience. This is exemplified by Officer Lincoln's account, which captures the essence of being caught between the demands of the job and the dictates of the heart. "Bruh, there's this constant battle inside, you know? What the job requires versus what your heart tells you is right," he states, articulating the profound impact of moral dilemmas on personal well-being.

These stories collectively underscore the complexity of moral injury and moral dilemmas faced by Black male police officers. They highlight not only the immediate emotional and psychological impacts of such experiences but also the broader implications for identity, professional integrity, and the relationship between law enforcement officers and the communities they serve. The depth of these accounts speaks to the urgent need for a systemic reevaluation of policing practices and supports mechanisms that address the moral and ethical challenges inherent in law enforcement work.

Discussion of Theme Three: Identity and Duality

The theme of Identity and Duality reveals the intricate challenges Black male police officers face in reconciling their professional roles and racial identities. This exploration highlights how these dual identities impact personal relationships, community engagement, and internal identity struggles, illuminated against the backdrop of systemic racism and police violence as documented by scholars such as (Okere & Bush, 2023; McBride, 2022). The officers' personal stories provide a vivid narrative on the complexities of navigating these intersecting identities. Officer Adams articulates this tension by stating, "Being a Black dude in uniform means walking through a maze of contradictions. To my folks and friends, sometimes I look like I'm part of a system that doesn't really care about what we go through."

The officers' interactions within their communities further illustrate the challenge of establishing trust amidst systemic biases. Studies by (Okada et al., 2018; Burt 2018) underscore the difficulties created by institutional norms in conflict with efforts to foster community trust. Officer Matthew conveys the complexity of his role within the community, saying, "In the community, there's a constant internal struggle. You're torn between being an enforcer of the law and being someone who shares and understands the community's struggles." These

accounts underscore the precarious position Black male officers occupy, straddling the expectations of their professional duties and their personal identities.

The internal conflict these officers experience regarding their identities is particularly striking. They find themselves at a crossroads, attempting to navigate the duality of being Black men in America and law enforcement officers. Officer Lincoln describes this internal battle: "Inside, it's like you're always trying to reconcile these two parts of yourself. The Black man who knows the pain and the struggle, and the officer sworn to uphold the law." This sentiment resonates with findings from Singer et al. (2019), who discuss the psychological implications of managing multiple social identities. Officer Jeffrey adds depth to this discussion by sharing, "There's this internal conflict that never quite settles. As a Black man, I've experienced firsthand the mistrust and fear of police. Now, as an officer, I'm part of the system I've once criticized."

Through their narratives, these officers not only shed light on the difficulties embedded in their dual identities but also express a steadfast commitment to bridging divides. They reflect on the societal tensions between law enforcement and Black communities, navigating a path that seeks to honor their professional and racial identities. Their stories underscore a deep engagement with their roles, emphasizing a dialogue that spans personal reflection and societal critique. This dialogue is crucial for understanding the nuanced realities Black male police officers confront, highlighting their journey towards achieving a balance of respect and understanding at the intersection of race, duty, and community engagement. Through direct quotations and reflections, the complexity of their experiences becomes vividly apparent, showcasing their resilience and dedication to redefining their positions within both the law enforcement community and society at large.

Discussion of Theme Four: Support Network and Strategies for Managing Stress

Theme four, focusing on the "Support Network and Strategies for Managing Stress," unveils critical avenues through which Black male police officers navigate the psychological and emotional challenges of their unique professional landscape. This exploration is pivotal in understanding the resilience and vulnerability of these officers as they face systemic injustices, moral dilemmas, and the complexities of their dual identity. The insights from Okere & Bush (2023) highlight a profound lack of tailored support, a systemic oversight contributing to feelings of isolation among Black male officers. The shared experiences of participants like Officer James emphasize the solitude felt due to the absence of adequate support, underscoring the unique battles they face within the law enforcement system.

Further complicating this issue, Officer Jared and Officer Matthews speak to the dissonance between their identities and the support offered by their departments. This gap indicates a broader systemic failure to recognize and address the specific needs of Black male officers, exacerbating their feelings of alienation and occupational stress. Such neglect not only highlights the struggles of these officers but also calls into question the structural mechanisms of support within law enforcement, pointing to an urgent need for systemic change.

In response to the lack of institutional support, Black male officers have found solace in personal coping strategies, such as community engagement and hobbies. These self-devised methods, highlighted by Officer Jared's community involvement, reflect a proactive approach to managing moral injury and systemic racism. Officer Adam and Officer Grant further illustrate the importance of personal peace and grounding, underscoring the adaptability and resilience of Black male officers in the face of systemic oversights. Their reliance on personal strategies not only showcases their resilience but also emphasizes the necessity for law

enforcement agencies to provide comprehensive support that acknowledges the complexities of race and duty.

The reluctance to discuss mental health issues among Black male officers underscores the cultural and organizational barriers that stigmatize seeking help. Officer Matthews and Officer Adam share their experiences with the stigmas surrounding mental health within both law enforcement and the Black community. The narratives of Black male police officers participating in this study shed light on significant disparities in the support system and highlight the inventive methods they use to manage their intricate positions. Additionally, their experiences bring attention to the emotional toll such gaps in mental health support.

Limitations

It is essential to identify and explain the constraints and influences that affected different aspects of this study's implementation and its findings. The goal is to recognize how these limitations might have influenced the research process, assess their potential impact on the results, and identify strategies to address or lessen these limitations in future research endeavors. For additional insights and recommendations concerning future studies, refer to the "Recommendations for Future Research" section below.

Sample Size and Generalizability

This study utilized Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to delve into the experiences of Black male police officers, intentionally opting for a small sample size to enhance the depth of analysis. The nature of IPA necessitates a smaller cohort to ensure that the participants' stories are thoroughly understood, allowing researchers to prioritize depth over breadth in their investigation, as highlighted by Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014, p. 9). IPA enabled a detailed and nuanced examination of individual experiences. However, it also

inherently limits the broader applicability of the findings. Due to the concentrated focus on the experiences of a select few, the results may not be widely applicable to all Black male police officers who have faced moral injury in the context of police violence against Black citizens. While this limitation is a compromise for the rich insight gained, it does constrain the study's relevance across varying contexts and populations.

Recruitment Challenges and Snowball Sampling

Recruitment posed a significant challenge due to the "blue wall of silence," which made potential participants wary of discussing their experiences. To overcome this, the study utilized snowball sampling, leveraging initial participants' networks to identify others willing to share their stories. While snowball sampling was effective in navigating the recruitment barriers, it potentially introduced bias, as the sample might reflect a certain degree of homogeneity in attitudes or experiences. Employing snowball sampling was necessary but underscores the complexities of recruiting for sensitive research topics within tightly knit professional communities.

Researcher's Reflexivity

Reflecting on my personal biases as a Black man was a critical aspect of conducting this research. Understanding the impact of these biases was essential, especially considering the sensitive topics at the heart of the study such as race, policing, and moral injury. The role of reflexivity in this context, a concept emphasized by numerous scholars, is fundamental in ensuring the integrity of the research process.

Inspired by recent scholarship, notably the work of Bergman et al. (2023), which utilized reflexive thematic analysis to examine Older Black Americans' views on structural racism and resilience, I was motivated to critically evaluate my personal experiences and

perspectives throughout the research process. From data collection to analysis, my aim was to minimize the influence of my biases. This approach was vital in maintaining the objectivity and credibility of the study, ensuring that the findings genuinely reflected the perspectives of the participants involved.

Moreover, recognizing the complexity of these interactions, I drew upon insights from Stubbs (2023). Stubbs underscored the need for heightened reflexivity in police research, suggesting that all researchers, including those who are police officers, must carefully navigate their social identities and inherent biases. This introspective approach was crucial in ensuring that the study's findings were driven by the participants' experiences, rather than being colored by my own interpretations or preconceptions.

Central to this research process was the inclusion of a diverse research team. The collective introspection and commitment of this team to minimizing biases significantly enhanced the depth and breadth of the research. This collaborative environment enabled an ongoing dialogue regarding our diverse backgrounds and experiences, and how these could potentially impact the research's integrity. Rankl et.al., (2021) noted that adopting such a team-based approach to reflexivity is critical when exploring the complex dynamics of race and policing, a principle that aligns with the analysis.

The methodological rigor and reflective practices adopted in this study were meticulously designed to ensure that our interpretations remained firmly rooted in the lived experiences of our participants. By doing so, I aimed to contribute to a nuanced and empathetic understanding of the intricate issues at the intersection of race, policing, and moral injury. This approach not only enriches the academic discourse but also ensures that the research reflects a broad spectrum of experiences and perspectives, thereby enhancing its relevance and impact.

Emotional Toll on Researcher and Participants

Discussing moral injury due to undue police violence against Black citizens had a significant emotional impact on both the participants and me, the researcher. When participants shared their experiences of moral injury, they risked retraumatization and emotional distress, necessitating the implementation of support mechanisms to mitigate these risks. Concurrently, the emotional burden of listening to these stories compelled me to seek professional support to manage my own well-being. The experience of emotional toll, affecting both participants and researcher, highlights the ethical considerations essential in conducting research on deeply personal and potentially traumatic topics.

Time and Resources

The implementation of IPA as the study's methodology demanded substantial time and resources, reflecting the approach's depth and detail orientation. Each stage of the research process, from conducting in-depth interviews to detailed data analysis, was time-consuming and resource-intensive. This investment was necessary to achieve the study's objectives but limited the scope and scale of the research. The commitment to a thorough and meticulous examination of participants' experiences, while a strength of the study, also represents a significant limitation in terms of wider application and scalability.

Implications for Practicing Counselors

For practitioners, this research underscores the critical need to develop a keen awareness of systemic racism and bias, notably impacting clients such as Black male police officers. It advocates for a sustained dedication to education and self-awareness, enabling practitioners to adeptly navigate the complexities of racial profiling and discrimination. To achieve such competency, practitioners should immerse themselves in continuous, specialized

training that deepens their understanding of systemic injustices and their psychological effects. This educational journey could encompass participating in workshops, seminars, and obtaining certifications that emphasize cultural competence and anti-racist counseling methodologies.

Furthermore, staying informed through the latest research on racial trauma and the psychological effects of balancing dual identities within law enforcement is vital. This involves engaging with contemporary research through journal subscriptions, conference attendance, and active participation in research efforts. The practice of regular self-reflection and professional supervision also plays a crucial role in recognizing personal biases and their potential impact on therapeutic relationships. Practitioners should actively seek feedback to enhance their cultural sensitivity.

Moreover, addressing the specific challenges faced by Black male officers requires the adoption of comprehensive therapeutic models that recognize the intricacies of racial profiling and discrimination. Offering support tailored to their unique experiences, including the facilitation of group therapy with peers, is imperative. Crafting counseling interventions that reflect the intersectionality of race, gender, profession, and identity, informed by a deep understanding of the specific stressors Black male officers navigate, is crucial for fostering healing and insight. Addressing moral injury is particularly important, given the moral dilemmas Black male officers often encounter between their professional responsibilities and personal values.

Finally, advocating for the integration of culturally attuned mental health resources within law enforcement is essential. This advocacy should focus on promoting policies and practices that cater specifically to the mental health needs of Black male officers, including the promotion of anti-racism training, the establishment of support groups, and the integration of

culturally competent counselors. Contributing to the creation and development of mental health resources that are culturally sensitive, through the development of support materials, workshops, and programs tailored for Black male officers, is also crucial. Establishing robust partnerships with law enforcement agencies ensures that mental health resources are accessible and appropriately tailored to the officers' needs, advising on best practices for mental health support and creating an environment where officers feel encouraged to seek help.

Implications for Counselor Education Training Programs

The current findings highlight the critical need for counselor educator training programs to integrate comprehensive modules on systemic racism and bias, with contributions from guest speakers and other educational facilitators playing a vital role. Such education is imperative not only to illuminate the profound impact of societal prejudices on Black male police officers but also to equip future counselors with the capabilities to address these intricate issues effectively. Additionally, an in-depth exploration of moral injury is essential, providing students with both the knowledge and practical tools necessary to support law enforcement personnel grappling with moral challenges and psychological strife stemming from their duties.

To enhance the foundation of this curriculum further, it is vital to integrate specific strategies. Beginning with systemic racism and bias education, counseling education programs should incorporate modules that dissect these issues with a particular focus on their impact on Black male police officers, utilizing case studies, peer-reviewed research, and guest lectures from seasoned professionals in the field to shed light on the real-world consequences of societal prejudices. Encouraging interactive discussions and reflection sessions will enable students to explore and articulate their understandings and perspectives, fostering a critical analysis of systemic issues.

Additionally, counseling education training programs should address the concept of navigating dual identities, focusing on individuals who manage their roles within both the law enforcement and Black communities. By inviting guest speakers with personal experience in managing dual identities to share their stories and strategies, counseling education programs can enrich the learning experience. Furthermore, facilitating group projects that challenge students to develop support plans for clients dealing with internal conflicts related to their dual roles will further enhance counseling student's practical skill set.

Lastly, dedicating a significant portion of the training to developing culturally competent counseling skills is paramount. This includes seminars on cultural humility, empathy-building exercises, and specific counseling approaches sensitive to the experiences of Black male police officers. Engaging students in community outreach initiatives will promote the application of their learning in diverse environments, encouraging a deeper understanding of cultural complexities.

By incorporating these detailed strategies within the curriculum, counselor education programs will not only educate students about systemic racism and bias but also prepare them with the practical skills and understanding necessary to effectively support Black male police officers. This comprehensive approach will ensure that future counselors are well-prepared to meet the unique needs of this population, thereby contributing significantly to a more equitable and supportive law enforcement and mental health landscape. Through fostering an educational environment where healing, understanding, and cultural competence can flourish, we pave the way for a more inclusive and empathetic approach to counseling within the law enforcement community.

Recommendations for Future Research

In light of the findings from this dissertation, it is essential to consider various avenues for future research and their implications for practice. An important step forward would involve broadening the demographic scope of study participants to include officers from diverse races, genders, ages, and ranks. Notably, the inclusion of Black women in future research is particularly crucial. This expansion is vital for uncovering how experiences of moral injury vary across different identities, offering valuable insights into the role of intersectionality in shaping these experiences. Such exploration can deepen our understanding of the nuanced ways in which social identities intersect to influence perceptions and experiences of moral injury within law enforcement.

Building on this expanded demographic exploration, including Black women, there's a significant opportunity to develop theoretical frameworks that elucidate the mechanisms of moral injury in policing contexts. This effort will not only enrich academic discourse but also inform practical applications and policy decisions. By articulating the complex processes underlying moral injury, researchers can pave the way for interventions and policies that more effectively address the needs of law enforcement personnel across a broader spectrum of identities.

Furthermore, integrating a mixed-methods approach in future research endeavors could substantially enhance our comprehension of moral injury's impact. While qualitative methods like Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) provide depth and nuance to our understanding, incorporating quantitative measures of psychological well-being, job satisfaction, and community relations could offer a broader, more holistic view. This approach allows for a comprehensive exploration of moral injury, validating qualitative findings through

quantitative data and uncovering broader trends that might not be immediately apparent through qualitative analysis alone.

The practical implications of these research directions are manifold. Specifically, the development of counseling practices and therapeutic interventions tailored to the needs of Black male police officers grappling with moral injury holds great promise. Including Black women in these considerations is essential, as they face unique challenges that intersect with both race and gender. By focusing on tailored support systems, coping strategies, and mental health resources, future research can facilitate the creation of targeted interventions that address the unique challenges these groups face. Such initiatives could significantly improve mental health outcomes and overall job satisfaction for affected officers.

In summary, future research that builds on these recommendations, with a special emphasis on including Black women, has the potential to significantly advance our understanding of moral injury in policing. This could lead to more effective practices and policies that support the mental health and professional effectiveness of a more diverse range of law enforcement officers, acknowledging and addressing the unique challenges faced by different genders and racial backgrounds in the field.

Chapter Summary

This study offers an incisive examination of the complex experiences of Black male police officers navigating the dualities of their identity and profession amidst systemic racial injustices. By utilizing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and the critical lens of intersectionality, the research illuminates the profound moral quandaries and injuries these officers endure. This Chapter Summary synthesizes the findings, limitations, and

recommendations, weaving together a narrative that underscores the urgency for systemic change and enhanced support within law enforcement and counseling realms.

The heart of the study lies in the exploration of moral injury, as experienced by Black male officers when confronted with undue police violence towards Black citizens. The integration of IPA and intersectionality has surfaced nuanced understandings of how intersecting identities shape these experiences, revealing a complex tapestry of systemic racism, moral dilemmas, identity struggles, and the search for support. These themes resonate deeply, highlighting the internal conflicts and societal challenges faced by Black male officers who must navigate their roles in a system that often undermines their professional integrity and personal identity.

The study's methodological approach, while offering rich insights, brings forth inherent limitations. The small sample size, though necessary for depth of analysis, restricts the findings' generalizability. Recruitment challenges and the potential biases introduced through snowball sampling further emphasize the difficulties in exploring sensitive topics within close-knit professional groups. Additionally, the emotional toll on participants and the researcher underlines the ethical considerations pivotal in conducting research on potentially traumatic subjects.

Amidst these limitations, the study nevertheless advances a critical discourse on moral injury in policing. It advocates for systemic reforms and a comprehensive reevaluation of support mechanisms for law enforcement personnel. Moreover, it calls for an acknowledgment of the unique challenges that Black male police officers encounter, thus highlighting the necessity for culturally competent counseling practices. These practices, in turn, should

specifically address the complexities of race, duty, and identity to effectively support officers navigating these multifaceted challenges.

Looking forward, the dissertation proposes several avenues for future research, urging a broader exploration of moral injury across diverse demographics within law enforcement. The inclusion of Black women, in particular, is highlighted as a critical area for future studies, aiming to deepen the understanding of how intersectionality influences experiences of moral injury. A mixed-methods approach is suggested to complement qualitative insights with quantitative data, fostering a comprehensive understanding of the impact of moral injury on psychological well-being, job satisfaction, and community relations.

The implications of this study for practice are significant, emphasizing the necessity of tailored counseling interventions and support systems for law enforcement officers grappling with moral injury. By incorporating the insights gained into counselor education and training, future professionals can be better equipped to support officers in managing the complexities of their roles. This, in turn, can contribute to rebuilding trust and improving relations between police officers and the communities they serve, fostering a more empathetic and effective approach to law enforcement in a diverse society.

In Chapter Summary, the dissertation not only sheds light on the lived realities of Black male police officers but also serves as a clarion call for systemic change. By highlighting the intricacies of moral injury within the context of systemic racism and policing, it underscores the need for a nuanced understanding and approach to law enforcement and counseling practices. The study advocates for a future where the moral integrity and psychological well-being of law enforcement personnel are prioritized, paving the way for a more just and equitable system that respects and upholds the dignity of all its members.

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APPENDIX A

Recruitment Email

Subject: Invitation: Participate in a Study on Moral Injury Among Black Male Police Officers

I hope this message finds you well. My name is Avery Rosser, and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Georgia. I am reaching out to extend an invitation to you for a vital study that aims to explore the experiences and perceptions of Black male police officers, particularly in the context of undue police violence against Black citizens.

Study Overview:

The purpose of this study is to deepen our understanding of moral injury among Black male officers, a topic that remains under-explored despite its significance. Moral injury, as you might know, is the deep emotional and mental pain felt when one's actions, or lack of them, go against their moral beliefs.

Eligibility:

- Self-identify as a Black male.
- Currently employed or previously worked as a police officer.
- Willingness to share personal experiences related to the subject.

Why Participate?

1. Contribute to pioneering research that can illuminate the unique challenges and experiences of Black male officers.
2. Provide insights that can potentially lead to better support and resources for Black officers.

3. Receive a \$25 Amazon gift card as a token of appreciation for your time and insights.

Confidentiality:

Your participation will be completely confidential, and all responses will be anonymized. We are dedicated to ensuring your privacy and the security of the information you share.

Participation involves a 60-minute interview, via Zoom conferencing platform, at a time that is convenient for you.

If you're interested in participating or have any questions about the study, please reply to this email or contact me at 706.977.5511 or avery.rosser@uga.edu. Please feel free to share this invitation with colleagues who may also be interested.

Thank you for considering this opportunity. Your perspective and experiences can make a significant contribution to our understanding of this critical issue.

Warm regards,

Avery Rosser

University of Georgia

avery.rosser@uga.edu

706.977.5511

APPENDIX B

Recruitment Flyer

RESEARCH STUDY PARTICIPANTS NEEDED!

SOUL CRY: EXPLORING MORAL INJURY AMONG BLACK MALE POLICE OFFICERS WHO EXPERIENCE UNDUE POLICE VIOLENCE TOWARDS BLACK CITIZENS

Background
Are you a Black male police officer who has witnessed or experienced undue police violence against Black citizens? I invite you to participate in a groundbreaking qualitative dissertation study on moral injury within the law enforcement community.

Study Objectives


- Understand the lived experiences of Black male police officers.
- Explore the concept of moral injury within the law enforcement context.
- Identify coping mechanisms and potential avenues for support.

Eligibility


- Identify as a Black male police officer.
- Have witnessed or experienced undue police violence against Black citizens

Benefits
Opportunity to have your voice heard and share your experiences.

- Contribute to academic research on moral injury and policing.
- Help shape policies and interventions to promote positive change.



CONTACT INFORMATION
AVERY ROSSER, MS, LPC, ACS
Ph.D Candidate
University of Georgia
E: AVERY.ROSSER@UGA.EDU
P: 706-977-5511



\$25 AMAZON GIFT CARD IS AVAILABLE FOR PARTICIPANTS

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent Form

Study Title: Soul Cry: Moral Injury Among Black Male Police Officers Who Experience Undue Police Violence Towards Black Citizens

Researcher: Avery Rosser

Institution: University of Georgia

Introduction:

You are being invited to participate in a research study about moral injury among Black male police officers who have witnessed or been involved in undue police violence towards Black citizens. Before you decide whether to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take the time to read the following information carefully.

Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of this study is to learn about the emotions and experiences of moral distress that Black male police officers might go through when they witness, fail to prevent, or take part in unfair violence by the police against Black people.

Study Procedures:

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

1. Complete a demographic questionnaire.
2. Participate in an in-depth interview lasting approximately 60-90 minutes.

Potential Risks and Discomforts:

There may be some emotional discomfort when discussing personal experiences related to police violence. You have the right to decline answering any question or to stop the interview at any time.

Potential Benefits:

While there may be no direct benefit to you, the results of this study may provide valuable insights into the experiences of Black male police officers and contribute to the broader understanding of moral injury in the context of police violence.

Confidentiality:

Your participation in this study is confidential. All data collected will be stored securely and will not be linked to your identity. Any publications or presentations resulting from this study will not include identifiable information.

Voluntary Participation:

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any time without any consequences.

Questions:

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please contact:

Researcher: Avery Rosser, (E): avery.rosser@uga.edu, (P): 706.977.5511

Supervisor: Dr. Brandee Appling, (E): bappling@uga.edu

Consent:

I have read and understood the information provided above. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX D

Interview Protocol

Introduction:

- Explain the purpose of the study and reassure confidentiality.
- Outline the structure and length of the interview.
- Emphasize the importance of their personal experiences and feelings.

Warm-Up Questions:

1. Can you share a little bit about your journey to becoming a police officer?
2. How would you describe the dynamics and culture of your precinct?

Main Questions:

1. Can you describe a specific incident where you observed or were aware of undue police violence against Black citizens?
 - How did you feel during that incident?
 - How did you respond, if at all, in that moment?
2. How has this incident (or incidents) impacted your personal and professional identity as a Black male police officer?
 - Can you describe any internal conflicts you've felt in relation to these incidents?
3. The term "moral injury" refers to the deep emotional and mental pain felt when one's actions, or lack of them, go against their moral beliefs. How do you relate to this concept given your experiences?

4. How do you think these experiences differentiate between Black male officers and officers of other backgrounds?
5. How do these experiences affect your relationships with other police officers, especially those of different racial backgrounds?
6. Outside of work, how have these incidents impacted your relationships with family, friends, and the wider Black community?
7. What resources or support do you wish were available to you to cope with or address these feelings of moral injury?

Reflection and Closure:

1. How do you envision the future of policing in relation to racial dynamics and violence?
2. What changes or actions do you believe need to occur within the police force to address the issue of moral injury?
3. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences or feelings that we haven't covered?

Wrap-up:

- I will provide them with resources or support contacts in case discussing these topics brings up any distress.

APPENDIX E

Moral Injury Outcome Scale

Moral Injury Outcome Scale*

This questionnaire is designed to gather information about personal experiences related to the use of excessive or unnecessary force against a Black citizen. It focuses on three key areas: (a) Instances where you may have acted (or not acted) in a way that conflicted with your moral code or values; (b) Situations where you witnessed others acting (or failing to act) in ways that contradicted your moral principles or values; (c) Circumstances in which you were personally impacted by the actions (or inactions) of others that were contrary to your moral code or values, such as experiencing betrayal by someone you trusted.

Have you had at least one experience like this that troubles you currently? ☐ Yes ☒ No

If yes, please check the type of experience that is most currently distressing: ☒ A ☐ B ☐ C If more than one, check all that apply.

Keeping this experience in mind, please indicate how much you agree with the following statements in terms of the impact of this experience in the last month (circle one number for each item below).

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I blame myself.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. I have lost faith in humanity.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. People would hate me if they really knew me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. I have trouble seeing goodness in others.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. People don't deserve second chances.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. I am disgusted by what happened.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. I feel like I don't deserve a good life.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. I keep myself from having success.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. I no longer believe there is a higher power.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. I lost trust in others.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. I am angry all the time.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. I am not the good person I thought I was.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. I have lost pride in myself.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. I cannot be honest with other people.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

How much has this experience made it hard for you to function in each of the following areas (circle one number for each item below)? If an area is not applicable, circle N/A**:

	Not at all	Somewhat	Extremely
1. Romantic relationships with spouse or partner	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Relationships with your children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Relationships with other family members	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Friendships or socializing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Training or education	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Day to day activities, such as chores, errands, managing medical care	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Religious faith/spirituality	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

*The Moral Injury Outcome Scale (2021). Litz, B.T., Phelps, A., Frankfurt, S., Murphy, D., Nazarov, A., Houle, S., Levi-Belz, Y., Zerach, G., Dell, L., Hosseiny, F., and the members of the Moral Injury Outcome Scale (MIOS) Consortium. MIOS consortium activities were supported in part by VA Cooperative Studies Program, Office of Research and Development, US Department of Veterans Affairs; Department of Veterans' Affairs Australia, Phoenix Australia - Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health; and the Canadian Centre of Excellence on PTSD and Related Mental Health Conditions.

**The Brief Inventory of Psychosocial Functioning (Kleiman et al., 2020).

APPENDIX F
Demographic Questionnaire

Name: _____

Race/Ethnicity: _____

Age: _____

Job Status: _____

Years on the force: _____