

AFRICAN AND AFRO-CARIBBEAN IMMIGRANT AND DIASPORA PERSPECTIVES OF  
POLICE VIOLENCE  
“IT’S ABOUT CULTURE, NOT RACE”

by

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THESIS

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**Table of Contents**

Acknowledgements	3
Dedication	4
Abstract	5
Introduction	6
Literature Review	11
Theory	22
Method	29
Results	34
Discussion	63
Appendices	
Terms used to describe populations	68
Population Demographics	69
References	70

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## DEDICATION

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To Kalief Browder and the many other men and women whose lives and stories have ended so tragically early, you are why I do this work. So much love to each of you brave and precious souls. Justice belongs to you and I promise to try and make that truth all of our realities.

## ABSTRACT

AFRICAN AND AFRO-CARIBBEAN IMMIGRANT AND DIASPORA PERSPECTIVES OF  
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“IT’S ABOUT CULTURE, NOT RACE”

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Police violence with minority communities in the U.S. is a growing problem and has gained a lot of national attention in recent years. While the issue seems to be prevalent in the country, the current means to track the data on excessive use of force or deadly encounters by police is lacking because police departments report voluntarily. The Justice Department has announced recent initiatives to better track this information but news agencies like *The Guardian* and *The Washington Post* have taken on the role of documenting these encounters and keeping the public and even federal agencies informed thus far. While data tracking is improving, the perceptions by minority communities of police violence is largely unexplored. People of color, particularly Black people, tend to be central characters in narratives about police violence yet their view on the matter is often overlooked. While race has proven to be an important predictor of satisfaction with police, the understanding of racial identity has been sparse. Black is not monolithic so while the perspectives of Black immigrants and diasporans on police violence may

vary greatly, studies exploring these views are almost non-existent. Differences in culture, language, immigration status and country of origin could contribute to a difference in perspectives and experiences with police violence. This study sought to capture and understand the views and experiences of African and Afro-Caribbean immigrant and diasporans through qualitative interviews. Utilizing Critical Race as the primary theory and Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis as the method for analyzing the data, five primary themes and twelve subthemes emerged. While the results were interesting and affirmed findings in other studies, differences emerged between participants by age.

Keywords: *immigrant, diaspora, Black, police, police violence*

## Introduction

The recent high profile cases of U.S police shooting unarmed men and women of color have garnered a lot of attention and inspired discussions on excessive force policies, racial profiling and biased policing. Police violence in America is a dangerous and persistent problem where excessive force is used too often (Balko, 2016) and results in hundreds of fatalities annually, especially with minorities. Excessive use-of-force tends to occur the most with males, Black and young persons, (Eith & Durose, 2011). The disparity in these encounters points to a greater pattern of discrimination in U.S. society against non-White people (“What Is,” 2009). These prejudiced practices also impact Black immigrants and the ways they integrate into the culture, particularly African and Afro-Caribbean immigrants and diaspora who are both racial minorities and foreigners.

Some of the key research conducted includes data on police misconduct, police involved shootings and explores how factors like race, gender, socioeconomic class, and neighborhood can influence the outcomes of these encounters (Schuck & Rosenbaum, 2005; Wu, Sun, & Triplett, 2009). Even in affluent neighborhoods where people had higher socioeconomic statuses, Black residents had less satisfactory attitudes of police than White residents (Wu et al., 2009). Police have extensive discretionary power to deescalate or aggressively engage with citizens, and the legal systems in place do not measure these decisions effectively. Policing agencies voluntarily report police-involved fatalities, allowing large numbers of actual encounters to go unrecorded and uncounted. Grassroots organizations and news outlets like *The Guardian* and *The Washington Post* have had to take on the responsibility to count these fatalities as a result instead of the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) (Hansen, 2015; Nordberg, Crawford,

Praetorius & Hatcher, 2016). Just recently, the Department of Justice announced new initiatives to better track police shootings, use of force and in custody deaths (Lichtblau, 2016).

Although U.S. society is highly racialized, diverse Black ethnic groups exist and resist the common misconception of Black people as monolithic (Johnson, 2008). While few studies have explored the experiences of African Americans with police violence in the U.S., there is a lack of sufficient data on the perspectives of African and Afro-Caribbean immigrant and diaspora communities. Their experiences specifically have not been recorded and are generally categorized with the experiences of Black people in the U.S. collectively (George Mwangi, 2014) although significant differences may exist in areas of citizenship status, ethnicity, national origin and language among other variables. It is important to capture the experiences of people within this diversity. This study seeks to fill the gap in knowledge and explore African and Afro-Caribbean immigrants and diaspora perspectives and experiences with police violence and connection to social justice issues.

Immigrants, especially immigrants of color, have been heavily surveilled, marginalized and discriminated against by police (French, 2013; Glaes, 2010). Police are frequently charged with controlling and monitoring the actions of immigrants, which at times has meant enforcing state sanctioned acts of violence (Glaes, 2010). In addition to racial discrimination, Black immigrants experienced problems when interacting with police because of a language barrier (Showers, 2015). Immigrants perceive that their social standing in society is based on the way police interact with them, attributing its impact on their ability to succeed, have upward mobility and assimilate into culture (Wu, Smith & Sun, 2013). An immigrant's social identity derived from the intersection of their foreignness and Black race is complex and contributes to many negative experiences with police.



Police violence leads to dangerous, even deadly, outcomes and Black people are disproportionately represented in these excessive force encounters (Eith et al., 2011). If these trends of police misconduct continue, there will be harmful outcomes and increased tensions between police and minority communities. Although police misconduct may be a researched topic, the perspectives of Black people are usually not captured. Even when they are explored, the Black experience is categorized as a singular voice, regardless of the many differences that exist. Although race has been the primary indicator of dissatisfaction with police (Wu et al., 2009), few studies disaggregate categories of race. This study seeks to explore the experiences during police encounters and reports of police violence among African and Afro-Caribbean immigrant and diaspora communities. This gap in research is significant to understanding the responses to this national epidemic of police violence in America. Discoveries will contribute to adding to the knowledge base about Black experiences of police encounters and police violence, especially as it pertains to relations with this demographic of immigrants and diaspora.

Social work is a profession concerned with improving the lives of people, without discrimination based on characteristics like race, gender, age, sexual orientation, nationality or socioeconomic class. In alignment with the Social Work Code of Ethics, the two core values of service and social justice are fundamental reasons why the profession must respond to police violence. Social Workers are committed to addressing social problems and challenging injustices on behalf of vulnerable and oppressed groups (National Association of Social Workers, 2014). Furthermore, the National Association of Social Workers' (NASW) statement on the Ferguson Grand Jury outlined specific goals for police reform that are necessary to achieve an equitable and just society for citizens (NASW, 2014). The NASW identified racial profiling, lethal use of force, lack of transparency and civil rights violations as current problems in policing and

provided an invitation for its members and other stakeholders to participate in improving these issues (NASW, 2014).

Minorities, youth, and immigrants are among the most vulnerable populations social workers typically serve. Social workers frequently interact with these groups in various capacities and should seek to understand their perspectives and experiences with police in order to best serve them (Nordberg et al., 2016). Responding to police violence against minorities should be approached in spite of political nuisances or desires to maintain status quo and privileges (McDowell & Jeris, 2004; Skerrett, 2000). Moreover, the intersectionality of race, immigration and other characteristics creates a multifaceted dynamic that social work scholars and researchers should seek to explore. Particularly, the experiences of Black immigrants in America and their experiences with police is an under-researched topic. Data on Black immigrants' perceptions of police violence will finally amplify the voice of an overlooked demographic and may encourage the involvement of such ethnic groups and communities in joining efforts for racial equality. It could also explain barriers for Black immigrants' civic engagement and racial solidarity.

This qualitative study seeks to utilize Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to understand the intersections of these experiences and how the participants have made meaning of them. As a member of the African Diaspora community, a first generation immigrant to the United States and a second-generation American, this research is unique to the community of people that I have grown up with in the United States. A list of whom is considered part of this demographic is included in appendix B.

## Literature Review

The Black immigrant population in the U.S. is increasing significantly. The number of African immigrants have doubled each decade for the last forty years with over 1.8 million people currently living in the U.S. (Anderson, 2015; Gambino, Trevelyan & Fitzwater, 2014). Major metropolitan cities across the country include dense populations of African immigrants that mostly originate from six African countries: Nigeria, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Egypt and South Africa (Gambino et al., 2014). Black immigrants challenge the dominant culture's typical perception of race in areas of education, employment and assimilation (George Mwangi, 2014; Showers, 2015). The Black experience as constructed by race can be misleading since it is complex, heterogeneous and varies greatly when factors like language and culture are considered (Showers, 2015). The historical racial stratification of the U.S. contributes to how Blackness is defined and the trend towards trans-migration, the segregated existence of communities instead of transnationalism, the cultural retention and participation of immigrant communities (Amit & Bar-Lev, 2015; George Mwangi, 2014).

### **Black Immigrants as Model Minority**

Black immigrants are at times viewed as the "model minorities" for typically complying with and striving for assimilation into the dominant White culture in the U.S, although their foreign backgrounds complicate their understanding of the White-Black polarization (George Mwangi, 2014; Showers, 2015). English speaking Black immigrants' work ethic, thriftiness, and community institutions have led to their designation as successful American stories and further spread their reputation as model minorities (Johnson, 2008). These behaviors have been rewarded by an overrepresentation of Black immigrants in higher education programs where they are the fastest growing group and at Ivy League universities and make up 55% percent of Black

students (George Mwangi, 2014). George Mwangi (2014), Lenoir and Kidane (2007), Showers (2015) found that while African immigrants attempted to reach success and upward mobility by assimilating into White culture; it also shows that they distanced themselves from a Black racial identity to avoid discrimination (George Mwangi, 2014; Lenoir et al., 2007; Showers, 2015).

### **Distancing from Racial Identity**

In studies by Amit et al. (2015) and Showers (2015), ethnicity was used as a defense mechanism from racial discrimination. African immigrants would proactively distance themselves from perceived African American association by emphasizing accents and embracing or nourishing segregated cultural life and traditions (Amit et al., 2015; Showers, 2015). They would also preserve a very close-knit informal network of diaspora from their country and avoid close relationships with African Americans (Amit et al., 2015; George Mwangi, 2014; Showers, 2015). However, Showers (2015) found that African immigrants' ethnic identity, among 42 female nurses from Western African countries, was also a source of discrimination because of the negative associations with the continent of Africa as inferior. The participants in Showers' (2015) study were trying to disassociate from both their ethnic and racial identities by pursuing mostly White specialization fields and departments in hopes of economic and professional upward mobility.

In Wilson's (2009) narrative study of 11 Afro-Caribbean immigrants in Arizona, participants struggled with the cultural transition into mainstream U.S. society because of the racialization process and their deep commitment to their Caribbean identities. Creolization, the hybrid identities West Indian people have embraced that fuse their Western European and African heritage, strongly conflicts with the polarized Black and White narratives of the dominant culture in the U.S. (Wilson, 2009). Darker-skinned, Black Afro-Caribbean immigrants'

inability to fully assimilate or “pass” as White in the U.S. further complicated their struggles to comfortably embrace an American identity and led to negative racial experiences (Wilson, 2009). Participants also code-switched, changed their speaking voice and communication style, because it was another source of discrimination, especially in professional settings. Wilson (2009) found that Afro-Caribbean immigrants struggled significantly with citizenship transgression, negative feelings associated with officially changing their citizenship from their home countries or birth countries to the U.S. This inner-conflict for maintaining identity could possibly result from lack of desire to embrace a culture and society where discrimination and unfavorable treatment is based on characteristics like their race and speaking voice.

### **Double Invisibility**

The general pattern of invisibility of Black People’s collective and specific narratives from primary data and conversations underscores an even greater problem. Although presented as “neutral” and “objective,” research can specifically neglect the voices and vantage point of people of color both as a demographic of participants and as researchers in order to maintain the majoritarian or “master narrative” of White culture in the United States (Solórzano et al., 2002). This exclusion of data and proper representation of views may be a result of how normalized and mainstream the singular view of the majority group has become. Delgado’s work in *The Imperial Scholar* analyzes the “selective citing” by White authors that ignores the scholarship and research by people of color either because of ignorance that it exists or just by choice (Solórzano et al., 2002). This disregard for an equitable process of research and representation is dangerous because such scholarship can inform how institutions regard groups of people, how policies are made and how these are incorporated into practice. If and when data on people of color does

exist, it is important that those counter stories are seriously regarded as credible and are valued and incorporated in academia, policies, and particularly by law enforcement agencies.

Furthermore, the presentation of Black voices as “monovocal” is not sufficient but requires that researchers rigorously and professionally seek to understand the experiences of people as they intersect with other variables such as gender, age and immigration since those factors can distinctly impact and shape their perspectives (Solórzano et al., 2002). George Mwangi (2014) found that categorizing Black immigrants into a single demographic of Black people in the U.S. actually excludes Black immigrant data altogether. Even in debates on immigration the least considered person is a Black immigrant, erroneously constructing the discussion about other ethnic groups only (Lenoir et al., 2007). Lenoir et al., (2007) found that even as African and Afro-Caribbean immigrant communities are increasing their presence in large urban metropolitan areas, they are still not integrated into traditional Black institutions and remain invisible to most African Americans. Even more significantly Lenoir et al., (2007) concluded that African immigrants in America are not civically engaged and are disconnected from African Americans on issues of racial solidarity. In this regard, African immigrant viewpoints within these areas are largely missing both in participation and in data; they remain invisible doubly to the larger majority culture when they are overgeneralized in a racial group and also to the immigration conversation because they are racially dismissed.

### **Racial Disparities in Policing**

African Americans are both over-policed and under-policed in the sense that they are likely to be victims of certain crimes like property and theft and not receive a timely and courteous response while also being the single most targeted group for traffic stops, searches and arrests (Eith et al., 2011; Wu et al., 2009). The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) administers the

Police-Public Contact Survey (PPCS) every three years and found in 2008 that Black drivers were more likely to be stopped in traffic, searched, ticketed and arrested during the stop than their White or Hispanic counterparts (Eith et al., 2011). The most significant findings by Eith et al., (2011) were their conclusion that males, Black people and young people were more likely to have force used in their contact with police and felt that the force was excessive.

A greater percentage of Black motorists than any other group felt that police did not act appropriately in their interaction (Eith et al., 2011) affirming that race is an important predictor of satisfaction with the police (Wu et al., 2009). Wu et al. (2009) sought to explore if people's neighborhoods, socioeconomic status or race would impact their perceptions of police more. Researchers found that people living in primarily White or mixed race neighborhoods had more positive attitudes of police and African Americans living in economically advantaged neighborhoods still had less favorable perspectives of police than their White neighbors (Wu et al., 2009). White residents also tend to have less serious, more positive experiences than those living in minority neighborhoods (Schuck et al., 2005). Consequently, a participant's racial identity, in spite of significant factors like wealth or suitable neighborhood, was more likely to result in unpleasant experiences and perceptions of police.

### **Collecting Data on Police**

Police involved shootings have reached significant numbers although the process for reporting and tracking that data has been inefficient. The Federal Bureau Investigation (FBI) has not required police agencies to report these encounters so only 2,700 out of 22,000 agencies across the country volunteered that information in a year (Hansen, 2015). Due to the minimal reporting of these agencies and the lack of enforcement on part of the government, both the FBI and Center for Disease Control's count have been wrong by almost half of the actual officer-

involved fatalities (Hansen, 2015). Grassroots and News reporting agencies like *The Guardian* and *The Washington Post* alongside Google have taken on the responsibility to properly track this data (Nordberg et al., 2016) and have had minimal error in counting both deadly use of force and fatal shootings by police (Hansen, 2015). Their alarming finding of hundreds of citizens killed by police annually highlights the grave problem of police violence. The absence of a national, government-enforced database adds to issues of transparency and accountability and the perception of police as corrupt.

Just recently in October 2016, the Justice Department announced a new initiative to better track police involved data along with a \$750,000 budget to see through these improvements. Beginning in January 2017, a new pilot program requires federal agents to gather use of force and “in custody” deaths, including shootings, suicides and natural deaths while in the custody of police or jailers at the following agencies: Drug Enforcement Administration, the Marshals Service, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, and the F.B.I. (Lichtblau, 2016). Attorney General Loretta Lynch will utilize the ability to impose financial penalties, as outlined in a 2014 law by Congress, to states that do not report “in custody deaths” although plans for how this will be enforced have not yet been shared (Lichtblau, 2016). Included in this plan is new funding for a “police data initiative” that will hopefully help local police departments track their data and share it with the public (Lichtblau, 2016). How this \$750,000 will be dispersed locally and nationally or if it will be invested into new technology has not been released.

Unfortunately, a portion of this new plan still depends on police departments to voluntarily report these encounters, circling back to the current lack of this data. Until these



initiatives can be more seriously enforced either through financial consequences for non-compliance to police departments, adequate data on police involved citizens may not exist.

### **Perceptions in Community Policing**

Community policing, a more people-orientated approach, may be a more effective interaction between those in authority and the citizens of those communities. Police work is dependent on the participation and cooperation of residents, including but not limited to, tips on crimes, identification of assailants and observance of laws (Schuck et al., 2005). People must feel that the police are legitimate, deserving of the authority given, in order to fully participate (Hinds, 2009). Schuck et al., (2005) found that residents can distinguish between the actions and reputations of their local police and those of the collective, general police. Therefore negative attitudes are associated with negative experiences within and outside of the neighborhood (Schuck et al., 2005). Studies by Hansen (2015) and Hinds (2009) show when the police took the approach of gaining the trust of the people and soliciting their voluntary compliance, the participants' attitudes improved and their willingness to cooperate increased. People's personal experiences and encounters with police most influence their perceptions and attitudes of them and are therefore an important dynamic to consider in police-community relations (Amit et al., 2015; Hansen, 2015; Hinds, 2009; Schuck et al., 2005;)

### **Youth and Police**

Young people were the highest stopped group by police and Black youth are particularly vulnerable to negative police interaction (Eith et al., 2011; Hinds, 2009). The significant national attention recently on police fatal encounters with young Black men highlights these frequent encounters. Due to the extensive contact between police and young people, the wide-ranging

unrestricted power that police can use when working with youth, youth under reporting of victimization, and the significant lasting impact these experiences have on their attitudes as adults, these relationships should be explored further and officials should conduct them with more caution (Hinds, 2009).

The involuntary experiences minority youth have had with police have been primarily negative with youth feeling these encounters were dangerous, controlling, prejudiced and ineffective (Nordberg et al., 2016). In the qualitative interpretive meta-synthesis by Nordberg et al. (2016) youth recounted moments when police officers were verbally and physically assaultive, over monitored youth, forced them to take unnecessary actions, used derogatory language and targeted immigrants and Black people with their overzealous use of power. Additionally, procedural justice, fairness in the justice process, is equally important in a youth's perception of police as legitimate and contributes to their voluntary compliance and willingness to assist (Hinds, 2009; Nordberg et al., 2016). Police misconduct in the initial meeting and throughout the process has significant bearing on the attitudes of youth, both immediately and in the future and should be assessed as such.

Even beyond the initial contact with police, Black boys and girls are significantly over represented in the juvenile justice systems with Black males five times more likely to be incarcerated than White boys and Black girls three times more likely to be incarcerated than White girls (Pinderhughes, Craddock & Fermin, 2011). In the Pinderhughes et al., (2011) study, youth are found to be overly aware of themselves, sensitive to their environments and how others perceive them. This alertness can cause them to interact with police or other groups negatively as a means of resisting the marginalization typically experienced as a low-income youth and youth of color. Youth may be using optimal— a more positive approach that perseveres beyond

existing problems, or a suboptimal approach which is riskier and simply tries to survive current circumstances, to respond to the layers of inequities, discriminations and crises they encounter (Pinderhughes et al., 2011). In congruence with other existing research (e.g. Nordberg et al., 2016) youth's perceptions are critically important in addressing issues that impact them and can potentially help solve for ineffective systems and nuances not yet understood by researchers, adults and those in power because their youthful voice is not sought out or valued (Pinderhughes et al., 2011). The emphasis and inclusion of youth in addressing issues they face should be the standard for how such problems are approached, in every setting.

### **Immigrants and Police**

Police racism and violence within immigrant communities is a global issue that most countries, even democratic nations are accustomed to (Aiano, 2009). The construct of social identities when race and immigration intersect is extremely complex and mostly unexplored (Wu, Smith & Sun, 2013). While darker-skinned minorities tend to receive prejudicial treatment and are overly surveilled, in spite of their socioeconomic status, the inability to fluently speak the primary language of the destination country further exacerbated and subjected them to unfair police practices (French, 2013; Glaes, 2010; Wu et al., 2013). Similar to that of African Americans, research on Afro Brazilians in Brazil, Nigerians in France and Chinese in America affirmed that even globally, race is the primary predictor in their perception of police and the interpretation of their own social standing is based on the racism of police towards them (Aiano, 2009; French, 2013; Glaes, 2010; Wu et al., 2013). Furthermore, a weak social consciousness may change with longer periods of residency in a country, correlating a more critical analysis of the police's misconduct after initial optimistic expectations are not met (Wu et al., 2013).

While immigration histories may vary, immigrants tend to have a negative experience as a result of societal identities as both minorities and foreigners. In America or other developed countries, the perceived “otherness” can lead to detrimental outcomes. Global examples of immigrants’ fatal encounters with police speak to the greater pattern of police violence. Just a few examples of this include a Chinese man beat to death in the Czech Republic, a Nigerian citizen choked in Norway and a Black teenager stabbed in the U.K. (Aiano, 2009). In the United States, *The Guardian* (2015) reported the killing of Antonio Zambrano, a Mexican man, by Pesco police in Washington State. Antonio threw rocks at the police, who chased and then shot him seventeen times instead of deescalating the situation (*The Guardian*, 2015).

Each of the police officers in these cases received little to no disciplinary action for their misconduct, and in some cases their actions were seen as justified and in alignment with the department’s use of force policy (Aiano, 2009; *The Guardian*, 2015). Immigrant experiences with forced assimilation, exclusion from labor markets and police violence speaks to patterns where police are tools for monitoring, regulating and controlling immigrants (“French Youth,” 2006; Glaes, 2010). It is critical to ascertain whether the U.S. police’s misconduct with minority citizens is a symptom of society’s racial order and an attempt to protect police interests or a response to each citizen and their alleged crimes as independently (Aiano, 2009). If indeed, the actions of police are only a means to enforce interests of the dominant group, without regard for justice, then the role of race and ethnicity in surveillance efforts is greater than assumed.

## **Conclusion**

The perception of police by immigrants in America is an understudied area, particularly those of African immigrants. The complexity of defining Blackness and the Black experience has been largely interrupted by the many intersections of race with ethnicity, culture, wealth and

education. Since racial identity is entirely socially constructed, Black immigrants come with a different racial identity schema than African Americans. So while a racial identity is shared among Afro-minority groups, how other factors may shape perspectives is not fully understood. The dominant White culture may influence immigrants' behaviors for upward mobility and survival, yet those actions should be considered more as compliance versus endorsement until values and beliefs have been properly assessed. Furthermore, the needs and barriers to survival that Black African and Afro-Caribbean immigrants face may be somewhat different than those of native African Americans. While African Americans and Black immigrants have typically been compared or pitted against each other by the larger dominant White culture for jobs, education and political gains, further research is required to determine what the outcomes would be if both racially homogenous groups share potentially similar experiences with the police.

## **Theory**

CRT is a theoretical framework that emerged from Critical Legal Studies in the late 1970's. Founders of the theory, Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman were frustrated with the slow and incremental advances for racial equality being made by the once vibrant and effective civil rights scholars in America (Onafowara, 1999; "What Is," 2009). Bell, Freeman and major contributor, Richard Delgado, wanted to challenge the traditional approach to racial reform and the discriminatory ways U.S. law was crafted. As a result, they established core theories that acknowledge the often-ignored economic and power structures that keep racial elitism in place. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) simply define racism through three components: superiority of one group; that group's power to discriminate; and the benefit of discrimination to the superior group while oppressing another. Bell, Freeman and Delgado's research contributions in the areas of systemic racism, power structures and intersectionality and their rejection of colorblindness, and meritocracy alongside their commitment to social justice are revolutionary and significant (Delgado, 2011; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; McDowell et al., 2004; "What Is," 2009).

### **History and Structures of Racism**

CRT's important historical premise of racism as a long-standing tradition and normalized aspect of U.S. society is indicative of racism as a widespread and powerful structure. Racial discrimination has evolved from slavery to Jim Crow laws and now mass incarceration and is fundamentally embedded into all facets of life in the United States (McDowell et al., 2004). Since such harmful ideologies have been employed for hundreds of years, CRT concludes that racism is therefore systemic and pervasively impacts at a societal level, not in isolated, individual situations (McDowell et al., 2004; "What Is," 2009). America's racial stratification favors White people and empowers them to dominate culturally and in every other area while oppressing other

minorities, particularly Black people (“What Is,” 2009). Black immigrants are exposed to these racial barriers and struggle to gain upward mobility without adapting to an existing racialized group.

CRT criticizes meritocracy, the belief that power is earned based on ability or performance. Due to the unequal structures evoked since America’s founding history, minorities cannot equitably access the same power and resources simply by merit or performance without challenges from White supremacist ideals and structures. Furthermore, it regards racism as an institutional power that people of color have never possessed (Solórzano et al., 2002). This theory rejects colorblindness as a satisfactory means for racial reform and liberal thinking for failing to aggressively address racism in a way that would produce real change (Delgado et al., 1993). Although racism may not be as overt in today’s society, it still infiltrates and negatively impacts all aspects of life (Onafowora, 1999).

### **Intersectionality**

Intersectionality, a term coined by major CRT scholar Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw posits that multiple variables are usually working simultaneously to discriminate and oppress a person or groups of people (Delgado et al., 1993; “What Is,” 2009). CRT challenges scholars to take a multidimensional approach in assessing the complex experiences of oppression faced by people of color and examine how their many societal identities like race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, class, ability, age and national origin can work together to impact how they are treated (Delgado et al., 1993; “What Is,” 2009). Therefore, an oversimplified explanation of racialization in America is ineffective and rejected by the findings of this theory. A “monovocal” account is insufficient to describe the intersections and layers of oppression and subordination people of color feel, for example as it relates to immigration and accents (Solórzano et al., 2002).

Societal identities are inextricably linked and collaboratively shape the outcome of people's experiences, particularly Black people, and a pursuit for racial reform and social justice should consider their comprehensive experiences as well as the systems and structures that promote such affronts. Furthermore, these intersections illuminate the complicated world Black foreigners must navigate in their journey of integrating into the White-dominated culture in the U.S.

### **Counter Storytelling**

Critical Race Theory's core concept of counter storytelling, a method of recounting narratives from the view of those who are not usually represented, is critical in magnifying the voices of marginalized groups (Solórzano et al., 2002). These narratives challenge the account of history by a dominant White supremacist lens, and can offer both painfully detailed realities of Black people's oppression as well as their brave and courageous acts of resilience and resistance to these dangerous societal racial norms ("What Is," 2009). Counter storytelling provides an avenue for the unique voices of people of color to be accurately represented as those who experienced it, from their distinctive lens and social position, rather than an outsider directing and accounting their experiences from a majoritarian or monovocal perspective (McDowell et al., 2004; Solórzano et al., 2002).

African and Afro-Caribbean immigrants are determined to not let Blackness become a defining trait to the formation of their self-identity and instead give considerable weight to other non-racial characteristics (Johnson, 2008). This vantage point can contribute to a unique narrative, directly in contradiction to majority culture. Contemporary efforts to mask racism with conversations only around ethnicity, culture and immigration distract from addressing the root issue with race and oppression as they intersect with these factors (McDowell et al., 2004).

Black, immigrant, and indigenous people are forced to live in a "dual life world" or have "double



consciousness” because of the systems that attempt to force them to assimilate into the White U.S. culture (Fanon, 2008; McDowell et al., 2004; Weiss, 2015).

### **Critical Race Methodology in Counter Storytelling**

CRT has informed the creation of a Critical Race Methodology that analyzes educational systems in America, distinctly from the lens of students of color (Solórzano et al., 2002). CRT methodology utilizes five elements that make up the framework, perspectives and pedagogy to eliminate racism and oppressive structures both in deficit storytelling that further marginalizes people of color and also in biased, not “neutral,” social sciences research that actually silences and misrepresents their experiences and views (Solórzano et al., 2002). Solórzano et al.’s, (2002) five elements consist of the intercentricity of race and racism with other forms of subordination, the challenge to dominant ideology, commitment to social justice, the centrality of experiential power and transdisciplinary perspective. In closely disaggregating the telling of stories in educational sectors, authors Solórzano et al., (2002) draw attention to the important questions of “whose stories are privileged and whose stories are silenced?” Their findings show that the majority group in U.S. society, mainly White and wealthy people, maintain power and privilege by telling “master narratives,” the narrow and monovocal accounts of an entire group of people in a stereotypical way, which disregards the minority groups’ rich culture or experiences (Solórzano et al., 2002).

Non-dominant groups feel disconnection, shame and pain at individual and societal levels as a result of prejudice, bias and a culture of exclusion that rejects core characteristics of people while emphasizing others (Jordan, 2000). These majority stories present racialized realities as a norm and disregards racism’s role, both historically and in modern times. It is important to note that majoritarian stories can also be told by people of color who have embraced and identified

with such narratives. Jordan (2000) examines the cultural bias in traditional counseling and psychological theories as well models of science like the Baconian model. These theories perpetuate “separateness,” but present themselves as objective and neutral while actually being deeply steeped in bias. Traditional methods of researching education and creating policy based on such data fails to examine the complex intersections students of color face and neglects their experience and knowledge. One of the core elements in the CRT informed methodology for education, centrality of experiential power, validates these experiences of students of color as legitimate, appropriate and critical and values them as a particular strength to draw from (Solórzano et al., 2002). According to Solórzano et al.’s, (2002) methodology, counter stories can include but are not limited to family histories, biographies, cuentos, and narratives.

CRT and Critical Race Methodology offer tools of resistance and survival by seeking out and empowering counter stories to be told. For example, the members of the silenced group can find comfort in the realization of others who are also marginalized, become empowered by sharing their stories and hearing others similar to theirs and learn how to pushback or “counter” against such harmful ways they are depicted in society (Solórzano et al., 2002). Chronic disconnection is caused by the marginalization and silencing of minority groups by those in power. Spaces where minority counter stories are shared and individuals are empowered can provide opportunities to experience healing because growth fostering connections are created (Jordan, 2000). Therefore, counter storytelling can serve as a form of therapy, healing and means to overcome the aggressions of racism in life generally and particularly in the educational pipeline.

Marginalized groups of people are often oppressed by the dominant White culture and media in the sharing of their stories, it is important to acknowledge and critically analyze the role

of race and its intersections to actually provide a safe space for this type of discourse to take place (Chaney et al., 2014). CRT as a multidisciplinary perspective can also increase race-consciousness by minorities and White people and challenge the desensitization to African American deaths, negative media images of Black people and police brutality as an extension of White supremacy (Chaney et al., 2015).

### **Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis and Critical Race Theory**

Using Critical Race Theory as a lens for IPA research is enriching and essential to comprehensively understanding the whole story. Interpretations of people's lived experiences through an institutionalized viewpoint may produce inaccurate explanations at best and oppressive ones at worst (Weiss, 2015). The societal identities people possess like gender, race and sexual orientation are not fixed and are uniquely shaped by each experience. However, it is important to recognize the phenomenon of how certain bodies are responded to by others, both individuals and systems, and how these experiences actually reject a classical definition of body schema (Fanon, 2008; Weiss, 2015). CRT and IPA together interpret one's lived experience from the individual's distinct personal perspective while also considering its relationship to the greater context of the racial and power structures that exist. This is also appropriate when dealing with a human rights issue like biased policing because a human rights lens insists on micro and macro considerations.

Critical Race Theory's commitment to social justice is in alignment with Social Work's Ethical Values (National Association of Social Work, 2014). This theory seeks to solve broader problems and oppression in society by addressing racism ("What is," 2009). Apologetics for racial discrimination have become more politicized and therefore require the social work profession to take a firmer stance for racial equality, not political neutrality (McDowell et al.,

2004). In order for racial emancipation on micro and macro levels to truly occur, the existing relationship between law, race and power must be transformed. Although both the intentions of this theory and the methods by which it seeks to accomplish them may seem radical, anything less than such efforts will produce minimal, if any changes, and ultimately fail to uproot oppressive structures embedded U.S. society.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of U.S. resident African diaspora communities with police violence. The two research questions in this study are: (1) what are your experiences with the police? and (2) what do you think of the relationship between minority communities and police?

## **Method**

This study is part of a larger project, Black Voices Matter (Dr. Anne Nordberg, PI) being conducted at The University of Texas at Arlington. This study has been designed and was conducted according to the principles of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith et al., 2009).

## **Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis**

IPA is a qualitative research approach that explores the phenomenon of how people's experiences acquire meaning (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). People freely interact in the world, sometimes without regard or consciousness of their experiences. Every now and then, significant events take place that cause people to be more aware of their environment, feelings and relationships. IPA studies are specifically interested in the process that marks certain memories in an individual's life and shapes their beliefs and interactions as a result. IPA researchers should be mindful of the individual's understanding of the experience and employ professional and analytical skills to assess and interpret these properly. Executing these skills successfully in this process can be both an art and a science and have been outlined further in later sections. Although this theory has gained credibility for its use in social work and

psychology research, it is deeply rooted in philosophy, particularly the philosophy of knowledge (Smith et al., 2009).

IPA core concepts are derived from and informed by three theoretical traditions: phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography (Smith et al., 2009). Early researchers of this theory like Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger and Sartre contributed significant knowledge and structure to how IPA is currently understood. Among the most important of their contributions is their person-in-environment perspective where people are interconnected with their surroundings and how perceptions are formed as a result of these immersed experiences (Smith et al., 2009). People do not live in isolation so their professional and personal environments, other people's response to their societal identities like race, gender, and national origin all help shape what they experience and the lens by which they interpret those encounters. Smith's findings imply that interpretation must be filtered with a specific understanding of the participants surrounding circumstances and the external factors that help create meaning from these significant experiences. Though these early theorists approached phenomenology differently, they were all fundamentally interested in experience.

The role of hermeneutics, the theory of interpretation, within IPA research is critical. In this theory, the practice of interpreting the participant's qualitative narrative is embedded in the interaction between the researcher and participant. Unlike other theories where the contributions of the researcher in interview settings is irrelevant to the exploratory process, IPA recognizes the researcher may analyze and interpret experiences in a more insightful way than the participant (Smith et al., 2009). This is not to hold in higher regard the interpretation of the researcher; rather it acknowledges that an outside perspective may offer a more objective view that also considers the relationship of the data to a greater theme or subset of data. Furthermore, IPA's

double hermeneutics posits that the participant interprets their experience first and then the researcher interprets the participant's interpretation. The participant may interpret their experience by its significance, how it made them feel and how it influenced their outlook or actions moving forward. The researcher does not analyze participant's experience in isolation to determine if it was right or wrong, justified or unfair, instead they interpret what that experience meant for the participant and explore the possible ways it impacted them.

IPA is dedicated to a detailed, systematic and thorough process of analysis and interpretation of individual experiences (Smith et al., 2009). Analysis through IPA is a flexible approach with an analytic focus on the participant's account (Smith et al., 2009). Smith et al., outline this process as typically progressing from particular and descriptive to shared and interpretive and ultimately to understanding how the participant made meaning of their unique experience. The iterative and inductive cycle includes line-by-line analysis, identifying patterns, the connection of these patterns to a broader theme and coherence of researcher's coding of data and interpretation (Smith et al., 2009). The attention to the particular also influences the sampling method that researchers utilize. Idiography encourages a case-by-case review of data in smaller samples as opposed to nomothetic larger groups that look to overgeneralize their findings without special attention to the unique perspective of participants and the meanings they extract from their particular context (Smith et al., 2009).

### **Sample**

This study utilized a purposive, non-probability sampling method to best understand the experiences of police violence among African diaspora, first or second-generation African immigrants. This methodology was most appropriate since participants were chosen for possessing similar characteristics like their age and a common African heritage. As I identified

these characteristics within my existing relationships, people were invited to participate.

Snowball and word of mouth sampling was also utilized as participants referred other prospects that fit the inclusion criterion to participate in the research.

IPA studies recommend having a small sample with commonalities whose experiences can serve the purpose of explaining a phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009). I had a total of 6 participants for the study, 3 participants ranging from ages 18 to 39 who were born in the U.S. or have been U.S. citizens with at least 10 years of residency in the U.S., from an African or Afro-Caribbean country, and 3 middle-aged individuals ages 40 and older that were born in an African or Afro-Caribbean country. Inclusion criterion included (1) 18 years and older (2) African or African-Caribbean ancestry; and (3) speaks English. These potential participants were found through the school, church, work, social and public places I frequent, through my existing personal relationships or through the recommendations of others.

## **Procedure**

I scheduled and conducted interviews with participants at a mutually agreed upon location and time. The questions used in this interview were been approved by the university's IRB in the study Black Voices Matter conducted by UTA Assistant Professor, Dr. Anne Nordberg. Interviews were in open-ended format with follow-up probing questions (see Appendix B for the interview schedule). Prior to the interview, participants were given written notice about the study and were asked to give voluntary, written consent in order to participate; a copy of the consent was provided to each participant. All ethical considerations and rights to terminate at any point in the study were explained to participants, as well as the \$25 Target gift card compensation for their time. Once all forms were signed and the process was understood, the qualitative data-gathering began. The interview typically lasted about an hour and was audio



recorded. All interviews were transcribed verbatim by me or through a professional transcription service and reviewed by principal investigator/committee chair.

After the qualitative data was coded for common themes and patterns, the narrative was analyzed systematically, case-by-case, and then interpreted by me and the principal investigator/committee chair to determine what meaning, if any, can be made of the participants' experiences and perceptions of police encounters (Smith et al., 2009). In assessing the participants' responses, the student researcher should be mindful of their own experiences and interpretations of such experiences and work diligently to clearly understand and interpret the participant's perspective instead (Smith, Jarman & Osborn, 1999). Understanding the participant's world and the variables that created this experience is fundamental in conducting research from an IPA perspective. The student researcher made every attempt to preserve, as closely as possible, the authentic meaning that the participant has made of his or her own experience (Smith et al., 2009).

## Results

Interviews were conducted with six people whose demographics consisted of one male and two females were ages 18 to 39 and three participants, two males and one female ages 40 or older (see Appendix B). Each participant lived in a major city in the United States with many other people from their country of origin living in close proximity and providing a sense of strong community. Overall, the data showed that all participants were aware of police violence and the racial discrimination that usually accompanied it. Each of the six participants had seen at least some media coverage of police interactions with minority communities and four of the six found that media was unfairly biased in favor of police in their reporting. All participants recounted at least one victim of police violence where excessive force was used or ended fatally and some expressed why that particular person or their case most resonated or stuck with them.

Each participant uniquely interpreted and made meaning of these experiences differently, with some commonalities throughout. An analysis of the six interviews identified five super-ordinate themes that reflected the unique African and Afro-Caribbean diasporan perspectives of and experiences with police violence in the United States. Those have been categorized into five super-ordinate themes: Policing, Otherness, Intergenerational Dialogue, Response to Police Violence, and Systemic Problems and are more specifically supported by the following narratives and quotations from participants.

### **Super-ordinate Theme 1: Policing**

Participants in all six interviews described police as aggressive or using unnecessary use of force. They described personal encounters of police violence, the experiences of someone they knew or what they had seen in recent national news. Some participants recounted typical

attitudes and behaviors of police both in the United States and in their country of origin, while all participants shared a notion that not all (U.S) police are bad. Their account can be described in three sub-ordinate themes: police attitudes and behaviors, police here vs. abroad and police training and accountability.

### **Sub-ordinate Theme 1a: Police Attitudes and Behaviors**

While police were described as friendly or helpful in many ways, participants did not agree with how seemingly simple situations were easily escalated and met with antagonistic behavior, at times evoking anger and fear from people. Participants also attributed racist or discriminatory practices to negative police behaviors. David, a Nigerian middle aged man described their actions this way:

So I saw the men in here as very, very friendly in the way they are, the, they are, they are very quick in responding to domestic violence and much more, when they are called upon. But their actions when they get there, it could be different. And uh, because of the issue of race in the United States, it's, it's uh, I'm uh, I'm begin to develop mixed feelings, mixed...feelings of fear. Not personally but my thinking is that the, they may react uh, negatively to issues that could be discussed with a handshake.

Aman, a middle aged Ethiopian man and working professional recalled how the people of his community perceive police violence:

However, when, when it comes to our community, yes, they, they get angry, um, for whatever they see on the media. And I would say for the most part, the people who are wrong are the police officers according to their description...That's how

they perceive it. The police are wrong. They're rough. Um, they're discriminating people by color. Um, they, they don't have any apology or anything like that for their acting. So they feel like there is hatred inside, inside the police officers, White police officers. And they, they have this stereotypical way of thinking against Black people especially if they're young.

While all of the participants identified more training and accountability for police is necessary, a few participants interestingly noted the burden on citizens to act responsibly and ease police officers fear so they can be safe. Marcus, a young Somali man in his thirties said:

And I asked the officers one time, 'What should I do when I get pulled over?' And the officer was like, 'Make sure the police is comfortable... it's always, the civilians have to make the officer comfortable, when it should be the other way around.

Aman describes how an officer's actions can be influenced:

Aman: Their action usually is, um, influenced. And when I say their action, the police officer's action is for the most part derived by the action of, um, the person who they stopped. If I act well, if I act in a non-corporative way. I don't think I'll bring the situation to a better condition. I will actually worsen it. So I always tell him [his son], this is how we should act when a police officer stops you while you're driving. "Put your hands on the wheel, smile. Give him what information he's asking. Don't make him suspect you. Whatever action you're going to take inform him first. I explain to him you know, he shouldn't sit like this, and he shouldn't try to pull out his cell phone from his pocket without informing the

police officer. Tell him, “Sir, I have my wallet on my right side. I'm going to take it out. I'm going to give you my insurance paper from here.” Or if he's going to open his car.

Interviewer: The glove compartment?

Aman: Yeah, inform the police officer. My insurance card is here. I'm going to give it to you from here...”so that the police can watch...whether he's going to pull his card or a gun. Something like that. I mean he should be to do all this because I mean, kids are innocent. They do some innocent mistakes.

### **Sub-ordinate Theme 1b: Police in U.S. vs. Police in Country of Origin**

Participants pointed to differences in the roles and duties of police in the U.S. when compared to police in their country of origin. The citizen-police interaction varied greatly, with the police in their country of origin remembered as less willing to help and less efficient in dealing with simple, daily functions. While participants acknowledged the many faults of police in the U.S., they overwhelmingly preferred them and found them to be incomparable or significantly better. The following are responses from participants that exemplify these comparative experiences:

Anne, a middle aged Kenyan woman said:

And you know, a whole different set of um, mindsets like what is rights? I mean, you know, things are not as well documented as they are here, and the policemen are usually not the most educated uh, you know, people in the society, um so it, it's so different I couldn't compare...

Um the reason why you can't compare is because everybody needs to be on the same, on the same um level when it comes to, "What do you understand? What are the duties of a policeman?" We, policemen usually, we didn't, they're not usually viewed up as people to, to protect you, or there is like, they just do their own thing, is the police force. There is, they don't really, they keep the peace, generally, but you wouldn't call them for any problem, if you had a problem you wouldn't call them. They probably don't have a vehicle to come to your place. They don't have the means. They don't have, maybe the phones, so that's why I'm saying I couldn't compare. It's just too much to compare the, it's, it's not, it's not comparable.

David, a Nigerian native and middle aged man describes police Nigeria this way:

But the issue is philosophically, the police system in Africa is quite different from the United States because we believe that uh, over here they [the police] are more efficient. They are more uh, friendly with the members of the public. They are more relational. The only problem is that uh, the, there is a lot going on about carrying guns here. You know everybody, ev- all the police will carry gun and uh, rather than setting uh, scores and disagreements with members of the public, they tend to react. They tend to overreact by using force.... they tend to react by over use of force. And because of that, everybody is scary, really scared of police. So I don't want to have any interaction with them. So I try to obey the law, rule of the, on the streets everywhere.

David continued to compare the differences in the roles and expectations of police:

So when they [police in country of origin] carry baton, the implication to the ordinary citizen [is] that they are coming to, they are coming to attack, they are coming to hit you, they are coming to, they are coming to wound you, they are coming to, you know, roll you down regardless of your positions. So because of that, the typical immigrant have developed a negative mindset of the policeman over there. So when you come over here, you see them [U.S. police] on the street being helpful, being caring, being, being uh, friendly and relational, you, you tend to, you tend to be surprised and you tend to develop more interest in their services. The only thing that has complicated their work, the nature of their work in the United States is not because, is not the fact that they are not very efficient. They have been very dutiful, but what was been clouded the integrity of the profession is the fact that there is some great racial, racial connotations to what they do.

Aman after living in the U.S. for more than a third of his life compares living under both police systems with the interviewer:

Aman: Well, uh, it's rough. It's rough because all the authority is given to them [police in country of origin]. If you don't behave exactly the way they want you to behave, they get rough on you. And, uh, whatever punishment or steps they take on you, they are the right ones. They are, they have that legitimate authority. Uh, and to me that is excessive.

Interviewer: Okay. So there is not like a citizen's right or anything like that in that regard?

Aman: Well, normally there is but the fact of the matter is that's not what it is. It's getting worse and worse as a matter of fact because always police personnel are not on the public side. They are on the government side, they are trying to protect the government and whatever policy the government has should be, um, respected regardless of the position of the people. So, um, especially nowadays, I have been to [my country] last year. Whether you agree or not there are certain rules that you have to go through. And when it comes to human rights there are a lot of, uh, evil things in it or unacceptable things. There is no respect for human beings to my understanding. And as I said earlier the police system is so rough.

Aman then continues to describe which policing system is more preferable:

Uh, somehow this is better. I would say somehow this, the American system is better. Why I say that, unless there is a very legitimate reason the police personnel from my experience do not get on you. Uh, or maybe harass you except, uh, the, the few events that I have watched over the TV which eventually I might come to. But other than that I haven't seen a police personnel you know, stopping me or asking me something I don't want to be asked. Or treating me in a way that I don't want. Somehow you know, it's much better here than, compared to [back home].

### **Sub-ordinate Theme 1c: Police Training and Accountability**

While five out of six participants characterized police as helpful in most areas, they also held them responsible for the fatal encounters with citizens and acknowledged a need for them to be trained better. A perspective in which the tense police-citizen relationship is a result of police



unpreparedness and lack of expertise rather than an intentional, malevolent act. Anne, also a working professional and mother outlines her expectations for police training:

But the policemen because they're in a formal training setting, they can be trained to, to expect to be questioned, even questioned aggressively. They should be trained to handle small, those are small crises, because they already should be able to anticipate, nobody wants to be stopped by a policeman...so you're already angry. I think the policemen should anticipate that people are going to be, wanting to know, "Why did you stop me, and why me?" And you state very carefully what it is, without getting angry, because what happens if a policeman is angry, and the person is angry, they're gonna fight.

They're gonna, you know, have those explosive situations that we have seen all the time, which unfortunately have cost people's lives, but I think the policemen should totally be prepared to be questioned aggressively, and so they should be able to have been trained never to get angry about this, being questioned, "Why did you stop me?" And they should state [their reason] um this exchange needs to be managed, but it can only be managed by someone in authority.

At that point the policeman is a person in, or you know, is having the authority. He has a uniform, he has the gun, so he has the upper hand. He should be, they should be prepared to have a conversation with whoever it is, and be prepared for, to be accused...I mean, they, should be calm, in order to bring the temperature down, you know, and for the person to have confidence, maybe there is not, this is not a bad cop, maybe he's a good cop, you know, I think it's to me, it's just a question of managing a crisis.

David, with some angst, describes the competing commitments police officers face in doing their job:

So that tends to, that tends to complicate the...policemen to- today and their good intentions are being misinterpreted. There are so many ... So I, I, I sympathize with them too because unlike twenty, thirty, forty years ago, it's more difficult to get employed in the police system now. You could get employment, but for you to survive there in the force for X number of years, ten, fifteen, twenty number of, twenty years, you may be, you may be risking your, your personal integrity, your, your, your men, your professional uh, profile and much more. So that's it.

Diana, a young Eritrean professional in her early thirties explains a need for more than just training:

So...but again, I'm going to teach my kids that from an early age. Hopefully it'll get better by then. Umm, I don't think it will, unfortunately, but- because we need to do a complete overhaul. I mean, officers need to be trained. I think police academies need to be longer.

### **Super-ordinate Theme 2: Otherness**

Each participant referred to a sense of “otherness” that contributed to a distinct difference in their response to police violence. This difference was correlated to an identity based on ethnicity, culture, country of origin and language instead of characteristics or identity perceived to be “American.” At times this otherness impacted how they were perceived by the larger society, how they identified themselves, how they responded in police interactions, and how they preserved their smaller ethnic communities while still being members of the greater society.

Some participants pointed to the overgeneralization of the term “Black” to describe them, a label that although they knew was true racially, was not representative of their identity totally and omitted important components of how they saw themselves. Their narratives within this theme have been organized into to sub-ordinate themes: self-perception and racialized experiences.

### **Sub-ordinate Theme 2a: Self-Perception**

Participants described having a dual identity that at times made it difficult to navigate issues like police violence. Participants, specifically all of those in the older group, considered their migration from a foreign land as a disqualifier to understanding or relating to the historical experiences of African Americans. Because they did not share the same racialized U.S. history, they often described a sense of illegitimacy in professing to relate.

Anne, a Kenyan native, described distancing from a racialized identity in this way:

You kind of do not have the experience, the, you know, the other African Americans have here. You can't even claim to have it or even, you know, you come as a grown up. Most people came as a grown up or they were born here...

She went on to explain that sometimes she doesn't even notice the discrimination or burden that other people of color feel. Her strong ties with her home country contributed to her feeling like she didn't really belong in America, and while she may face issues of racism and police violence, she is not as invested and does not have enough stake in these issues to be involved.

...You, you know, you, you, you're not even seeing a lot of things that people are seeing. You know, "How can you tolerate that? As a Black person you don't-"  
And I know it's unfair to say that, but you, you, you know, you're already, you think so differently like, "My life is, is like borrowed time here," so you can't, you

can't uh plunge in, into the deep politics of race and all that, because you feel, "I belong to another place. There we don't have uh those kind of race issues. We have other different kinds of, you know, yeah issues going on, but not these ones," so, maybe we're not the best candidates to really comment on that or to say whether it's good or bad because we don't really partake fully in, you know, in, in the politics that go on, economic politics eh, political things. We're not so deeply, you know [as invested].

One participant in outlining their need to have a conversation with their children about safety in interacting with police clearly illustrated the complexity of the intersections of race and immigration and how that impacted how they saw themselves, their children and police.

They, they, they're always, you know, now that, I mean, you have, you have to be cognizant of the fact that a policeman isn't going to view an immigrant child different from, differently from it's, at that point it's color, it's what you see. OK, so the prejudices a policeman may have for an African American will spill over to anybody who appears to be Black, even though they're not, you know, they're immigrants, so there's no distinction.

Diana describes a similar struggle, but identifies as a Black person, instead of being further stratified by her origin of country or ethnicity. She also spoke of the need to unite and the dangers in Black immigrant communities differentiating themselves from African Americans.

So, it's hard because I do have a culture that stems back to Africa, but I'm also Black American here. That's what I'm identified as. People don't see me as the African girl. They see me as a Black woman umm, so it's almost like a dual

identity, umm, that I'm not always aware of. I don't really pay too much attention to it. I'm just, I'm Black. That's just what I am here.

Conversations of racial realization may contribute to a sense of otherness felt by Black diaspora communities and how they raise their children simply because a historical understanding of racism may be missing. Diana continues on to say:

Our parents weren't talking to us about racial profiling. They didn't even understand that. So, I think that that might have kept us- that actually may be a reason why we separate ourselves so much so, because our parents didn't educate us on that because they had no idea either.

### **Sub-ordinate Theme 2b: Racialized Experiences**

All participants felt like they were impacted by both racial discrimination and police violence in spite of the neighborhoods they lived in, their economic status or education, however they also felt like they were not impacted to the same extent as African Americans. This interesting paradoxical phenomenon of participants seeing themselves as victims in these experiences while simultaneously feeling immune to them was expressed repeatedly throughout each interview. Furthermore, in addition to identifying as a minority in the U.S. and a person of color, participants expressed a disadvantage to the intersectionality of their foreignness, or immigrant status. Some even described how it could make interactions with police worse. Anne described two experiences of being perceived as “other”

I would say um there is an, an added disadvantage of an immigrant because um, it's so easy to be known you're an immigrant, because of your accent.

So you can't hide too much. So does that create a difference? Now, it all depends

on, somethings we really cannot place them here or there. Yeah, it can be, sometimes it ends up being a good thing, sometimes people feel more comfortable or, "At least these are people from another place," and sometimes it works worse like uh, you know, there are some jobs you won't be able to get, because you have an accent and they don't want that, you know?

Anne, recounted a story she heard from a friend about an unpleasant experience she had of being profiled:

Um she reported that a policeman stopped, it's a lady, a mother of two young children. The, a policeman stopped her and said, "I stopped you because you look suspicious." She said, "I look suspicious is like how? How, how do you look, how do I looks suspicious? Like I'm stealing or did you see me doing something weird like maybe driving zigzag or what?" He couldn't explain anything, so you know, there are subtle, but they are, you know, some harassments...

Marcus, a young East African man, shared a time when he was working and needed the assistance of police. When they arrived instead of simply helping him, they asked him questions and made him prove what he was doing, although he had his work uniform on:

Interviewer: Why do you think he did that?

Marcus: The neighborhood I was in... [it was] one of those richest neighborhood in the city. And ... because of my color obviously. That's the only thing because I called them for help. [You] think they'll come to help you know?

Marcus was specifically traumatized by that experience in hindsight because he recalled walking back to his car, a situation similar to a fatal case of an unarmed Black man:

The reason I bring this up is I remember the [man from] Oklahoma? The guy walking back to his car? And I remember myself, walking back to my car- And the police walking behind, and I was thinking, "Maybe, that's what happened to him." Remember they told him, "Get your license." And he was walking back to his car. So I thought that was strange why he needs my ID when I've already called them. Anyways before he could help me, he run my name, then finally he helped.

Aman felt that Black immigrants were treated differently by police than African Americans because they also respond differently to police, largely because of their experiences with police in their country which shaped their expectations for and understanding of police duties. The conversation between Aman and the interviewer is below:

Interviewer: Do you think that the experiences of immigrants are the same? Are they different? Are they ...?

Aman: Well, uh, I will say it's a little bit different.

Interviewer what way?

Aman: Um, the way police officers treat me is a little bit different than they treat any African Americans who were born and grew up in this country. Meaning, for either lack of knowledge or fear, or experience that we have back home we are for the most part we are submissive, we submit...we submit, we don't react. So they treat us differently. But those brothers who were born and have grown up in this country, that's not the way they behave. Because it is the, their upbringing. It is whatever they have been hearing and seeing. You see, that's their mentality that

will put them in a position where they, where they will start with reaction. We don't start with reaction. I told you earlier of my experience back home. If a police officer stops you, you need to submit even if they are wrong because it's going to be worse if you don't. So it could be that or it could be, um, not really understanding what human rights is here in America. For the most part, uh, people of my generation coming from Africa at least from Ethiopia that I know of, I cannot say for anybody else. Um, they are for the most part very submissive, not reactive. Faithfully they treat the police officers in any way they want. So it is different, it is different.

### **Super-ordinate Theme 3: Intergenerational Dialogue**

All six of the participants had intergenerational conversations around what was happening with police violence and black communities. The three participants in the younger group mentioned having a conversation with their parents or older relatives, at times warning them to be safe or informing them on what was happening through media reports. Whereas, all the participants in the older group, all of whom were parents, had critical conversations with their children and loved ones about what to do if they encounter police. Throughout all of these conversations emotions of shock, anger or fear were common. Anne described the following conversation with young kids in her family because police couldn't tell the difference between an African American and her African immigrant child categorizing them all as Black and maybe treating them with prejudice and unnecessary use of force:

so people have began to talk to their children, about, "Be careful. Don't do this, don't do that," I mean, we have a, a, our little boy here. He's 14, and um we, we always warn him, you know, um, "stick, stick to what you can do, not actually



uh," you know, to be aware of situations that might make people to be suspicious or, you know, we, we want them to be careful so definitely we have a conversation because of that lack of um, um, differentiation, you know, a policeman isn't going to know or ...you know, it's, it's what you see mostly, so we have began to talk to them and we're telling them, "Make sure you don't do this. Make sure you're always sticking to the right thing. Um if you're going out, let's know where you're going. Do not hangout with eh, with a crowd that's going to look like they're too loud, or going to, you know, do not enter someone's house," We have to. You know, we have to make them be aware and um, mostly we just want to make sure that they're not going into dangerous places.

Two participants described conflicting desires of wanting to warn young people about safe interactions with police without making them feel racially inferior or embracing a “victim” mindset where they always assume everything is racialized. In both instances, participants chose to still to have the conversation but attempted to shape the narrative differently to accomplish both goals. Here a father, Aman, shares the emotional dilemma, expressing the great lengths he’s gone to demonstrate and model this behavior for his son in his own encounters with police:

The basic, the basic attempt that I had in that is for him [his son] to have the right mindset that everybody is being treated the same way. Um, or whenever he's treated in a different way, and instead of relating that into racial issues to give it a different reason...so why I am bringing this is, yes, the kids have some incidences which substantiates what's in their mentality. So they grew up with that, and whenever they see activities like the ones we saw on the media, “Here they go, that's what I was believing. Here they go, this is what I was thinking. So this is

how they perceive me. This is how the police officers sees me.” So they have this, um, anger in them, and I have the fear if they encounter a police officer, I have the fear that my child will, not react the same way I do. Meaning, he probably is already on the defensive side, or maybe he will react in a bad way, not the way I did.

Diana, a professional young woman employed in a helping profession, outlines conversations she currently has with young people in her field of work and what she would one day tell her kids:

Umm, I tell all my juvenile clients, umm, one what the reality is. Because I know that I have colleagues that refuse to educate their kids- or not educate, let me not use that word because they of course want to educate their kids- they don't want to make their kids feel as if they're inferior. So it's almost as if, I won't let them know that because they're Black they're at a disadvantage, umm, for various reasons. They don't want to, you know, have their kids use that as a crutch or already feel as if they're already behind. Umm, they want to make their kids feel as if they're just as good as their White counterparts. I don't think that that's reality. I'd like to tell my kids that, "You have to work ten times harder because of your skin color," because that's just how this country came about. That's just what it is. So, I think being honest is important and I don't think it takes away from them working hard. They just have to work harder. But telling them that first and then telling them that at some point you are going to be judge because of your skin color, you may even be stopped- And then the whole interaction with police officers in general is a whole different topic of discussion. But I'm not going to raise my children not to respect authority or not to respect law enforcement

because that is the conversation a lot of parents are having with their kids right now.

Three of the six participants had conversation with younger people about knowing their rights and even forfeiting their rights in order to stay alive. Marcus, although not a parent, would tell his younger family members and future kids:

Respect the police officer. Don't try to argue with them. You won't, you do have rights but, just be worried about your safety first...just, whatever you need to do to get out of that situation alive, do it.

A participant from the older group, Aman, thought younger people had a wrong understanding of what their rights were and the dangers of operating outside of that:

Aman: They [young people] have a different perspective. They over stretch the freedom...What I mean by that is they believe that they can be whatever they want to be here in America.

Interviewer: Can they?

Aman: No. That's not true, you can't be. You have to abide by the rules. You cannot be whatever you want to be. Um, you should remain within the boundaries that, that the law enforcement either gives you or what the system gives you.

Aman went on to explain:

If a police officer stops that generation that I just said now ...they'll probably, um, react in a way of, it is my right, um, to do this, or to do that. However, they don't explicitly know what their right is. It is exercising rights without a complete

knowledge. So they probably will pass that territory and end up being, um, not criminals, but anything less than that. End up being on the wrong side. Um, maybe sometimes not collaborating with police officers, sometimes.

And one thing I noticed though is I, I really want to give credit to the police personnel in this aspect. Um, somehow if the police personnel understands that, that individual is behaving that way due to lack of knowledge, I don't see them becoming harsh. They have a rule. I really appreciate that, and I have seen that in the past.

When the three participants of the younger age group had conversations with their parents or older family relatives, it was more on educating and informing them on what was happening, a sense that the younger participants were more in touch with current events and issues. This education on racism and police violence and how the two work simultaneously seems necessary because of the significant cultural differences in America when compared to country of origin. While at least half of the participants felt similarly about the need for this type of knowledge, Tanya, a mid-thirties, Jamaican woman described it like this:

Um, I think over the years, my parents, they've become even more aware of it. Of, the the struggle. And some of the conversations, even having the conversations I have with my parents now around police brutality and racism and stuff...these are conversations we never had! I had never heard these conversations come out of my family members mouth when we're in the Caribbean or we go on family reunion. But they are so aware of it. This country ha-made us "woke" [chuckles]. What's going on and it's crazy! My dad is 66 years old and my mother never experienced, you know racism, until she moved to

this country.

Tanya describes her parents' growing levels of consciousness as more violent police-citizen interactions occur:

So for my parents, um, turning on the news, it happening in their backyard...I think more so them wanting to be able to share with us and be part of the conversation that my siblings and I have, um, they have been open to it. And the fact that it's happened to my pa-dad with my mom sitting in the car by the way. Seeing that happen on the news, over and over and over again. They know um, Amadou Diallo can be my brother. The guy who was shot 30 something times taking out his wallet, years ago.

Technology and news media may also help improve knowledge in this process. For Tanya's family it has been really useful:

It's interesting because technology has you know really opened their eyes to a lot of information. So my dad taught himself years ago to use a computer and my mom is a news junkie like myself. So, [clears throat] so it's just the conversation about what we need to do as a people? What should be happening? What laws should be changed? And, and how people are reacting?

### **Sub-ordinate Theme 3a: Young People Are “Woke”**

Interestingly, half of the participants had a particular opinion about the upcoming generation and how younger people responded to the issue of police violence.

Participants of both the older and younger group described the increased awareness by young people of police violence. Diana describes it to the interviewer this way:

Diana: But at the same time, I think that a lot of our younger, umm, kids are more woke than we've ever been. Umm, and maybe that has a lot to do with social media.

Interviewer: And when you say "woke" what do you mean?

Diana: Aware. Awaken. Okay? They are aware of what's going on. I know when I talk to kids in schools, and I ask them about their perception of police officers, and then I ask them- which is largely negative- and then I ask them where they get that from, they tell me: news. You know, we see it. Because it's hitting home. It's hitting young- It's hitting schools. You see where that police officer dragged that girl out of her desk. It's happening in schools, so they see it. I don't think I've ever watched news that way. I never watched CNN. Umm, so and then social media. Umm, you have young celebrities, young actresses, umm, who are getting involved. So I think that, yes they're silly, basic things that kids nowadays covet, but at the same time, there are those who are more aware of their surroundings and what's happening in America. Uhh, so I've got to give them credit for that.

Participants also noticed a greater likelihood of young people to engage (even negatively) with police and to be involved in the fight against police violence as an injustice. Aman expressed some concerns as a parent and as a middle-aged man who lived most of his life in Ethiopia:

If a police officer stops that generation that I just said now ...they'll probably, um, react in a way of, it is my right, um, to do this, or to do that. However, they don't explicitly know what their right is. It is exercising rights without a complete

knowledge. So they probably will pass that territory and end up being, um, not criminals, but anything less than that. End up being on the wrong side. Um, maybe sometimes not collaborating with police officers, sometimes.

And one thing I noticed though is I, I really want to give credit to the police personnel in this aspect. Um, somehow if the police personnel understand that, that individual is behaving that way due to lack of knowledge, I don't see them becoming harsh. They have a rule. I really appreciate that, and I have seen that in the past.

Marcus discusses with the interviewer how the younger people within his Somali community are involved:

Marcus: As African-American, uh, like I know several people in the Black Lives Matter [local branch] that are Somali and they've been high ups, or they're always out, you see them making rallies. People in our community participate, organize, and lead the drives, so I I think that's probably, because they're born here now, so anybody 95' and up is probably born uh here you know? Africans who are 94' born in 1995 and up, who are under twenty I should say, under twenty-five.

Interviewer: They're the ones that are leading and getting involved?

Marcus: Yeah, yeah, because they're they're born, they were born here. And they're no more then, uh, more and more African [immigrants and diaspora] are identifying them self as African-American, so.

Interviewer: But people that are older are not?

Marcus: No.

Interviewer: Why do you think that is?

Marcus: I don't think it's, like, growing, like when I came to America, I was, it was hard for me too. Because I would relate more with Americans, but when I would hang out with my Uncle's and other people, they were quick to, quickly remind me that I'm not. (Laughs) And I, but I am you know? So, to them it's just, I think it's just older people, they hold onto whatever they're known for, whatever wherever they grew up, you know?

This pattern of younger diasporans being involved in efforts to protest police violence compared to older diasporans that typically abstain or remain disconnected from such engagement was strongly echoed by another participant, Aman when he said:

I guarantee you the next maybe 50 years you will never see any Habeshas during these events [protests]. Unless and otherwise those are young people like people who were born and have grown up in this country, or maybe you know, around your generation. Probably you might see that. If you ask me, people around my age, you will never see them.

#### **Super-ordinate Theme 4: Response to Police Violence**

Participants expressed a variety of ways they or their ethnic, immigrant community responded to police violence. This ranged from reasons why they would stay silent and avoid the issue to reasons for becoming civically engaged. Some responses were purely emotional and others galvanized actions, both directly and indirectly. Interestingly, participants noted how their self-perception, their age and cultural upbringing may have shaped their response. Participants



also provided insight into reasons why they would choose to distance themselves and possibly a distinct correlation to their response and their identity as foreigners or immigrants.

#### **Sub-ordinate Theme 4a: Emotional Reaction**

All six participants expressed anger in response to police violence, while four of the six participants expressed a sense of fear. Anne in describing how she felt about the news making case where the police officer aggressively handled a teenage girl at a swimming pool said, “the policemen who came there behaved so arrogantly that actually when I looked at it I said, ‘That’s a biased policeman.’ I’ve never felt so angry.”

When police officers escalate a seemingly minor case with escalation and necessary force, he has “Feelings of fear. Not personally but my thinking is that the, they may react uh, negatively to issues that could be discussed with a handshake.”

#### **Sub-ordinate Theme 4b: Engagement**

All six participants thought the protests were “right or effective” and expressed that they are aware of but not personally involved in any protests or Black Lives Matter Movement although they may know someone who is. All six participants expressed other potential ways that they or others can be civically engaged and make a difference. Alternative ways they mentioned ranged from mentoring young people and attending local meetings, to sitting on community boards. Two participants felt being vocal via social media was also a viable way to be join these efforts. Anne said: “People can protest in many ways. Some people go online, others do whatever it is.” Aman interestingly categorized his participation in the protest for social justice and against police violence when he stated “I do, I’m a different soldier, I should say I, I prefer to share um, posts and comment, and I think everybody takes different, I do it

online more.”

Similarly, at least half of the participants cited cultural differences, and the extra measures they took to avoid being involved. Multiple participants mentioned risks to their immigration status if they were to get in trouble. Anne stated some fears that her fellow immigrants may be feeling:

Why [not be involved]? Because you, you, you feel like you're, you, you feel, you are a foreigner, you feel like a foreigner, you say, "Oh well, I don't want to get in trouble. Let me not do this, you know, probably for me to be different, they, you know, I don't want uh to jeopardize my living in the United States or my status, or you know." ...So it, you, you tend, to be extra careful especially around policemen, and things that would likely lead you in trouble, and, and, you know...

Anne went on to explain that (the sometimes desperate) and specific reasons for their migration to the U.S. tends to keep them focused and unwavering at anything that could potentially distract from fulfilling that purpose or goal:

...because by the time people, you know, migrate to another country, they're doing that maybe for economic reasons or they came for school, you know, so you, it's like you have a, this purpose. "I just want peace. I just want-" So you, you might not get to, you know, to dirty your hands in the politics of race and all that too much. You, it's like one track minded.

Aman referenced a cultural norm from his country of origin of not engaging with police and although he had lived in America for over twenty years, he still observed it. Below is a passage with Aman and the interviewer:

Interviewer: Okay, and do they, or in particularly maybe people, you know, your

community, do they happen to be involved, um, in some of these efforts?"

Aman: Not that I know of, no. Like I told you, this community is very submissive. Why? Because of their experience back home. Or the way they interpret the law. The law has its own interpretation in individuals. There's, there's one way, there's one way of interpreting the law in you, in me, in everybody else... In a way, don't mess with police officers. Don't mess up with police officers. Stay away from them, whether you're right or not, don't. That's what the mentality is.

One participant cited concerns for safety at the protests and the lack of de-centralized knowledge of organization as reasons for not participating in protests. Anne said "It [protests] may not be the traditional way and sometimes people do not really want to um be out in the streets, you know, um, because of the, of those dangers that you don't know."

### **Super-ordinate Theme 5: Systemic Problems**

All participants thought that the issue of police violence, particularly with minority communities was related to larger systemic problems. Issues across a diverse spectrum were outlined from poverty, lack of quality housing, a disproportionate number of African Americans incarcerated, to disparities in educational achievement and the unequal distribution of healthcare and wealth as articulated by Diana:

But the gap between African-American and White is huge in education, and income, income equality and incarceration rate, and it's one of those states that's very progressive, liberal state, and people, "Uh, it's a liberal state." But, there's actually a study going on over there, trying to figure out why that a state like [this], that's so progressive, doing very well in the economy, the economy is one

of the best in the country, but they still have this huge income inequality.

### **Sub-ordinate Theme 5a: Flawed Criminal Justice System**

Below are some examples of how three participants found the criminal justice system to be flawed, from police officers, the offices and associations that support them all the way to the prosecutors who play an integral role in holding corrupt officers accountable.

Diana said:

And when it comes to prosecution, the police tend to, the system is also uh, uhm, charged with a lot of uhm, discrimination in, in a way. So if you look at the, the, the prison system for example, you find out that ... And that's my personal opinion. You find out that uh, more member of the, of minorities are being arrested, illegally imprisoned, and they are being uh, convicted of their offences much more than some other part, members of the society. So comparably the, the, the system is, is, is biased against minorities.

David, after describing the multiple encounters that Nigerians have had being unfairly treated by police in the U.S., he pointed to the likelihood that the “bad apples” of police forces are actually more common than expected:

So in many cases you just have to pray that you find, you get the right policeman who is, who is level headed, who is uh, who is uh, universal in thinking, who is not the type that is uh, biased to, to try you, to try any of your cases. So it depends on who you meet. That's, that's, that's the trend. It happens multiple times. Multiple times, I've witnessed [it].

Aman described the sometimes discriminatory and powerful police system this way:

They [Ethiopian community] believe that the [U.S. police] system is so strong. The system is ...when I say the system is so strong, it's not going to happen overnight...the police system that we have today...Is not going to change overnight...It is so strong. It is hard to break it. It's hard to penetrate that and bring change.

### **Sub-ordinate Theme 5b: Disproportionate Incarceration of People of Color**

In regards to the overrepresentation of people of color in jail, particularly African Americans, three participants thought it was a noticeable and problematic trend. They also correlated the presence of this demographic in the criminal justice system as also negatively impacting their relationship with police. One participant in particular articulated it this way:

When we say that people are the same, people are equal, that has to be practical. Don't pull every Black person, not every Black person, more Black persons, Black people into jail and go out to the media and announce that there is freedom. No, change it until everybody believes that it's true.

He supported this claim with his own personal experience witnessing the disparity:

You see, I was playing with data for 14 years. Data showed me, uh, the, the proportion of Black students in college compared to other groups. Um, at the same time I was able to see the statistics about Black people in jail. That really puzzles me. Why do we have more young Black men in jail than in college? So even the Black people, even though they, they did not come to the point where I said earlier, to the point where they say, "Okay, this is what has happened in the

past. Or this is what is happening, let's go ahead and try to change the future."

Even though they did not come to that point, I see that they have some points to the way they act today. There are ... What I'm trying to say is, there is of course whether open or hidden discrimination to some extent.

### **Sub-ordinate Theme 5c: Historical and Racial Implications**

While half of the participants had reported lacking extensive knowledge of the country's racialized history, five of six participants still found America's historical and current racial climate to be contributing factors to the seemingly race-based police violence. Furthermore, two participants thought that lack of unity among U.S. citizens and residents contributed to how this problem was perceived and how the country came (or did not come) together to solve it.

Outlined is David's thought on the matter:

I think it's mostly also because of the racial tension in the country is, is, is increasing by the day everywhere. Maybe because of the current political system, people are coming to elections and uh, there is a lot of biases about uhm, the, the, the ... Biases about political positions are different. And uh, there is a lot of racial tensions too. For example in uh, several part of the country where unharmed minorities are being killed because of over use of force by the police system. So in some aspect of the society, things are very, very ... Tension is very high. And so working in the police system, people tend to overreact to, even to their actions, even when they have good intentions.

## Discussion

According to this study, there may be data to support that African and Afro-Caribbean diasporan experience with police may be markedly differently than African Americans, or U.S. citizens in general. While each participant was fully aware of police misconduct and discriminatory practices, particularly towards people of color, they did not necessarily see themselves impacted by such policing. The dual or hybrid identity particularly described by participants proved to be significantly influential, insulating or protecting them from a racialized identity and determining their levels of engagement in protests or counter efforts. This supports Amit et al.'s (2015), George Mwangi's (2014) and Showers' (2015) studies that ethnicity and cultural identity were used to minimize the impact of racial discrimination and that diasporan segregated themselves to their ethnic communities as a protective mechanism.

Five of the six participants maintained an ethnic-based network, with the older group having stronger connections; they based their identities on these connections and were less likely to relate to those outside of their cultural community. It's important to note that this cultural or ethnic preservation of identity was mostly a result of how they viewed themselves within their communities and less dependent on how the external, or majority culture viewed them. Alfred Olango a Ugandan refugee, was just killed by police in September 2016 in El Cajon, CA because police thought he was holding a gun, when it was actually a vaping device (McLaughlin, Blau & Vercammen, 2016). Thus perception of being different does not always translate to actual safety.

Existing studies (George Mwangi, 2014; Showers, 2015) found Black immigrants were perceived as "model minorities," while this study did not investigate the perceptions of diasporan communities by others, African diasporan behavior tended to be more submissive and non-confrontational than African Americans. I am curious if the responses from participants in this

study could further classify their behaviors as “model minorities.” This sense of safety in police encounters was felt even more by people in the older group who reasoned if they were “submissive,” polite and cooperative with police, their interaction would be positive. Three of six participants from the older group described learning this type of respectability politics in their country of origin where interacting in a way other than complete compliance with police was deadly. While they could easily articulate the flaw in this type of policing back home and label those police as “corrupt,” “harsh” or “harmful,” they could not so easily make the same distinction here. Participants gave police the benefit of the doubt and incredible praise for how relatable, patient and efficient their services were. Interestingly, even in the midst of criticizing unfair police behaviors, participants held a mostly positive or just view of police.

Besides the typical emotional responses of fear and anger to police violence, this demographic of participants also developed a sense of acceptance and resiliency to the racial hierarchy and politics of the U.S. While a majority of participants took extra precautions to maintain peaceful encounters with police and not risk their immigration status, others circumvented any perceived barriers by simply choosing not to care at all about being discriminated against and finding ways to focus on gaining upward mobility and further isolating themselves from a racialized society. It is possible that this response as an adaptation to negative experiences could serve as a source of resilience and protection for diaspora communities. It leads to an interesting question—are minorities in America too concerned with acceptance, approval and inclusion across racial lines by the majority culture? According to this study, African diasporans chose to be more narrowly focused on upward mobility over race relations.

It is also worth mentioning the powerful, intergenerational discussions that occurred throughout all of the interviews. While feelings for concern and safety by parents and relatives



for younger kids was consistent, I was surprised by the conversations the younger group was having with their parents and older relatives. The data showed that younger members of society also shared concerns for the safety of their older family members. This practice of informally sharing information helped increase consciousness in the parents and improve their knowledge of the country's history and its racial implications, something that all three participants of the older group felt they did not quite understand.

The three younger participants' discussion on how they informed and educated their parents about police violence increased their awareness and helped them care more about the issue. The differences in response between older and younger groups was most evident in this conversation because of the stark differences in self-identification and civic engagement. While this study did not specifically look at levels of social consciousness of participants, the response by three of the six total participants (all from the younger group) could possibly support Wu et al., (2013) findings that negative police encounters can result in a more critical analysis. It would be interesting to see if there is any correlation among years of residency in the U.S., the age in which people migrated, the people that helped educate or make them aware of such issues like police violence and how that could impact their levels of consciousness.

Younger participants were surprisingly more aware of police violence than the adults in their lives expected them to be, consistent with Pinderhughes et al., (2011) study of a hypersensitivity to themselves and their environments. In these recounting of stories, it sometimes led the youth to forming negative perceptions of police before they even interacted with them. The more participants saw themselves as "American" or "Black" they were more likely to be bothered by and invested in fighting police violence, especially as it impacted minorities. Although more research would need to be done, this data showed correlations

between age, self-assigned identity and civic engagement of African and Afro-Caribbean diasporan on the issue of police violence.

Half of the participants did notice the overrepresentation of people of color in the criminal justice system, supporting Pinderhughes et al.'s (2011) study that Black members of society were more likely to end up in detention centers. One finding in this study does points to improved community relations and decreased crime when a community policing approach was taken. Furthermore, it appeared that when indigenous leadership from the ethnic community was empowered to be part of the police force, the members of that community responded more positively and were more trusting and compliant. (Hansen, 2015; Hinds, 2009). Some participants thought people who call the police were equally responsible for the interactions that followed if they did not call for legitimate reasons. This claim was supported by the notion that some citizens maliciously report in order to discriminate or harass certain groups of society. This information could be valuable in addressing and solving for police violence. Possibly, policy reforms can include provision on responsible and accountable reporting so that unnecessary interaction between police and the publics, oftentimes running with high emotions, don't happen.

### **Social Work Implications**

Some implications for social work practice include the need for more research and scholarship on this topic and amplifying the voices of such disregarded groups. The gap in literature on the police-citizen encounters from the vantage point of people of color can contribute to the continued marginalization and silencing of such groups. Even further, research on experiences with police by Black immigrant and diaspora groups in the United States is almost non-existent and provides no data to inform social worker's practices working with these groups in the field. Furthermore, the intersections of race and immigration can make individuals

in this population particularly vulnerable and misunderstood if practitioners and policy makers don't understand the starkly differences experiences and fears that may be felt by the same racial group.

The social work profession serves as an advocate for needy, helpless or oppressed people groups and seeks to advance social justice and equality, therefore the issues of police violence and police brutality are of significant relevance. Many opportunities in research, practice and policy on micro and macro levels exist for social workers to be involved in the process of improving police and minority community relations. The knowledge obtained through research and practice can equip social workers to train law enforcement officials on how to safely engage with the public, specifically minorities, and can also help improve their cultural competence. The more that social workers are also recipients of such training, they can create safe spaces for clients that are Black immigrants and help them navigate discriminatory experiences with police that they may be otherwise afraid to report or address.

### Appendix A

Older Participants	Age	Gender	Ethnicity
Aman	53	Female	Ethiopian
Anne	54	Female	Kenyan
David	56	Male	Nigerian

Younger Participants	Age	Gender	Ethnicity
Tanya	39	female	Jamaican
Diana	33	female	Eritrean
Marcus	36	male	Somalian

## Appendix B

Terms Used to Describe Populations	Descriptions
Black Immigrant	Anyone born in an African or Afro-Caribbean country and immigrated to United States and is racially Black.
Diasporan	A group of people whose ancestry is from an African or Afro-Caribbean country but are living abroad in the U.S. Diasporans can be born in their country of origin or born in the U.S. and ascribe to an identity other than American, or identify with a dual identity and are racially Black.
African American	Anyone born in the U.S. who identifies as American only without any recent ties or family ancestry to another country of origin and is racially Black.

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